

**Ensemble 10:10**  
**June 19 programme notes**

Jack Sheen debuts new work from right across the UK music scene – from his own *A line, a curve, or figure*, to introducing sparkling new voices (Sky Macklay and Sylvia Lim) to our concert platform – in a programme with no fewer than five world premieres.

Tonight also features two new pieces from local sources: the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's Timothy Jackson, with his solo work for the Orchestra's Principal Cello Jonathan Aasgaard, and a work for chamber orchestra from Stephen Pratt, who has contributed so much to Ensemble 10:10 and Liverpool's music scene over the years.

**Jack Sheen** *conductor*

Jack Sheen returns to Liverpool after conducting an Ensemble 10:10 concert in June 2022.

Sheen is a composer and conductor from Manchester whose music spans orchestral works to performance and sound installations. He regularly works with leading orchestras, ensembles, galleries and artists on concert and operatic performances, commissions, and interdisciplinary projects. Especially at home within late-romantic, modern and contemporary music, he brings his compositional insight to interpretations of core repertoire that have been highly praised.

Sheen has conducted orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, Lithuanian Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, and Royal Northern Sinfonia, as well as ensembles such as London Sinfonietta, Bit20, Apartment House, EXAUDI, 12 Ensemble, FontanaMix, and Ensemble 10:10. This season, he will make his debut with the BBC Symphony and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Equally at home in the opera house, 2024 will see him conduct a new production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* with English Touring Opera.

As a composer, Sheen has had his concert works commissioned by orchestras, ensembles and organisations including the LSO, BBC Philharmonic, London Sinfonietta, Aldeburgh Festival, Apartment House, EXAUDI, Manchester Camerata, Aurora Orchestra and Les Metaboles, alongside large-scale site-specific installations at the Venice Biennale, Casa de Serralves in Porto, V&A, Camden Arts Centre, and Holden Gallery and PINK in Manchester.

Recent projects include his debut album *Sub, Phantom Heap Render* – a 15-minute large ensemble and audio work commissioned by the London Sinfonietta; *Solo for Cello* which received its world premiere at the Wigmore Hall; *Lag*, an orchestral piece commissioned by BBC SSO and Ilan Volkov for Tectonics Festival 2024; *Press*, a piano quintet commissioned by Wigmore Hall and Apartment House; *Croon Harvest*, a performance-installation for voices, field recordings and white noise, developed for Camden Arts Centre; and a new performance-installation commissioned by Ensemble Mosaik for Silent Green (Berlin).

Awards include Ernst von Siemens Foundation Progetto Positano Residency (2024), PRS Composers Fund (2021), Arts Foundation Fellowship (finalist, 2020), Rovaumont Voix Nouvelle Composition Prize (2018), Royal Philharmonic Prize for Composition (2016), an RNCM Gold Medal (2012) and BBC Young Composer of the Year (2011). In 2019 he was a Jerwood Fellow with Manchester International Festival.

His music has been broadcast internationally, and released on labels included The Trilogy Tapes, SN Variations, and NMC. Sheen is one of the curators of the London Contemporary Music Festival and is co-founder of the LCMF Orchestra.

### **Jonathan Aasgaard** *cello*

Norwegian Jonathan Aasgaard is one of the UK's most versatile cellists, as soloist, chamber musician, studio musician, orchestral principal, teacher and explorer of new music.

He studied at the Barrett Due's institute in Oslo and at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London with the late Professor Leonard Stehn, where he won all the cello and chamber music prizes and was a gold medal finalist.

Aasgaard was appointed Principal Cello of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 1999 and has since performed more than 40 works for cello and orchestra. He is regularly invited as a guest principal with several leading British and European orchestras and is Principal Cello of the Sinfonia of London conducted by John Wilson.

He has given numerous premieres including Carl Davis' *Ballade for cello and orchestra*, the European premiere of Giovanni Sollima's *Double Cello Concerto* and the UK premiere of Weinberg's *Cello Concerto*.

Chamber music performances have taken him around the world, including a range of festivals collaborating with artists like violinists Nigel Kennedy, Henning Kraggerud and Julian Rachlin, violist Laurence Power, cellists Yo Yo Ma and Giovanni Sollima, and pianists Simon Trpčeski, Joanna Macgregor and Boris Giltburg.

He is also a member of the Pixels Ensemble and, a dedicated teacher, he is Professor of Cello at the Guildhall. Aasgaard plays a cello by Celeste Farotti, made in Milan in 1926.

### **Jack Sheen** *A line, a curve, or figure* (arr. for chamber orchestra, world premiere)

*A line, a curve, or figure* was originally commissioned for ensemble by the Aldeburgh Festival and Britten Pears Young Artists Programme and has been expanded to larger chamber orchestra forces by its composer especially for Ensemble 10:10.

It opens with solo players, as if it were still a sinfonietta piece, and – while remaining 'fairly soloistic' – slowly fills out until the full orchestra is used.

