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FIRST PERFORMANCES

(1) Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 2008

After 4 or 5 years of uncertainty, HCMF seems finally to be forging a strong and yet inclusive identity for itself once again. 2008 was perhaps the strongest year since before the upheavals which saw three successive festivals take place under different artistic directors between 2004 and 2006. Now in his third year in charge, Graham McKenzie clearly has interests and priorities of his own, but they shaped themselves around other currents too, producing parallel streams or interesting interference patterns.

The festival commissions and premières, in particular, came from an interesting mix of old friends and new acquaintances, appearing in guises which were as apt to shed light on each other as to pass like proverbial ships in the night. Thus, a new notated piece commissioned from improvising saxophonist John Butcher chimed with some of the concerns increasingly evident in the work of Richard Barrett, a festival regular for many years now. UK premières of a number of works by the late and sorely neglected James Tenney invited comparisons with an American experimental tradition which was itself revived in performances of Cage classics including the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*. Another influential figure of the 1950s, Karlheinz Stockhausen, was represented not by his works of that period but by some of his very last pieces – thereby also providing a rare point of commonality between the current 'Huddersfield' and 'London' new music scenes, since several visitors, like myself, had surely arrived in Yorkshire still fired up with the discoveries of the South Bank Centre's Stockhausen festival earlier the same month.

Barrett's *nacht und träume*, a major new work for cello, piano and electronics, itself seemed to be a piece both retrospective and forward-looking. Performed as the third part of a continuous sequence beginning with Bernd Alois Zimmermann's searing *Intercommunicazione* and centred around a screening of Samuel Beckett's film *Not I*, the piece seems in some ways to revisit the Beckettian poetic world of Barrett's music of the 1980s and early '90s, and yet couples this with an expansiveness in the use of improvisatory passages and in the electronic part's treatment of 'found materials' which suggests a continuing openness to a whole world of sound. With a new London Sinfonietta commission scheduled for autumn 2009 and rumours of a 50th-birthday feature at Huddersfield, Barrett seems to have hit a mid-period stride.

A slightly younger British composer also producing interesting work is Bryn Harrison. His new commission *Repetitions in Extended Time*, a 40-minute work for the committed musicians of ensemble plus-minus, played out his interest in repetition and variation of a palette of deliberately restricted materials, which thus come to seem like the images in the bottom of a kaleidoscope. One is tempted to think of this as Feldmanesque, though, as someone commented to me after the concert, it is perhaps closer to the Italian composer Aldo Clementi's sonic world of glinting instrumentation, material in slow but insistent evolution, canons so densely woven one no longer hears the individual lines.

Coming from a very different point on the stylistic spectrum, yet equally assured, were the three ensemble pieces by the German Enno Poppe (b. 1969) receiving their UK premières in the expert hands of Klangforum Wien, the composer conducting. Poppe's work was also featured a few days later in a London showcase of Ricordi composers, and his imaginatively odd sonorities, complexly energized structures and teasingly inscrutable titles ('Salt', 'Bone', 'Oil') – the various elements combining to ensure an elusive but compelling expressivity – will surely continue to impress British audiences as his work becomes more widely known here.

And so to Stockhausen. At the aforementioned South Bank Centre festival London audiences had heard several parts of the *KLANG* cycle, for various combinations of instruments and/or electronics. Stockhausen projected a piece for each hour of the day (though they are not all a full hour in length), and had completed 21 at the time of his death a year ago. Huddersfield pilgrims could hear the third 'hour', *Natürliche Dauern* for solo piano, and the ninth, *HOFFNUNG* (*HOPE*) for string trio, the latter lasting around 30–35 minutes. Unusual for Stockhausen in being scored for string instruments only, and given a marvellously concentrated reading here by members of the German ensemble musikFabrik, *HOFFNUNG* is audibly based on

the same melodic 'formula' as some of the pieces heard in London. There's something maddening about this formula, especially about the way it's simply speeded up or slowed down at foreground level in what is little more than figuration, and yet there's also something irresistibly attractive about both the sonic surface of *HOPE* and also about its unflappable conviction. Near the beginning, and again as the sustained single movement nears its close, the instrumentalists speak religious phrases which seem to recall Stockhausen's early Catholicism from the later, mystical standpoint of a composer too often accused of having left the spiritual concerns of our own planet behind: 'Gott sei Dank!'

John Fallas

(2) Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 2008

During his three years as Artistic Director, Graham Mackenzie has noticeably altered the priorities of the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, presumably in a bid to attract new audiences. Though it still encompasses notable first performances, the festival now embraces installations, theatrical experiments, and a new emphasis on improvisation. Highlights are still to be found, but they now have to be carefully picked out of a decidedly mixed bag of events.

One of the undoubted gems of the 2008 Festival was an all-British programme, performed by the Arditti Quartet in St Paul's Hall on 22 November. It seemed to sum up all that is good about the HCMF, ensuring it a special place in the musical calendar: namely, an opportunity to hear challenging but rewarding new and recent works played superbly by specialists in this repertoire. Paul Archbold's brief but punchy *Impacts and Fractures* (1999) developed from an accident when the composer was knocked down by a car. Disparate slivers of material were introduced, seemingly at random, though as Archbold explained in the programme notes, the whole 'can only be reconstructed in the listener's imagination'. The Quartet No.3 (2008) by Roger Redgate was more substantial and, like Hugh Wood's Quartet No.2 of 1970, is made up of a series of sections derived from the opening bars. Hence, though the argument was bold and demanding in its complexity, with the material in a constant state of flux, there was also a satisfying sense of inevitability in its discourse, holding the listener's attention throughout its closely-argued 16 minutes.

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Works for viol consort by the Renaissance composer Christopher Tye inspired Brian Ferneyhough's *Dum transisset I–IV* (2006), which the composer describes as 're-imaginings'. In four vivid, contrasting movements entitled 'Reliquary', 'Totentanz', 'Shadows' and 'Contrafacta', this was a compact and inventive piece in which Fernyhough's fabled complexity was entirely at the service of its considerable emotional range. Finally, Harrison Birtwistle's *The Tree of Strings* (2007) was a one-movement string quartet in which the composer invents folk music which might have been played on the Hebridean island of Raasay if centuries of Presbyterian restrictions had not expunged it. This compelling 30-minute tone poem for four players made a glorious conclusion to the concert. Beginning with an unearthly, windswept soundscape, it took in a sharply-etched evocation of wild, primal rites before its simple and affecting close as the three upper strings solemnly left the stage, abandoning the cellist, who repeated a morose, rasping figure. The Arditti players made light of the considerable demands all four works imposed upon their virtuosity, yet for all their dazzling technique, the deepest impression was made by the sheer musicality and interpretative imagination on display.

The closing concert in Huddersfield Town Hall on 30 November also highlighted the Festival's particular strengths. Entitled 'Concert Reclaimed', it took the form of a three-part celebration of the music of John Cage, as members of Apartment House recreated a Cage retrospective given in New York Town Hall on 15 May 1958. Following the outline of the 1958 concert, the HCMF programme began with examples of Cage's early music, continued with later pieces (including his *Music for Carillon* (1951, 1954) for musical boxes, realized by Scott Mclaughlin and Nick Williams with considerable drollery), and ended with the monumentally virtuosic and challenging *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, which received its first performance at the 1958 concert.

There was one key deviation from the New York Town Hall retrospective: the 1958 concert's central portion consisted of movements from Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* for prepared piano, whereas in Huddersfield, we were given instead the premières of six new pieces from international composers, invited to respond to Cage's work. Of these, the most engaging came from Philip Corner, Claudia Molitor and Alvin Curran. Corner's affectionate *Lingering Random Chords* (*After William Faulkner*), with its sonorous pizzicato chords and strolling string players, deftly conveyed the freedom of expression which belongs to Cage's legacy. Molitor's *Paper Cut* for string septet embraced scrunching the paper on which the parts were written, tapping the stand and whistling, and involved much decision-making on the part of the performers; the results were more capricious and playful than anarchic or rebellious, as befitted an affectionate tribute. Also for string septet, Curran's *ERAT VERBUM JOHNNY* made ingenious use of the simplest of musical materials – the unison and the octave – and pitched it against the 1917 popular song by Rose and Olman, *Oh Johnny*: which, in an incidental and unexpected pleasure, bore a more than passing resemblance to the *Wallace and Gromit* theme-tune.

Fortunately, the considerable technical complexities of the piano part of the *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*, including its convoluted graphic notation, were in the capable hands of pianist Philip Thomas, a widely respected champion of Cage's music. Thomas demonstrably knows and loves this repertoire and his authoritative account of the prodigiously intricate score, ably supported by the players of Apartment House, strategically distributed on the Town Hall's tiered stage, formed the linchpin of this prolix, sometimes arcane, but always stimulating festival finale. Although the *Concert* is undoubtedly too complex to yield all its secrets in a solitary reading, this self-assured and scrupulous performance had an authentic sweep, whilst preserving the work's essentially enigmatic nature. This was a rare opportunity to hear a powerful, cryptic and thought-provoking work, ending the 2008 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival on a satisfying and encouraging note.

