

A black and white profile photograph of Ayanna Witter-Johnson, a Black woman with short, curly hair, looking to the right. She is wearing a dark, sleeveless top and large, gold, geometric earrings. The background is dark and filled with a dense shower of small, metallic confetti pieces in various shapes and sizes, creating a dynamic, celebratory atmosphere. The lighting highlights her face and the texture of her hair and clothing.

OCEAN FLOOR

AYANNA WITTER-JOHNSON
LSO PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

OCEAN FLOOR

Ayanna Witter-Johnson vocals, cello, percussion, composer

Gwilym Simcock piano, composer

LSO Percussion Ensemble (Neil Percy, Sam Walton, David Jackson, Jacob Brown)

Recorded in 24bit 96kHz LPCM in the studio on 11 & 12 November 2022 and
live in concert on 12 November 2022 in the Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's, London

Nick Wollage producer, editor & mixing engineer

Classic Sound Ltd recording and mastering facilities

Jonathan Stokes for **Classic Sound Ltd** balance engineer, mixing & mastering (stereo, surround & Atmos)

Ayanna Witter-Johnson and **Neil Percy** executive producers

Ayanna Witter-Johnson is published by Faber Music.

Gwilym Simcock is published by Basho Music.

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TRACK LIST

1	<i>Applause</i>	0'18"
2	Unconditionally Ayanna Witter-Johnson	5'20"
3	All Roads Gwilym Simcock	2'05"
4	Chariot Ayanna Witter-Johnson, Ofei Sakyi, arr. Gwilym Simcock	4'01"
5	Falling Ayanna Witter-Johnson, Alex Webb	4'14"
6	Holding Gwilym Simcock	5'40"
7	Tidal Warning Ayanna Witter-Johnson (LSO Commission / World premiere recording)	5'05"
Ocean Floor Suite Ayanna Witter-Johnson (LSO Commission / World premiere recording)		
8	Prologue	1'56"
9	I. The Darkest Hour	5'11"
10	II. Pioneers	4'22"
11	III. Ocean View	4'31"
12	Forever Ayanna Witter-Johnson	9'21"
		Total 52'04"

OCEAN FLOOR PROJECT

This special project was born out of a beautiful friendship with Principal LSO Percussionist Neil Percy, whose love of music knows no bounds. His enthusiasm for my music moves me to tears and was the catalyst behind our first collaboration and subsequent commission *Forever*. We had so much fun playing this, the ensemble wanted to create a full concert programme which led to the second commission *Ocean Floor Suite* and a selection of arrangements which includes Gwilym's composition *All Roads*, (a response to my song *Chariot*) as well as his own beautiful song *Holding*.

The organic development of this project is something I will treasure forever because, above all, I have felt the fullest support in expressing myself exactly as I am and that goes beyond words. My deepest thanks to the LSO Percussion Ensemble.

© 2023, Ayanna Witter-Johnson

UNCONDITIONALLY

Cellist, singer-songwriter and composer Ayanna Witter-Johnson has described her songs as influenced by 'soul, hip-hop and reggae'. Her classical cello training is also vital to her musical idiom.

Witter-Johnson wrote *Unconditionally* as a tribute to her mother, following a trip to Cuba. It was originally scored for voice, cello and cowbell – with Witter-Johnson accompanying herself on both instruments, playing a traditional Cuban rumba clave on the cowbell with her foot. The cello part employs techniques including *pizzicato* (plucking the strings), clapping on the body of the instrument, and *col legno* (tapping the strings with the wood of the bow). The bowed passages are reminiscent of the famous *moto perpetuo* opening of Bach's first cello suite. The lyrics describe mother and daughter's mutual love ('nothing comes between me and you') and Witter-Johnson's recognition of her mother's generosity ('the hard roads you walked so I could fly'). The song ends in an ecstatic repeated affirmation: 'I see you in me'.

Unconditionally featured on Witter-Johnson's 2019 album *Road Runner*. This is her new version for voice, cello, piano and percussion.

© *Kate Hopkins*



ALL ROADS

All Roads is a short piece for voice, cello, piano and percussion by pianist and composer Gwilym Simcock, which uses thematic elements of Ayanna Witter-Johnson's *Chariot* and acts as an extended introduction to the latter work.

CHARIOT

Chariot, co-written with songwriter Ofei Sakyi, is another song featured on *Road Runner*, and is the story of how a daughter perceives her father, through the eyes of a child. Reminiscent of a classic soul song, with its roots in gospel music, it takes on a fresh perspective with this new reimagining, which uses the mallet percussion to accentuate different layers of time within the original lilting groove, whilst staying true to the spirit and feel of the original track.

