

The Miners' Hymns

A film by Bill Morrison with live musical score by

Jóhann Jóhannsson

BRASS: Durham International Festival

9.30pm, 15 & 16 July 2010, Durham Cathedral

Forma is pleased to announce its new production, *The Miners' Hymns*, which will premiere at Durham Cathedral as a highlight of BRASS: Durham International Festival. *The Miners' Hymns* is an homage in film and music to the coal mining history of North East England, for which Forma initiated a first time collaboration between renowned American filmmaker Bill Morrison and acclaimed Icelandic musician and composer Jóhann Jóhannsson.

Collaged from footage excavated from the BFI National Archives and local archives by Morrison, the film is a powerful and poignant evocation of a recent past that is widely forgotten. The physical traces of the coal industry have been all but erased from the North East landscape, and its history is increasing invisible, inaccessible and alien to our world now. Weaving together news, documentary and industry footage, Morrison's film celebrates the sense of vibrant community, rich, self-organised culture and the forbearance that characterised the dangerous lives of those who worked underground, and the places in which they lived. *The Miners' Hymns* marks the demise of the mining industry not only as the end of a way of life, but as the last gasp of the Industrial Revolution, and a social and economic watershed in our recent history. In the midst of our current economic crisis, another watershed moment, the piece offers a timely reminder of how we used to live and work in Britain's industrial age.

A continuing legacy of the coal mining industry is the brass band tradition. Brass bands began in County Durham, and became integral to the mining communities, with miners as the bands' self-taught players. The tradition remains strong, with the resurgent Durham Miners' Gala as its annual highlight. Jóhannsson's score for *The Miners' Hymns* draws upon the region's brass music culture; it will be performed live by a specially assembled ensemble of brass band players from the NASUWT Riverside Band and classically trained brass musicians, with organist Robert Houssart, led by Icelandic conductor Gudni Franzson. The music provides an elegiac and atmospheric soundtrack to Morrison's cinematic images.

Bill Morrison's films are frequently made for screening with live music, and he has worked in this way with some of today's most acclaimed contemporary classical composers including John Adams, Gavin Bryars and Steve Reich. Similarly, Jóhannsson is a prolific composer for film, dance and theatre and has collaborated previously with other musicians including Marc Almond, Barry Adamson and Pan Sonic. More recently, his award-winning soundtrack to Marc Craste's animated short film *Varmints* was released by Type Recordings as the CD - *And In The Endless Silence There Came The Sound Of Bees*. The collaborative nature of both artists' work extends into the performance of *The Miners' Hymns*, with Morrison cueing the film sequences to the music in a live video mix.

The Miners' Hymns is a commission by Durham County Council as an emblematic project for its Brass Festival. Both the Festival and this project connect the region's brass heritage with contemporary approaches to music and art, and make new connections with international artists and musical forms. For Forma, the new commission is part of a summer season of large-scale musical art projects in landmark locations including Ryoji Ikeda's public art installation spectra at the Teatro Grec amphitheatre in Barcelona, and Chris Watson's *Whispering in the Leaves* sound installation at the Palm House, Kew Gardens.

For more information, images or interviews, please contact Róisín Stimpson, Communications Manager at Forma, rs@forma.org.uk / 0207 456 7823

Durham Cathedral by kind permission of the Chapter of Durham. This project has been enabled by Northern Film + Media and the UK Film Council's Digital Film Archive Fund supported by the National Lottery.

These performances of *The Miners' Hymns* form part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the BFI National Archive. Supported by One North East.

Notes to editors

Event details, 15/16 July 2010

The event begins at 9.30pm on 15 and 16 July 2010. £12 full price, £8 concessions. All tickets can be purchased online at <http://www.galadurham.co.uk/> or from the Gala Theatre box office on 0191 332 4041. The event lasts for 1 hour.

Bill Morrison

Bill Morrison is an award-winning filmmaker specialising in documentary and found footage. He is best known for his film *Decasia: The State of Decay*, a feature-length collaboration with composer Michael Gordon. *Time Out New York* commented, "This radical, experimental masterwork feels like the first film, and feels like the last film." Morrison has been recognized with two Bessie Awards and an OBIE for this work with the Ridge Theater in New York. His films have been screened at festivals, museums and concert halls including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Sundance Film Festival, Tate Modern and the Royal Festival Hall, London.

www.decasia.com/

Jóhann Jóhannsson

Jóhannsson emerged on the visionary Touch label with his *Englaborn* album in 2002, followed by *Virðulegu Forsetar* in 2004. His following two releases on the 4AD label *IBM 1401*, *A User's Manual* (2006) and *Fordlandia* (2008) both addressed themes of technology and obsolescence, and these interests continue in *The Miners' Hymns*. Most recently, he released *And In The Endless Silence There Came The Sound Of Bees*, on Type Recordings (2010).

Cinematic in its vision, Jóhannsson's work draws from the past and the present, combining electronics and orchestral arrangements to create haunting, panoramic soundscapes.

www.johannjohannsson.com/

BRASS: Durham International Brass Festival (3 - 17 July 2010)

BRASS: Durham International Festival delivers a programme that showcases the contemporary use of brass music across the globe, as well as informing those new to Brass about the qualities of the genre. Events include free street performances, music residencies, workshops and special commissions, as well as playing an important role in one of the region's biggest community events, The Durham Miners' Gala.

<http://www.brassfestival.co.uk/>

Durham Cathedral

Durham Cathedral has been described as 'one of the great architectural experiences of Europe'. It is renowned as a masterpiece of Romanesque (or Norman) architecture. It was begun in 1093 and largely completed within 40 years. It is the only cathedral in England to retain almost all of its Norman craftsmanship, and one of few to preserve the unity and integrity of its original design.

The Cathedral was built as a place of worship, specifically to house the shrine of the North's best-loved saint, Cuthbert, in whose honour pilgrims came to Durham from all over England. It was also the home of a Benedictine monastic community. The Cathedral was inscribed together with the Castle as one of Britain's first World Heritage Sites. In a nationwide BBC poll held in 2001 Durham Cathedral was voted the Britain's best-loved building. Like Hadrian's Wall and the Angel of the North, it is an icon of North-East England.

www.durhamcathedral.co.uk/

Forma

Forma is one of Europe's leading production agencies for ambitious, interdisciplinary contemporary art. Collaborating with some of today's most interesting artists, it produces, tours and publishes groundbreaking new projects that seamlessly combine diverse media. Forma's programme encompasses exhibitions, performances, films, online and public realm projects, and is developed with and for leading venues and festivals across the world.

Forma is supported by Arts Council England.

www.forma.org.uk

The BFI National Archive

The BFI National Archive is the world's most significant archive of film and television and celebrates its 75th anniversary this year in July and August with a special programme of events, screenings, and national releases. It contains more than 180,000 films (features, shorts and documentaries) and more than 750,000 television programmes. The collection also contains internationally renowned holdings of posters, stills and designs along with the papers of major directors. The BFI promotes understanding and appreciation of Britain's rich film and television heritage and culture.

www.bfi.org.uk

Northern Film & Media

Northern Film & Media is the screen agency for the North East of England. It takes a leading role in the building of successful commercial creative industries in the North East, investing in talent, in people and in their ideas.

www.northernmedia.org/

One North East

One North East is the Regional Development Agency (RDA) covering North East England. It is one of nine RDAs in England established to transform the English regions through sustainable economic development. Its vision is a vibrant, self-reliant, ambitious and outward-looking region promoting the benefits of living, working and doing business here.

<http://www.onenortheast.co.uk/>