Paul Conway

Boston: Elliott Carter celebrations

There's been a whole lotta Carter goin' on. No important composer has ever before reached his centennial year still producing works, and even people who are not necessarily crazy about his music are willing – and, apparently, happy – to celebrate Elliot Carter's remarkable longevity. The Carter Centennial website's listing of 782 performances during the time of the observation of this event, though, makes it clear than it is not merely a small handful of devoted acolytes who are participating in its commemoration.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra's main celebration of the Carter centenary was the remarkable week-long all-Carter festival at Tanglewood in July,[1] but it marked Carter's actual birthday on 11

[1] On which see Christian Carey's review in *Tempo* Vol. 63 no. 247, pp. 46-47 (Ed.)

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December with a performance in Carnegie Hall in New York of *Interventions* for piano and orchestra; the première of the piece occurred a week earlier in Symphony Hall in Boston. During the week prior to that event The New England Conservatory, in co-operation with several other institutions in Boston (including the Music Department of Harvard University, The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, and the Longy School of Music, as well as the BSO), presented another celebratory festival, curated by John Heiss of the NEC faculty, featuring works from each of the eight decades of Carter's career as a composer, including all five of the string quartets and a multitude of other items, ranging from throw-away occasional pieces to some of his most important works, as well as pre-concert discussions and masterclasses.

Among the highlights of those concerts were a magisterial performance of the Sonata for cello and piano by Lawrence Lesser, of the NEC faculty, and alumnus Christopher Taylor; the *Asko Concerto*, performed by the NEC Chamber Orchestra conducted by Donald Palma; the Second String Quartet, performed by the Ariel Quartet; the *Elegy* for string quartet, performed by a quartet from the NEC Preparatory School; the Sonata for flute, oboe, cello, and harpsichord, performed by members of the NEC Contemporary Ensemble; and *The Harmony of Morning* and *Musicians Wrestle Everywhere*, performed by the NEC Choruses, conducted by Amy Lieberman. A performance of the Double Concerto by Stephen Drury and Yukiko Takagi with the Callithumpian Consort, conducted by William Drury, exactly caught the spirit of the piece as an intense drama written on the wind, and was spell-binding.

Perhaps most extraordinary of all was a performance of the First Quartet, the work which was the major turning-point in Carter's early career, by the Borromeo Quartet. Every adjective which can justly be applied to the Quartet – noble, heroic, exalted, visionary, and exhilarating come to mind most immediately – could equally justly be applied to their wonderful performance. Unlike the other, following, concerts of the festival, which were fairly long and crowded with works, this was on a concert in a regular series of chamber music presented by NEC faculty, preceded only by a Beethoven string trio, which allowed one to take in the Quartet more or less by itself, rather than followed and/or preceded by three or four other pieces.

The festival included one first performance, that of *Tintinnabulation* for six percussion players, which was performed by the NEC Percussion ensemble, conducted by its director Frank Epstein, percussionist of the BSO and an NEC faculty member. Strangely enough, the ensemble of *Tintinnabulation*, which is for only unpitched percussion, doesn't include any bells. The many instruments which are included are grouped by wood, metal, and skins. The fairly brief work presents the instruments in that order. The beginning is very dry and clattery, with no sustaining, then gongs come in quite loudly, with lots of sustaining, then the skins bridge the gap, the whole work ending with a big hammer blow. The concentration on orchestrating the length of resonance is a rather striking difference from much of Carter's other percussion writing (in the Double Concerto and the Concerto for Orchestra, for instance), where the percussion is often a sort of continuum of sound, out of which the pitch material develops.

The Boston Symphony concert, which was the culmination of the whole series, featured the first performance of *Interventions*, a 20-minute long work for piano and orchestra, written in 2007 for conductor James Levine and Daniel Barenboim, as pianist, two of Carter's most ardent champions, to play in this concert with the Boston Symphony – the orchestra for which Carter has had a special fondness, going back to his student days at Harvard. Levine and Barenboim between them have presided over the first performances of a dozen of Carter's works. They are both enormous musical personalities, and their personae both suggested the layout and dramatic plotting of *Interventions* and are enshrined in the work in important as well as in relatively trivial ways. Just as the beginning and ending of *Soundings*, the work for piano-playing conductor and orchestra written for Barenboim, made use of the musicalization of Barenboim's initials with a play on Bb and D at its beginning and end, so *Interventions* begins with dramatically presented octave A's (A=L(a), for Levine) for the full orchestra, which are answered by B♭'s in the piano's entrance; the work ends with a sort of raspberry *fortissimo tremolo* of the united notes B♭ and A. Between these points the piano and the orchestra have mutually exclusive developing arguments, the orchestra's lyric and sweeping, largely featuring strings, and the piano's more impetuous and bravura, each interrupting, intervening in, and influencing the other's progressing line in turn. Like the Piano Concerto, *Interventions* also has, in addition to the soloist, a sort of concertino group of instruments that act as intermediaries between the soloist and the orchestra.

For a composer of any age, *Interventions* would be a strikingly vivid, muscular, and energetic work, but for a composer nearing his centennial year it is truly remarkable. This concert ended

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with a rather brilliant performance of *The Rite of Spring*, the work which, on his first encounter with it, made the adolescent Elliott Carter decide that he wanted to be a composer.

Rodney Lister

Leuven: Transit New Music Festival

Since its inception in 2000, *Transit* has quietly established itself as one of Europe's most impressive small-scale contemporary music festivals. Based in the old Flemish university town of Leuven (about 20 minutes from Brussels), its events are given in the STUK arts complex over an intensive weekend, attracting impressively good audiences. The emphasis is uncompromisingly on music of intellectual rigour and toughness and its Artistic Director, Marc Delaere, defines its ethos as 'controversial, questions existing beliefs about music and is aimed at an adventurous, open-minded and curious audience made up of listeners, musicians, composers and organisers'.

Over 24–26 October there were six concerts with performers ranging from the Arditti Quartet, Trio Scordatura, cellist Arne Deforce and the New York New Music Ensemble, though to Flemish groups such as Champ d'Action and Spectra Ensemble, plus pre-concert discussions for all events. The festival puts Flemish composers unashamedly at the centre of its programme, ranging from well-established names through to composers at the start of their career. Commissioning is something that *Transit* does very handsomely, this year presenting 15 first performances, nine of which were actually commissioned or co-commissioned by the Festival. Those returning to the Festival a year later also receive a CD featuring around half-a-dozen of the commissions from the previous year.

Spectral music and matters pertaining to tuning dominated the first two concerts with a particularly stimulating performance by the Amsterdam-based ensemble, Trio Scordatura, led by Bob Gilmore. Gilmore is well-known for his book on Harry Partch and, although the Festival focus is almost exclusively on new work, a couple of Partch's works created a framework for a contemporary spectral approach to tuning. New commissions from Scott McLaughlin, Christopher Fox and the Flemish composer Peter Adriaansz underlined the essential constraints that spectralism can impose: a slow harmonic rhythm and sustained textures, allowing the microtonal harmony to achieve its full effect in a way that can be more difficult with faster music. Only Tim Mariën's *Quick Transit* (another commission) suggested the possibility of a more playful side to spectralism.

Many of these issues were explored, with great clarity and elegance, by Bob Gilmore in a lecture entitled *Just Intonation*, ranging over the issues of unconventional tuning in contemporary music. On the opening night a concert entirely devoted to Flemish music revealed the importance of spectralism to the work of many of Belgium's younger composers. The Spectra Ensemble is a Flemish group with a London Sinfonietta-type line-up and its concert included music by Luc Brewaeys, a leading figure in Flemish contemporary music, a prolific composer and Director of Music at Flemish Radio for over 20 years. Spectralism is central to Brewaeys's music and two of a set of seven pieces reflecting different single malt whiskeys were featured: *Oban* and *Cardhu*. The extension of the pitch range was mainly achieved through the judicious use of quarter-tones and glissandi but, unlike some of the other works in this and Trio Scordatura's concert, tackled head-on Brewaeys' concern with velocity in music. Other works in the concert such as Daan Janssens' *(étude scénographique)* showed a fine ear for sonority albeit within a slower rate of change. Annelies Van Parys (b.1975) *Colours for Spectra*, by comparison, was rather shapeless and inconclusive and perhaps not the best advert for Flemish music, but did help to reflect the full range of Belgium's composers.

Arne Deforce, best-known in Britain for his recent performance of Jonathan Harvey's Cello Concerto, has undertaken some of the most taxing of contemporary cello repertoire. One of the highlights of *Transit* was an afternoon concert in which Bernd Alois Zimmermann's *Intercommunicazione* (1967) was heard alongside a major new 25-minute work for cello, piano and electronics, *Nacht und Träume* by Richard Barrett (a co-commission with Concertgebouw Brugge and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival). Based on Schubert's song of the same title, a relationship is formed to Samuel Beckett's play of the same name. Zimmermann's work is essentially an 'anti-sonata', tackling the impossibility of combining cello and piano, whereas Barrett's new work dealt, often disturbingly, with the lack of contact between the live and electronic sounds. It did not match the impressively dark singleness of purpose of Zimmermann's work, but it promises much for repeated hearings.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the Arditti Quartet's concert, where the sense of ensemble, attention to detail and electricity of the playing were of the highest quality. A highlight, perhaps *the* highlight, of the weekend

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was their performance of Ferneyhough's recent *Dum Transisset I–IV*, based around the music of Christopher Tye. Its four compressed movements (with a central scherzo, slow movement and fleeting finale) comprise a string quartet in all but name. The combination of the Ardittis and Ferneyhough have been one of the great artistic partnerships of the last 25 years; here they bought to the music fluidity, line and transparency born both out of a new clarity in this composer's music and many years of creating a performance tradition for it. Closing the programme, it overshadowed some of the other works, but the terse drama and tightly argued *Impacts and Fractures* by Paul Archbold remains fresh in the mind.

