

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 3 December 2022

Quatuor Bozzini: A day in the life

Quatuor Bozzini

Clemens Merkel violin
Alissa Cheung violin
Stephanie Bozzini viola
Isabelle Bozzini cello

11.30am

Cassandra Miller (b.1976)	Warblework (2011 rev. 2017) <i>I. Swainson's Thrush • II. Hermit Thrush • III. Wood Thrush • IV. Veery</i>
Gerald Barry (b.1952)	6 Marches (String Quartet No. 3) (2001) <i>I. • II. • III. • IV. • V. • VI.</i>
Tanya Tagaq (b.1975)	Sivunittinni (2015) <i>arranged by Jacob Garchik</i>
Gerald Barry	String Quartet No. 1 (1985 rev. 1994 & 2015)



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

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3.00pm

Linda Catlin Smith (b.1957) Gondola (2007)
Claude Vivier (1948-1983) Pulau Dewata (1977) *arranged by Michael Oesterle*
Gerald Barry 1998 - String Quartet No. 2 (1999)
Cassandra Miller Leaving (2011)



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7.00pm

Quatuor Bozzini • Juliet Fraser soprano

Cassandra Miller Thanksong (2020) *London première*
Michael Oesterle (b.1968) String Quartet No. 3 'Alan Turing' (2010 rev. 2021)
I. • II. • III. • IV.
Cassandra Miller About Bach (2015)
Gerald Barry First Sorrow (String Quartet No. 4) (2006-7)

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8.30pm

Post-Concert Q&A

Join Quatuor Bozzini and Cassandra Miller for a Question & Answer session in the auditorium after the evening concert.

The Quatuor Bozzini has commissioned and given the world premières of an astonishing amount of music since its foundation in Montreal in 1999. Its open-minded, collaborative spirit is key to building relationships with composers, for as Michael Oesterle has observed, 'one cannot exist without the other'. Through its musical 'laboratories', the *Composers' Kitchen*, *Performers' Kitchen* and *Bozzini Lab*, and record label *Collection QB* it has fostered and promoted generations of composers. A day such as this, then, demonstrates the wide range of music the Quatuor Bozzini brings to life.

The concerts are centred around four quartets each by Gerald Barry and Cassandra Miller, two composers with whom the Quatuor Bozzini has worked closely. Barry, born in Ireland in 1952, studied with Stockhausen and Kagel. Miller, born in Canada in 1976 and now based in London, studied with Christopher Butterfield, Michael Finnissy, and Bryn Harrison. Barry's music, as John McAlpine has observed, is often block-like in construction, enjoying radical switches of mood. Miller's compositions frequently draw on musical transcriptions and, as Tim Rutherford-Johnson explains, transform them akin to songs being passed from generation to generation, or as if the melodies are caught in a tape loop or on a variable speed turntable. Between Barry's and Miller's quartets of quartets are woven works by composers Tanya Tagaq (b.1975), Linda Catlin Smith (b.1957), Claude Vivier (b.1958) and the already mentioned Michael Oesterle (b.1968), all of whom were born or have settled in Canada.

11.30am

Cassandra Miller Warblework

Gerald Barry 6 Marches (String Quartet No. 3)

Tanya Tagaq *Sivunittinni* arranged by Jacob Garchik

Gerald Barry String Quartet No. 1

'This piece has an unusual origin'. So begin **Cassandra's Miller's** notes for the first two of her pieces included in today's concerts, *Warblework* and *Leaving*. The same might be said of all the music in these programmes, in which composers have taken their cues from a variety of places, people and phenomena. To say that a theme of travel runs through several of the pieces seems trite, even old-fashioned, but reconceptualised as an exploration of how people and music move through space and time it is fundamental to many of the composers' musical processes, which explore and transform their source materials in radical and distinctive ways.

