

MAX RICHTER



SLEEP CIRCLE



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SLEEP
Berlin, 2016

Max Richter

Sleep Circle

Liner Notes by Max Dax

Max Richter may or may not have dreamed of such remarkable success when he began composing his eight-hour magnum opus *Sleep* in 2012. It took him three years to complete the piece. Yet upon its release as a lavish 8-CD box set with the iconic moon cover, designed by his creative partner Yulia Mahr in 2015, *Sleep* was destined to become synonymous with an embracing invitation to meditate on the daily ritual of finding a healthy entry into falling asleep—the so-called “hypnagogic” state. Connecting with legions of listeners, *Sleep* has become one of the most streamed classical compositions in the years since, heard nightly by millions of people around the world.



SLEEP
Berlin, 2016

The story of *Sleep* dates back to the introduction of the then super-fast 4G internet, which suddenly gave people access to all the world's information in real time. The downside was the psychological challenge and strain on the individual to compute and digest this flood of information. At their home in Oxfordshire, Max and Yulia spent long nights discussing how large-scale works of art could provide an anchor or an alternative reality—an epic novel like Marcel Proust's *La Recherche*, a super-long film like Jonas Mekas' *Walden* cycle, Mark Rothko's large-scale Houston Chapel paintings, or Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, which was actually a composition designed to help the insomniac Baroque Count Keyserlingk fall asleep. Max: "I was thinking about how immersive great works of art like this can provide an alternative landscape to inhabit. I started to think about a long form of ambient music, I thought: maybe I could write a piece that would function as a place to rest, or as a roadblock to the information superhighway, to shut it down for a moment."

Max also began discussing the subject with a neuroscientist, David Eagleman, who had written a best-selling book about the human brain and its connection to the subconscious—*Incognito: The Secret Lives of Our Brains*. Eagleman introduced Max to the idea that slowly repetitive tones could support slow-wave sleep—the part of sleep where memories consolidate and we lock in the happenings from each day. David Eagleman: "We talked about the rhythms in the brain and what happens when you fall asleep. Large, slow oscillations can be measured: Neurons linking up and operating in concert. We entertained the idea that if you played music with exactly that rhythm, you could potentially help the brain to stay in that rhythm and give someone a better sleep."



SLEEP
SXSW, 2018



SLEEP
Los Angeles, 2018

Max: "I've always been very passionate about low frequency sounds. Working on *Sleep* was a carte blanche for me to explore this space deeply. In general, *Sleep* has a very articulated low-frequency spectrum. I tend to think of sleep as a tabula rasa, a daily new beginning. As human beings, we all unconsciously carry with us the memories of our first long, formative sleep within another human being, our mother. The low frequency spectrum that the unborn child hears and that is part of our biology is reflected in *Sleep*. The low-pulsed piano music that recurs in regular variations throughout the piece is meant to match a perfect sleep cycle. But whether it synchronizes with your own cycle is beyond my control."

Composing such a complex piece of classical music with a dramaturgical arc spanning a performance time of more than eight hours presented Richter with extreme difficulties on a music-theoretical level. At the same time, the music is very direct and emotional. *Sleep* invites the listener to slow down and refocus, as it also draws on the lullaby tradition. Most of us were sung lullabies when we were babies. The parent's voice singing a lullaby, is a fundamental part of our collective childhood memories. Max: "Normally when you're composing you try to relate the moment you're working on to all the other moments of the composition and try to understand what the teleology of it is. I realized very quickly that I couldn't do that with *Sleep*. It was just too complex. So I started to embrace the idea that maybe the piece itself is starting to dream, and I'm just transcribing or channeling this dream music? So there's an element of discovering the piece as you're writing it, rather than authoring it in the traditional way."



SLEEP
Paris, 2017



SLEEP
China, 2019

Over the years, Max has performed the entire *Sleep* cycle for audiences lying in beds, ready to drift off into a peaceful, deep slumber. Max Richter: “These performances were a completely different experience to all the other concert situations I’d had up to that point. With our music, we’re accompanying something that’s happening in the room—namely, hundreds of people who’ve never met before trusting each other completely and falling asleep together. The dramaturgical narrative works in such a way that in the last 40 minutes I add more and more high frequencies. These frequencies wake people up. It’s a survival mechanism.”

Later on, Max began performing an abridged version of *Sleep* in selected venues—these concert experiences would last 90 minutes. The length of the new suite, like that of *Sleep*, is of course not arbitrary, as David Eagleman points out: “90 minutes is the pattern of time between dreams. When you fall asleep, you’re first in light sleep, and then you go all the way down into very deep sleep, called slow-wave sleep. And then you come back out into light sleep, and that’s where you dream, and then you go back down again, and each of these cycles is about 90 minutes.”

This new album you hold in your hands, *Sleep Circle*, is this newly recorded, abridged version of *Sleep* informed by those concert experiences and focusing on the movements within the composition that are more in the foreground. This way *Sleep Circle* becomes a hallucinatory 90-minute trip into the hypnagogic state. For Max, the approach offered new insights into his epic composition: “Some of these compositions, such as *Dream 11*, *Moth-like Stars* or *Non-Eternal*, are so rich in their poetic core that I wanted the music to be experienced in a more traditional way. I first wrote a structure for a concert performance. The new version we’ve recorded now is based on these performances, which also means that it has a slightly different architecture. It’s like *Sleep* distilled.”

MAX RICHTER

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SLEEP CIRCLE

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Written by Max Richter
 Composer Lyricist: Max Richter
 Piano, Synthesizer, Keyboard: Max Richter
 Soprano Vocalist: Grace Davidson
 Violin: Louisa Fuller (3-5 · 7-11 · 14 · 16-18 · 20 · 22-24)
 Natalia Bonner (4-5 · 7-11 · 14 · 18 · 20 · 22-24)
 Viola: Nick Barr
 Cello: Max Ruisi (2-5 · 7-11 · 13-14 · 17-24)
 Zara Hudson-Kozdoj (4-5 · 7-11 · 14 · 18-24)

Produced by Max Richter
 Recorded by Rupert Coulson
 Project Engineer: Alice Bennett
 Mixing Engineer: Rupert Coulson
 Mastering Engineer: Cicely Balston

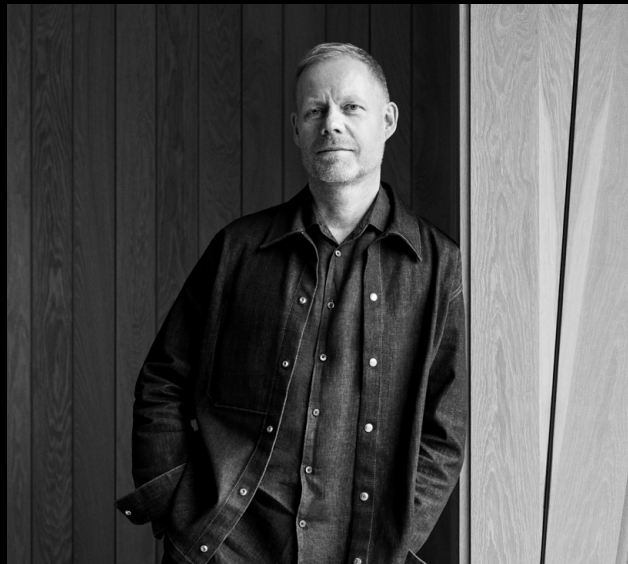
Recording Location: Studio Richter Mahr, UK

Publisher: Mute Song

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