I was unable to hear the closing concert of the Festival by the New York New Music Ensemble (26 October) and wish I could be more enthusiastic about the concert by Champ d'Action under James Wood, especially after their excellent concert at the 2007 Festival. Perhaps I missed the point of the two pieces by the Danish composer Niels Rønsholdt (b.1978), particularly *The Merman*, which had a crude naivety unrepresentative of the Festival as a whole. Alas, a new work by Walter Zimmermann, *Fear of Symmetry*, turned out to be a dry, disappointing piece with not a vestige of the creative fantasy that one associates with this composer. But the joys and disappointments of commissioning new work are part of its adventure and endless fascination and, ultimately, this was a superb weekend.

Peter Reynolds

Belgrade: 17th International Rostrum of Composers 2008.

The 16th International Rostrum of Composers held in Belgrade in 2007 presented a general survey of the previous 15 years, with a selection of the best pieces performed. The choice was very successful, with the music of well-known composers like Milan Mihajlović or Zoran Erić and some of the youngest generation, among them Marko Nikodijevich (now resident in Stuttgart, Germany) and Djuro Zivkovic (living and working in Stockholm, Sweden). This, and the next idea, came from the new selector of the festival, the young composer Ivan Brkljachich (assistant at the Faculty of Music in Belgrade), whose own music is very intriguing and out of the usual.

The 17th International Rostrum of Composers, held 19–25 November 2008, was completely different, and with its theme, 'New Miniatures', offered us five- to seven-minute pieces, written for the most varied combinations of instruments. It started with the voice, followed by an evening with the exceptional piano-duo Lončar/Pavlović and then the always refined and thoughtful pianist Nada Kolundžija, and as the sonic highlight, an evening with the Radio SO under the baton of its chief conductor Bojan Sudjić. Numerous first performances of short compositions were offered, not only by local authors, but from Australia, Asia, Europe, Israel, North and South America.

The most innovative idea, which gathered the largest audience the festival has so far had, was a new site for the festival, the Hall of the very modern, glassy, National Bank, in the center of the town. This was transformed (acoustically as well) into a new concert venue, putting chairs in its spacious entrance and enabling comfortable seating on the staircases around. Radio and television, as well photographers, were present.

The organizer of the Rostrum of Composers, from its inception, has been the Association of Serbian (formerly Yugoslav) Composers, in collaboration with the very imaginative Agency Jugokoncert, who were successful in offering us a 'short' overview of the global contemporary music scene. So, we had with us present some of the authors of the *Miniatures* at their world première performances. Some of those who answered the request of the Composers' Union are well-known names, but many are completely new and some very young. We came to the satisfactory conclusion that many of them are very gifted and have offered us a positive experience of future music, with the widest range of kaleidoscopic styles of expressional and performing devices and with new, innovative approaches and solutions. The result was overall less aggressive or experimental, and much more accomplished and refined; not short-breathed or unfinished, but well-thought-out, rounded creations. Among the 100 names, the most interesting (and no longer surprising) fact was that almost half of them were women composers, all very inventive and fresh. Beside the well-known ones, Mirjana Živković, Svetlana Maksimović, Milana Stojadinović-Milić, Jasna Veličković, Katarina Miljković, Alexandra Vrebalov, Irena Popović, Milica Paranosić (most of whom live around the world), we met some new ones. The most gifted among them, a real revelation, was the very young Milica Djordjević (born 1984)[2]; then, Bushra El-Turk (Lebanese in origin, living in England); the Lithuanian Ugne

[2] from whom the Arditti Quartet has commissioned a Second String Quartet. Milica Djordjević is finishing her doctor's degree in Strasbourg. The chamber version of her *Svitac u tegli/Firefly in a jar*, premièred in France in 2007, was performed in Belgrade on 23 November by the Belgrade Chamber Orchestra 'Ljubica Marić' under its conductor Rade Pejčić.

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Giedraityte; Darija Andovska and Valentina Velkovska-Trajanovska from Macedonia; Fani Kosona from Greece; and Mej-Fang Lin from Taiwan, beside the real 'lady' – Sofia Gubaidulina.

Among the already known and appreciated composers were Sir Harrison Birtwistle,[3] Philip Glass, Mauricio Kagel (In memoriam), Kim Helweg, Chiel Meijering, Chick Corea (still very much alive), Morton Feldman, Charles Ives, as well as Bruno Vlahek from Croatia and Paolo Longo from Italy. We should also mention such local figures as Srdjan Hofman, Vladimir Pejković, Szilard Mezei, Miloš Zatkalik, all of whom have different, individual approaches to music. Some of the most representative Serbian composers were not present: some had explained that they did not have time to compose 'a short piece', while some others 'needed more space than only five minutes to compose'. But throughout the festival, day by day, there were so many short and excellent compositions (nowadays it is common to write 'short' pieces up to 10–12 minutes) by internationally-known names, among them, Rodney Waschka from the USA, Pertti Jalava from Finland, Mika Pelo from Sweden or Norbert R. Stammberger from Germany – all present in person, with their newly-created music.

Among the most innovative items, with new tonal solutions, were the Greek Nickos Harizanos (*Si Vis amari, Ama* for solo flute, with the unforgettable Ljubiša Jovanović as its interpreter), and the Israeli Amos Elkana (with not one but two pieces: *Prague 1588* for solo clarinet and *Eight Flowers – a bouquet for Kurtág* for solo piano, played majestically by the pianist Natalija Mladenović). Another was the Australian Paul Clift, whose *Action Painting* was impressively played by the very young and gifted virtuoso pianist, Vladimir Gligorić – who presented as well, and in an astonishing way, the *Seven Bagatelles* for solo piano by the German Friedrich Jaecker. As the youngest composer of all, with a fine perspective, we need to mention the 21-year-old Luka Čubrilo (a student of Zoran Erić) who is making great strides.

Beside the compositions, which were followed with great attention, we have to emphasize that all the performers were local, young and showed a surprising affinity to the music they played with great understanding. As Boulez said to me a long time ago in London: 'If the performer himself understands the contemporary music piece and plays it well, the public will understand and accept it, as well'.

Donata Premeru

[3] Represented by *Pulse Sampler* for oboe and claves. His *Crowd* for solo harp, which Birtwistle had sent to the performer, Milica Zarić, was not played because she had had an accident.

Leeds Town Hall: Judith Bingham's 'Shakespeare Requiem'

Commissioned by the Leeds Festival Chorus to mark the 150th anniversary of its foundation, Judith Bingham's *Shakespeare Requiem*, premièred in Leeds Town Hall on 29 November 2008, is a substantial 35-minute work for soprano and baritone soloists, chorus, organ and large orchestra. It interlaces extracts from the traditional Latin Mass, sung by the chorus, with words selected by the composer from Shakespeare's lesser-known plays, exploring themes of revenge and reconciliation. The chosen texts, taken from *King John*, *Edward III*, *Henry VI Part 3*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Henry IV Part 2*, are rendered ageless so that the general meaning relates to any time and any country. Together they create a timeless evolving drama between two characters experiencing grief – a king, whose military action leads to the death of his eldest son, and his queen – both of whom react in different ways.

The composer has summed up the themes of the work as 'the universality of grief, the vulnerability of the world we live in, and man's addiction to conflict.' She has cited as the initial inspiration for the piece the solemn Requiem Mass for Princess Diana held at Westminster Cathedral, especially the opening procession. *Shakespeare Requiem* does have a strong sense of drama, even theatre, but there is also a deeply personal element to the work: she wrote this meditation on grief during her brother's own long illness and death in 2007 and it is dedicated to him.

Like Bingham's *Mass* (2003), the work begins with an organ solo, though in the former piece, the instrument contributes an overture-like 'Preamble' introducing key themes, whereas in the *Requiem* it sets the scene with an evocative muted solo and is soon joined by the implacable tread of an off-stage tenor drum. In a vivid depiction of a funeral cortège, the chorus intones a choral ascent through *Absolve Domine*, over which an exquisite soprano line is floated as the inconsolable queen thinks of her son as a child: the mood and character of the music here recalls the opening of Ralph Vaughan Williams's Ninth Symphony – a bleak and epic upward struggle. Laced with florid woodwind writing, the second movement (*Libera Me*) is enriched by some powerful choral writing as the king's rash, revenge-seeking military action creates more chaos and despair. *Liber Scriptus* has a syncopated, Holstian cosmic energy, as the king realizes the weight of his actions and asks for forgiveness. A telling contrast is provided by the central section, a still and serene setting of *Salva me*. In the following *Lacrymosa*, the queen is

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unable to move on from an all-consuming grief: atmospheric writing for woodwind and vertiginous strings vividly depicts her anguished mood. Announced by brass fanfare-like figures and drums, the last movement (*Lux Aeterna*), finds the king trying to broker an uneasy peace, leading to a delicately optimistic ending as, between fluctuating modes, the baritone quotes, poignantly: ''tis strange that death should sing'.