Sheen explains: "A lot of my music is about expansion and contraction, but *A line, a curve, or figure* is almost entirely about expansion: the piece is loosely based on an idea of a fractal, alongside the idea of stretching out something to see more of it. So, the initial three bars contain all the material in the piece, and they simply reoccur. Each time, each section of the initial sound is expanded to reveal more of itself and become less of a fleeting gesture and more of an established 'section of music'. And then there is a coda to shake things up somewhat."

### **Sky Macklay** *Microvariations* (arr. for chamber orchestra, world premiere)

Sky Macklay, born in Minnesota in 1988, is a composer, oboist and installation artist whose music is conceptual yet expressive, exploring extreme contrasts, surreal tonality, audible processes, humour and the physicality of sound. She studied composition at Columbia University where her tutors included George Lewis and Georg Friedrich Haas.

Macklay has been commissioned by – among others – the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chamber Music America (with Splinter Reeds and West Coast Chamber Ensemble), the Fromm Foundation at Harvard University (with Ensemble Dal Niente), the Barlow Endowment (with andPlay), Jerome Fund for New Music (with ICE saxophonist Ryan Muncy), and Kronos Quartet's 50 for the Future project. Since being recorded on Spektral Quartet's Grammy-

nominated album in 2017, her string quartet *Many Many Cadences* has been performed around the world and studied in dozens of university composition and theory classes.

*Microvariations* was originally composed for large ensemble in 2016 and commissioned by Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne. This new arrangement for chamber orchestra receives its world premiere in Liverpool.

In 1825, British conductor George Thomas Smart travelled across Europe and compared his A = 423.5hz tuning fork to the tuning of every musical group he could find. Some were perfectly in tune with his fork, but others – especially around Vienna – were higher and closer to today's standard A = 440hz. *Microvariations* is a 'fast forward and transcontinental sonic truncation and fantasy' on Smart's journey. Pieces he probably heard, entire symphonies and sonatas common to the practice period, are distilled to their most skeletal, structural chord progressions and played at hyper speeds. It begins with material similar to *Many Many Cadences*; predictable tonal chord progressions recontextualised into fast cells that are constantly changing key. *Microvariations* situates the cadences in two different groups ("towns") playing a quarter tone apart from one another, at first distinct but then eventually blurring.

### **Jack Sheen** *Études* (arr. for orchestra, world premiere)

The second of two Sheen world premieres in one concert, this piece comprises of three short *études* that take as their starting point the music of the classical era. Sheen explains: "I've always been struck by moments in the music of this time that become nothing short of obsessive over their material, with composers continually breaking down and repeating fragments of melodies as they are gradually varied, or emphatically reiterating cadences to mark the final bars of the work."

The piece focuses on this idea and attempts to present a series of small musical moments which act almost like static objects, placed within a constantly shifting perspective through the play of real or imagined repetitions and variations. In its original version, as a work for between 10 and 16 players, it was commissioned by Manchester Camerata and premiered in 2015 with Gabor Takács-Nagy. This new arrangement is expanded compositionally for larger ensemble.

The composer adds: "The original version was more fleeting, like snapshots on to a larger mobile-like structure. In this new version we see more of that structure/the musical object, spending more time in each movement to see the music ebbing and flowing. This version is a few minutes longer than the original. It's still not a linear-narrative form, the story itself isn't any longer so to speak, more that – except for the third – we spend more time within the ecosystem of each movement."

### **Sylvia Lim** *Reframe*

UK-based composer Sylvia Lim studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, gaining a first-class degree in music and a master's degree with distinction, and completing her PhD on 'exploring organic decay through sound'. She currently teaches composition at the Guildhall and The Purcell School.

In 2021 she was part of the Royal Phonographic Society's composer programme. She won the 2022 Rubiks Collective's Pythia Prize.

Her pieces are intimate, exploring a small amount of material in-depth – often a single texture, sound or entity. Her most recent work has included a new piece for prepared cello with Natasha Zielazinski, a multidisciplinary work with Melbourne-based ensemble Rubiks Collective and artist Allison Chhorn, and a new work with artist Chris Zhongtian Yuan.

*Reframe* for chamber orchestra dates from 2017/18 and was inspired by an encounter with Beijing artist Jiang Zhi's *Love Letters* (2014) in the White Rabbit Gallery, Sydney. The artist's wife, whose name meant Orchid, had died aged 37 and as a tribute to her and 'all who love and are loved' he began dousing orchids and other flowers with alcohol and setting them alight, his subsequent pictures capturing the moment when flame and flower are both in bloom. In the real world each flower will soon be ash, but in the dream space of the photograph, death can still be averted, and the flower emerge phoenix-like from the flame. The viewer is simultaneously confronted by the stark reality of death, and the notion that death can be avoided.

