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FEELING HER WAY

ROOM 3 TANITA

Tanita Tikaram (b. 1969, Germany) is a multi-award-winning singer songwriter with a pop-folk style infused by an intensity conveyed through her soft, low, voice. *Feeling Her Way* is Tikaram's first vocal improvisation; she describes the group session as 'amazing, as there's so much trust in that situation ... of unifying and coming together. Maybe that's the whole point of music, and any creative endeavour, that you somehow find common ground.'

For her solo, she co-opted the Steinway piano in the Abbey Road Studios and spontaneously created a sequence of original song segments. As privileged witnesses of this extraordinary freeform composing session, we may notice a few rogue notes, which highlights the journey of crafting something new in one innovative flow. Later, she recalls the sense of liberation she found in the vocal improvisation process in which 'the only limit is your imagination.'

Instant Singer-Songwriter

Improvised performance by Tanita Tikaram, 2021
2 screen HD video with audio, 10 minutes 49 seconds, 2022
Courtesy of the artist © Sonia Boyce

ROOM 2 POPPY

Poppy Ajudha (b. 1995, UK) recently came to prominence in the UK via the underground jazz scene in south east London. Her sound is infused with jazz, soul and R&B. Her music is informed by her critical thinking on politics, gender, and race. Largely self-taught as a singer, she has a distinctive way of fading the start and end of words as she sings. Her blues-infused acapella song *Demons* combines an imploring vocal style with astute confessional lyrics, calling out the vulnerability inherent in each of us. Reflecting on this first experience of singing unaccompanied, Ajudha noticed she focused on the emotional expression of the notes more than ever before.

On singing in Studio Two, Abbey Road, made famous by the Beatles, she realised, 'the walls of that studio have seen so many incredible, inspirational and innovative artists sing their most intimate work, before it meant anything to anyone else.'

Demons

Written and performed by Poppy Ajudha, 2021
Single screen HD video with audio, 3 minutes 36 seconds, 2022
Courtesy of the artist © Sonia Boyce

ROOM 1 FEELING HER WAY

Boyce's dramatic environment of tessellating wallpaper designs, and the reflective gold seating provides the staging for four videos showing Poppy Ajudha, Jacqui Dankworth, Tanita Tikaram, and Errollyn Wallen together in the famed Studio Two at Abbey Road Studios, London.

Boyce proposed the improvisation as an opportunity for free expression between the musicians. The award-winning composer Errollyn Wallen CBE (b. 1958, Belize) guides the singers, who commit to actively listening to one another and responding without inhibition. Within minutes she spontaneously leads them step by step beyond the safety of their perfected and polished vocal styles into a space of humour, discomfort, delight, and unguarded experimentation. We witness how the imagination of becoming different beings manifests in their bodies and is expressed via the breath, which sets the parameters of the acoustic piece: a game of call and response in which the singers' vocalisations become increasingly freeform and playful.

Errollyn Wallen's prolific output includes over twenty operas and a large catalogue of orchestral, chamber and vocal works which are performed and broadcast throughout the world. She has composed for the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games 2012, for the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees, a specially commissioned song for COP 26, 2021, and a re-imagining of Jerusalem for the Last Night of the Proms 2020.

4 screen synchronised HD video with audio, 12 minutes 28 seconds, 2022
Courtesy of the artist © Sonia Boyce

ROOM 4 DEVOTIONAL

ROOM 5 JACQUI

Jacqui Dankworth MBE (b. 1963, UK) is celebrated for her richly resonant vocals that blend jazz and folk with rhythm and blues. The accuracy of her pitch, enunciation and lyrical interpretation suggests a legacy of her former acting career with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

The poetic lyrics of *Reach Out* (2021) share how Dankworth has internalised wise advice from her mother, Cleo Laine, one of the world's leading jazz singers. Dankworth attributes Laine's success to her radiant energy, so she recently asked for her secret. Now 94 years old, Laine replied, 'You've got to imagine there's this light ... It's always there and you've got to reach towards it.'

For her final verse, Dankworth creates the sound of a chiming bell from single notes layered over the recorded playback of her song. Sofia Jernberg's vocals from the other side of the room respond to the chimes in an apparent duet.

Reach Out

Written by Jacqui Dankworth and Charlie Wood, 2021
Single screen HD video with audio, 7 minutes 53 seconds, 2022
Courtesy of the artist © Sonia Boyce

ALSO ROOM 5 SOFIA & JACQUI

Sofia Jernberg (b. 1983, Ethiopia) is a composer and soloist acclaimed in jazz, classical music and sound art. With a vast range, her extraordinary voice is pitch-perfect, yet she chooses to disrupt it with abstract sounds, her body becoming a musical instrument. With precision she combines electronic sounds, animalistic noises, throat-singing and folksong influenced by places where she has lived – northern Europe, Vietnam, and Ethiopia – all part of her self-concept as 'an international being'.

On one screen, through a glowing orange filter, we see Jernberg vocalising alone, until Dankworth interjects one minute of a steadily repeated, chiming note. In this temporary duet, both vocalists make abstract sounds as they imagine their voices emulating non-human sounds. Dankworth's pre-recorded vocalisation is her imitation of a single note from a church bell, originally recorded as part of her own solo, also shown in this gallery.

Jernberg was unexpectedly absent from the group improvisation at Abbey Road Studios due to rapid changes to international quarantine rules in the days before the session. She was filmed for this piece at Atlantis Grammofon Studios in Stockholm.

For Sonia

Improvised performance by Sofia Jernberg
with Jacqui Dankworth, 2021
2 screen HD video with audio, 7 minutes 53 seconds, 2022
Courtesy of the artist © Sonia Boyce

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