

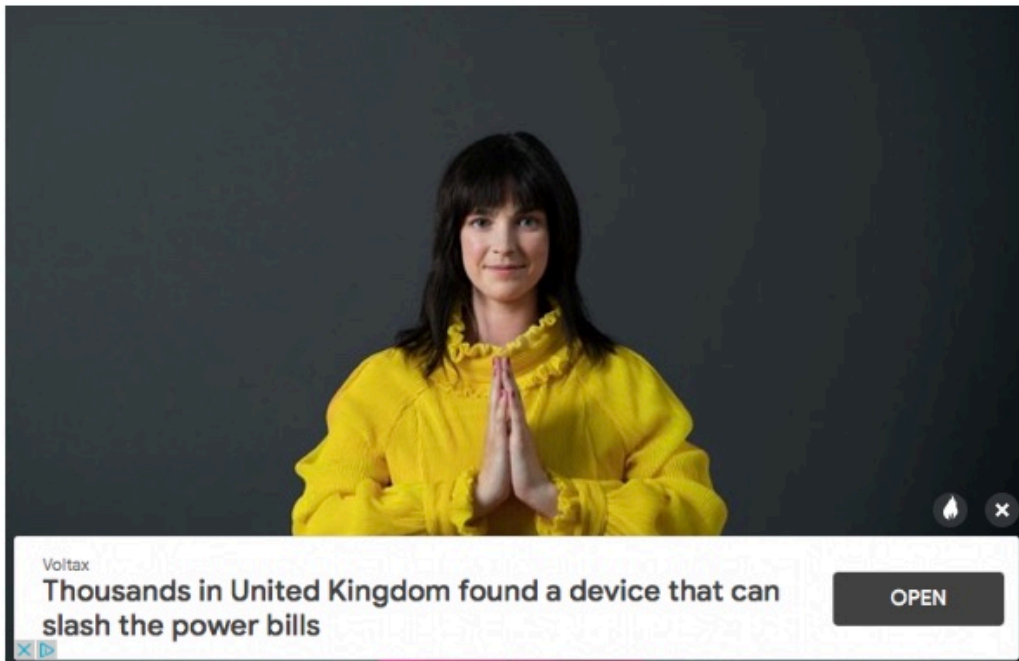
'You want mantras, you'll get mantras' - SUTRA, a yoga-inspired clarinet concerto

During lockdown, Belgian clarinetist and yoga fanatic Annelien Van Wauwe commissioned Flemish composer Wim Henderickx to write a concerto for basset clarinet, orchestra and electronics. The results will be heard for the first time in Glasgow later this month, writes Ken Walton

By Ken Walton

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Annelien Van Wauwe

In 2020, just as Covid threw the world into instant shutdown, Belgian clarinetist and yoga fanatic Annelien Van Wauwe had a crazy idea. Why not commission a new work that combined her two passions?

Two years on, she has recorded the result – SUTRA, a concerto for basset clarinet, orchestra and electronics by Flemish composer Wim Henderickx. That album, Flow, is due for release on 1 April. The previous day, she'll be in [Glasgow](#) with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, to perform it live for the very first time.

“Obviously I’m not going to be doing yoga on stage when I’m playing,” confirms the sunny 34-year-old former BBC New Generation Artist. But yoga did have a key part to play. “I thought it might be a nice idea if I could sing something, because there are very beautiful mantras, Indian music of the sort sometimes sung at the end of yoga sessions. I like to sing, so I asked Wim to consider that. He said ‘sure, if you want mantras you’ll get mantras – for the whole orchestra!’”

That’s why, when you first hear the woodwind in SUTRA, they are whispering words that the audience may not necessarily perceive. “It’s a nice way of working, basically to get the human being behind the musician upfront,” she explains. As for her own vocal involvement, “it’s only at the very, very end that I get to sing for real”.

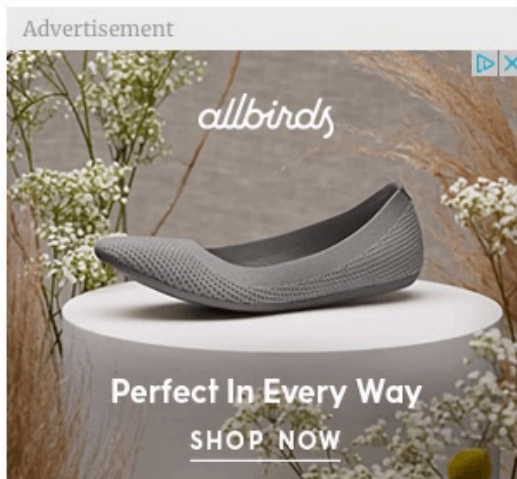


Van Wauwe suggested as a starting point for Henderickx the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, of which four of its eight pillars were to become the basis of the concerto’s four movements: Breath of Life, Meditation, Mind Concentration and Intense Spiritual Union.

“I feel many similarities between actually doing yoga, getting really focused and concentrated on the breath, and then being on stage as a woodwind soloist. It’s almost the same thing. And you also need to have this calmness in your entire system to really be able to perform the music as precise and perfect as possible.”

As to simple practicalities, she also suggested that the new concerto, commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, be scored for the rarer basset clarinet, for which Mozart wrote his famous concerto. “It’s just like an ‘A’ clarinet with extra notes, such a special instrument, yet it’s so silly there’s essentially just this one concerto for it. I played it to Wim and he loved the sound.”

Henderickx responded with his own ideas, such as the use of multi-phonics (playing more than one note at a time). “I really had to do some research to make that sound right,” Van Wauve says. “He also added electronics to the music, which create a completely fascinating sound world.”



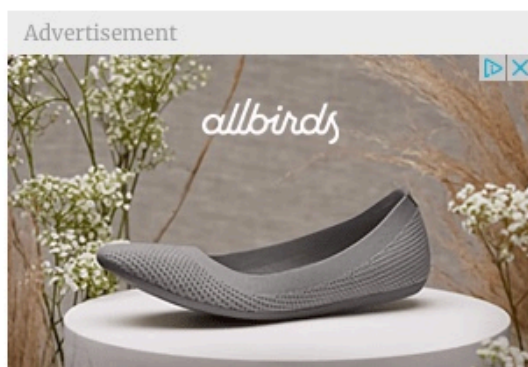
By the time she received the completed work last September, with recording scheduled for November, a new challenge had presented itself. Van Wauve was pregnant, but again her yoga proved its worth. “It was the perfect piece under the circumstances,” she recalls. “It’s all about breath and meditation. I took every

recording day as it came. Four days after we finished, my son was born.”

For the album, which also features the Mozart Concerto, she worked with former BBC SSO principal guest conductor Andrew Manze and the NDR Radiophilharmonie. “I hadn’t realised that his mother was a yoga teacher and he knew everything about it. He made the music seem so natural.”

The Glasgow performance, which Martyn Brabbins conducts, will be a whole new experience again, she reckons. “Being the first live performance, and having these amazing electronics surrounding the audience, will be so different. I’ll get to feel how it really should sound.”

This isn’t Van Wauwe’s first collaboration with the SSO. That was in the Royal Albert Hall at the 2018 BBC Proms. “It was probably the most special concert I’ve ever done,” she recalls. “But gosh, with all those people, it being recorded and televised, the pressure was on. I was on my yoga blanket for about five hours before.”



*Annelien Van Wauwe premieres Wim Henderickx’s SUTRA with the BBC SSO at the City Halls, Glasgow, 31 March. Details at www.bbc.co.uk/bbcso. Her new album, *Flow*, is released 1 April on Pentatone.*



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