© *Ayanna Witter-Johnson / Gwilym Simcock*



© Tom Lovatt



© Tom Lovatt



© Tom Lovatt

FALLING

Falling – also featured on Ayanna's debut album *Road Runner* – is a song about unrequited love, co-written with pianist and songwriter Alex Webb. This is an intimate new arrangement of the soulful lilting ballad for voice, cello, piano and percussion.

© *Ayanna Witter-Johnson*

HOLDING

The world premiere of *Holding* took place in 2021, although I'd actually performed it dozens of times before! To explain, my son Rowan was born a few months before the premiere, and part of my daily routine involved taking him for a walk around our local park in Berlin. This could take up to two hours – depending on how successfully I could get him to sleep – so I started thinking about how to use that time creatively, getting into the habit of inventing melodies and various musical things in my head, and then writing them down when I got back home.

One of the routes in the park is a circular running track. Whilst on this, I thought I'd write the most incredibly simple thing I could, something that would seem like it had a constant cycle – going round and round – with the connections being disguised by the piece having an irregular length. Each bar has exactly the same rhythm, and I realised that this never-ending cycle would hopefully be most useful in the (considerable!) efforts to put little Rowan to sleep each night. Until last year (2021), I had sung this to him dozens of times, but never actually played it on an instrument – hence a world premiere but not a first performance!

Usually, I like the pieces I write to have an arc and a clear narrative journey, but this one is just meant to exist and hopefully be pleasant to listen to. I hope you enjoy it, but please do try to remain awake!

© *Gwilym Simcock*

TIDAL WARNING

World premiere recording / LSO Commission

As a young child, I often spent the six-week summer holiday season in Jamaica, staying with extended family and taking trips to a particular beach along the south coast of the island. On a more recent visit to this familiar spot, I bore witness to a fatal drowning of a young man. The sea was rough, he was drinking alcohol and refused to heed the warning of his friends – and indeed the violent waves – that he must not go into the water for a swim. Ignoring the local pleas, he proceeded to enter the water and after half an hour was not seen again. A search party of fishermen was sent to investigate, but it was too late. They recovered his body and brought him back to shore. They say he heard the Angel of Death calling and could not resist her voice.

This piece is my response to the intensity and tense atmosphere that led up to that moment – the conflict between having a beautiful day along the coast and then being thrown into an emotional cocktail of

disbelief, sadness and acceptance at the fleeting nature of life. The ostinato rhythm in the marimba part holds the essence of basic dancehall rhythms, which were playing through the restaurant speakers at the time, and underpins the entire piece like the constancy of time passing. The other instrumental parts weave in and out, at times in harmony, and at others in odds with one another, searching for a consensus and state of peace amidst an uncertain moment in time.

© *Ayanna Witter-Johnson*

OCEAN FLOOR SUITE

World premiere recording / LSO Commission

Ocean Floor Suite pays homage to a major historical event that affected my ancestors in the 18th century and reflects upon the fateful day I had at the beach along the south coast of Jamaica a few years ago, the same event depicted in *Tidal Warning*.

In 1781, the *Zong* – a British slave ship – left Ghana with twice the number it was designed



to carry, bound for Jamaica. The ship's owners claimed that water was running low, and the crew threw more than 130 living enslaved people overboard. Evidence to the contrary suggested that there was heavy rain and that the ship had enough water. The ship owners had taken out insurance for their 'cargo' of enslaved people and made a claim for compensation upon their return to England.

Over 200 years later, a young man lost his life to the powerful ocean currents in what felt like a senseless death the day I was at the beach along the south coast of Jamaica. What, and whom, did he leave behind? A young life cut short. At the same time, a baptism in the water was taking place further along the coast, and in the other direction along the beach children were playing, splashing in the shallow waves, building sandcastles, and burying each other knee-deep, completely unaware of the mourning party that was gathering around the dead body of the young man that had now been brought back to shore. I scanned the horizon in awe of the spectrum of events. Even amidst the darkness of death there is still room for joy.

The rhythms, choice of percussion, and harmony, all have symbolic meaning in relation to the inspiration for the songs.

© *Ayanna Witter-Johnson*

FOREVER

I composed *Forever* as an accompanying piece to my song *Unconditionally*, dedicated to my mother, that opens this album. *Forever* expands upon the gratitude that I express to her for nurturing my musicality in my early childhood. When I was three years old, my mother was a dancer in a Ghanaian West African dance troupe, and I would dance with them on a few of their shows, becoming the 'baby' of the troupe. Those dances are embedded in my soul, especially the grounding drumming rhythms of the Atsiagbekor dance of the Ewe-speaking people of Southern Ghana, Togo, and Benin. It is this sound that opens the piece, forever combining my earliest memories of my love for dance and music.