In *Reframe*, Lim seeks to explore the notion of death ceasing with the same sense of intimacy and simplicity, while maintaining a degree of abstraction. It is two movements – *Fraying* and *Prolonged*. The first presents a sonic object which gradually decays, and the second reframes this object and slows it down so the process of decay is frozen, and the object appears almost immortal.

### **Timothy Jackson** *Traffic Jams and Anagrams* (world premiere)

Timothy Jackson was born in Preston and at 15 was awarded a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music. He also studied at Manchester University and the RNCM. He was a member of the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and was appointed Principal Horn of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in January 2011.

As a composer and arranger, Jackson has received commissions from groups as diverse as the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Hallé Orchestra, the Philharmonia, Royal Opera House and the St Florian Bruckner Festival. He is also composer-in-residence with Onyx Brass. Jackson's work has been performed and broadcast all over the world, in venues including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Hollywood Bowl, Vienna Musikverein, Sydney Opera House and at the BBC Proms.

He has a particular interest in creating music for young musicians and young audiences. His proudest achievement as a composer remains *Eeyore's March*, written in 20 minutes to fulfil a bet, which has gone on to sell more than 300,000 copies worldwide before being chosen to be part of Faber's anthology of the 20 best pieces ever to appear on the ABRSM Grade I Piano syllabus.

The title *Traffic Jams and Anagrams* comes from Leo Robin's lyrics to Ralph Rainger's 1938 song 'Thanks for the Memory'. Jackson explains: "This was the favourite song of my father-in law David Jones, a war hero who was awarded the Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur for his service as a radar operator aboard HMS Meynell on D-Day. David spoke very little of his wartime experiences, and ironically it was only really as he began to decline into Alzheimer's that we started to get fleeting fragments of stories to try to piece together. This favourite song of his, with its underlying theme of fondly recalled shared experiences, took on a double-edged significance as his own memory, and his ability to recognise people, slipped away."

The piece is for solo cello – a lone voice working through an extended set of variations (29 in total) on the song melody, which merge and blur into each other. The original tune appears in full only once, right at the centre of the piece, played extremely softly in ghostly harmonics. From this point onwards the piece spins on its axis and the soloist, in a huge palindrome, works back through the preceding music in reverse. The final variation is a half-remembered memory of the opening, slowly and inevitably fading into silence.

**Stephen Pratt** *Noting the Landscape* (world premiere)

Stephen Pratt is no stranger to Liverpool audiences. Born in the city in 1947, the composer, conductor, broadcaster and educator studied at the Royal Manchester College of Music and later at Reading and Liverpool universities.

He became known with works like the *Piano Sonata* (1974-5) and *Star and Dead Leaves* for flute and piano (1977), and in 1978 an Arts Council bursary enabled him to write his first orchestral work, *Some of Their Number*, which was premiered by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 1980 under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle. In 1991 he completed the first part of his work *Uneasy Vespers*, commissioned for the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society (RLPS).

His many other works include a violin concerto (1997), *Lovebytes* for soprano and ensemble (2003) which was premiered by Ensemble 10:10 and Patricia Rozario, *Chants du Printemps* for large ensemble (2013), and *Song and Dance* (2016) premiered by Ensemble 10:10, while recent pieces include *Hazy* (2017) premiered by Ensemble 10:10, *Symphonies of Time and Tide* (2018) commissioned by the RLPS, *Telling the Tale* (2019) commissioned by Psappha, and *A Short Flight Across the City* (2022) for the Hope Metropolitan Orchestra.

As a conductor he has worked with various orchestras including the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Merseyside Youth Orchestra and has been guest conductor of the Metropolitan Cathedral Orchestra since 1985.

From 2013-20, he developed and directed Liverpool Hope University's Voices of Hope, a six-part student a cappella vocal group which performed madrigals to his own arrangements of recent songs.

*Noting the Landscape*, which receives its world premiere at this concert, was composed in the wake of the Covid pandemic. Its composer explains: "during lockdown I'd found it impossible to compose and turned instead to painting, which I hadn't done for many years. When commissioned by the RLPS to write a piece to mark my 75th birthday, it seemed an obvious step for me to return to composition from this starting point. As work developed, I recognised that the music that was emerging was more 'the expression of feeling than painting': Beethoven had been there long before in his description of his Pastoral Symphony!"

The work is in four movements – *From a Window*, *An Oak by Water*, *An April Primrose* and *The Fall of Narcissus (and Rise of Aurora)* – the first three of which are played without a break. *From a Window* recalls the anxiety and excitement of Pratt's first time in a plane, while *An Oak by Water* is 'a little snap' of Liverpool's historic and remote Oglet Shore which is under threat of development. *An April Primrose* was written in memory of his mother who died in 2022 aged 100. It's dance-like quality is inspired by her love of kicking up her heels. Pratt adds: "The final movement is best seen as an abstract reflection of the socio-political landscape of the pandemic years. Listeners may notice the presence of a five-note motif drawn from a song released by a popular Swedish group, apparently a favourite of partygoers in a famous London location during the lockdowns."