Part opera, part religious rite, *Shakespeare Requiem* is a compelling fusion of spectacle and devotion. Soloists Mary Plazas (soprano) and Giles Underwood (baritone) brought out the imagination in the composer's response to her well-chosen texts and the Leeds Festival Chorus successfully realized their challenging semi-dramatic role. In the mid-1990s, the BBC Philharmonic helped to establish Judith Bingham's reputation as a vivid, creative orchestral composer by premièring *Chartres* (1988) and *Beyond Redemption* (1995); in the *Requiem*, the players evidently relished her subtle and poetic use of a very large orchestra: the extensive percussion section, in particular, was deployed with taste and resourcefulness. Simon Wright, music director to the Leeds Festival Chorus, conducted his forces with commitment and sensitivity, highlighting the cogency, clarity and formal strength of this hauntingly beautiful new work.

Paul Conway

London: King's Place Opening Festival

Boldly defying convention, and displaying an essential economy of line, in all directions – both in its format and artistically, King's Place, London's newest concert venue, just by King's Cross station, opened its doors on 1–5 October with 100 concerts in five days. 'Who's paid for all this?' asked a lady in the queue to enter Hall Two for John Metcalfe's latest (on the first day's 5.15pm, 45-minute slot). I didn't know, but by the end of the session I was introduced by Metcalfe to the big chief himself – *entrepreneur par excellence* Peter Millican – who, when I repeated the question, replied with an ominous smile: 'I did'.

Yes, this is indeed all too true, and amazing. By dint of combining office space for *The Guardian* newspaper (who were currently still moving in) and the London Sinfonietta as well as the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, two small but splendid purpose-built, 'state of the art' concert halls have been afforded, as well as art galleries, eateries and terraces onto the Regents Canal (lovely in the moonlight). And this all 20 minutes by train from St. Albans where I live, right on our doorstep, so to speak, just down York Way from King's Cross terminus/St Pancras International. It feels like we've suddenly become the centre of the world – artistically, as well as transport-wise.

In defiance of convention there were no glossy programmes on sale at the hundred largely sold-out concerts, organized in 45-minute slots, over the five days, so no programme notes. (As one prominent music critic said quietly in an aside to me: 'at least they won't then be trying to tell us what to write!') But in fact I can report pretty well universal upbeat reviews on the music and venue, though a few moans about 'noises off' from the hammering of builders as the *Guardian* moved in. There was also no grand opening ceremony, fireworks or champagne in sight, but according to the free brochure, those who arrived by 9 am 'in the cathedral-like Atrium' (i.e. well designed arty entrance foyer), got Ligeti's *Poème Symphonique* for 100 metronomes, and that was free too!

With 100 concerts on offer, one was spoilt for choice, but I decided to start (1 October) with the London première of Edward Rushton's heady *Palladas*, sung by soprano Elizabeth Atherton with Iain Burnside (piano) – whose humorous verbal introductions to the various songs under the title 'Iain Burnside and Friends' were better than any programme-notes. Employing extremes of register on the piano, swoops of the voice and big leaps for dramatic effect, and even sounds as of a police siren to illustrate his theme, Rushton gave us a 'thrill-a-minute piece', most memorable.

But by the time Burnside started to move on to Schubert, I soon realized I was in the wrong Hall for *Tempo* purposes, so managed to get transferred to Hall Two for John Metcalfe's new music (I had reviewed him before at the 2007 Spitalfields Festival: see my review *Tempo* January 08). Metcalfe's sheer virtuoso skill as lead viola, ably backed by his Band and 'sonic science' electronics manipulated on stage, had to be heard to be believed. The young chap next to me in the audience had first heard some of these themes at Metcalfe's 'Big Chill 'festival in Herefordshire in August: '10,000 people standing barefoot in a field in the rain'. Now this might seem a bit 'outside the usual canon' for *Tempo* readers, but as Fiona Maddocks wrote in the *Evening Standard* in August, reviewing another virtuoso bestriding the genres in the BBC Proms (the brilliant young pianist Gwilym Simcock): 'Forget whether or not it's jazz, one of those red rag words to the classically timorous – Can we just call it music?'

Similarly, in Hall Two later that evening I took in the Eden/Stell Guitar Duo, which I'd reviewed at RAM in 2004 (see my *Tempo* review). Their

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'Music from an Island' was illustrated on the large screen backdrop to the stage with graphic images of unusual coastline, castles and old abbeys, etc around the British Isles, and their intuitive, sensitive, interaction with each other as a guitar duo on stage marks them out as something special.

Returning on Friday 3 October, for the London Sinfonietta's world première of Philip Cashian's *Opening of the House*, one was impressed by the community aspect of this piece, involving the Guardian Choir and the local Islington Youth Choir, though I found the intervening episodes for the London Sinfonietta less evocative of local themes and sound. But when I asked the composer about this, he explained these interludes were 'just a piece of music', not Community-related. What was very evocative of 'community' was the use of archive recordings, overlaying the choir's voices, of an elderly local King's Cross workman, Derek, reminiscing about his life delivering coal in the area, and the chanting of the names of local streets throughout. Bizarrely 'Mornington Crescent' kept coming across, decades before its present-day context!

The real gem for me from the Sinfonietta that evening was a classic revised live presentation of Gavin Bryars' *Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet*. Shorter than the original, but retaining all the poignancy of the sheer simplicity of the repeated theme, spoken by a homeless man, on the original tape from the 1980's, the Sinfonietta's deft response, with strings softly modulating in tune with the wavering voice, was well worth travelling to London that evening just for that experience.

On Sunday 5 October we were treated to an 'urban soundscape' by Tony Whitehead (sonic artist) and Matthew Sansom, composer who, though working independently of each other, managed to merge impressions in sound of King's Cross: footsteps, traffic, swooshing of trains, pigeons, police sirens – in fact everything you hear 'if you just stand still for half an hour in the environs, close your eyes, and just listen…'. This was further overlaid with recorded local voices reminiscing on the war years, street names – enough to bring tears to your eyes if one had relatives or friends from that era – also the railway and the canal, illustrated with images of King's Cross of yesteryear on screen.

Later in the larger Hall One, we were treated to the world première of Thea Musgrave's *Cantilena* for oboe and Strings,[4] innovative due to the oboe being heard initially offstage, before joining the string trio on stage for this interestingly lyrical piece performed by the Chilingirian String Quartet, with Nicholas Daniel, oboe.

[4] Published by Novello in 2008.

Although I wasn't there for the first of the 100 concerts, nor for Ligeti's 100 metronomes in the splendid foyer, on 1 October, I was determined to be there for the closing pianist. Late night on 5 October I caught Gwilym Simcock's scintillating *original works* for cello with himself at the piano, his Acoustic Triangle jazz/classical ensemble (don't miss a chance to hear them live or on CD), and managed to catch the opening of his impressive *Improvisations* on two pianos with John Taylor in concert No. 100 – before dashing off to catch my midnight train just round the corner at good old King's Cross/St Pancras.

Jill Barlow

London, Barbican: Benet Casablancas

Music which develops and counterpoints, rather than merely illustrates, Shakespeare's play provides the original appeal of the *Set escenes de Hamlet* (Seven scenes of Hamlet) by the Spanish composer Benet Casablancas. It received a thrilling UK première by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with the actor Ray Fearon as reciter, under the dynamic baton of Josep Pons. He was making his impressive UK concert debut at a capacity Barbican Hall on 24 October 2008, the concert being broadcast live on Radio 3. With its unusual format of seven recitations followed by seven orchestral reflections, *Set escenes de Hamlet* – conceived first in 1989 for chamber ensemble – displayed rich, finely wrought contrapuntal textures, with plenty of dramatic excitement and affecting lyricism. Casablancas's idiom, often redolent of Henze's sumptuous translucence, Boulez's intricacy and even Birtwistle's weightiness, also echoes a Bergian expressionism. That attests to his twin influences, which, like those of Roberto Gerhard, stem from the Second Viennese School (he studied with Friedrich Cerha) and the 'Spanish tradition' of Falla – whose fiery ballet *El amor brujo* (with an authentic Flamenco singer, Ginesa Ortega), formed the sunny Spanish context in the remainder of the programme alongside Turina's colourful *Danzas fantásticas* and Ravel's *Rhapsodie Espagnole*.

The music is divided into seven aphoristic responses to Shakespeare's tragedy, compressed ingeniously into seven soliloquies, all but the first by Hamlet. The 'Prologue', Horatio's encounter with the King of Denmark's ghost, gives rise to suitably eerie shimmering textures for celeste, string harmonics, undulating woodwind, and overlapping solo melodic figures. The second

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interlude's searing, effervescent energy reflects Hamlet's anger at his mother's remarriage in explosive gestures balanced by the contrapuntal clarity of oboe and violin solos, while expansive drum-rolled dissonances prepare the three portraits: Hamlet, Ophelia and Yorick. The profundity of 'To be or not to be' is rendered in a throbbing double fugue; lyrical subjects and sprightly countersubjects dovetail like insects crowding on a watery leaf, with a climactic percussion interruption before the subjects scamper into silence.