© *Ayanna Witter-Johnson*





AYANNA WITTER-JOHNSON

VOICE, CELLO, PERCUSSION & COMPOSER

Some composers defy succinct definition, and shoehorning Ayanna Witter-Johnson into a tidy profile is no mean feat. Her music blurs boundaries between classical and alternative RnB – two genres that rarely coexist – and you are just as likely to find her singing while playing the cello, as you are to find her pouring over an orchestral score. This remarkable confluence of styles stems from a childhood that was saturated with music of every shape and colour. ‘My Dad and Uncle are DJs and my Mum loves to sing,’ says Ayanna, ‘so I embraced a pretty healthy diet of classical piano and cello studies while absorbing pop culture, soul, jazz, reggae, hip-hop and RnB music throughout my childhood and until now’.

Witter-Johnson was just three years old when her mother spotted an aptitude for music and took her to her first piano lesson, and she took up the cello as her second instrument (now very much her first) when she was thirteen. She went on to graduate with first-class degrees from both Trinity

Laban and the Manhattan School of Music, and in 2009 was featured as an Emerging Artist in Residence at London's Southbank Centre. Since then, she has been commissioned by the Ligeti, Solem and Kronos Quartets, and London Symphony Orchestra; collaborated with Anoushka Shankar, Courtney Pine and Nitin Sawhney; and been nominated for a MOBO award. A recipient of the Nordoff and Robbins' Classical O2 Silver Clef Award, Ayanna has toured the world performing with Andrea Bocelli and Peter Gabriel amongst others. She cites Bob Marley and Stevie Wonder among her greatest influences as readily as she does J S Bach and Claude Debussy, and while many of her works chronicle her experience as a female artist in the 21st century, she is also no stranger to tackling issues of social oppression and globalisation. Her music is impossible to label (and why should we?) but its guiding principle is one of authenticity and personal truth.

Profile © Jo Kirkbride

GWILYM SIMCOCK

PIANIST & COMPOSER

Gwilym Simcock has carved out a career as one of the most gifted pianists and imaginative composers on the European scene. Gwilym's influences are wide ranging, from jazz legends to classical composers. Although principally a jazz artist, Gwilym has composed numerous works for larger Classical ensembles that combine through-composed elements with improvisation, creating a sound that is distinctive and very much his own.

Gwilym's career is unique in spanning a huge range of musical settings. He has performed with orchestras, choirs, big bands, and dancers, as well as performing with musicians from diverse backgrounds including the classical, jazz, folk, and rock traditions. Gwilym has also written music that has appeared on television and on stage.

Gwilym has led and recorded a variety of different projects. His debut album *Perception* was nominated for Best Album in the BBC Jazz Awards 2008 and has been

critically acclaimed at home and abroad. Subsequent albums have been universally praised with reviews citing his work as 'sublime', 'flawless' and 'impressive'. Gwilym was nominated for the Mercury Prize in 2011.

© Gregor Hohenberg



© Benjamin Ealovega



**LSO Percussion Ensemble (L-to-R):
Neil Percy, Jacob Brown, Sam Walton, David Jackson**

LSO PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE

NEIL PERCY, DAVID JACKSON,
SAM WALTON, JACOB BROWN

The LSO Percussion Ensemble comprises members of the London Symphony Orchestra's percussion section, as well as distinguished orchestral players with enviable reputations. Its members have appeared on countless LSO recordings, including hundreds of soundtracks for films such as *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Braveheart*, *Notting Hill*, and *The Shape of Water*. The ensemble enjoys an international following, and in 2018 embarked on their first tour of Japan.

The backbone of their contribution to the LSO is approximately 70 concerts every year that the orchestra gives at its home in the Barbican Centre, as well as a similar number on tour around the world, working with such eminent conductors as Bernard Haitink, Sir Antonio Pappano (LSO Chief Conductor from 2024), and Sir Simon Rattle (LSO Music Director 2017–2023, Conductor Emeritus from 2023).

The group's first release on the LSO Live label featured music by Steve Reich, including *Sextet*, *Clapping Music* and *Music for Pieces of Wood*, the last of which was licensed by AMC for use in Season 8 of *The Walking Dead*. The *Gramophone* review of the album commented that “the LSO percussion's performance of *Sextet* builds up in energy and momentum to a quite thrilling climax”, and *HR Audio* remarked, “the performances and the recorded sound are so outstanding... unreservedly recommended”.