The unusual origin of Miller's *Warblework* (2011), for the time, was its crowd-funded commission: to raise funds to move from the West Coast of Canada to study composition in Europe, Miller sold bars of the music she would write to over 60 friends, family, and community members. The result was *Warblework*, which explores through its four movements the songs of four birds indigenous to the Pacific Coast and its

forests: Swainson's thrush, the hermit thrush, the wood thrush and the veery thrush. These birds' songs, Miller points out, follow the harmonic series. Slowed down in the studio, they 'reveal incredibly human-like melodies'. Birdsong is often discussed as an influence on the creative imagination of human composers, from Biber to Messiaen: here it sounds as if birds are jamming along.

The notion that the string quartet, as a genre, tends to remain inward focused and somehow detached from the world outside is belied by the music of **Gerald Barry**. He writes of his String Quartet No. 3 (2001):

At one time I thought of this quartet as six marches. Probably the kind of marches occurring in dreams. I think of the first movement as Snow is white.

The second movement is a savage version of music from my opera, *The Triumph of Beauty and Deceit*. It occurs there dreamily to the text: *You are my delight, my comfort at night, and I'll roll you nine times before morning*.

The third movement is Aeneas and Dido. Aeneas's moment in the sun.

The fourth is perhaps a memory of the time I played in a viol consort. Our sound was so horrific I found it liberating and it would make me laugh. The other bass player had Parkinson's and sounded like a road drill. I've always loved English viol music.

The fifth and sixth movements are Viennese - Kafka Kaiser Waltz. The sixth has a ghostly epilogue.

Born in Iqaluktuuttiaq, Nunavut, **Tanya Tagaq** is an award-winning improvisational singer, composer and author. A celebrated Inuk throat singer, Tagaq became world famous through her collaborations with Björk and ensembles such as the Kronos Quartet, for whom *Sivunittinni* was devised in 2015 as part of its *50 for the Future Project*. Tagaq explained that working with the Kronos allowed her to 'take the sounds that live in my body and translate them into the body of instruments'. She made several recordings of her throat singing that were then transcribed and arranged by American composer Jacob Garchik.

Tagaq likens *Sivunittinni* – which means 'the future ones' – to documenting her present world as a kind of cautionary tale. By migrating the sound of her throat singing into the timbres of the string quartet, Tagaq extends what has traditionally been a means of passing down oral history to generations of Inuit women into the concert hall. She explains:

My hope is to bring a little bit of the land to future musicians through this piece. There's a disconnect in the human condition, a

disconnect from nature, and it has caused a great deal of social anxiety and fear, as well as a lack of true meaning of health, and a lack of a relationship with what life is, so maybe this piece can be a little bit of a wake-up.

Gerald Barry's First String Quartet was originally composed for the Arditti Quartet and premièred at the ICA in 1985. Barry recalls:

Morton Feldman was there and said 'I liked your quartet but you should get rid of the dramatic stuff.' He was right and I did get rid of it. At the première by the Arditti Quartet, I was so horrified by much of the music I took it off their stands after the concert lest they play it again. They were wonderful but my contribution angered me.

Barry revised the score for the RTÉ ConTempo String Quartet in 2015. He continues:

Now though I'm happy with it. At the time I was writing my opera, *The Intelligence Park*, and the music touches on that. The players are muted throughout and often sound like bees.

3.00pm

Linda Catlin Smith Gondola

Claude Vivier Pulau Dewata arranged by Michael Oesterle

Gerald Barry 1998 - String Quartet No. 2

Cassandra Miller Leaving

Lines drawn through time and space connect the works of this programme. New York-born, Toronto-based **Linda Catlin Smith** explains how for her fourth string quartet, *Gondola* (2007), she was 'drawn to the not-quite unison melody – the slightly unravelled line – and the quietly rocking chords. The title loosely refers to its slight undulation or floating qualities — a subtle motion or disturbance of the surface, like trailing the hand in water'. Rather as her description suggests, Smith's piece explores her distinctive harmonic realm with a profound calm: like a trailing hand, it never re-enters the metaphorical water at the same spot.

