

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 13 April 2024
11.30am

Apartment House

Kerry Yong piano
Raymond Brien clarinet
Heather Roche bass clarinet
Mira Benjamin violin
Gordon MacKay violin
Bridget Carey viola
Anton Lukoszevieveze cello
Simon Limbrick bells

Marek Piaček (b.1972)

Canzonetta (1992-3)
UK première

Adrián Demoč (b.1985)

Zamat (Velvet) (2023)
world première

Šarūnas Nakas (b.1962)

Cenotaph (1995)

Christopher Fox (b.1955)

Heaven as a scroll (2023)
world première

Guðmundur Steinn Gunnarsson (b.1982)

Sitt hvoru megin við þilið (2018)
UK première

David Mahler (b.1944)

Only Music Can Save Me Now (1978)
UK première

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John Cage described contemporary music, shortly before his death in 1992, as consisting of many rivers feeding into a delta of styles, methods and aesthetic identities. 'We live in a time not of mainstream but of many streams'. I think a similar state can still be observed today and certainly is apparent in the three concerts happening here today at Wigmore Hall.

Marek Piaček, a Slovak composer born in 1972, is at home in the theatre, on television and in the concert hall, perfecting a kind of informal music often echoing the past rather joyfully, yet underpinned with a contemporary ear to the reception aesthetics of music.

Canzonetta (1992-3) is a piece with repetitive and polyrhythmic structures, in which Piaček uninhibitedly incorporates elements of actual musical realities into his compositional work – musical motifs from a well-known film series, or jingles from TV commercials. Piaček treats the creative process as a space for transforming disturbing or potentially negative sounds into 'positive' musical events. He incorporates the sonic molecules of 'sound smog' into aurally surprising and interesting musical structures, thus compositionally disrupting their original dessicated, pop-culture appeal and allowing them to be perceived in a new context. The music begins with quite stark, angular material that gradually morphs with a growing intensity into something more familiar, yet strangely intangible.

Adrián Demoč (b.1985) is another Slovak composer treading an individual and perhaps more oneiric path. *Zamat (Velvet)* has an open instrumental scoring and examines a reduced material, which sways together gently in a 'Korean unison'. The term Korean unison was coined by the composer John Cage and exemplified by his composition *Ryoanji*; it is a unison whereby the instruments play the same material, but with slightly unhinged rhythmic exactitude creating a delay and a smudging of melodic lines.

Composer **Šarūnas Nakas** (b.1962) grew up and studied composition in the then Russian-occupied Soviet Republic of Lithuania. The piano trio *Cenotaph* is a strident and dissonant work, written in memory of the anti-Soviet resistance fighters in Lithuania (1944-53). Blocks of angry, often brutal and dissonant gestures are contrasted with stiller and more contemplative passages of quiet, sustained music. Throughout the work a great tension is palpable and it ends with an enigmatic and fragmentary dissolution of the material.

Christopher Fox (b.1955) is a prolific composer who was perhaps created in order to flourish in a delta of musical streams of consciousness. *Heaven as a scroll* takes a very simple idea of tuning the string

instruments to the actual tuning of bells, thus embracing their tunings and resonances, creating a constant environment of aural contemplation. He writes of his new work, 'As I was working on *Heaven as a scroll* I was haunted by images of the interior of the Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta in Torcello and its two great mosaics, in particular the Last Judgement that fills the west end of the church. Within the mosaic one can see an angel performing the task prescribed in Chapter 6, Verse 14 of the Book of Revelation: "and the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together". *Heaven as a scroll* was written in 2022 and 2023 for Apartment House, to whom it is dedicated.'

Guðmundur Steinn Gunnarsson's string quartet *Sitt hvoru megin við þilið* ('On both sides of the divide'), is a rich, fertile, febrile and stuttering work. The string quartet plays off the same digital dynamic score, a score that is constantly moving from right to left enabling the musicians to play sounds in multiple polymetric ways. At no point are any sounds synchronised rhythmically. As the score passes by the eyes of the performers, a sonic landscape for the listener unravels. The fragile harmonic material and textural sounds are like natural phenomena, environmental cries and whispers, like a sonified Arte Povera drawing or a long wall painting by Cy Twombly, embedded with scribbles, indiscipherable words, the flotsam and jetsam of existence.

David Mahler is an American composer, a baseball fanatic and an extraordinary cook. Born in Plainfield, New Jersey in 1944 he has meandered a path through experimental tape composition, community music, choral music and instrumental composition. *Only Music Can Save Me Now* for piano, composed in 1978, inhabits a minimalist aesthetic in a playful yet intense manner. Like a number of Mahler's pieces, the length of this piece is indeterminate, since the performer is allowed to choose the number of repetitions of patterns usually contained within a single measure. *Only Music Can Save Me Now* is typical of minimalist structures in that it uses a very small amount of musical material to generate a potentially never-ending form (similar to the *Keyboard Studies* of Terry Riley). An ostinato pattern continues throughout, in the left hand. Around it, the right hand doubles, repeats, embellishes, changes the length of the repeated phrases and adds a subtle change of resulting patterns through very simple means. The harmonic pattern is predictable, though the phrasing of each new variation within it is not. The cumulative effect, over time, is that the simple but true constancy of the piece's foundation is something one can truly depend on: *Only Music Can Save Me Now* is perhaps an apt and even optimistic title.

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