

Niels Rønsholdt

Gaze for Gaze (2017)

Blik for Blik

performance opera
for ensemble, actors, and singers

Dur. c. 75'

Commissioned by SCENATET

Dedicated to Anna Berit and SCENATET

LIBRETTO

Edition·S music-sound-art

T/ (+45) 3313 5445 · E/ sales@edition-s.dk · W/ www.edition-s.dk

DANISH ARTS FOUNDATION

Edition-S publications are supported by the Danish Arts Foundation / Edition-S udgivelser er støttet af Statens Kunstfond

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OVERTURE

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

Music is a dark world of meaningless abstraction. Of memory and longing. That's why I prefer the stage to music. The stage is much more like the real world. The stage is language and body. There is action and reaction. Even so, what goes on on the stage isn't real either. The stage is pure imagination, pure fiction, pure possibility. Much like the things in life you didn't do. The kiss you chose not to accept will forever remain a fantasy. The child you chose to abort will remain unreal. The city you chose not to move to will remain unknown to you. The man or woman you chose to leave, the parent you would have been; the person you would have been in that city, with that man or woman, if you had accepted that kiss; if you had dropped everything to take that job: all these things could all have been real, but they are not. Like the stage they are fiction. Like everything you are about to see, they aren't real.

As in love, as always, there are certain rules that you must obey. Please listen carefully. In a moment you will receive a card with a number of phrases on it. When you feel a hand on your shoulder, read the first phrase aloud to the other members of the audience. The next time you feel a hand on your shoulder, read the next phrase on your card aloud. And so on and so forth. Hand on shoulder – read a phrase. Hand on shoulder, read the next phrase. And so on and so forth. You might feel uncomfortable about it. It might feel awkward. But why not read aloud with pride? They are just words, none of this is real. Like so many things, the words could have been real, but they are not.

ACT 1
Open Eye

Scene 1.

You are silent

You look away

Why don't you look at me?

You seem lonely

I want you to be silent

I hate you because of your family

I am going to forget her gaze

You cry when you think I am not looking

Why don't you feel my soft skin under your palm?

I hate you because you don't come to me when I cry

I am going to run

I want to talk away the silence

Who was she?

I am going to forget her soft skin under my palm

You don't seem to admire me

That woman you secretly kissed in the snow: who was she?

I hate you because of your arrogance

I am going to keep running until I forget her

You never touch me

I want you to stay.

Scene 2.

You don't fuck me the right way

I want you to sit in my chair forever

I hate you because you remind me of my father

I would have screamed at you how much I hated the way you touched her

Why don't you slide your hand down my dress?

You don't seem to like my family

Why don't you squeeze your hand into my clothes

I want to be alone

Instead I remained silent

I am going to forget her

I would have poked my own eyes out to forget the sight of your mouth on her skin

Why don't you feel the way your hand meets the soft hairs?

Instead I went on looking

You don't seem to love me

I am going to forget what she asked me to do

I would have hit her chest so hard that my hand went through her skin, her flesh, her bones.

When did you feel alive?

Instead I turned away

I hate you because of your weakness

When our bodies were softly moving to the music

I would have fucked her chest with my bare arm

Instead I left the room without a word

You are secretive

I would have enjoyed how the light faded from her eyes

I want to leave and never come back

Instead I was the one left in darkness

[Darkness]

Scene 3.

[Light]

When did you love me the most?

I am going to forget how deeply I fell into her eyes.

I want you to let me feed you, nurse you, wash you

When the rhythm had us moving in time, like two swans on the same lake

You are not tender

Your memory will capture this moment in time, like a camera

I hate you because of your friends

He stands up

She looks at him as he gets up from the chair

I want you to forget about her

He wants to go to her

She hopes he will come to her

He changes his mind

She thinks he might be interesting

He thinks poorly of himself

She is disappointed that he sits down

He stands up again

She thinks he is weak

He walks a few steps

She thinks he lacks courage

He decides not to do it, it is too dangerous

She watches him stand up again

He decides to do it

She loses any interest in him as he stands there, wracked with doubt

He thinks life is too short not to do it. What is the worst that could happen?

She wanted to get up and go to him, but now she doesn't care

He is afraid she will reject him

She watches him walk towards her

He fears what a rejection would do to him

She really hates him, at this moment she hates him

He feels strength rush through him; he is proud of himself as he walks towards her

She gazes into his eyes. She hopes he understands how little she wants him to approach her

He feels his heart pounding

She decides to reject him by humiliation

He tells himself that she will like him, that she will be nice to him, that the look she is giving him means that she wants him to approach her.

She decides to humiliate him in a way that will stay with him for the rest of his life, something that will destroy his trust in himself, in women and in love

He smiles and says 'Hello'

[Darkness]

Scene 4.

[Light]

Why don't you feel the moist warmth

When were you happy?

I hate you because you look at me that way

I want to keep the lights on

I am going to forget that sensation

When the dance made you lose control

You are cold

Instead I left the room without a word

I hate you because of who you are

When was I who you wanted me to be?

I want to forget you

I would have watched her eyes turn dark

When I felt the warm smell of your breath on my face

I am going to flee from her dress and her soft skin

When did you feel loved?

