

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.

Tonight's Concert

Tonight's concert is structured around performances of a selection of Béla Bartók's *44 Duos for Two Violins*. As pristine musical arguments in miniature form, brimming with personality, we felt they would be provide perfect inspiration both for the concert in general and for our composers, who were given the option of responding directly to Bartók's idiosyncratic duets. The resulting 'Bartók sandwiches' which punctuate the concert situate these contemporary responses alongside their partner works. The other commissions performed tonight were not directly inspired by the Bartók duets, but, we hope, contribute to a pleasing, varied, but cohesive concert.

The commissions tonight were written for Ruth Nelson, Matthew Olyver and Rachel Scott. We are very sorry to say that Rachel was forced to withdraw from the concert for personal reasons. We are hugely grateful and much indebted to Roger Huckle for agreeing to stand in at short notice.

The Programme

Bartók – No.21 New Year's Song; Benedict Todd – Duo for two violins (premiere); Bartók – No.32 Dance from Maramaros;

Bartók – Rutén Nóta/Ruthenian Song; Aaron May – Miniature in response to Rutén Nóta (premiere); Bartók – No.8 Slovakian Song

BT: This *Duo for Two Violins* plays with many of the key elements which struck me on first hearing the Bartók *Duos*. The structure seeks to echo the conciseness exhibited in all of the Bartók pieces and is, effectively, a traditional rounded binary form. The main melodic theme, which contains much of the character and joy of the more lively Bartók *Duos*, becomes the subject of a (relatively!) strict canon (a favourite device used in these Bartók's *Duos*) firstly at a two bar separation and then, in the recapitulation, at a closer one bar spacing. As is the case in many of the original *Duos*, this theme also focuses principally on one particular violin technique (an alternative name for the piece could be *A Study in 6ths!*). Whilst the harmonic style inevitably owes more to my own compositional language than that of Bartók (although it is kept deliberately 'simple' and clean), it nevertheless contains a distinct nod towards his use of bitonality (or perhaps bi-modality) in these books of *Duos*. Finally it is (unlike this programme note!) brief: a brief, joyful, musical outpouring.

AM: While listening to *Rutén Nóta* I was struck by its simplicity; through this it seems to portray a sense of naivety, even fragility. It is this feeling that I have tried to portray in my own *Miniature*. A simple melody, inspired by the opening six notes of *Rutén Nóta*, provides my piece with a base. While this melody is to a certain extent developed, it is the 'imperfections' to which it is subjected which provide the piece with interest. Subtle microtonal inflections and extremes of timbre and dynamics are employed in an attempt to portray the fragility that I found within *Rutén Nóta*.

Obsidian III – Kostis Tsioulakis (premiere)

This piece is an excerpt from the ‘Obsidian Solo and Duet Series’ (including *Obsidian I*, 2009 for solo trombone, *Obsidian II*, 2010 for solo snare and *Obsidian IV*, 2013 for violin and clarinet). *Obsidian III* consists of four movements, *i. pesante*, *ii. fuga*, *iii. con fuoco* and *iv. coda*, performed almost with no pause. All movements are structured based on the Golden Section, introducing their climax points mostly as ‘anti-climax’ ones, as silence has a prominent role throughout the piece. The first half (parts I & ii) is based on a 12 note series, which is given the colour of the Harmonic minor scale by extra notes. The second half (parts iii & iv) is based on a mixed scale, half ‘diminished’ and half ‘Harmonic minor’. All four pieces often employ a theme imitation, which is the basis of the Obsidian series; Obsidian is a volcanic stone, and more accurately a volcanic glass, used to make mirrors in ancient Anatolia and Greece. I attempt to provide this glassy notion with some pianissimo, together with some sharpness of the sound using techniques as “sul ponticello”. Also, one could realize some "reflections" on specific small motifs that are presented with timbre and/or rhythmic distortions. **KT**

Uhadi/Umrhubhe – Chris Skipper (premiere)

Uhadi is the *isiXhosa* (a South African *Bantu* people) name for a large percussion bow with calabash resonator. The performer strikes the string of the bow with a reed or small stick while closing the calabash against the chest. *Umrhubhe* is a similar instrument, but the role of the calabash is replaced by the player’s mouth, which amplifies the overtones of the single string. The instruments both generate simple two note chords, which are played in a rhythmic manner. The piece *Uhadi/Umrhubhe* is music for these African Classical Music instruments written for the Western Art Music violin, and does not claim to be an epigone of the instrument. **CS**

Traces – Liam Taylor-West (premiere)

