

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 13 April 2024
3.00pm

Apartment House

Kerry Yong piano, reed organ
Mira Benjamin violin
Gordon MacKay violin
Bridget Carey viola
Reiad Chibah viola
Anton Lukoszevieveze cello

Michaël Lévinas (b.1949)

Les lettres enlacées IV (2000) *UK première*

Dubravko Detoni (b.1937)

Forgotten Music (1981) *UK première*

Jem Finer (b.1955)

Hrdy-Grdy (2022) *transcribed by Kerry Yong*
world première

*Morning Song • Roly Poly Phony • Duet with a Gate •
Fugue Number Two • The Names of the Born Dead •
Nine Rounds • A Vacuum Ascending*

Marek Piaček (b.1972)

5 Studies (2021-2) *UK première*

Prelude • Melody • Improvisation • Dance • Finale

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The past infiltrates the present continuously, and many echoes of past music haunt this programme. French composer **Michaël Lévinas**'s early works focused on acousmatic phenomena and spectral music, signifying him as an acoustic explorer. The string quintet *Les lettres enlacées IV* is part of a series of chamber works exploring his concept of a spiral polyphony (inspired by his work with spatialization technology at IRCAM, in Paris). The piece begins with the continual transposition of modal scales, which run through the registers of the instruments from low to high, or from high to low, according to a system of asymmetrical alterations. Opposite movements are also used. Thus, a scale that takes place in a low register will be reproduced an octave higher by undergoing an alteration similar to the Doppler effect that Lévinas used earlier in his work with IRCAM technology. Two of the instruments, the second viola and the cello, have their ranges extended by a scordatura (retuning down) of the lower strings. The title of the work refers to the overlapping of two voices on a single stringed instrument. At different points, instrumentalists play a melody in a canon of micro-intervals on two strings simultaneously, each line 'pursuing' the other by a sort of doubling into micro-intervals. The melodic figures resulting from these techniques can be considered as false glissandi or even as paradoxical effects obtained by an enigmatic polyphony. A strangely dark and dramatic work, *Les lettres enlacées IV* unravels like an Escher staircase, going nowhere yet seemingly everywhere.

Dubravko Detoni is a Croatian composer, born in 1937. He had composition lessons with John Cage in Paris and also attended courses in Darmstadt. His early compositions often use graphic notation and exhibit a Polish modernist influence from composers such as Lutosławski (whom he also studied with) and the formative music of Penderecki. Like many older composers who lived in communist countries during the Cold War, Detoni is little known today, therefore the title of his piece we perform today is perhaps perversely apt. *Forgotten Music* (1981) is a concise string quartet in 27 short movements. Each aphoristic movement is a post-modern vignette, examining different musical styles as if under a microscope. Dances, sonoristic landscapes, ironic melodies, nostalgic moments, modernist musical tropes, deceitful cadences and glitchy rhythms whizz past as if viewed out of the window on a train journey.

'I think a wooden voice was dragging me. guardian of nothingness, astray in a drum.'
From *Untitled Poems* (1977-82), Dubravko Detoni

Jem Finer is an English musician, composer and artist. He is notable for his live and computer-generated work *Longplayer*, which is designed to play music for 1000 years without ever repeating itself.

I discovered his solo album *Hrdy-Grdy* a couple of years ago and immediately fell in love with it. The hurdy-gurdy is the crazy bastard of instruments, as a cellist the instrument is kind of ridiculous but utterly beguiling and as a child I played the hurdy-gurdy-influenced *Gavottes* from the Sixth Cello Suite of Johann Sebastian Bach, droning away with them. I am indebted to Kerry Yong for his wonderful transcriptions of Jem's music for us.

Jem Finer writes, 'the hurdy-gurdy is, in a sense, a string sextet rolled into one instrument. As such it has both limitations and advantages. On the downside it's monophonic, but the bow, in the form of a wheel, will play the strings continuously for as long as one wants. They can be tuned to create harmonic drones and the two melody strings tuned variously too – in unison, an octave apart or to other intervals. Like any instrument, aside from its own orthodox complexity, it contains all manner of sounds, there to be discovered by experimentation. The music you are hearing today, played by Apartment House, was originally released as a cassette tape, *Hrdy-Grdy*, on Benedict Drew's label, Thanet Tape Centre in 2022. In 2020 Benedict invited me to make an album of hurdy-gurdy music, an invitation I happily accepted. The music took shape over the course of a year, starting from improvisations and experimentation with tunings, extended techniques and playing the instrument through various electronic devices. Rather than effects these were mostly algorithmic processes, modelled on old tape delay systems, essentially multi-pitched time lag accumulators, which meant a melodic line would split into harmonising copies, shifting in and out of phase against each other, effectively extending the hurdy-gurdy's range into polyphony. It is a great thrill and honour that Anton Lukoszevieze and Apartment House's Kerry Yong should want to transcribe these compositions, to untangle the hurdy-gurdy's music and transcribe it for their performance'.

The final work in this afternoon's concert features another work by Slovakian composer **Marek Piaček**, his 5 *Studies* for piano quintet, written in 2021-2. Piaček's music is little known in the UK, but his ecstatic, invigorating and joyful music deserves greater attention. The 5 *Studies* display Piaček's wide-ranging influences, from Lydian melodies that are also reminiscent of Indian ragas, to American minimalism, to the musical traditions of central Europe. The character of each study is suggested by its title: *Úvod* ('Prelude'); *Melódia* ('Melody'); *Improvizácia* ('Improvisation'); *Tanec* ('Dance'); *Záver* ('Finale').

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