
White Stripes go classical at Royal Opera House

Paul Arendt

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Tutu heavy ... The White Stripes

The Royal Opera House is to stage a new ballet inspired by the White Stripes. Choreographer Wayne McGregor is creating the as-yet-untitled performance using avant-garde orchestral arrangements of White Stripes tracks.

McGregor's source is a new classical album called Aluminium, due for release next month, which features 10 orchestral arrangements of familiar White Stripes tracks. The arrangements were created by composer Joby Talbot, a former member of indie rockers the Divine Comedy.

According to Talbot, the idea for the record came from Richard Russell, the founder of the White Stripes' record label, XL Recordings. "He was musing about that old tradition of doing instrumental versions of rock songs, and wondering why it doesn't happen any more," Talbot told the Guardian. "When you put the two worlds of orchestral and rock music together, you normally end up with this bland, anaemic Muzak. Our aim was to avoid that at all costs. Some of the songs sound like lost soundtracks to bizarre silent movies from the 20s. Others are like outtakes from a John Ford western - and some are just beautiful, mesmeric chill-out music. Hopefully it's uncharacterisable."

Talbot says that the band's frontman Jack White gave the project his blessing after hearing three of the tracks. "Jack thought it was fantastic, and was going on about what a great honour it was. He had one stipulation, which was that we weren't allowed to move to a posher studio. We had to do the whole thing in Wapping."

The album will be released as a limited edition of 3,333 CDs and 999 LPs, although it will also be available for download. (The number three is a recurring motif for the White Stripes, appearing in album artwork, sleeve notes and inspiring the three colours - red, white and black - that Jack and Meg White wear on stage.)

Three of the Talbot/Stripes arrangements - Aluminum, The Hardest Button to Button and Blue Orchid - will appear in McGregor's ballet, along with four of Talbot's own chamber-music compositions. John Pawson, the minimalist architect, is designing the stage sets.

Best known as the founder and artistic director of the acclaimed Random Dance Company, McGregor has worked with a wide range of international companies, from La Scala in Milan to the National Theatre. He also recently provided choreography for the film Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.

The ballet will premiere at Covent Garden in November. Talbot says he is "hoping it will motivate the Covent Garden orchestra to blow some cobwebs out of their instruments and really go for it".