

TOM PHILLIPS

Irma: an opera

Director / Designer - Netia Jones

Music Director - Anton Lukoszevieze

Performed by Apartment House

Feat. Josephine Stephenson, Benjamin

O'Mahony and Elaine Mitchener

Video by Lightmap



South London Gallery, 65-67 Peckham Rd, SE5 8UH

16 and 17 September 2017

Performances: 7.30pm

Tickets: £15/£10 conc

Installation: 11am – 6pm. Free admission

Booking: southlondongallery.org/irma

Tom Phillips RA is one of Britain's most versatile artists: a painter, printmaker, librettist and composer, as well as notable Peckham resident. *Irma* is a unique, intermedia artwork, a miniature 'chance' opera drawn from his masterpiece *A Humument*. To mark Phillips' 80th birthday, director/designer Netia Jones, and her company Lightmap, joins Anton Lukoszevieze, his acclaimed ensemble Apartment House, soloists and an actor, to present the first performance and installation of a new *Irma* score, *Opus XIIB*. Set within the South London Gallery's main space where Phillips first showed his work as an art student, this landmark event celebrates one of Britain's most distinguished artists, recognising Phillips' work as a composer and wider influence on the world of music.

Irma is one of the hidden gems of English experimental music, alongside Gavin Bryars' *Sinking of the Titanic* and Cornelius Cardew's *Treatise*. It is drawn from Phillips' most famous artwork *A Humument*, which he painted onto the pages of a Victorian novel bought for threepence on Peckham Rye in 1966 - an authentic 'threepenny opera'. The score, comprising prose directions, sound vocabulary plus instructions, performance suggestions and a group of melodies, is to be thought of as the surviving elements of a lost work whose performance tradition is unknown. Brian Eno produced a recording by Gavin Bryars of this early version on his Obscure label, plus AMM gave a performance at the Serpentine in 1986 and made a recording for Matchless, recently reissued on Café Oto's label. With his 80th birthday approaching in 2017, and the

completion of *A Humument* after 50 years, Phillips decided to extend the original one page *Irma* score, *Opus XII*, into a far more expansive new work, *Opus XII B*.

Taking place in the South London Gallery's main exhibition space, whose Victorian architecture echoes the source of *Irma's* story, this exciting new performance brings *Irma* to life through video projection, recordings, instruments, vocalists and actor. Soloists **Josephine Stephenson** and **Elaine Mitchener** perform as *Irma* and Nurse with actor **Benjamin O'Mahony** (*Ripper Street / Kajaki*) as Grenville. The chorus of art officers feature contemporary music specialists and EXAUDI regulars **Alastair Putt**, **Francis Brett** and **Jon Stainsby**, who perform alongside **Gordon Mackay** (violin), **Bridget Carey** (viola), **Anton Lukoszevieve** (cello), **Kerry Yong** (piano) and **Simon Limbrick** (percussion) from **Apartment House**. The costumes are inspired by Phillips' artworks and his collection of postcards held at the Bodleian Libraries. During the day an audio visual installation uses elements of Phillips' intricate visual score together with his voice and found sounds to create an evocative combination of soundscape and video within the space.

Tom Phillips attended art school during the 1960s and was swept up in the free exchange of art forms these institutions encouraged. He was instrumental in bringing composers like John Cage and Morton Feldman to the UK, and introducing Brian Eno to cross-art work. He was a founding member of Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra and has composed many graphic scores performed and recorded by the world's leading musicians and ensembles. To name just a few of his artistic achievements, Tom Phillips was the second artist to have a retrospective of his portraits at the National Portrait Gallery in 1989 and was commissioned by the Royal Mint to design the first UK kilo coins to mark the occasion of the London 2012 Olympic Games. His design for the Benjamin Britten 50p piece in 2013 was the first to feature poetry. Phillips is also a judge for the Man Booker Prize 2017.

