

The Contemporary Music Venture

The Contemporary Music Venture is a series of concerts run by postgraduate students of Bristol University Music Department. The venture aims to provide students the opportunity to have their music performed to the highest standard by the Department's finest performers at a public concert, as well as offering audiences the occasion to hear some of the best established contemporary repertoire.

The Programme

A Flower – John Cage (1912-1992)

A Flower, composed in 1950 originally for choreography by Louise Lippold, vocalises phonemes such as 'uh', 'wah', etc., without vibrato. I've certainly enjoyed exploring some of the more unusual and entertaining instructions given in the score including, 'like a pigeon' and 'like a wild duck'. The entire vocal line is constructed of just four pitches, except for a single bar near the end where a fifth pitch is used, and is accompanied by passages for closed piano. **BW**

YEH – David Ridley (premiere)

YEH is a textless study for soprano and clarinet. Its goal is to explore the way we lyricise different feelings: we're familiar with the noise a child makes sliding down a steep slide, or the intonation of two excited old friends meeting after a long period apart. These sounds often correlate from language to language, suggesting that they are intrinsic to our inner perception of the world. In **YEH** I took these sounds as a starting point and tried to explore a feeling of wonder and joy. The clarinet acts as a second voice of the soprano's feelings, and loud harmonics on the instrument act as a springboard for large gestures. 'Yeh' was chosen as a title for no other reason other than being positive sound: its wide and high embouchure making it a recurrent syllable in the piece. **DR**

Sostenuto – Misurato – Prestissimo – György Ligeti (1923-2006)

This piece is the first movement of eleven that make up *Musica Ricercata*, an exploratory cycle of compositions completed in 1953. This movement uses only one pitch-class – 'A' – until the final moment which introduces 'D'. Each movement progresses similarly, adding one pitch-class until the final movement explores the full keyboard. An intriguing challenge to composers, this movement produces a coherent and appealing argument without the use of one of the main musical parameters – variety of pitch. **AKB**

The Remains of Our Lives – Julian Leeks (premiere)

Text by Julian Leeks. Electronics by Aaron May

A story of devastating loss. The struggle to continue living. And the gradual assimilation of grief. **JL**

Hommage à Manuel de Falla – Béla Kovács (b.1937)

Written in 1994, *Hommage à Manuel de Falla* for solo clarinet has the character of a written cadenza based on de Falla's folkloric Spanish themes. Kovács originally intended it as a study piece, but it is fast becoming a popular concert and recital piece

around the world. It comes out of a book of nine compositions, all responses to composers such as Claude Debussy, Richard Strauss, and J.S. Bach. While a performance of the piece only lasts about 3 minutes, several moods and motives are expressed throughout, and much freedom is given to the performer to interpret the piece as they wish. **LI**

Mortuous Plango, Vivos Voco (for tape) – Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012)

This work is a reflection of my experiences at Winchester Cathedral where my son Dominic was a chorister from 1975-1980. It is based on his voice and that of the great tenor bell. This enormous black bell of superhuman power has inscribed upon it: HORAS AVOLANTES NUMERO MORTUOS PLANO: VIVOS AD PRECES VOCO (I count the fleeing hours, I lament the dead: I call the living to prayers). This serves as the boy's text. The pitch and time structure of my work is entirely based on the bell's rich, irregular harmonic spectrum, a structure neither tonal nor dodecaphonic nor modal in any western or oriental sense, but unique to itself. Constant transformations between the spectrum of a vocal vowel and that of the bell are made by internal manipulation of the two sounds' components. The walls of the concert hall are conceived as the sides of the bell inside which is the audience, and around which (especially in the original 8-channel version) flies the free spirit of the boy. **JH**

The Butterfly from I Never Saw Another Butterfly – Lori Laitman (b.1955)

Text by Pavel Friedman (1921-1944)

The text of Pavel Friedman's *The Butterfly* was found in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt in what is now the Czech Republic. The poem evokes the brilliant memory of a yellow butterfly in the mind of the poet, who knows – though he finds beauty even in the ghetto – that he shall not glimpse this symbol of hope again. Laitman's free-floating opening clarinet solo depicts the butterfly in flight, and its apparent lack of association with the voice hints at the gap between poet and his image of freedom. Only once does imitation occur, a downward scalic passage in the soprano taken up by the clarinet. The allusion, like the illusion, however, is fleeting. **DF**

Rain Tree Sketch II – Tōri Takemitsu (1930-1996)

The *Rain Tree Sketch II* was composed in 1992 and dedicated to the memory of Olivier Messiaen who died that same year. The last work completed by Takemitsu for solo piano, the *Rain Tree Sketch II* is tightly structured both in terms of its form and its harmony, and is immaculately laid out on the page as is often the case with Takemitsu's piano music. It is largely atonal but with fleeting illusions of tonality which help to establish the haunting and beautiful atmosphere of the work. **RG**

Klibat (Glimpse) – Camellia Razali (premiere)

Klibat (Glimpse), or brief images of the clarinet's sound (as the title suggests), pictures the solo clarinet moving and hiding from one's view. It combines legato lines with short bursts of staccatissimo. Loud short notes with soft high held notes move through different dynamics in between pauses and silences, as one would when holding one's breath when hiding from view. **CR**

Upon Westminster Bridge – Manos Charalabopoulos (premiere)

Text by William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

Wordsworth's sonnet of 1802 paints a quintessentially British moment; immersed in the auroral vapours of the Thames river the author 'undresses' – seemingly inch by inch, with his senses – his mysteriously enchanting surroundings. As the landscape unfolds one is pervaded by an intimate experience of spirituality, a moment of profound awe in the face of the unfathomably beautiful. The music seeks to portray the journey of this experience; the undulating ostinato echoes the hypnotic character of the author's trance-like state, while harmony and timbre expand as he becomes increasingly consumed by his vision. At the end, overwhelmed by the sheer physicality of the experience, the atmosphere is dominated by the sparsity of an introspective meditation. MC

2. Poppies in July and 4. Poppies in October from Ariel – Ned Rorem (b.1923)

Text by Sylvia Plath (1932-1963)

The vividness of the surface imagery in these two poems by Sylvia Plath is spurned by the composer in favour of a more measured response to the poems' underlying feelings of numbness and despair. Rorem sets both texts at an extremely slow pace, and the introspective feeling of drug-induced stasis of *Poppies in July* is reflected in the clarinet's and soprano's limited motivic material. *Poppies in October* presents more harmonic variety, in keeping with the text's broader horizons, and closer interplay between the performers, whose imitative lines constantly overlap, lending the movement a more flowing feel than its partner piece. DF

The Players

Bethan Waters is a third year music student at the University of Bristol. During her time at University she has been a member of numerous ensembles, as well as taking a principal role in the University Operatic Society's production of *La Cenerentola*. She has also conducted both the Chamber Choir and this year the Wind Orchestra.

Luis Ingels holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in Clarinet Performance from the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has studied under Mark Brandenburg and Bill Kalinkos, and is an active performer and teacher in the Bay Area. He is currently continuing his music education in England at the University of Bristol.

Richard Louis Gillies graduated with a BA in Music from the University of Bristol and is currently studying for a Masters in piano performance with Raymond Clarke, also at the University of Bristol. His main interests lie in the research and performance Soviet-Russian music, in particular the works of Prokofiev and Shostakovich.

Thanks for coming! Join us for drinks and jazz – provided by Doug Cave & Friends – across the road at Racks.

A retiring collection will be made to help cover the costs of the CMV concert series.