

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 12 October 2022
7.30pm

Apartment House

Josephine Stephenson soprano
Heather Roche clarinet
Kerry Yong piano
Gordon Mackay violin
Mira Benjamin violin
Bridget Carey viola
Reiad Chibah viola
Anton Lukoszevieve artistic director, cello
Colin Alexander cello

Oliver Leith (b.1990) Grinding bust turning (2018)
Juta Pranulytė (b.1993) Harmonic Islands (2022) *world première*
Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall and Apartment House
Zoltán Jeney (1943-2019) El Silencio (1986) *UK première*
Scott McLaughlin (b.1975) Natura Naturans II (2022) *world première*
Interval
Jack Sheen (b.1993) Solo for Cello (2021)

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This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Zoltán Jeney (1943-2019)

El Silencio (1986) **The silence**
Federico García Lorca

Oye, hijo mío, el silencio.	Listen, my son, to the silence.
Es un silencio ondulado,	It is a rippling silence,
Un silencio,	a silence
Donde resbalan valles y ecos	whence valleys and echoes glide
Y que inclina las frentes	and which causes heads to bow
Hacia el suelo.	to the earth.

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Harmonic Fields

This programme of works features new and current works by the younger generation of composers who are working today. In addition we have a rare piece by the Hungarian composer Zoltán Jeney from 1986.

Harmonic Islands is the title of a new work by Lithuanian composer Juta Pranulytė, which I will come to later. Her title relates also to my title for the whole programme, *Harmonic Fields*, as the works all inhabit different areas or 'fields' of harmonic activity. Contemporary composition today is a multi-faceted affair and at this stage in the 21st Century there do not appear to be any dominant styles or aesthetic movements. We seem to be wading through a delta of different types of composition, resulting in many rivers of confluence.

Oliver Leith's enigmatically titled *Grinding bust turning* pairs the cello and clarinet as a dissolute couple, bonded but not united, pitch-wise, both playing material in unison but tuned microtonally apart. This grating, yet ever so slightly elegant effect, creates a perfect foil for the laconic and implacable piano part. As the music unfolds I feel the air of a slow blues, lumbering along in a subtle, yet slightly resigned way. French composer Erik Satie's *3 Gymnopédies* could be described as views of a musical sculpture seen from three different angles, and thus *Grinding bust turning* appears to inhabit a similar aural concept. In Italian artist Giorgio de Chirico's painting *The Uncertainty of the Poet* (1913), a classical bust of an armless, legless (and headless) torso is juxtaposed with a nocturnal landscape, a train passing in the distance, and a large bunch of bananas. We have reached a surreal point of departure.

Juta Pranulytė is a Lithuanian composer based in Graz and Vilnius. *Harmonic Islands* is composed for cello, clarinet and piano. She writes of it, 'this work is inspired by the psychoacoustic phenomenon of combination tones, when the pitch relationship between two pitches changes from movement (instrumental glissandi for example), causing new harmonies and vibrations to appear. This phenomenon is what my ears were exploring during the composition of this work.' In the composition the piano maintains a persistent, sustained pitch, around which the cello and clarinet slowly weave and oscillate their material, with additional harmonic commentaries by the piano. Slowly, a resonant landscape unfolds, with distinct harmonic islands emerging and submerging, until the initial fundamental home pitch is discovered again.

Zoltán Jeney (1943-2019) was a Hungarian composer, notable for being part of a small group, including composers László Vidovszky and Péter

Eötvös, who formed the Budapest New Music Studio in 1970. At this time Jeney became influenced by American minimalism and also the music of John Cage. This was an interesting and still somewhat unexplored period in European musical history as they were then living behind the Iron Curtain. Jeney's *El Silencio* sets a poem by the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca for soprano and strings. He creates a strange harmonic curtain of quiet and sustained microtonal pitches, almost bleak in character like a slow dirge, which continues throughout the duration of the work. After some time the soprano intones the Lorca text, creating an enigmatic and intense effect. The Lorca poem imagines a father (God?) and son (Jesus Christ?) looking down on the world, observing people praying, in silence.

Scott McLaughlin's *Natura Naturans II* is scored for solo clarinet and strings. McLaughlin writes, "Natura Naturans" is Schelling's term for the continuous "productivity" of nature: nothing in nature is fixed, instead it is constantly "becoming" as it cycles through stable, unstable, and "metastable" manifestations. His example is the whirlpool, which emerges from the interaction of flow and obstacle becoming pattern. In my piece, instruments surf this interaction of forces and obstacles. Cellos (and viola) are prepared by coupling strings together with wooden rings, creating unruly resonances, while the clarinet explores spaces between its registers where different resonant obstacles pull the flow of sound into vibrant patterns. The same actions take place over and over but with interference leading to different outcomes.'

Jack Sheen's *Solo for Cello* and fixed audio is an extended exploration of the resonant body of the cello, but also a kind of flickering, glitchy and incessant 'moto perpetuo' of extreme intensity and a delicate beauty. The cello has a particular scordatura tuning, which creates an enigmatic harmonic 'space' to its sounding throughout the work. I am reminded of Horatiu Radulescu's sound icons, which are grand pianos laid on their sides and bowed, creating strange and ethereal webs of microtonal harmonic fields. As the cellist constantly bows the heavily muted cello with various arpeggiated freneticisms, the instrument emits a particular halo of harmonic resonances creating a spectral and ghostly effect, deceptive and illusory. The work gradually morphs into different sections, each with their own particular motivic identity, at times accompanied by an audio playback of various densities. The latter sections of the work have a baroque-like lightness and ornamental quality, but do not allay the dramatic incisiveness of the work, which ends with a final enigmatic spasm of sounds.

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