

PRESS RELEASE
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Michael Nyman

War Work: 8 Songs with Film

Film-concert – Salle Pleyel, November 23rd

Michael Nyman
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A total artwork, *War Work* is not a documentary and is more than a film. It is an act of remembrance interweaving music, images and poems to exhume the unbearable reality of the sufferings inflicted on humanity during the Great War. Horrors often conveniently hidden under hygienic descriptions or abstract accounts of a war which claimed the lives of 8 millions fighting men and wounded 21 millions more.

Michael Nyman's montage of German and French archives combined to the soundtrack he has composed – eight songs preceded by instrumental movements and based on texts by war poets who all died, except one, during the conflict – makes us feel the trauma of war, its rational movements (its practical organisation) and its chaos (its deformation of men).

Nyman's work brings formlessness, the disfiguration and mechanisation of the soldier's body, to form both visually and musically. It is with the corporeality of war, the wounded flesh and prostheses of broken faces, the glorified muscles of soldiers training, the automated bodies of weapons, tanks and planes that he confronts us. But aestheticisation is avoided by reiteration. Close-ups of faces beyond repair are repeated throughout the film, mercilessly imprinted on our eye. They become a nagging refrain intensified by the fragments of paintings and drawings produced at the time by the avant-garde and which Michael Nyman reframes and atomises as as many shrapnels. Works by Italian futurists, British vorticists and German expressionists dissect the war's barbarism. Its obscenity is reflected in the shock created between images which link the distress of victims of post-traumatic stress disorder whose dysfunctional bodies convulse and the vanity of bare-breasted soldiers running in circles.

There is a sense of ineluctability in the way violence 'circulates' in a film structurally founded on repetition: from men in action on battlefields where sleep looks like death to boy scouts playing at war, there is but a step. It is this tragedy that *War Work* invites us to experience, all the more intensely that the film pertains to the monumentality of architecture. Like a living cenotaph, it builds new memories every time it is performed on stage by Michael Nyman and his band. A promise that gives us a beautiful incentive to *remember*.

War Work: Eight Songs with Film was commissioned in 2014 by War on Screen International Film Festival (Châlons-en-Champagne, France); L'Arsenal de Metz (Metz, France); La Cité de la musique (Paris, France); KölnMusik Betriebs und Service GmbH/Kölner Philharmonie (Köln, Germany) and The Palace of Arts (Budapest, Hungary) to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the First World War.