

Julia Wolfe

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Biography

Drawing inspiration from folk, classical, and rock genres, Julia Wolfe's music brings a modern sensibility to each while simultaneously tearing down the walls between them. Wolfe's music is distinguished by an intense physicality and a relentless power that pushes performers to extremes and demands attention from the audience. In the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, Wolfe has "long inhabited a terrain of [her] own, a place where classical forms are recharged by the repetitive patterns of minimalism and the driving energy of rock."

Wolfe has written a major body of work for strings, with pieces commissioned by the Lark, Ethel, Kronos, and Cassatt quartets. Three of her quartets – *Dig Deep*, *Four Marys*, and *Early That Summer* – can be heard on the disc *Julia Wolfe: The String Quartets*. As described by the *New Yorker*, these one-movement works "combine the violent forward drive of rock music with an aura of minimalist serenity [and] use the four instruments as a big guitar, whipping psychedelic states of mind into frenzied and ecstatic climaxes." Wolfe's thirty-minute *Cruel Sister* for string orchestra, inspired by a traditional English ballad of a love rivalry between sisters, was commissioned by the Munich Chamber Orchestra and received its US premiere at the Spoleto Festival. Her most unusual string work is perhaps *Stronghold*, a tour de force for eight double basses written for Robert Black.

My Beautiful Scream, a string quartet concerto, was written for Kronos Quartet and the Orchestre National de France and was premiered in the US at the Cabrillo Festival under the direction of Marin Alsop. The work was inspired by the idea of a slow motion scream and was written shortly after September 11, 2001. *The Vermeer Room*, *Girlfriend*, and *Window of Vulnerability* are other examples of Wolfe's ability to create vivid sonic images. *Girlfriend*, for mixed chamber ensemble and recorded sound, uses a haunting audio landscape that consists of skidding cars and breaking glass. *The Vermeer Room* was inspired by the Vermeer painting *A Girl Asleep*, which, when x-rayed, reveals a hidden figure. Originally written for a large chamber ensemble, the piece received its orchestral premiere at the San Francisco Symphony. In *Window of Vulnerability*, written for the American Composers Orchestra and conducted by Dennis Russell Davies, Wolfe created a massive sonic universe of dense textures and fragile windows.

The influence of pop culture can be heard in many of Wolfe's works, including *Lick* and *Believing for the Bang on a Can All-Stars*. *Lick*, based on fragments of funk, has become a manifesto for the new generation of pop-influenced composers. The raucous *My Lips From Speaking* for six pianos was inspired by the opening riff of the Aretha Franklin tune *Think*. Wolfe's *Dark Full Ride* is an obsessive and relentless exploration of the drum set, beginning with an extended hi-hat spotlight. In *LAD*, Wolfe creates a kaleidoscopic landscape for nine bagpipes.

Wolfe has also extended her talents to theatre by composing for Anna Deveare Smith's *House Arrest*, and won an Obie award for her score to Ridge Theater's *Jennie Richie*. She has compiled a series of collaborative multimedia works with composers Michael Gordon and David Lang, including *Lost Objects* (Concerto Koln, directed by Francois Girard), *Shelter* (Musikfabrik and Ridge Theater), and *The Carbon Copy Building* (with comic-book artist Ben Katchor). Wolfe recently created the city-wide spectacle *Travel Music* with architects DillerScofidio+Renfro in Bordeaux, France, filling the streets of the old city with 100 musicians walking and riding in pedi-cabs. Her work with film includes *FUEL* for the Hamburg-based Ensemble Resonanz and filmmaker Bill Morrison, and *Impatience* for the Asko Ensemble and 1920s film experimentalist Charles De Keukeleire. Upcoming projects include *Steel Hammer*, an evening-length work commissioned by Carnegie Hall for Trio Mediaeval and the Bang on a Can All-Stars with a set by Jim Findlay; a new work for percussionist Evelyn Glennie; and an evening-length work for Celtic singer and the string quartet Ethel.

Julia Wolfe's music has been heard at BAM, the Sydney Olympic Arts Festival, Settembre Musica (Italy), Theatre de la Ville (Paris), Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall, and has been recorded on Cantaloupe, Teldec, Point/Universal, Sony Classical, and Argo/Decca. Wolfe has been a recipient of numerous grants, including awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Art, and a Fulbright to the Netherlands. She holds degrees from the University of Michigan, Yale, and Princeton. Wolfe joined the NYU Steinhardt School's composition faculty in the fall of 2009. She is co-founder of New York's music collective Bang on a Can.