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do something different

music

contemporary
spring
08

**Pet Shop
Boys
Battleship
Potemkin**

**with the BBC
Concert Orchestra
conducted by
Jonathan
Stockhammer**

Fri 11 Jan 9pm

www.barbican.org.uk/contemporary

Free programme

Pet Shop Boys Battleship Potemkin

Pet Shop Boys

BBC Concert Orchestra

Jonathan Stockhammer conductor

Music composed by **Neil Tennant** and
Chris Lowe with orchestrations by
Torsten Rasch.

Thanks to **Sven Helbig**.

Pet Shop Boys personnel:

Pete Gleadall programmer

Ben Adams keyboard technician

Colin Bolland front of house engineer

Holger Schwark orchestra engineer

Seamus Fenton monitor engineer

Joe Sanchez production manager

James Webb stage manager

Phil Pieridis projectionist

Andy Cookston tour manager

Dorrell Management management

Open Sourcing Revolution

Silent films were never meant to be seen in silence, and rarely were. At *Battleship Potemkin's* Moscow premiere in January 1926, its live orchestral accompaniment was a medley of existing pieces by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and others. When later that year, the film was shown in Berlin, the director of the film, Sergei Eisenstein, commissioned an original score composed by Edmund Meisel, an Austrian modernist composer newly migrated to Berlin and known for his wilfully non-commercial



approach. Eisenstein had conceived *Potemkin* from the start as a film whose impact derives equally from pictures and sound - what Richard Wagner termed a *gesamkunstwerk* to describe his own operas, where each aesthetic element is choreographed towards a total experience for the audience.

Meisel's original score was quickly written in just a few days, with many sections of the score simply repeated, due to delays in getting the film passed by the Berlin censorship board. Contemporary reviews of the film all comment on the music's expressive power and emotional impact.

Eisenstein said that *Potemkin* should ideally be re-scored every decade to maintain its

freshness and relevance for each new (revolutionary) generation. And in the intervening 80 years, the film has been shown with many different soundtracks. Most of the many international VHS and DVD versions of *Potemkin* use selections of music from Shostakovich. However it is the Meisel score that set the template for *Potemkin* as a film to be experienced with the body, rather than the mind as Eisenstein intended.

The rescoring of silent films has become a fascinating tributary within contemporary music, infusing and subverting the conventions of classical film music with a new, eclectic musical performance connecting audiences once again to the uniquely plastic beginnings of cinema as an art form. Scoring a silent film presents a special kind of challenge. In most modern films, music exists as a lapping presence, moving in and out of scenes, whereas in *Potemkin*, and in other modern scorings of silent films, everything is musically illuminated, creating a unity governed by the rhythms of the moving images.

The processed, phase shifting sounds of live electronica seem best suited to this work of disinterment. Recent examples include DJ Spooky's inventive remixing of DW Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, re-editing soundtrack and pictures to expose the racist message of the original. Ex Tangerine Dreamer Thorsten Quaeschning's beautiful recent score for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, Detroit techno-DJ Jeff Mills darkly impressive tribute to Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and Sheffield-based From The Nursery who have performed UK concerts against a backdrop of another Soviet classic - Vertov's *The Man With A Movie Camera*. The Barbican has also hosted The Cinematic Orchestra's performance of its score to *The Man With A Movie Camera* and played an important role in rebirthing

silent cinema with its Sound & Silents stream within the Birds Eye View Film Festival with new live accompaniments to silent shorts by Seaming To and Errollyn Wallen.

Pet Shop Boys have over the last two decades built a back catalogue of attitudes and electronica that deals in both irony and sentimentalism, without becoming bogged down by either. They have co-opted the main milestones in pop's development since the mid 1980s whilst still retaining the credibility of marginal, elder statesmen. Ambiguity has been the secret of the Pet Shop Boys' longevity, and allowed them in *Fundamental* (2006) to include darker, more politically charged lyrics than in previous works.

