CAROLINE BERGVALL : NOTTSONG
22 September 2023, Arnolfini

Nottsong is a dark, ecopoetic, multilingual and immersive performance tracing a world in full and radical transformation. It asks what it means to be in the dark, to see and especially to listen through the dark. How to prepare for it and be changed by it. It is created as an intermeshing of repeating motifs from poetic texts, vocal work, sound structures and filmic sequences.

Nottsong is the nocturnal and final creation of Caroline Bergvall's **Sonic Atlas** cycle (2015-–): a cycle of works and performances written for spoken and sung voices, breath patterns, and electronic works, staged indoors or outdoors, between dawn and night in unique landscapes and settings. Each work explores and recreates ancient and contemporary multilingual and transcultural connections.

Speakers and languages that appear in *Nottsong* are a selection of recordings and conversations with poets, translators and language workers invited at various stages of Sonic Atlas. Includes: Ladino / Scottish Gaelic / Occitan / Provençal / Irish / Farsi / Arabic (North Africa) / Icelandic / Greenlandic / Punjabi / Romansh / Galician / Anglo-Saxon / Berber / Andalus-Arabic / Sicilian / Welsh / Levantine Arabic /..

Creative and production team:

Caroline Bergvall: direction, all texts, spoken voice
Gavin Bryars: vocal composition for mezzo-soprano : "Ask What Stands", "Is This Night's Work"
Jamie Hamilton: sound design
Rosie Middleton: mezzo-soprano, improviser
Andrew Delaney: filmic sequences. The projections are organic scenes that were filmed in real time.
Millieon Hu: "Seeking shelter", "Allar kins and kindir" digital text
John Cayley / Orange: algorithmic text "Passengers Passages"
Michaela Freeman: Sonic Atlas project management

Broad Synopsis

1. Passengers we are passages we are (lead phrase)
This carefully composed sound refrain is here made up of some 15 languages. The phrase runs across all the works of Sonic Atlas and forms the basis for conversations and recordings. It has become the leitmotitf and also leading vocal mantra of the cycle.

2. How do I get from A to B
Composed in part during lockdown, a sparse text and highly detailed sound-work that outline disorientation and uprooting. It closes with Nottsong's second refrain: ***oh my oh my oh my***.

3. Refugio.
From this X to this Y we're thrown onto the route.
The word is traced etymologically. As many as one in 95 people in the world today are on the move forcibly, from wars, persecution, economic hardship and, increasingly, fleeing from environmental devastation brought on by disproportionate human activity. Framed by digital textwork: ***Seeking shelter***

4. Listen heare
Listen, listen, inside you and all around, inside me and all around
Calling in guidance and support.

5. Voluspå
No land no gasp at stars ne stjornur ne vissu nohere nowhere norigins

Solo text based on an ancient Nordic mythic poem in which a seeress (a volve) sings of the start and end of times. She forewarns of battles that had brought on Ragnarok, the first end of the world and the road to *hellsveg*, hellsway. The poem ends with a potential reawakening of some sort of life. The Deep Ecology philosopher Arne Naess echoes this who has said "I'm an optimist for the 22nd century". Framed by the digital textwork: ***Allar kins and kindir.***

6. **Ask what stands**. (music Gavin Bryars)
At time's wreck age, the old tree, skelfr and shakes, yet stands
Solo song for the nordic mythological Tree of Life.

6. **What is found to have been lost**
This sequence mourns deep losses and profound disappearances from the world. It also calls on poetic practices that seek renewal in hidden sources.

7. **Is this night's work** (music Gavin Bryars)
Is this night's work, is this her crash course awakening
Nott is the nordic goddess of the night. She assists sleepers and is hidden and powerful. Not and Knot are two dynamic conditions of contemporary change.

8. **Conversations**
A longer excerpt of recordings with speakers around their language/s. They were asked to translate and share testimony from the project's lead phrase.

9. **Prepare to cross X pathways**
Prepare to cross X pathways in the dark, from dark
This sequence echoes the subtle interweaving of the 2nd sequence. It is accompanied by the silent film poem: ***Listen Heare.*** It leads to the urgent openings of the closing sequence:
No is another yes – What guides what ghosts will we be –
and the closing phrase*:*
Passages we are for passengers to come, Passages we are for passengers around

Bios –
CAROLINE BERGVALL is an award-winning, multi-lingual poet, performer and interdisciplinary artist who moves across art forms, media and languages, and is renowned for her innovative and multi-faceted vocal use and exploration of linguistic and cross-cultural dimensions.
GAVIN BRYARS studied philosophy but became a jazz bassist and pioneer of free improvisation with Derek Bailey and Tony Oxley. Works include operas, chamber music, concertos and much vocal music including madrigals.
JAMIE HAMILTON is a composer and performer who combines sound, technology, words and acoustic phenomena to explore ways in which sound can heighten our perception.
ANDY DELANEY is a filmmaker and an award-winning director of music videos and commercials. His first feature film 'Love Is Blind' starred Chloe Sevigny, Aidan Turner and Matthew Broderick.
ROSIE MIDDLETON is a mezzo-soprano specialising in new music and collaborates with composers internationally. Contemporary opera credits include Laura Bowler's GOLD (Riot Ensemble), and recently Matt Rogers' She Described it to Death (Royal Opera House).