The unusual structural rapport of text and music was demonstrated in the 'Ophelia' movement, where Ray Fearon's ever-characterful racy recitation, ending in the line 'Get thee to a nunnery', was counteracted unexpectedly by the elegiac slowness of the solo flute melody, taken up by bass clarinet and low strings. A *fin-de-*(19th)*-siècle* nostalgia pervades what the composer described, in the pre-concert interview, as the work's 'great Adagio'. Yet it also conveys Hamlet's abrupt aggressiveness towards Ophelia – who, significantly, receives the most intense music, as shown in the eloquent string quartet threnody which ends the sixth movement 'Yorick. Burial of Ophelia'. Here music and text come together for the first time in a Melodrama, with clear hints of *Sprechgesang* and film music, in such clichéd gestures as tense chords after 'Alas, poor Yorick'. Yet overall the purely musical level of discourse is persuasive, as in the sizzling scherzo, 'Party of Players', in which Hamlet teases out the truth from the play-within-a-play, evoked in a dancing web of musical quotations (including an Elizabethan jig). The explosive climax, however, is the highly-charged finale: this encapsulates how the music is comment rather than illustration, in that its brass-led eruption after the poignant words 'The rest is silence' potently resists the words' overt meaning to the last. Casablancas's masterly fusion of operatic and symphonic discourse represents an innovative genre which speaks with intimacy and power; one hopes his more recent works – they include another inspired by the Bard, *The Dark Backward of Time*, based on *The Tempest* – will reach UK audiences soon.

Malcolm Miller

Covent Garden, Linbury Studio Theatre: Michael Berkeley's opera 'For You'

Having already shaped concertos and many instrumental works, Benjamin Britten's godson Michael Berkeley now appears to be transforming

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himself into a more radiant musical realm, moving onward and upward towards an elevated – perhaps even spectral? – plane. His first two operas, and the concertos for oboe, clarinet, viola and organ, have all reflected a strong desire to blend ground-breaking harmony and colourful structure with profound thought. All of this seemed quite transparent in his *Slow Dawn*, a highly imaginative orchestral soundscape inspired by daybreak over his house in the Welsh Marches – given its world première in the 2008 Promenade Concerts. Barely discernible quarter-tones, frozen ethereal chords, strange distortion and ecstatic moments from his 1995 *Magnetic Field* and the more recent *Abstract Mirror* and *Touch Light* – all three performed at the Wigmore Hall during Matthews's memorable 60th birthday celebration last October – also give the impression that his creative mind is now exploring far more radical textures and the acoustic properties of pitch and human perception, a process bearing some resemblance to the spectral music of Gerard Grisey and Tristan Murail.

Not long after that stimulating anniversary, his third opera was to receive its world première at the Linbury Studio Theatre, Royal Opera House. Unfortunately, the first planned performance of *For You*, commissioned by Music Theatre Wales – an associated company of the Royal Opera House who produced his second opera, *Jane Eyre*, at the Cheltenham International Festival in 2000 – had been cancelled because the original lead singer developed serious vocal problems and was forced to withdraw. Set to an astonishing libretto by the renowned author of 11 novels, Ian McEwan, the story concerns a high-flying composer, conductor and irrepressible womanizer who is preparing frantically for the première of his new work, *Demonic Aubade*. Confronted with this tale of startlingly irrational behaviour, Michael Berkeley has responded by writing his most emotional and theatrical music to date, dramatically illuminating the effects of desire, frustration and anger.

Having employed one of the dominant singers of the Benjamin Britten world – *Death in Venice* supremo Alan Opie – Music Theatre Wales had certainly located the right man for the job to play the demanding central role of the composer, Charles Frieth. Opie portrayed his tragic blunders and destructive desires with incredible skill and enthusiasm in his customarily forthright style. As the story includes orchestral rehearsal, the first performance of a new work and other related musical scenes, Berkeley was clearly driven to develop an outlandish parallel between the narrative and the immediate presence of the Linley Theatre stage and orchestra pit. While discordant 'warming up' sounds begin to emerge in the opening Scene from the 14-piece ensemble in the pit, composer Charles Frieth strides forward – baton ready – from a dimly-lit rear stage, to rehearse one of his early works, but immediately bursts into wild fury over a wrong note from the horn player, demonstrating with devastating passion the dark obsessions which are about to be explored throughout *For You*.

It then became rapidly apparent that the real-life composer, Michael Berkeley, is undoubtedly developing his own unique brand of opera, on this occasion fusing angry obsession, sexual desire, low cunning and frustration – even the occasional crude expletive – with an immensely creative musical panorama, brimming with inventive textures and combinations from the orchestral ensemble. All of this accentuated the disturbing features of destructive desire and fast-growing mental turmoil.

This theme of barely-controlled infatuation intensified throughout both Acts, as the strong-minded Frieth, and his sick wife Antonia, her doctor, Simon, their housekeeper, Maria, and the remainder of the superb cast indulge in a fast-developing atmosphere of sexual craving and strange behaviour, ending with the cruel murder of Antonia by Maria, to gain the everlasting attention of the man she desires – Charles Frieth. The grand climax looms as Charles conducts the première of *Demonic Aubade*, and is instantly afterwards arrested for murder. Such a melodramatic scene presented Michael Berkeley with the long-awaited opportunity to flamboyantly express the *Aubade*'s 'a dust-reddened sun lifting itself over the cold desert rim' and 'the searing white heat of creation', against a backdrop of intense human torment – the resultant musical finale rising overwhelmingly from the orchestra pit, then soaring over the entire auditorium to create a truly cosmic conclusion.

John Wheatley

London, Wigmore Hall: Julian Dawes

Passion and intensity informed the world première of a sonata for cello and piano by its dedicatee Gemma Rosefield, partnered by the pianist Gordon Back. It formed the climax of a concert featuring varied chamber works by Julian Dawes at the Wigmore Hall on 14 December 2008. This British composer's prolific work for the theatre has given way in recent years to an oeuvre of original inspiration and quality that deserves to

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be heard more often. The concert well displayed Julian Dawes' individual voice: at once lyrical-pastoral and elegiac, yet also underpinned by a sturdy energy and wit, it is at its most effective in a consolatory tenderness, as in the finale of the Cello Sonata, which Gemma Rosefield eloquently conveyed. Her bold projection of the strongly melodic first movement, the intriguing variations of the slow movement and the lilting third movement made a persuasive case for this idiomatic addition to the cello repertoire.

The programme offered a fascinating sample of Dawes's extensive creative oeuvre, which has found particular vigour in dramatic genres relating to solo voice, chorus or stage, with song cycles and oratorios on biblical or Holocaust poetry, while in his instrumental works he displays a lighter, theatrical and more abstract idiom. His craftsmanship and characterful invention were evident in each of the works performed, from the light jazzy humour of the Clarinet Sonatina, the expressive intensity of the violin *Elegie* and the exciting, often witty drama of the sonatas for Violin and Cello. Discernible throughout were echoes of English pastoralism deriving from Herbert Howells, the textural richness of Walton and the elegant delicacy of Berkeley, mingled with the caustic irony of Shostakovich and Kurt Weill and the rhythmic impetus of Prokofiev and Stravinsky.

The immaculate artistry of Emma Johnson, in Dawes's Sonatina for clarinet and piano, formed an ideal overture that sparkled and glistened with shade and nuance. Composed in 1994, the Sonatina displays Dawes's penchant for jazzy idioms, yet tinged with a punchy dissonance and piquant wit. The first movement contrasts a snappy first subject in dialogue with a more lyrical second subject that broadens into a flowing nocturne. Another nocturne-like section forms the central interlude of the eloquent, palindromic ternary slow movement. The jazz element is most pronounced in the jaunty finale, where an exploratory, progressive harmony radiates the bonhomie of traditional jazz walking bass (wittily projected by Gordon Back), with swing rhythms and improvisatory ornamentation.

In Dawes's two violin works, the meltingly expressive *Elegie* and the dramatic Sonata, the accomplished violinist Serena Leader drew long-breathed lines which Gordon Back accompanied eloquently throughout. The *Elegie* projects a more profoundly expressive aspect of Dawes's compositional voice. Composed in 1988, the single movement is 'in memoriam' for the composer's mother, who died in 1943 when the composer was an infant. Its simple, symmetrical ternary design features extended lyrical outer sections that envelope a more turbulent central interlude, allowing full rein to his melodic invention – this is evident in the mesmeric, elegiac quality of the violin's theme, smoothly set over gently pulsing chords, as well as in the more imitative and troubled central section. Yet the work's emotional force derives from a biting clash of semitones (G flat and G) of the major and minor triad. This is a favourite device of Dawes's harmonic language, which is at once fresh in its reinterpretation of tension and resolution within a chromatic idiom, yet unpredictable in its fluctuations of consonance and dissonance.