Instead I turned around and left silently

When you moved your legs as if we were young

Let's go inside

We can only stay out here in the snow

Let's throw ourselves in each other's naked arms

We can only stay fully dressed

Let's forget everything

We can only dream of being closer

Let's enjoy the sweet taste of skin and breath

We can only stay out here in the dark night

[Darkness]

Scene 5.

[Light]

When we danced

I hate you because you are an animal

We dance, we kiss, we make love

Why don't you do it now

We abort, we cheat, we laugh

We fight, we promise, we lie

We hold each other's hands

We scream, we cry, we smile

We gaze into each other's eyes for what seems like an eternity

We dance, we cheat, we smile

We leave, we fuck, we look away

We come back, we fight

I am going to run

You don't kiss me the way I tell you to

We promise, we make love, we lie

I hate you because you make me lonely

We dance, we leave, we hurt

We laugh, we stay

I am going to run into the deep forest like a mouse being chased by an owl

We hold each other's hands

[Darkness]

Scene 6

[Light]

I don't need you

I don't need anyone

I don't care about you

I am pregnant

I don't miss you when you are not here

I don't need anyone but me

It is as if you have disappeared

But you said you loved me

It is as if I have no face

I am not going to keep it

I don't think you understand

It is as if you stand right in front of me in the dark

But you said you needed me

It would change everything, just like you said

It is as if you are right next to me and I still can't see you

But you said you couldn't make it without me

I thought you would agree

It is as if I have no heart

It is too late now, anyway

I don't think you listen

It is as if the one I loved has gone

I've already had it removed

It is as if the past never happened

But you said no-one understood better than me

It is as if my hands belong to someone else

I had every right to do it

I don't like it when I love somebody

It wasn't yours anyway

I feel all numb

I feel like a shadow struck by the light

It was someone else's

It is as if your eyes are dead

I don't care about you

[Darkness]

Scene 7

[Light]

You are silent

I left the room without a word

I hate you because of your family

You will never forget this sensation

You cry when you think I am not looking

I was the one left in the darkness

I am going to forget that gaze

I want to forget you

[Darkness]

Man: I hoped she would never forget
He hoped she would never want to forget, but she will

Man: I hoped she would need me
He hoped she would need him, but she doesn't

Man: She hoped I had the courage
She hoped he had the courage, but he hadn't

Man: She hoped I would stay
She hoped he would stay

Man: I hoped I would do what she wanted
He hoped he would do what she wanted him to, but he couldn't

Man: She hoped it wouldn't be like this
She hoped it wouldn't be like this, but it is

Man: I wanted it to be different
He wanted it to be different

Man: She wanted it to not be like this
She wanted it to not be like this

Scene 8.

[Light]

I want you to forget about her

I want to forget you

I want to forget you

I want to forget you

I want to run

I want to lie

I want to look away

I want to scream

I want to leave you

I want to forget you

I want to forget you

ACT 2
Closed Eye

Scene 1

[Darkness]

Choir: Intro (no text)

Man: Who are you, I didn't see you before. Why are you silent? Everyone else speaks

Choir: We only speak in the dark

Man: The light will go up again, then you should speak. It's the rule

Choir: We can't, the light swallows our words, like a shadow hit by the sun

[Light]

It is as if you have disappeared

It is as if you stand right in front of me in the dark

It is as if you are here next to me and I still can't see you

I want to remember you

Scene 2

[Darkness]

Choir: Why are you here?

Man: Why am I here?

Choir: You are becoming one of us, one of us in the dark.

Man: Where am I? Who are you? I came here with the others

Choir: You were one of them, now you are joining us, so it seems

Man: Who are you?

Choir: There is light matter and dark. We are the dark matter, the life that didn't become.

Man: Why am I here then?

Choir: We are the options that didn't unfold

Man: I came here with them, I came here with her

Open your eyes

[Light]

Look at me

Look me in the eye

I remember you

Scene 3

[Darkness]

Choir: You are no longer one of those lit by the light

Man: I'm gonna leave with the others, I'm gonna leave with her

Choir: Are you sure? You belong here now.

Man: Why am I even here?

Choir: Try to remember

Man: Look at me, she said

Choir: This is a place of pure past and no future

Man: I remember the snow in her eyelids

Choir: We are the dark matter of un-life

Man: I remember how the snow hit our faces like cold, dead kisses

Choir: We are the faces you'll never see in the mirror

Man: I remember how our kisses were like small explosions, like snowflakes biting the skin before they melting and running down the cheek like a tear

Choir: We are the people you'r too afraid to be

Man: Look me in the eye, she said

Man: I remember her gaze

Man: It was like the light from a bulb ready to burst

Choir: You remember how you wanted to run

Man: I remember I didn't come to her when she cried

Choir: You remember that you were afraid

Man: I remember how I ran

Choir: You remember you didn't stay when she wanted you to

Man: I remember her gaze. I remember the broken hope in her gaze.

