



Recomposed

We spoke to Max Richter about the language of dance, the Barbican's Rain Room, and breathing new life into old music



Rain Room Installation image by Felix Clay. Courtesy of Barbican Art Gallery



German-born British composer Max Richter has produced for Vashti Bunyan, soundtracked Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir* and worked with Julian Opie and Wayne McGregor for *The Royal Ballet*.

His education began in Edinburgh, continued in London's Royal Academy, and then Florence, with electronic music pioneer Luciano Berio. "Studying classical music is a little like spending time in a museum," he says. "You get to know lots of old stuff. You live in a slightly strange historical world where you're in dialogue with people who are dead..."

Richter speaks of Bach and Purcell as his musical "Himalayas", though he has a passion for electronica, singling out Warp Records-signed Autechre and American metal band Godspeed. "I love that feeling in music, no matter what the style, that somebody is committed," he says. "That they've made a decision and it has authenticity".

A few years ago, he was approached by Deutsche Grammophon to contribute to their *Recomposed* series, which invites contemporary artists to re-work an original piece. He took the opportunity to brush the dust from a titan of classical music, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*.

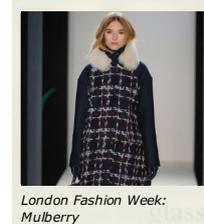
"I think, like many people, I got to know it as a kid by hearing it around," he says. "I thought it was beautiful. But then you're hearing it all the time, and I just fell out of love. I thought this would be a perfect chance to investigate the material, take a trip through it, sort of reclaim it and maybe in doing so, reclaim it for other people too."

At the end of "Summer" in the original, there's a violent thunderstorm. We're hit with an agitated riff in the strings, then a dramatic pause. In Richter's version there is no pause; instead he loops the riff, offbeats the bass notes, and keeps going. Under his pen, around 75% of the source material was put aside, the remainder thoroughly explored.

"Once I started to really look at the dots on the pages," he says, "I just thought 'this is so fantastically put together, the ideas so brilliant'. I treated it as a sort of chemistry experiment, raw materials Vivaldi had made that I could shuffle around. Like a remix, but on paper. Moving dots around on a page, then re-recording it. An analog remix."



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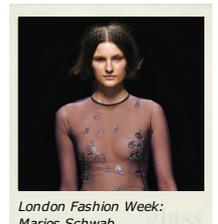
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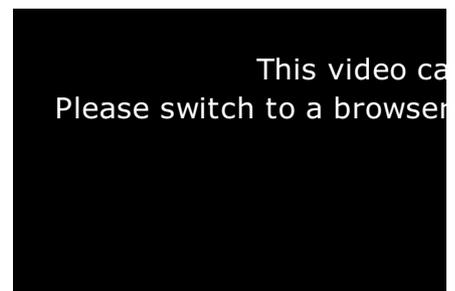
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Cut Out

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glassmagazine Max Richter talks dance, the Barbican's Rain Room & breathing life into old music.<http://t.co/q86zrCQ2>
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I know the original and, since preparing for the interview, have become a little obsessed by Richter's version. It's like he's adapted it to suit my electro leanings. Before, it was the Four Seasons. Now, it's the soundtrack to a heady night when you caught fragments of the Four Seasons.

A good deal of Richter's work has been for the stage. He scored INFRA at The Royal Ballet for choreographer Wayne McGregor, who directed SUM, Richter's chamber opera inspired by neuroscientist David Eagleman's short stories about the afterlife.

"Dance is its own language," he says, "A language without words. Which is an amazing thing because for many of us – certainly in my own case – the universe is full of words. But dance has this sort of short circuit that bypasses that. Its emotional quality is amazingly direct."

In an ongoing relationship with London's Barbican Centre, Richter was commissioned to soundtrack McGregor's Random Dance performances in the Rain Room, an interactive water sculpture by art collective rAndom International. As you move through sheets of rain – rendered almost digital by intense white light – the water moves aside, keeping you dry as you explore the space. A choreographed downpour.

"I thought it felt very immersive," says Richter. "It has a sort of womb-like quality, in the dark with the sound of the water, and I wanted to make a piece of music that would sit inside that without getting in the way. I knew that Wayne was going to make a movement piece for it, so I was thinking about pulsation, tempo, and the expressiveness the dancers bring with their physicality."

Richter terms Rain Room a one-liner, which it sort of is, though one of the most beautiful and magical you're ever likely to experience. "You know in a cartoon when there's a rain cloud above someone's head and it's only raining on them? It's like the antithesis of that."

Richter has a new solo album due later this year, and is currently putting the finishing touches to a score for Ari Folman's live action animation The Congress.

by Sam Edwards

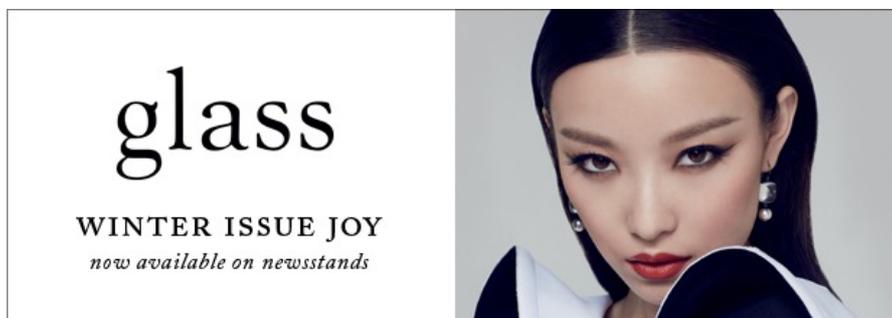
Keep up to date with his live gigs: **Max Richter**

Watch a video of **Random Dance in the Rain Room**, with music by Richter.

See a performance of Richter's **Recomposed Four Seasons**

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