Canadian composer **Claude Vivier** studied with Pierre Tremblay in Montreal before moving to Europe, where after periods in Paris and Utrecht he became an acolyte of Stockhausen, attending Darmstadt from 1972. Gradually, however, Vivier distanced himself from the serial approaches favoured by many of his contemporaries, finding rhythmic, timbral and dramatic inspiration from ethnomusicological tours of Egypt, Iran, Japan,

Thailand and Singapore. He was enthralled most of all by Bali, whose culture he described as 'a lesson in love, in tenderness, in poetry and in respect for life'.

Vivier said he 'wanted to write a piece filled with Bali's spirit: dance, rhythm, but above all an explosion of obvious and simple life'. *Pulau Dewata* ('Isle of the Gods', 1977) drew on the rhythmic play of Balinese gamelan. He did not specify an instrumentation but provides a single line of music that can be played by any combination of instruments. The Bozzini Quartet gave the première of **Michael Oesterle's** orchestration of the work in Montreal on 17 September 2002.

Named after its year of composition, **Gerald Barry's** String Quartet No. 2 *1998* also exists in a version for violin and piano. It is the longest of Barry's quartets and the grandest in conception. He explains:

There is something about this music which defies me though there is yearning in it. It is as if it were written by someone else and I woke to find it at the bottom of my bed like a Grimm fairytale. At the moment, the nearest I've come to an image for it was in reading about a linear particle accelerator at the National Accelerator Laboratory in California:

'A linear particle accelerator is a type of particle accelerator that accelerates charged subatomic particles to a high speed by subjecting them to a series of oscillating electric potentials along a linear beamline.'

I like linear beamline. It fits the increasingly frenzied journey of the sounds in the music.

Barry's String Quartet No. 2 is in three parts, each roughly of the same structure and length. Like the 'linear beamline', the part-writing becomes denser throughout, beginning with viola and cello and adding instruments until all four parts are moving together, in irregular rhythms, at speed. The Bozzini gave the première in Montreal in 2002.

Cassandra Miller's *Leaving* began life as a movement of *Warblework*, heard in today's first concert, before taking on its own identity as a separate piece – hence both works having an unusual origin. Canadian fiddlers Zav RT and Oliver Schroer, who then lived on the remote Salt Spring Island, as had Miller, had recorded the melody. Miller transcribed the lines, building on the relationship between folklore and bird songs: as she puts it, the result was 'a kind of ode to the regional sounds of the Pacific coast, of both the cafes and the forests'. There is something in the sound of the open strings caught in chords and the gentle lilt of this music that captures that landscape and its musicians.

7.00pm

Cassandra Miller Thanksong

Michael Oesterle String Quartet No. 3 'Alan Turing'

Cassandra Miller About Bach

Gerald Barry First Sorrow (String Quartet No. 4)

The transformational power of memory runs as a thread through each of the pieces in this final concert. Music and text from the past, nature and people remembered, are filtered through processes that change and reflect on where they came from and where they might be going.

Cassandra Miller's *Thanksong* was to have been premièred at the Aldeburgh Festival in 2020, but inevitably the pandemic prevented that. Instead, the musicians – the Quatuor Bozzini in Montreal and British soprano Juliet Fraser – recorded their parts separately, and their performance was edited together and released as a video, first presented at contemporary music festival TIME:SPANS in New York. It received its first live performance at Dartington International Summer School this summer; tonight is its first live performance in London.

The pandemic may have hampered the première, but the manner of composition was in keeping with Miller's process, which already treated each part individually, so that they would, she explained, 'perform independently, as if five soloists'. As indicated by the title *Thanksong*, Miller took as her source material truncated music from Beethoven's 'Heiliger Dankgesang' ('Holy Song of Thanksgiving') of the String Quartet in A minor Op. 132, composed in 1825 as Beethoven recovered from illness. Miller says that she was drawn to the Beethoven by its beauty, modernism and prayerfulness.