[Brief light as in Act 1 (and in this act's scene 1 and 2) – this time nobody says anything. Then back to darkness]

Scene 4

Man: I am pregnant, she said

Choir: We are the unchosen

Man: I am not going to keep it, she said

Choir: We have no face, no body

Man: It would change everything like you said, she said

Choir: We have no heart

Man: I'm sorry – it is too late now, she said

Choir: We have no will

Man: It is gone now, she said

Choir: We are the lives un-lived

Man: I thought we agreed, she said

Choir: We are the roads untravelled

Man: I don't understand why you are getting upset, she said

Choir: We are everything that could have been.

Man: It's my body, she said

Choir: Everyone will join us eventually

Man: It wasn't even yours, she said

Choir: They don't think so, but they will. It's the rule.

Man: It is someone else's, she said

Choir: In this very moment, everyone is being forgotten by someone

Man: I am sorry, she said

Choir: Everyone is being left

Man: I don't need you, she said

Choir: First they start to hear us

Man: I don't need a child, she said

Choir: Second they can see us

Man: I don't need a man, she said

Choir: Third they become one of us

Man: I don't need anyone, she said

Choir: Like you, they will all become one of us

Choir: You all think you grow with time, but in fact you are reduced. For each choice you make you split in half.

Man: I didn't believe her. I think she was lying.

Choir: You leave half of yourself, and those you chose for, behind in the dark

Man: She was lying I hope

Choir: Until you have no choices left to make. Until you're reduced to as close to nothing as possible

Choir: Look at it. Look at us. Look at everything that could have been.

Scene 5

Woman: Look at me

Man: Are you here too, in the dark?

Woman: I didn't hear you before

Choir: We only speak in the dark

Woman: Look me in the eye.

Man: I can't see you, where are you

Woman: Where are we?

Choir: This is the place of no body, no face, the place of only past.

Man: It is as if you stand right in front of me in the dark

Woman: I do, I stand right in front of you in the dark

Choir: The place of missed opportunity.

Man: I don't need you, you said

Woman: I was lying, that is why I am here. I am the part of me that was lying

Man: I want to forget you, you said

Woman: I can't. That's why I am here. I am the part of me that couldn't forget.

Man: I want to leave, you said

Woman: I am the part of me that want to stay

Choir: This is the place of pure memory and no reality

Man: I wish I hadn't been afraid

Woman: I wish I had done everything different

Man: We can make it right

Woman: Let's change what we chose.

Choir: This is the place of music

Man: Let's dance

Woman: Let's make love

Woman + Man: We want to dance. We want to make love

Choir: This is the place of only longing, no action

Woman + Man: We want to return to the light

Choir: You can't escape the darkness. You are becoming two of us.

Woman + Man: We want to do it all again

Choir: You have chosen. Choices can't be undone

Woman: We chose wrongly, we want to go back

Choir: It is too late. You have become two of us.

Woman + Man: We want to laugh

Choir: This is the place of only regret

Woman + Man: We want to kiss

Choir: This is the place of only remorse

Woman + Man: We want to smile and kiss

Choir: No one gets back to the light. It is too late.

Choir: Here you will fade slowly into the black

Choir: Here you are waiting to be forgotten entirely.

Choir: Here you can do nothing but recall each sentence that went through your mouth and through your ears.

Choir: Again and again, in a circle of echoes from everything that was said, everything that was heard.

Choir: Again and again. Again and again. Word for word. Gaze for gaze.

Scene 6 / Epilogue

[Light]

You are silent

You look away

I hate you because of who you are

You cry when you think I'm not watching

I hate you because you don't come to me when I cry

Why don't you look at me

I want to forget you

Look at me

I want to forget your gaze

Why don't you feel my soft skin under your palm?

I want to forget your soft skin in my palm

I want you to stay

I want you to sit in my chair for ever

I am going to keep running until I forget you

When did you feel alive

When our body's moved softly to the music

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Vicky Wright
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Matias Seibæk
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Mina Fred
My Hellgren
Niels Rønsholdt
Ida Urd Damm Bramming
Laurits Emanuel Pedersen
Laurette Tribert

clarinet
trombone
guitar
piano & organ
percussion
violin
viola
cello
vocal
vocal
man
woman

Idea & concept
Composer
Libretto
Director
Dramaturgy
Choirmaster
Light design
Assistant light design
Sound design
Producer
PR & Communication
Photography
Graphics
Costume & Scenography

Artistic Direction

Niels Rønsholdt
Niels Rønsholdt
Niels Rønsholdt
Charlotte Munksø
Jesper Bergmann
Asbjörn Faleide Fristad
Mikkel Jensen
Martin Danielsen
Jonas Nakel & Louis Daurat
Laura Møller Henriksen
Line Wium Olesen & Chris Petter Spilde
Marc Fluri
Pulsk Ravn
Laura Møller Henriksen &
Anna Berit Asp Christensen
Anna Berit Asp Christensen

For more information on Niels Rønsholdt and available works please visit the Edition-S website: <http://www.edition-s.dk/composer/niels-rønsholdt>

Produced by SCENATET with support from the Danish Arts Foundation, Knud Højgaard's Fund, the Danish Composers' Society's Production Fund, and Koda's Fund for Social and Cultural Purposes.

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