

a relatively restrained evening, with Ward, Wand and Hayward joined by Mark Wastell on percussion and, in a nod to Bailey's work with dancers such as Will Gaines, tap dancer Petra Haller. Each performer attacks every corner of the music with laser-like precision, and even in this crowded musical setting, Haller completely zeroes in on the sound she levels out of the floor. Wastell channels Bailey's recently departed co-conspirator, percussionist Jamie Muir, at points locking in with Hayward to batter around the edges of their respective drum sets in a manner that feels like its own version of tap dancing.

The second night opens with a trio made up of Wand and Ward joined by Teresa Hackel on recorder. Wand on electronics shows off his considerable range, jumping from humorous samples, squelchy textures and warped acoustic sounds. Even as she primarily serves as anchor for the performance, Hackel takes plenty of opportunities to join in on the madness, gasping through her recorder with great intensity.

The event ends with yet another large group bringing together Wand, Hayward, Butcher, Thomas and Brüssel. Crucially, Thomas trades his piano for electronics, his harsh and guttural sounds providing a cutting counterpoint to Wand's shimmering and swirling textures. The performance has a similar unpredictability as the one Thomas, Brüssel and Hayward's trio delivered the night before. In this instance, however, Butcher is in the eye of the storm, playing with a wild and flighty sense of abandon.

The event's compere Stewart Lee addresses how the political origins of this music have been reinvigorated in a time when listening has become a radical act. If there is any one takeaway from Company 2025, it would be the limitless creative potential of listening.

Levi Dayan

### Elaine Mitchener: Are 'Friends' Electric?

Wigmore Hall, London, UK

How long before we start talking about Elaine Mitchener as a genre? For many years, she's been a standout musician in her field, a gregarious performer moving fluidly through contemporary composition, improvisation, politics, sound art and movement to make punchy, vocal-centred music. Add to this her

total command of her instrument and her recognisable vocabulary (built upwards from a deconstructed approach to language), and to write for Mitchener today is to write for Pierrat ensemble or string quartet.

2026 is Mitchener's final year as an Associate Artist at Wigmore Hall, and it's interesting to experience Are 'Friends' Electric?, a programme unimaginable in the hands of another, in a space that venerates artworks over artists. No matter how hard Mitchener commits, it's a distant-feeling concert. The lighting is dimmed and purple, rather than the usual bright ochre, and the performances are amplified by a slightly weedy speaker system. Only during the magnificent final stanza of *SOLO THROAT* does this freeze begin to thaw.

Are 'Friends' Electric is peak Mitchener, an artist who swings so hard and so often finds connection. Of course, there are misses. In her written introduction, she asks Chat GPT the question "Are friends electric?" and then transcribes her conversation with the resource-sapping, disinformation-generating chatbot. This is a rare awkward choice in an evening that unfolds as an essay on two of Mitchener's fundamental concerns: constriction and release.

Of the five Wigmore Hall-supported commissions that make up the first half, Corie Rose Soumah's carefully etched *Limpidités VI* stands out, its twitching sound design unfolding in a rigorously deployed sequence. Its concern is restraint. Amadeus Julian Regucera's *Bocca Chiusa* begins similarly, but breaks out of its guttural interiority into longer sustains that sound faintly devotional.

Other works start unfettered and never relent. Laure M Hiendl's *White Radiance™* examines the politics of skin bleaching creams, elaborated on by Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter in a tape essay in the second half of the piece. The first part is a rushing monotonous phase-piece setting text you can find on SPF bottles. It could have done with a less theatrical delivery. Hiendl's works are event-free accumulations of the banal – see their alluringly blank *Seht meine Wunden...* for Explore Ensemble – and I found myself too engaged with talk of wrinkle correction and "transparent rosy radiance" to engage with the later essay.

Loré Lixenberg's *COSMIC VOICE PARTY*

from 2023, a political broadcast from a party proclaiming that "everything should be ruled by the laws of music", is a joke that I struggle to find funny. More theatrically effective is Jessie Cox's *Remains Unvoiced*, Mitchener clawing the words from out of her mouth at points. It's a fine, focused piece, though it gets slightly lost alongside more extroverted works.

Mitchener's deconstructive approach to language and form means she's often left playing with shards and snippets, collaging them together into something bigger. A live remix of her celebrated LP *SOLO THROAT* gives the chance to work with bigger chunks over a more sustained period of time. With Shamica Ruddock and Pat Thomas joining on electronics, listening to the trio play is like watching a shoal of fish: shimmering, darting, all moving in slightly different directions individually, but with a sense of the total collective movement. The performance breathes and reacts, meanders and then comes back into sharp focus.

Hugh Morris

### The Hotel presents Stan Brakhage + Henry Cyer + Excel DJ Cafe Oto, London, UK

This is the second time musician and film maker Henry Cyer has screened a film by Stan Brakhage – perhaps the greatest American avant garde film maker of all time – under the banner of his curatorial/publishing house The Hotel. In 2025, Cyer hosted three sold out screenings of Brakhage's famous 1958 film *Anticipation Of The Night* at London's Close-Up cinema. This packed event at Cafe Oto presents the rarely seen (because unavailable on any medium other than 16 mm) 1990 work *Passage Through: A Ritual*, which is particularly notable for being one of the few Brakhage films with a soundtrack, a score by the American composer Philip Corner. Also on the bill are musical performances by Cyer himself and Excel DJ, whose chaotic set provides an energising counterpoint to the contemplative tone of the rest of the night.

In 1983, Brakhage presented a selection of his films for Andrei Tarkovsky in a hotel room with the image projected "about TV size" on faded floral wallpaper in lieu of a screen. Unexpectedly, the Russian master found Brakhage's elliptical and abstract work objectionable and flew into a rage, assailing him with a range of arguments – in Brakhage's own words, "from the Emperor's New Clothes argument through this-is-too-rapid-it-hurts-the-eyes, through 'this is sheer self-indulgence', to 'film is only a collaborative art!'"

While Tarkovsky's objections represent a familiar litany with regards to Brakhage, perhaps the wholly inopportune viewing environment didn't help. Brakhage's work is uniquely immersive when seen in a cinema. This is particularly the case in terms of *Passage Through: A Ritual*, the vast majority of the 50 minute running time of which consists of a black screen, intermittently punctuated by snatches of imagery – a domestic fragment here, a glimpse of foliage there – and monochromatic flicker.

Unfortunately, while Cafe Oto is far from a 1980s hotel room, on this occasion its screen



Elaine Mitchener at Wigmore Hall