The musical material is transformed through what Miller describes as '(intentionally) inaccurate mimicry'. She sang along (in meditation) to recordings of each part repeatedly, gradually transforming the material into her own vocal gestures. Each line from the transformed Beethoven was then layered back on itself in a kind of mindful counterpoint, attending to the nuance of every repetition. The musicians listen and play along to Miller's transformed version, using graphic notation to aid their mimetic memory. The soprano's line, intoning 'thank you' at a glacial pace, is joined by the quartet singing, bringing a communal aspect to the sharing of the hymn.

Michael Oesterle is long-time friend of the Quatuor Bozzini: he was the first composer the quartet commissioned, 25 years ago, and he has composed many pieces with it in mind, as reflected on its recent recording of his quartets. Oesterle has written several

works about the lives of scientists, especially Alan Turing (1912-1954), now celebrated as a wartime cryptographer and father of modern computing, but during his lifetime fatally persecuted for his sexuality. Rather than trying to convey scientific discoveries in music, Oesterle is drawn to its processes: how a figure such as Turing can work with such concentration and creativity despite societal opposition.

Of his String Quartet No. 3 (2010), *Alan Turing — Solace for Irreversible Losses (Matter and Spirit; Delilah; The Universal Machine Concept; Acronyms; Morphogenesis; Hyperboloids of Wondrous Light)*, Oesterle explains:

Alan Turing took a second-hand violin and a sextant to Princeton University: the violin, to be like Einstein, the sextant to chart his course while aboard the ship that carried him there. He never learned to play the violin well, (his brother referred to his playing as 'excruciating') but he loved to play and played for those he loved. He played for his lover and later, for the officers who arrested him. He played as a declaration of faith in civilisation and the need to strive towards greatness of both heart and mind.

In interviews Oesterle has said that he too would have liked to be able to play the violin well: his joy in the sound of strings is apparent throughout his playful and energetic Quartet.

Miller's *About Bach* is an expansion of a solo work for viola by the same name. The first piece was commissioned by philanthropist Daniel Cooper for Canadian violist Pemi Paull, the second by the Quatuor Bozzini. The piece is built from a live recording of Pemi playing the D minor *Chaconne* from Bach's Partita No. 2. Miller took a short phrase, the first time the piece moves to the major, and as she has in other works, transcribed it in detail, with the aid of software. All the idiosyncrasies of the original performance were thereby captured, from the exact rhythms to the viola's changing upper partials within a bow stroke. Bach may no longer be recognisable in its transformation, but there is something of the quick finger- and bow-work of the Partita in the jaunty reharmonised chorale played by the lower strings; and the essence of the *Chaconne*, its repeated descending bassline, is here transformed into the line played by the first violin, ascending, again and again, into the stratosphere. As Miller puts it, 'It's a piece about process, about Pemi's musicality, about Bach of course, and in the end, about the Quatuor Bozzini'. *About Bach* received its première at the Angelica Festival in Bologna in 2015 and was awarded the Jules Léger Prize for New Chamber Music in 2016.

Asked in a 2010 interview about whether he distinguishes between the types of texts he's setting, **Gerald Barry** replied:

I don't have taboos about texts and their setting. I fall on text, make love to it, elevate it, crush it, mull, weigh, meditate, explode, serve, Mum's the word.

All of this happens to the texts imbricated in Barry's String Quartet No. 4, *First Sorrow* (2006-7). According to the composer:

First Sorrow refers to the story of that name by Kafka, about a trapeze artist who is happy only when aloft. The quartet includes a hymn to the following text:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are!
Up above the sky so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

When the blazing sun is gone,
When he nothing shines upon,
Then you show your little light,
Twinkle, twinkle all the night.

Then the traveller in the dark
Thanks you for your tiny spark.
He could not see which way to go,
If you did not twinkle so.

In the dark blue sky you keep
And often through my curtain peep,
For you never shut your eye
Till the sun is in the sky.

As your bright and tiny spark
Lights the traveller in the dark,
Though I know not what you are,
Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

Like so many famous poems of which we tend to only remember the first verse, the later lines of 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star' make a poignant ending for this day of concerts: the spark that lights our way might be from times and places far distant, but brings us always to music.

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