



# Divergent Sounds

Queen Elizabeth Hall  
Sunday 14 May 2023, 4 and 7pm

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**SOUTHBANK  
CENTRE**

## Join the conversation

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Divergent Sounds is part of a research project at King's College London exploring ways in which neurodivergent people's minds may work differently, and the strengths and challenges that come with being neurodivergent in a neurotypical world.

Today's performance builds on conversations with neurodivergent people to explore their experience and identity. As part of our research, we would love to hear how this performance has influenced your thinking about the concept of neurodiversity and the experiences of neurodivergent people.

Scan the QR code to access a short survey or visit us in the foyer after the performance.



Flow Associates, an independent evaluation and audience engagement consultancy, are supporting King's College London to measure the impact of *Divergent Sounds*.

# Flow

# Tonight's programme

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## Divergent Sounds

### Music:

**Amble Skuse** *Divergent Sounds* (world premiere)

### Artists:

**City of London Sinfonia** orchestra

**Alexandra Wood** leader

**Jack Sheen** conductor

**Stephanie Lamprea** soprano

**Amble Skuse** composer

**Jen McGregor** dramaturg/librettist

### A note on neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is the idea that we all differ in our neurological make-up – namely the way our brains have developed and how they function. These differences mean that we all process information differently, therefore we will all experience the world around us in a different manner.

We acknowledge that the experiences that inspired these soundscapes are not representative of the full neurodivergent community – there is vast diversity within and between neurodivergent people. The focus groups were conducted online and largely via spoken word, therefore they may not have been accessible to all.

Dr Virginia Carter Leno

# Welcome from Dr Virginia Carter Leno

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I was motivated to create this project because sometimes I get a sense that the research we do in the academic world, focused around how neurodivergent people's brains develop differently, does not capture the lived experience of being neurodivergent. I could tell you which parts of the brain we think function differently in neurodivergent people, but this doesn't give you a sense of what it is actually like to be neurodivergent.

I really wanted to work with creative types and neurodivergent people to create something engaging for people who might not know much about neurodiversity – I could stand up and give you an academic lecture about my research, but I suspect this wouldn't be as interesting or accessible!

The soundscapes that make up this piece used a series of online focus groups conducted last year as their source material. I spoke to around

25 neurodivergent people, and they told me how they felt they experienced the world differently, and the impact it had on their lives. Recordings of these discussions were then used to shape musical depictions of people's lived experience. It was important to me that neurodivergent voices were at the very core of this project, and that we gave them a platform by which to speak directly to the audience.

Better understanding of these lived experiences will hopefully shift society towards a deeper appreciation of human diversity, and encourage people to consider how we all experience the world slightly differently, and this might dictate how we interact with and respond to the world. Getting people to think more on these topics will hopefully encourage people to reflect on how we could make the world more inclusive for people with all different types of minds.

Dr Virginia Carter Leno

# Introduction to the music by Amble Skuse

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My work uses voices of people we might not usually hear in mainstream media. I love to work with the rhythms, pitch, and tone of voices, but also to tell stories and share different perspectives. This project allowed me to delve deep into the experiences of neurodivergent people and to draw out threads and themes for the audience to experience.

I initially worked with librettist Jen McGregor to go through all the text and draw out themes and phrases that we wanted to share with an audience. We wanted to get a balance of different experiences, different voices, and different aspects of neurodivergent experience. Once we had a thread which went through those stories, Jen wrote the songs from phrases in the interviews, and from her own lived experience of neurodivergence. She recorded herself speaking her songs and I set to work notating all the phrases in the songs directly from the interviews or from Jen's speech. I notated pitch

and rhythm and then set chord progressions and orchestration under the 'melodies' of the words. For the soundscapes I used the original clips from the interviews and layered them thematically into each soundscape. In the soundscapes, the players have more freedom to interpret what they are hearing and improvise alongside it. This is a key aspect of my work with disabled composition as it reflects our experience of being different every day, and having fluctuating conditions. The players are free to be who they are in the moment of the soundscapes.

I hope that the audience hears a broad range of experiences of being neurodivergent. We have tried to show both internal and external (society-based) experiences, as well as the emotions that come with those experiences, anxiety and exclusion, but also community and hope.

Amble Skuse

## Contributors

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This project would not have been possible without the generous contribution of the people who took part in our neurodivergent focus groups. We thank them first and foremost.



**Dr Virginia Carter Leno** is a Sir Henry Wellcome postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience at King's College London. Her research focuses on understanding differences in brain development and functioning that may characterise autism, and the reasons behind the high prevalence of mental health difficulties in autistic youth.