Their second album, *Quartet Quintet*, presents a vibrant, jazz-infused selection of music, including the world premiere of Gwilym Simcock's *Quintet*, which draws inspiration from seminal jazz-fusion acts Steps Ahead, Yellowjackets, and Weather Report; Steve Reich's *Quartet* for two vibraphones and two pianos; and works by Chick Corea, Joe Locke, and Makoto Ozone.

LINE-UPS

Unconditionally

Ayanna Vocals, cello,
foot jam block
Gwilym Piano
Neil Bongos, vibraphone
Sam Shaker, congas

All Roads

Ayanna Vocals, cello
Gwilym Piano
Neil Drumset
David Marimba
Sam Marimba
Jacob Vibraphone

Chariot

Ayanna Vocals, cello
Gwilym Piano
Neil Drumset
David Marimba
Sam Marimba
Jacob Vibraphone

Falling

Ayanna Vocals, cello,
foot jam block
Gwilym Piano
Neil Drumset

Holding

Gwilym Piano
Neil Vibraphone 1
Jacob Vibraphone 2
David Marimba 1
Sam Marimba 2

Tidal Warning

Neil Vibraphone 1
Jacob Vibraphone 2
David Marimba 1
Sam Marimba 2
Gwilym Piano

Ocean Floor Suite

Prologue
Ayanna Spoken text
Sam Ocean drum (Geophone)

I. The Darkest Hour

Ayanna Vocals, cello
Gwilym Piano
Neil Vibraphone
Sam Ocean drum (Geophone)
David Bass drum, caxixi,
cymbal
Jacob Congas, tubular bell,
wood block

II. Pioneers

Ayanna Vocals, cello,
foot jam block
Gwilym Piano
Neil Udu [drum]
Sam Talking drum
David Cabasa
Jacob Triangle, wood block,
mark tree

III. Ocean View

Ayanna Vocals, cello
Gwilym Piano
Neil Drumset, tambourine
Sam Marimba
David Vibraphone
Jacob Triangle

Forever

Ayanna Vocals, cello,
foot jam block
Gwilym Piano
Neil Congas, bongos
David Caxixi, shaker
Sam Djembe, hi-hat
Jacob Cowbell, bass drum,
wood block

ALSO AVAILABLE ON LSO LIVE

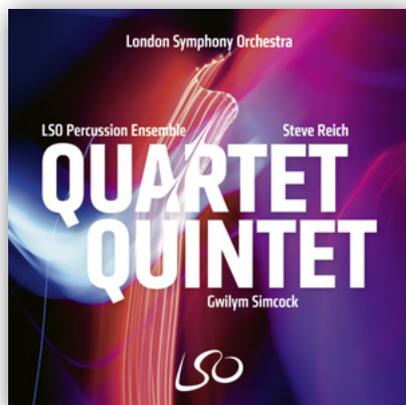
Available on disc and via all major digital music services

For further information on the entire LSO Live catalogue, previews and to order online visit Isolive.co.uk

QUARTET QUINTET

Reich, Simcock, Locke,
Corea & Ozone

LSO Percussion Ensemble



CD (LSO5090)

'Goodness, this is virtuoso musicianship, the range and sophistication of Jonathan Stokes and Neil Hutchinson's recording a joy to hear ... A varied and brilliant programme, impeccably played and recorded; percussion albums don't come much better than this.'
Musicweb International

Steve Reich

Sextet, Clapping Music,
Music for Pieces of Wood

LSO Percussion Ensemble



SACD (LSO5073) / LP (LSO5073-LP)

Recordings of the Year 2016 – Finalist
Presto Music

Performance *****
Recording ****
BBC Music Magazine

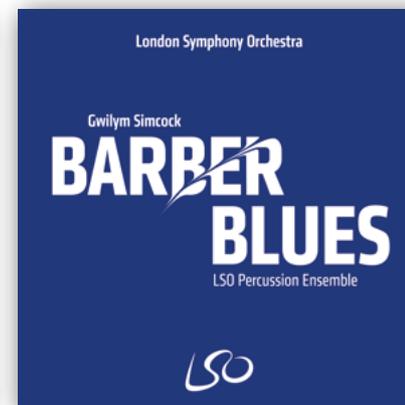
Performance *****
Recording *****
HR Audio

********* *The Telegraph*

Gwilym Simcock

Barber Blues

LSO Percussion Ensemble



Digital (LSO5091-D)