Dawes's most substantial work for violin and piano is the three-movement Sonata for Violin and Piano premièred by the same artists in 2006. The first movement exemplifies Dawes's individual approach to classical sonata design, one that favours blurring of divisions and unexpected reversals of themes, yet maintains a clarity of intention which enables the harmonic bite and melodic development to come to the fore. Flavours of Franck, Delius and Debussy waft through the violin's broadly-shaped first subject, countered by more urgent rhythmic motifs which preoccupy the short development, with the thematic sequence reversed in the reprise. The slow movement is a beautifully-structured variation form, the piano's chromatically-inflected yet serene theme repeated eight times, like a Purcellian 'ground bass', as accompaniment to the violin which appears during the second statement. This is developed in ever-richer ways until a climax in the sixth appearance, after which the violin emphasizes its mellow low register, coming to rest on the sonorous open G string. Dawes's interest in Jewish music is apparent in the Rondo finale, where the thrice-repeated theme displays the syncopated energy of Klezmer music. Announced by unaccompanied violin, it is enriched by the piano's dance band textures, with two lyrical episodes.

The Cello Sonata (2007), composed shortly after Dawes revised his five-movement solo Cello Suite (1987), again showed the composer's individual approach to sonata form, his preference for evolving thematic material and continuities, seamless elisions and sequence reversal. Throughout there is plenty of dialogue, imitation and dovetailing, with passages of solo piano often acting as transition, and an exploration of the wide registers of each instrument. In the first movement, a dynamic sonata form, the cello's boldly shaped first subject is contrasted with a spiky piano theme, both developed richly in interplay and leading to climactic scalic gestures. As in the violin and clarinet works, the expressive heart of this sonata is a meditative, song-like slow movement, its free flowing lyricism

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belied by highly disciplined hybrid of variation and ternary design, with a framing piano chorale. The third movement, an exuberant, effervescent and yet delicate Rondo, with plenty of cello pizzicato and surprising harmonies, was a delightful foil for the concise finale, developing motifs from the slow introduction across a wide variety of registers and syncopated gestures, boldly rising scales, and quasi-18th century ornamental 'turns'.

The enthusiasm of the near-capacity audience was rewarded with the second Dawes world première of the evening as encore, a delightful arrangement of a *Musette* for all the performers. A lilting piano texture is overlaid by a delicate melody shared amongst the violin, clarinet and cello: spiced with subtly-honed dissonances, it was an ideal miniature with which to conclude a fascinating window into Dawes's oeuvre.

Malcolm Miller

West Dulwich, All Saints' Church: Holbrooke's 'The Pit and the Pendulum'

Josef Holbrooke's orchestral music occurs in concerts about as frequently as Halley's Comet does in the night sky – and a good deal less reliably. So three cheers to the conductor Christopher Fifield and his largely amateur Lambeth Orchestra for adding Holbrooke's 'Fantasie for Orchestra' *The Pit and the Pendulum* (his op. 126) to the Orchestra's impressive tally of revivals[5] – except that this was no rediscovery: the performance, in All Saints' Church, West Dulwich, on 13 December 2008, seems to have been the first performance of the piece, in an edition prepared for the occasion by Fifield and Mark Henegar.

The Pit and the Pendulum was composed in 1929. But the writings of Edgar Allan Poe had long fascinated Holbrooke: his first major success, in 1900, was the symphonic poem *The Raven*, and he was to write well over 30 works inspired by him (his choral First Symphony of 1907, for example, bears the title *Homage to E. A. Poe*; four years earlier he had written another symphonic poem, also with chorus, *The Bells*, beating Rachmaninov to the draw by a decade). By the time of *The Pit and the Pendulum* Holbrooke's star had long since begun to wane, and he was also battling with increasing deafness; he continued to compose into the 1940s, knowing that what he was producing stood little chance of being heard anywhere outside his own head. In this instance it took 80 years.

The Pit and the Pendulum, set in the time of the Spanish Inquisition, is explicitly programmatic, its four sections presenting the sufferings of a prisoner in a dungeon. It opens as, using his shirt in the pitch black, he measures the dimensions of his place of confinement. (I have the programme note – unsigned, but probably by Fifield – to thank for the narrative detail: Strauss claimed he could depict a knife and fork in music if he wanted to, but Holbrooke is content with the more general provision of atmosphere.) The work begins in appropriately dark foreboding, deep in the orchestra: the brass in its bottom registers, baleful trombones prominent, with minatory smacks on the tam tam. Against this bleak wall of sound a consolatory, rather Baxian melody arises in the strings and, yearning and soulful, is developed by the full orchestra. The anxiety-ridden mood of the beginning returns, but the gloom dies away and a rather Russian quasi-scherzo emerges – are these the rats which gnaw through his bonds?

Again the tension ebbs to admit a passage that the unaided imagination might take to be a seascape, broad and shimmering; instead, it seems to be the prisoner's growing excitement at the realization that freedom is at hand. As the exhilaration mounts, fanfares announce the arrival of his rescuers and the work is over, surprisingly swiftly: it took only nine minutes. Fifield and his players did Holbrooke proud, using the piece as quasi-overture at the outset of an ambitious programme: the Hurlstone Piano Concerto and Elgar First Symphony were to follow. Time now for a professional British orchestra to follow the example of the bold Lambethans and present *The Pit and the Pendulum* nearer to the centre of one of our major cities. Audiences would respond directly to its honest melodrama.

Martin Anderson

University of Chichester: Contemporary Music Group Christmas Concert

Fifteen members of Chichester University's Contemporary Music Group have just combined their talent and enthusiasm to present a remarkably imaginative concert in the Chapel of The Ascension, exploiting the lofty structure of this modern architecture in the centre of Bishop Otter Campus with fervour and dynamism. In their Christmas Concert on 16 December 2008, the articulate and highly expressive pianist Adam Swayne conducted five modern compositions in

[5] The astonishing list of works the Orchestra has performed under Fifield, its Music Director since 1982, can be found at **www.lambeth-orchestra.org.uk/works_performed.htm**, and puts most other such organizations to shame.

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a stylish manner, displaying his athletic passion for music of the contemporary world. (Sussex-born, Swayne has recently performed in many parts of Britain, including London's South Bank Centre.) While the audience gathered eagerly around the Chapel, ten University musicians emerged, combining harmoniously with their instruments – guitar, woodwind, double bass, trumpet, piano, keyboard and percussion – and moving calmly around the Chapel to attain the orchestral arena as they gradually introduced all those present to the engaging, gently swaying, *First Waltz* by Michael Nyman.

Intense musical artistry followed inevitably. Much akin to John Cage, Dublin-born Jennifer Walshe is absorbed by everyday sounds that one hears the world over, such as nature-sounds, snapping twigs, tearing paper, and inventive instrumental timbre, all of which can be full of subtle beauty. Immediately after an invigorating performance of Jonathan Harvey's percussive *Climbing Frame*, the Chapel suddenly went pitch black, enabling Walshe's *he was she was,* written in 2008, to be presented in candlelight, delicately illuminating a weird sound world emanating from a small ensemble and spoken voice – ending gently as the double bassist shredded paper.

Next came a short, extraordinarily pungent new work written by one of the finalists in the 2008 British Composer Awards competition (which had received 268 submissions). Royal Academy of Music student Alexander Campkin wrote *Counting My Numberless Fingers* in 2007, focusing on inventive percussion and rhythm while developing an intense orchestral mode – all of which concluded with radiant, ascending piano chords.

After the interval, the conductor appeared unexpectedly on the Chapel balcony, introducing John Cage's 'considered response to minimalist music'. As Jennifer Walshe must also be aware, Cage's stated belief was that 'any noise constituted music' and his '*HymnKus*' – a 35-minute tour de force contrasting strange sounds with a relentlessly evolving musical structure – is so typical of his technique. Even as the mysterious resonance of tiny musical notes and jingles, sudden toots and drones from the unseen balcony ensemble pervaded the upper atmosphere of the Chapel, seven musicians in the main lower section progressively applied Cage's 'response', creating a slowly evolving – and diaphanously balanced – soundscape, all coordinated with eloquent skill and vitality by Adam Swayne, still communicating enthusiastically from high level.

John Wheatley

London, Bauer & Hieber: Jonathan Powell plays Sorabji

According to Paul Rapoport's invaluable anthology *Sorabji: A Critical Celebration*,[6] the 27 sections of said composer's *Sequentia cyclica super 'Dies irae' ex Missa pro defunctis* fill 335 pages; Rapoport's detailed worklist notes drily, but unsurprisingly, 'Not performed'. That was before Jonathan Powell began his extensive involvement with Sorabji's music, recording a succession of first performances for the Altarus label.[7] On 18 December 2008, in the basement of Bauer and Hieber – the former premises of Schott & Co. on Great Marlborough Street, fast becoming one of the favourite London venues for musicians wanting to try out a programme before a small but generally dedicated audience – Powell tackled the first 13 of those sections, sitting at the piano at 6.03 and playing this relentlessly demanding music for precisely two hours and 42 minutes, with only the briefest of pauses between them. This was probably the first performance of the music anywhere in the world: rumours of a performance in the United States have apparently reached the Sorabji Music Archive, but requests for supporting documentary evidence were not substantiated. Mind you, there was no paperwork left behind to support Powell's claim, either, if a dispute were ever to arise: in lieu of a printed programme he introduced the work from the floor – there were, though, a handful of witnesses, growing stalk-eared with amazement as the evening progressed.