**Amble Skuse** is a composer and sound artist who uses disability theory, body sensor technology, spoken word interviews, and electronics to create unique sound works. She is interested in the interface between the disabled body and the exterior world, and has explored this through numerous sound walks using her wheelchair.



**Jen McGregor** is an award-winning neurodivergent dramaturg, director, and playwright based in Edinburgh. Recent credits include *Ghost Stories* (Pitlochry Festival Theatre), electronic opera *Music for First Contact* with Post Coal Prom Queen (Hidden Door Festival), and *Rabblar* (Scottish International Storytelling Festival).



**Jack Hudson** is an illustrator, designer and director working on both personal and commercial projects from his studio based in Somerset. Over the last decade his colourful work has been commissioned by brands such as Google, Oreo and The BBC whilst his editorial work has been published by Taschen and The Guardian newspaper.



**Mehr Siddique** is a 3rd year King's College London medical student who worked on the project as a research fellow as part of the King's Undergraduate Research Fellowship programme. She helped with running the focus groups on which the compositions are based.

# Project steering committee

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Our steering committee consists of four neurodivergent people with an interest in collaborative and socially engaged projects who have been involved throughout to aid decision making and ensure the project is respectful of neurodivergent narratives, priorities, and agency.



**Jon Adams** is both a contemporary artist, autistic advocate, and researcher. He makes a variety of work in many differing media, often referencing his autism, synaesthesia, and dyslexia, all interwoven with history, science, time, and his past experiences. He advocates for the rights of neurodivergent people to fully access the arts, funding, and health care, and to coproduce relevant research.



**Iona McTaggart** is a neurodivergent writer/actor and producer. Currently she is the Innovation producer at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, working with many different stakeholders both inside and outside of the creative arts industry, promoting cultural democracy and innovative collaboration within her work.





**Dr Tony Lloyd** is the CEO of the ADHD Foundation Neurodiversity Charity, the largest user-led ADHD specialist agency in Europe. The Foundation provides services, training and consultancy for the UK National Health Service, public and private sectors, relating to all aspects of neurodiversity; dyslexia, autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, and Tourette's. Dr Lloyd has been a pioneering advocate for neurodiverse paradigm in health, education, and business in the UK.



**Siofra Heraty** is a neurodivergent researcher with a love for the arts. She is passionate about sharing neurodivergent lived experiences with the world in many different forms, and an advocate for research co-production.

# Musicians

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**Jack Sheen** is a musical polymath, in demand as both conductor and composer, as well as a creator of dynamic cross-arts projects.

Sheen has already worked with leading orchestras including London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic, Britten Sinfonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia, and Manchester Camerata.



Colombian-American soprano **Stephanie Lamprea** is an architect of new sounds and expressions as a performer, recitalist, curator, composer, and improviser, specializing in contemporary-classical repertoire. Trained as an operatic coloratura, Stephanie uses her voice as a mechanism of avant-garde performance art, creating “maniacal shifts of vocal production and character... like an icepick through the skull” (composer Jason Eckardt).

# City of London Sinfonia

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City of London Sinfonia (CLS) is a London-based chamber orchestra that approaches all audiences – from our concert-goers to people in the community or healthcare settings – as individuals who can connect with the musical experience in their own way. With Creative Director and Leader Alexandra Wood, CLS's musicians bring a uniquely collaborative approach to everything they do, encouraging audiences to engage more fully in the concert experience. The Orchestra is leading the way in creative, collaborative practice in health and social care through its participation programme – the driver of everything the Orchestra does. CLS gives over 75 performances each year, performing regularly at the Albany (Deptford), Canada Water Theatre, Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall, Southwark Cathedral, and as Resident Orchestra at Opera Holland Park since 2004.

## On stage tonight

### **Violin 1**

Alexandra Wood

### **Violin 2**

Jane Carwardine

### **Viola**

Matt Maguire

### **Cello**

Will Schofield

### **Bass**

Paul Sherman

### **Clarinet/Bass**

Hugo Lao

### **Trumpet**

David Hilton

### **Percussion**

Glyn Matthews

Chris Blundell

### **Harp**

Paula Chateauneuf

### **Piano/Keyboard**

Clíodna Shanahan

# Acknowledgements

This project was generously funded by the Wellcome Trust (213608/Z/18/B), and represents a collaboration between King's College London and City of London Sinfonia. We also thank the Southbank Centre for their support in putting on the final musical performances. BSL was provided by Performance Interpreting.



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