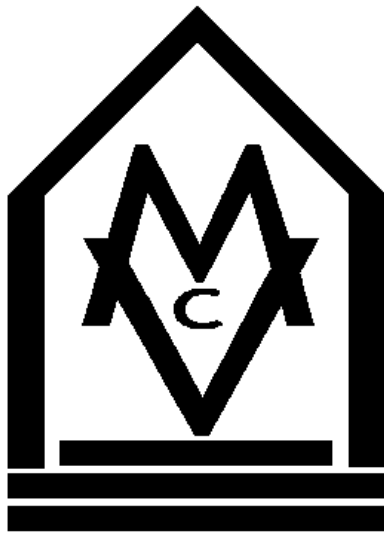
The word ‘Trace’ can be defined as ‘evidence or an indication of the former presence or existence of something’. In this piece, music from the opening – overlapping figures in the violins that rise upwards, away from, and around each other – leads to a violent interruption where each instrument takes its turn to distort the theme. Once this section has settled, we are left to experience the ghostly remains of the fragment as it continues to rise and tumble over itself before finally coming to rest. **LTW**

Bartók – No.11 Cradle Song; Arthur Keegan-Bole – Boy Sailing a Little Boat (Francis Danby); Bartók – No.12 Hay Song;

Bartók – Sorrow; Carmen Ho – Float (premiere); Bartók – No.1 Menuetto

AKB: This piece is part of a series of short studies for Violin Duet based on pictures held in the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery where the pieces were/are being written. Each piece tries to capture a mood and any sense of narrative from specific pictures on show in as little time as possible – tiny pieces for tiny pictures. This picture has an appealing narrative of a naughty boy sent to peel potatoes but who instead carves and sails a toy boat with his friends.

CH: *Float* was inspired by Bartók’s *Bánkódás (Sorrow)*. This work tries to capture the stillness and emptiness of atmosphere. I have attempted to portray this serene image of scenery to a distinctive sound world.



**Contemporary
Music
Venture**

Concert 2

**Ruth Nelson (violin)
Roger Huckle (violin)
Matthew Olyver (viola)**

Tuesday 19th March 2013

8pm Victoria Rooms Auditorium

Generously supported by The Duignan Fund, Bristol University Music Department, and ARPA
Productions

Tears of the Clown – Matthew Olyver (premiere)

Tears of the Clown is a piece inspired by the feeling an outcast may feel. The work deals with emotions such as humiliation, anguish, loss, anger and sadness. Cheerful stuff! **MO**

Cecilia McDowall – Rousseau's Execution

2012 was the tercentenary of the birth of the philosopher, writer and composer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, so it was strange that it was in this year I chanced to unearth two tomes of the 1781 edition of his *Dictionnaire de Musique* which has been in my family for many years. In these rough-edged, yellowing pages Rousseau gives didactic expression to all aspects of music. The first to catch my eye was *Exécution* in which he expounds at length on the finest principles of performance, stating that nothing is so rare as 'good' execution. (He didn't live to see the French Revolution, a few good executions there).

Each of these three movements is initiated by one of Rousseau's musical entries. The first, *Ouverture*, is in the French overture style which, he says, should be 'striking, imposing and harmonious'. With tightly dotted rhythm as a feature of this movement I like to think there might be some element of competitiveness between the players. Before the reprise the two violins vie with one another in the 'execution' of a sweeping, rising scale. Rousseau considers 'the third (of a chord) to be the soul of harmony'. In *Les Tierces* (thirds), a gently combative exchange ensues amongst the three instruments, arguing for possession of the 'soul' with a major-minor disagreement. In the final movement, *Chaconne*, peace is restored. Melody is an important feature of the chaconne, states Rousseau, the tempo, too. One must perform a chaconne 'without ever hurrying or slowing the beat before finally coming to rest. **CMcD (copyright 2012)**

The Players

Ruth Nelson began studying violin at the City of Belfast School of Music with Beverley Scott. Before arriving at Bristol University to study Music, she led the City of Belfast Youth Orchestra, and was a member of the Ulster Youth Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of Ireland. Ruth studies with Roger Huckle and has led all of the University's major ensembles. She is looking forward to performing Mendelssohn's violin concerto in Poland with the University Chamber Orchestra next month.

Roger Huckle is one of the South West's leading violinists. As well as being founder, leader, Artistic Director and first violinist of the Bristol Ensemble, Roger is also a visiting member of Norway's Bergen Philharmonic, and performs with leading UK orchestras - including co-leading the London Concertante and Swansea City Opera Orchestra. He teaches violin at the University of Bristol.

Matthew Olyver Matthew is a first year music student at the University of Bristol, after having studied viola and composition at the Purcell School and led the National Youth Orchestra viola section. An active composer for various ensembles, Matthew has also recently completed the score for a full-length digital ballet for prestigious filmmaker Roydon Turner, which will be choreographed by the English National Ballet Company.

Thanks for coming – join us at the pub!

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

www.cmvconcerts.weebly.com