For all their pianistic difficulties, those 13 movements are relatively straightforward structurally: when one considers that the *Sequentia cyclica*, written in 1948–49, when the composer was in his late fifties, contains in addition some of those specialities of Sorabji at his most monumental (in this instance a passacaglia with 100 variations and a *Fuga quintuplice a due, tre, quattro e sei voci ed a cinque soggetti*), a complete performance of the *Sequentia cyclica* would probably surpass the even five-hour *Opus clavicembalisticum* in duration. If, as it likely, it is Powell who rises to the challenge, I hope he tackles it somewhere with more comfortable seats.

[6] Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1992, pp. 153–54.

[7] They now include the *Passeggiata veneziana* and *Villa Tasca* (AIR-CD-9067), Toccata No. 1 (AIR-CD-9068), the Fourth Sonata (AIR-CD-9069(3)), the *Concerto per suonare da me solo* (AIR-CD-9081), *Un nido di scatole*, *Djâmî* and *St Bertrand de Comminges ('He was laughing in the tower')* (AIR-CD-9082), *Rosario d'arabeschi* and *Gulistan* (AIR-CD-9083) and the *Fantasia ispanica* (AIR-CD-9084).

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Powell explained that one of Sorabji's means of avoiding thematic monotony is to use all the tropes that occur in the chant as used in the liturgy of the Requiem Mass – Sorabji's full title means what it says. The opening *Largo*, qualified *Legatissimo sempre e nello stilo medioevale detto 'organum'*, is purely chordal, presenting the material in mild harmonization, with the bass hinting at darker things to come, in an eerie luminosity that recalls late Busoni. Over in three minutes, it gives ground to a spiky toccata with an extended right-hand commentary above textures that grow ever more complex – though sometimes with a surprisingly jazzy touch. Sorabji's beefy treatment of the keyboard suggests an orchestral inspiration, as he plays different colours off against one another. At the opening of the third movement, *Legato, soave e liscio*, the theme is first presented in octaves, the melody tolling in bell-like sonorities from which sound ripples outwards, the consonant harmonies evoking monastic calm before spinning off tendrils that bring a bluesy touch.

The first larger span, the *Tranquillo e piano* fourth section, brings what seems to be a series of fantastical episodes, often with snippets of startlingly direct melodic material, almost as if Sorabji were improvising on the theme; a section using the extremes of the keyboard brings a hint of Busoni's Toccata. Gradually, it becomes clear we are moving through an extended set of variations, the piano-writing ever more grandiose and heroic, Sorabji occasionally letting up the pressure as he builds towards a massive climax, marked by a short series of huge chords in the bass. The theme now starts off again with the artful simplicity of a Bach two-art invention, gradually becoming more lyrical, sweeter; sometimes, indeed, the theme seems to disappear, leaving the harmonies hanging like the grin of the Cheshire cat. At a point which my notes tell me was exactly an hour into the performance I began to wonder whether this movement at least was losing direction, when ringing treble figuration over crashing left-hand chords unleashed more power in a passage of unarguable magnificence. As the temperature again ebbed, Busonian bells lent a touch of tranquillity. At this point it struck me, as it has before and was to do many more times that evening, that Sorabji's chromaticism, his ceaseless attempts to avoid a cadence, is something of a smokescreen, perhaps even for the composer himself, a way of avoiding the admission that his music is at heart tonal.

The fifth section, a stormy capriccio marked *Ardito, focosamente* which sank into an island of calm half way through its six minutes' duration, brought more disloyal thoughts: that for all Sorabji's inexhaustible ability to pile on the decoration and reharmonize, there comes a point where we seem to be going round the houses yet again – even he can't maintain individuality of expression indefinitely. A perky *perpetuum mobile* refocused attention, its ferociously difficult writing, *Vivace e leggiero*, animated with an impish humour, an Indian quality nodding at the sitar. For all that one occasionally wonders if Sorabji has bitten off more than he, or perhaps his audience, can chew, he can still surprise, now delivering his material almost with the immediacy of a pop song which, despite a growing wave of power, disappeared as soon as it had arrived.

The eighth part is an extended waltz-fantasy which emerges from an atmosphere of Satiesque, even gymnopédian, languor, the Straussian warmth and richness of the music confounding the image of Sorabji as a cantankerous old codger; the *Dies irae* theme keeps to the background so as not to spoil the party. Another capriccio, excited and angry and fearsomely difficult, brought some of the most gratifying writing so far, spinning through an astonishing variety of moods, flinging off hints of Bach, Busoni, Debussyan arabesque and bolero.

Powell's introduction, accurately enough, had described the following section as 'a big nocturne with a couple of loud bits'. It opened with the theme set in harmonies that suggest vast open spaces – desert plains under vaulted starlit skies – and admitted, surprisingly, the first extensive use of trills in the piece, the atmosphere pointing to Szymanowski at his hothousiest. The second of Powell's 'loud bits' brought in anvil-hard chords in the treble – still more or less in tune, though the bass was now beginning to protest. Those 'bits' also functioned as useful sign-posts: one of the downsides of Sorabji's fondness for proceeding by way of relentless decoration is that it works against a sense of shape: five or 25 minutes through a movement you have little feel for its structure. Another motoric *moto perpetuo* swirled past in two minutes to usher in a *capriccio quasi passacaglia*, where double-dotted rhythms brought a Baroque dignity.

Powell ended this part of his odyssey with an 18-minute *Aria* which Sorabji marks *Con fantasia e dolcezza*. It's infused with a gentle ecstasy, a consolatory kindness, threaded through a haze of decoration, tendrils and trills – a typical Sorabjian evocation of a sultry summer night, with a kind of sublimated exalted lyricism glowing deep in the background. One last splash in the treble, a deep chord long held in the bass and it was over.

The cynic might contend that a standing ovation is now inevitable: after nearly three hours of

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confinement the first thing the audience wants to do is get off its collective bum. But Powell's excited reception was genuine and well deserved: I know of no other pianist who seems to be able to harvest energy and deploy it with such unflagging intensity for such improbable spans of time – perhaps for the very reason that no other pianist has the guts to tackle such implausibly demanding music.

In earlier reviews in *Tempo* I've wondered aloud whether first Prokofiev[8] and then Janáček[9] might have shown signs of autism; as I've since also raised the question about Gubaidulina elsewhere,[10] I realize I run the risk of looking for Asperger's Syndrome in any aberrant behaviour. But I can't help asking whether Sorabji's much-quoted rebuff of 'stupid and impudent enquiries from lexicographical persons',[11] the minatory sign on his gate that began 'Visitors Unwelcome', the decades-long withdrawal of his works from public performance and, above all, the obsessive nature of the music itself, all point to yet another composer who was autistic at least to some degree. God save us, of course, from the amateur psychologist – but the possibility remains an intriguing one.

Martin Anderson

London, South Bank Centre: 'Musical Dialogues'

There was a large and enthusiastic audience to enjoy the UK premiere of Tzvi Avni's striking *Se Questo e un Uomo (If this is a Man) Five Orchestral Songs on poems by Primo Levi* (1998), performed amidst a feast of premières at the South Bank Centre on 30 November 2008. Entitled 'Musical Dialogues: British-Israeli Music Day', the three-concert event was an exciting highlight of an ongoing project by the Forum for Israeli Music of the Jewish Music Institute, SOAS, spearheaded by its 'Visiting Israeli Composer' Michael Wolpe and aiming to foster cross-cultural dialogue and exchanges between British and Israeli composers, performers, scholars and institutions. Over a hundred young musicians from leading British and Israeli conservatories participated in a programme designed to reflect the parallel concerns and approaches of British and Israeli composers across several generations. Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Patron of the Day, highlighted in the programme how the event would enable audiences to appreciate 'how traditional regional instruments can be woven into a contemporary orchestral sound world – both in my own music and music of my British and Israeli colleagues'.

The first concerts featured Tzvi Avni, the featured composer, in conversation with Humphrey Burton, interspersed with premières of three chamber works. Avni, one of Israel's most important composers, was born in 1927 in Saarbrücken, Germany, and came to Israel as a child in 1935 with his family to escape the Nazi persecution. He related how, living alongside Arab villages in his youth, he absorbed the sounds of the region, amalgamating them in his early works of the 1940s and 50s within the 'Eastern Mediterranean' style forged by his teachers Ben-Haim and Boskovich. Studies with the more modernist Abel Ehrlich and Mordecai Seter were followed in the mid-1960s by a period at the Princeton Electronic Music Center, with Vladimir Ussachevsky, and at Tanglewood, where he encountered the European and American avant-garde, as well as Copland and Xenakis. In 1971 he became Professor at the Rubin Academy in Jerusalem and Head of the Electronic Music Studio; since then he has been Head of the Israel Composers League, Chairman of the National Council for Culture and Art and Chairman of the Israel Jeunesses Musicales, composing works for the Arab-Israeli Youth Orchestra. Since the 1970s Avni has displayed an interest in Jewish mysticism, adding modal and neo-tonal elements to his style. Asked by Burton about his Israeli musical identity, Avni explained that a composer 'responds to needs of living in that society' – highlighting how, alongside many biblically-inspired works, he has composed works centred on the events affecting Israel, such as a choral work in memory of Yizhak Rabin to poems by Nathan Sachs.