As part of the 80th birthday celebrations in September, the impact of Phillips' work as an artist and composer will be explored through online resources, new digital works by students from Camberwell College of Arts and Phillips' public artworks in his local neighbourhood of Peckham. A display of student work inspired by Tom Phillips' graphic scores is planned for December 2017 in a new student-led gallery space.

About the Creative Team:

About Netia Jones / Lightmap: led by director and video artist **Netia Jones**, Lightmap is a critically acclaimed creative and technical studio working internationally in live performance, music, film and installation projects. Jones directed and designed a recent production of *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Aldeburgh Festival 2017. Other projects include works by Georg Haas and György Kurtág at the Royal Opera House, *Alice in Wonderland* by Unsuk Chin and *Where the Wild Things Are* by Oliver Knussen at the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Barbican. Site-specific installations include *Curlew River* for Lincoln Center's White Light Festival and the Barbican, London and *Everlasting Light*, a large-scale installation at Sizewell nuclear power station for Aldeburgh Festival.

"Netia Jones is the most imaginative director of opera working in Britain today" The Observer

About Anton Lukoszevieve / Apartment House: Apartment House was created by cellist **Anton Lukoszevieve** in 1995. Under his direction it has become an award winning exponent of avant-garde and experimental music from around the world. Their performances have included many UK and world premieres of music by a wide variety of composers. Notable portrait events have featured composers Jennifer Walshe, Luc Ferrari, Laurence Crane and Richard Ayres to name just a few. They are a regular feature on the European music scene and have ventured as far as Australia, Russia and USA. In 2012 they received a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Outstanding Contribution to Chamber Music. They were the featured ensemble for the 2016 London Contemporary Music Festival, performing works by Julius Eastman, Frederic Rzewski and the UK Premiere of Arthur Russell's *Tower of Meaning*.

The spell-binding intensity of the performers [...] made for something both enthralling and moving, Daily Telegraph, December 2016

Read Netia Jones / Lightmap's blog about *The Making of Irma: An Opera* at www.opusxiib.com

Tom Phillips has created a unique limited edition print to mark the first performance of the new score for *Irma: an opera*, available to buy from www.sounduk.net and the South London Gallery shop.

Listings information:

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Music Director Anton Lukoszevieze

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Video by Lightmap

South London Gallery, 65-67 Peckham Road, London, SE5 8UH

Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 September

Performances: 7.30pm. Tickets: £15/£10 concessions

www.southlondongallery.org/irma

Installation 11am – 6pm. Free admission.

Artist websites: tomphillips.co.uk, lightmapstudio.net, antonlukoszevieze.co.uk, apartmenthouse.co.uk

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Notes to Editors:

About Sound UK: Sound UK produces and commissions extraordinary musical encounters in venues from national concert halls to village greens. It works with the world's most creative artists to create memorable performances that excite and move audiences across the country and beyond. Recent projects include *Sonic Journey: Gavin Bryars + Blake Morrison* an audio download to be experienced on the train from Goole to Hull at Yorkshire Festival 2016 and currently as part of Hull2017, plus *One and All* – a voyage through sight, sound and sea, a major online co-commission with National Trust's Trust New Art by Martyn Ware, Tania Kovats and Owen Sheers experienced online and at Somerset House. Find out more at www.sounduk.net

About the South London Gallery: Founded in 1891, the South London Gallery (SLG) is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art space recognised for its ambitious artistic programmes and award-winning education and outreach work. The exhibition programme has included solo shows by established international figures such as Chris Burden, Ellen Gallagher, Thomas Hirschhorn, Steve McQueen, Roman Ondak, Amie Siegel and Lawrence Weiner, as well as those by younger and mid-career artists such as Alice Channer, Michael Dean, Ryan Gander, Kapwani Kiwanga and Oscar Murillo.

The SLG has recently been donated the former Peckham Road Fire Station by an anonymous benefactor, securing it for public use. Dating from 1867 and the earliest surviving example of a purpose-built fire station in London, fundraising is in progress to transform the semi-derelict, four-storey building into a new cultural centre as an annexe to the SLG's main buildings, opening to the public in 2018. www.southlondongallery.org



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