

Lena Herzog

Last Whispers

with composition and sound design
by Marco Capalbo and Mark Mangini

The British
Museum



BLOOMSBURY
FESTIVAL
19-23 OCTOBER 2016

www.lastwhispers.org

January 2017

For Immediate Release

Last Whispers

Oratorio for Vanished Voices, Collapsing Universes and a Falling Tree

is an immersive sound and video installation of new work by artist Lena Herzog (concept & direction) built on her themes of ritual and gesture, as well as her exploration of loss and dislocation.

The fifty three minute Oratorio is original and it is comprised of speech, choral pieces, recitatives, incantations, songs and ritual chants spoken and sung in the languages that are extinct or endangered. The black-and-white video projection combines animation, stills, visualization and footage poetically linking image and spatially distributed complex 8.1 sound arrangement.

It is a project about a mass extinction—the unprecedented disappearance of our linguistic diversity. By definition, it occurs in silence since silence is the very form of this extinction.

In collaboration with the Endangered Languages Archive at SOAS University of London, Herzog's team (researchers Theresa Schwartzman and Eveling Villa) culled together an extensive source library of hundreds of voice recordings from all over the planet. Based on this diverse material of spoken words, songs and stories from extinct and endangered languages, Herzog and the composers Marco Capalbo and Mark Mangini created an experiential soundscape with a rich aural and spectral quality as well as an accompanying video (by Lena Herzog, Amanda Tasse, Tomas Van Houtryve and Aziz Lechgar) so that we can hear and feel this vanishing chorus and experience these distant worlds gathered into one piece.

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Last Whispers is an invocation of the languages that have gone extinct and an incantation of those that are endangered.

Last Whispers, Oratorio for Vanished Voices, Collapsing Universes and a Falling Tree premiered in October 2016 in The Living and Dying Gallery at the British Museum.

“When museum collections and artistic responses to cultural phenomenon meet we gain unique insights in to the very heart of what it is to be human.

Last Whispers allowed us to contemplate endangered languages and their probable extinction in a space surrounded by the material culture that would have accompanied those languages for generations. Thought provoking and moving, Last Whispers raises more questions than it answers, pushing us to learn more, and one can be sure that those beautiful voices and all that they represent continue to linger, whispering in the minds of all who engage with them.

Lena Herzog’s Last Whispers is informative, beautiful and heart breaking.”

David Sheldon, curator
British Museum

Collaborator & Resources:

Last Whispers’ main collaborator and resource on the project has been The Endangered Languages Documentation Programme of The Department of Linguistics, SOAS, University of London headed by the Programme Director, Mandana Seyfeddinipur.