During the course of the interview we heard three chamber works introduced by Avni. *Mirage* (2004) for violin, cello, piano, double bass and percussion, performed deftly by the Thallein Ensemble (Birmingham Conservatory), is an aphoristic reflection on four paintings by Juan Miró, with witty quotations, and a virtuoso double bass solo. String Quartet No. 3 'Paths of Time' (2003), engagingly played by the Brodowski Quartet, is a musical portrait of the conductor Yuri Ahronovitch (1932–2002), a champion of Avni's work, and reflects strong emotions. Avni's Saxophone Quartet (1990, rev. 2008), superbly premièred in its revised form on this occasion by

[8] *Tempo* Vol. 61, No. 242 (October 2007), p. 70.
[9] *Tempo* Vol. 62, No. 245 (July 2008), p. 66.
[10] *DSCH Journal* No. 29, July 2008, pp. 65–66.
[11] Letter to Percy Scholes dated 22 February 1952, quoted in the Preface to the Sixth Edition of *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, ed. Nicolas Slonimsky (7th edn., New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), p. xxiii.

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the Sirocco Saxophone Quartet, features as its expressive slow movement a transformation of Gesualdo's *Moro Lasso*, while the 'Catch as Catch Can', a tarantella finale, quotes from an Israeli folk-dance.

More Avni featured in the second concert, which began with the neo-classical *Concerto Accademico* (1924/5) by Vaughan Williams, given a spirited account by the young players of the Yehudi Menuhin School under their Musical Director Malcolm Singer, with Ben Baker as eloquent soloist. A quartet from the orchestra performed Tzvi Avni's early *Summer Strings*, String Quartet No. 1 (1962), alert to the music's striving muscularity and drama, from the quick-fire counterpoints and acerbic syncopations of 'Destination', eerily veiled soundscapes in 'Argument', or the starker dissonances of the 'Variations Without Theme', all of which are combined in the final cyclic 'Interweaving'. Avni's more recent piano work *On the Verge of Time* (1983), blending oriental melos and avant-garde 'atonality', received a fine account by Amit Yahav, winner of the 2008 Spiro Ark Israeli Music Competition. Another winner, violinist Litsah Tunnah, played Paul Ben-Haim's popular *Three Songs without Words*, which exemplifies the 'Eastern Mediterranean' style, with its exotic impressionism suggesting the sundrenched Judaean Hills, and a beguiling Sephardic folksong.

Representative of the younger Israeli composers was Lior Navok, whose Saxophone Quartet here received its UK première by the Sirocco Saxophone Quartet. Composed, like Avni's Quartet, for the Rascher Saxophone Quartet, in 2001, it contains echoes of Jazz and the American postmodernism (Navok studied both, with Yinam Leef in Israel and John Harbison in the USA), and effectively highlights the saxophone's vocal qualities, by means of sustained textures with shifting focus, individual lines emerging to the fore in melodic roles and in recitative links between movements. The Sirroco Quartet displayed impressive artistic qualities, conveying the gradual process across the four movement, from the introductory movement through the more energetic 'Circles' – a polyphonic excursus on a rhythmic ostinato – the ravishing half-lights and shades of 'Evening Thoughts', and the jaunty Scherzo, with its group interactions, soprano sax leading the way to the finale.

The British works included the remarkable premières of Oliver Kentish's *Prelude and Fugue for Ten Violas*. Kentish, a British cellist who settled in Iceland following a post as cellist in the Iceland SO, was present to introduce his piece, commissioned for the 1995 Viola Congress in Reykjavík. Its fugal form transforms the B–A–C–H motif through a chromatic Prelude and vivacious Fugue, which the viola ensemble of Trinity College of Music delivered with panache. The finely-wrought *Bartlebooth*, for clarinet, cello and piano by Joe Cutler, Head of Composition at Birmingham Conservatoire, followed and displayed its wonderfully terse, witty and human qualities, full of musical and expressive felicities, in the conviction and precision of the Thallein Ensemble's performance. With the conductor Daniel Rosina the ensemble gave a gritty concluding account of Thomas Adès's *The Origin of the Harp* (1994).

The climactic Queen Elizabeth Hall concert began with the European première of Noam Sheriff's Viola Concerto *Canarian Vespers*, performed by the Canadian-British-Israeli violist Rivka Golani, with the Yehudi Menuhin School Orchestra, conducted by the charismatic Malcolm Singer. Commissioned in 2006 for Justus Frantz's festival in Gran Canaria, the title also refers to afternoon and evening prayers in the Jewish liturgy, which influences the chant-like modal patterns. Extended solo viola *cantabile* passages pervade, framing the first movement, forming the entire central movement and the conclusion: an ideal vehicle for Golani's rich and impassioned tone. There was Mahlerian *angst* in the first movement, countered by a haunting resonance in the slow movement, but the slow finale conveyed a magical surprise: ravishing progressions with Bach-like inner voices that lead to a searching soliloquy, and an abrupt silence before the orchestra's calm major triad.

Remember Just the Brightness, a concerto for oud and orchestra by Michael Wolpe, received its UK première in a stunning display of Middle-Eastern virtuosity by Taiseer Elias, Head of the Arabic Music Department at the Jerusalem Academy, for whom the piece was composed. Enhanced by amplification, he was richly harmonized by the luscious Eden Sinfonia under their 24 year-old conductor Daniel Cohen, prize-winning RAM graduate and protégé of Daniel Barenboim. The neo-Romantic, film-score vibrancy derives from the influence of Moshe Wilensky (1910–97), a leading composer-arranger of oriental Israeli music and one of Wolpe's mentors. Wolpe's Arabic-Jewish synthesis is very individual, as was evident in the slow introduction for oud and then orchestra, followed by livelier additive dance rhythms, with exotic percussion, leading to an entirely improvised cadenza. Authentic Middle-Eastern flavours were heightened in Taiseer Elias's *Elias Variations*, an improvisatory excursus on an Arabic taqsim with mesmeric syncopations, accompanied by the Eden Sinfonia, and including an elaborate dialogue with the principal cello.

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Avni's *Se Questo e un Uomo* received a compelling UK première with the outstanding Israeli soprano Sharon Rostorf-Zamir. Avni's vivid settings, here sung in English translation, recall in intensity Mahler, Shostakovich, even Berio, responsive as they are to the depth and irony of Levi's meditation on humanity and inhumanity. The set moves from the steady march pulse of the first two, to the cataclysmic third song about destruction, via a bleak fourth song to a more optimistic celebration of compassion. Avni's music throughout heightens the impact of the text, follows its contours and moods, and individual phrases.

'There Were a Hundred' ('Erano cento') (poem of 1959) depicts a nightmarish vision of massed armies, ghostly images of war, through surging march-like textures, pounding drum beats, marching tunes, with dramatic *tremolandi*, and an outburst at 'they took a step forward' ('un passo avanti'). A ravishing soprano melody in 'Il tramonto di Fossoli' (1946) ('Sunset at Fossoli' – also set in Simon Bainbridge's 1993 cycle *Ad Ora Incerto*) – is enveloped by sustained cellos and basses with pizzicato violins, lugubrious bass clarinet and watery vibraphone. In 'Dateci' (1984) ('Give Us'), the ironic pleading of the destroyers elicits raw energy, with jazzy rhythms and shrieking vocal intensity. Yet pounding tuttis give way to eerily-veiled harmonics and silence, a touching bassoon solo, before resuming fierce rhythmic cross-accents until the singer literally spits out the climactic line 'And makes us feel that we exist' in a *Sprechgesang*, and the final 'Pity Us' ('Comimiserati').

The soprano begins the fourth song 'After R. M. Rilke' (Da R.M. Rilke) (1946), the mood desolate, foreboding, with only a glimpse of something brighter in the concluding harp gesture for 'restless while the leaves fall'. A point of light and hope is introduced in 'Singing' (Cantare) (1946), a poem that evokes the power of singing to restore order after chaos; 'when we started singing…everything was again / As it always had been'. Allusions to 'Santa Lucia', and later to *Ariadne's Lament* by Monteverdi, offer a far more glistening texture, retrieving the soprano's soliloquy at 'while we kept singing' before the concluding harp flourishes.

The concert ended with Maxwell Davies's poetic depiction of the *Orkney Wedding with Sunrise*, its vivid scenes conjured up colourfully by Daniel Cohen and the Eden Sinfonia. The shift from the initial cool dissonance to the witty tuning-up and ebullient reels were conveyed with élan and jaunty trumpet solos. The Highland bagpiper Finley MacDonald played memorably if only briefly, to bring the evocative tone poem to a riveting, and haunting close.

Overall the day offered a fascinating portrait of one of Israel's leading composers, whose oeuvre has attained international stature and significance. Fortunately many of Avni's works, including those performed here, are available on CD, as are several of those by Sheriff, Wolpe, and Navok. The event as a whole highlighted the extent to which the younger generations of British composers share with the third and fourth generation Israeli composers the challenge of responding to a pluralistic post-modernism, grappling eloquently with contemporary issues in a dynamic and thriving creative climate.

Malcolm Miller

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