Their collaboration with the German arranger and composer Torsten Rasch and the Dresdener Sinfoniker, includes three new songs in a mainly instrumental score. This is probably the most melodic treatment that *Potemkin* has had in its 80 year history, but also by far the most accessible. The anticipated DVD reissue of the film with this new score will introduce *Potemkin* to the plasma screened living rooms of the present – a million pixels away from the collective experience that Eisenstein conceived. This score is an uplifting version of revolution seen through the rearview mirror of digital culture – open source and glimpsed in the act of becoming. This music describes the journey to the top of the barricades rather than the downwards rush of post-revolutionary terror that usually follows. The score uses a number of generic musical devices. Stripped down, discordant synthesizer passages show the dystopian society about to be changed from within, whilst orchestral led sections are elegiac, relying less on counterpoint for impact. In other sections the bass heavy house patterns



Pet Shop Boys

animate a powerful sense of physical crowd movement through the urban landscape. And at various points in the score, there is the easy familiarity of Tennant's voice, questioning our own failure to rise up against today's deceiving leaders in the song *After All*, and exhorting us to stand together, as brothers, 'all for one and one for all', in the closing song *For Freedom*.

This is a highly relativistic form of, and for, revolution. Friendly to all cultural theories and ideas, meaning whatever we want it to mean. The score resurrects *Potemkin* for a new generation and lets it stand for any revolution, and any popular mass movement. A symbol of the hope for a

'good revolution' as Neil Tennant commented at the time of *Potemkin's* 2004 premier in Trafalgar Square.

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Russell Lack is the author of *Twenty Four Frames Under: A Buried History of Film Music* (Quartet Books, London)

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Battleship Potemkin CD released by EMI Classics/Parlophone Records.



Wed 30 Jan 7.30pm

**Stan Tracey Big Band
and Octet + T' n 'T –
Keith Tippett and
Stan Tracey**

Mon 18 Feb 7.30pm

**African Soul Rebels:
Salif Keita, Tony Allen
+ Awadi**

Sun 9 Mar 7.30pm

**Linton Kwesi Johnson
+ special guests****As part of The Harder They
Come season: Thu 6 Mar –
Sat 5 Apr**

Sun 16 Mar 7.30pm

**Mayra Andrade +
Son de la Frontera**

Fri 28 Mar 8pm

**Dee Dee Bridgewater:
Red Earth – A Malian
Journey**

Mon 31 Mar 7.30pm

Gilberto Gil

Wed 9 Apr 7.30pm

Dianne Reeves

Thu 10 Apr 7.30pm

Lalo Schifrin & LSO

Tues 15 Apr 7.30pm

**Mavis Staples + Jhelisa:
Down in Mississippi**

Fri 25 Apr 7.30pm

Wayne Shorter

Mon 28 Apr 8pm

**The Blues: Back to the
Source Otis Taylor's
'Recapturing the
Banjo' and Bassekou
Kouyate**

Sat 3 May 7.30pm

Café Tacuba + support

Sat 17 May 7.30pm

Abdullah Ibrahim

Thu 29 May & Wed 4 Jun 7.30pm

**Ravi Shankar -
Farewell to Europe
Tour**

Sat 31 May 7.30pm

John McLaughlin

Thu 12 Jun 7.30pm

**Philip Glass - Waiting
for the Barbarians
Part of the Present Voices
Festival: Sun 13 Apr - Thu
12 Jun**

Tue 27 May 7.30pm

**Roberto Fonseca
+ support**



London Symphony Orchestra
Book at lso.co.uk (reduced booking fee)
020 7638 8891 (bkg fee)

Sunday 2 March 2008 7.30pm

Prokofiev Alexander Nevsky
(Live to projection)

Xian Zhang conductor
Anna Stéphan mezzo-soprano
London Symphony Chorus

Prokofiev's choral and orchestral score for Eisenstein's film *Alexander Nevsky*: a mix of tunefulness and sheer expressive power, it's a reminder that great film music does not have to come from Hollywood.

Tickets £6 £12 £18 £24 £30

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This concert is part of the **Only Connect series**, the Barbican's innovative series that brings together the worlds of film, music and art by inviting exceptional musicians, composers, artists and filmmakers to develop collaborations and present new work.

There will be no interval in tonight's concert. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on the Barbican premises. No cameras, tape recorders or any other recording equipment may be taken into the hall.



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