

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 3 February 2023
1.00pm

Gran Cadenza: Irvine Arditti 70th Birthday

Arditti Quartet

Irvine Arditti violin
Ashot Sarkissjan violin
Ralf Ehlers viola
Lucas Fels cello

Jake Arditti countertenor

Roger Reynolds (b.1934)

imAge for solo violin (2015) *UK première*

Unsuik Chin (b.1961)

Gran Cadenza (2018) *UK première*

Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001)

Ikhoor (1978)

Sven-Ingo Koch (b.1974)

String Quartet No. 3 (2020) *UK première*
I • II • III

Hilda Paredes (b.1957)

Canciones Lunáticas (2008-9)
I • II • III

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Roger Reynolds imAge for solo violin (UK première)

In the early 2000s, I began composing a series of strongly contrasted works for solo instruments. The 'imAge/' member of each pair is symmetrical, gentle, and evocative, while its 'imAge/' partner is asymmetric, articulate, and assertive.

In composing the complementary pair for violin, I thought about my long association with Irvine Arditti and what it is in his playing, in his 'being', that particularly appeals to my ear (and mind). The rapid shifting of dyads between the upper and lower strings of his instrument, the implacable precision and instantaneousness with which he executes such moves, became the central concerns for *imAge/violin*. A managed (but extreme) energy state is sustained through patterns of interlocking periodicities, unexpected eruptions of passage work, and a general feeling of being 'at an edge' (perhaps 'the' edge) and its associated perils. Its counterpart, *imAge/violin* is rife with trills, tremolos, and brief repeated figures that move higher or lower, faster and slower, often while the performer is also sounding an open-string drone. Rich harmonic sonorities drift higher or lower almost as brush-strokes might in a watercolor.

While I was composing the *imAge/violin* pair, Irvine and I interacted over the internet, sometimes on a daily basis, for more than half a year. And there was a working period in his London home mid-way. The resulting two works constitute the most ambitious pairing in the imAge/ series.

imAge/violin is dedicated to my much admired friend of many decades, the inimitable Maestro Arditti.

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UnsuK Chin Gran Cadenza (UK première)

Gran Cadenza is a virtuoso duo for two violins. Cadences were originally closely related to a culture of interpretation that displayed strong elements of improvisation and was often tolerant of free modification; a self-contained, written-out work, and also clearly longer than the solo cadenza of an instrumental concerto, mine nevertheless has elements of free traditional musical forms.

The piece opens with marked and abrupt gestures of the second violin, which are juxtaposed with seemingly improvisatory, ethereal-ornamental figures of the first violin. After a while, the first violin suddenly 'attacks' the second violin, and virtuoso musical skirmishes and exchanges of blows of various kinds ensue.

Eventually, the two soloists come together, with series of descending chords: the entire kinetic energy comes to a virtual standstill and flows into tonally distorted, triad-like harmonies. There follows a sudden build-up of energy, in which short fragments flare up as echoes of earlier motifs or as anticipations of later developments.

Via an abrupt crescendo, it comes to a contrasting middle section, a longer passage of unintentional pause in which the two violins merge into a 'super instrument.' The second violin performs a melody that is harmonically enveloped by overtones in the first; the tempo gradually becomes more fluid, and the two violins play two complementary melodic lines. The flow is repeatedly interrupted by reminiscences of the beginning of marked chords, as well as of improvisatory-virtuoso fragments; finally, the two lines lead into a quick and dense motion in the middle range, which resembles a sort of carpet of sound. This texture, although interrupted by suddenly flaring fragments, spreads out inexorably in various registers and in continually more virtuoso forms until it is abruptly interrupted by pizzicatos, and the whole motion unexpectedly comes to a standstill.

© Maris Gothoni, 2021 (translation: Howard Weiner)

Xenakis Ikhoor

Iannis Xenakis's string trio *Ikhoor* was composed in 1978, making it by far the oldest piece on the programme. Its title is the Greek word for the blood of the gods - a transparent and ethereal liquid, deadly to humans, but at the same time a symbol of power and energy.

© BoulezSaal

Sven-Ingo Koch String Quartet No. 3 (UK première)

The preoccupation with memory, or with the 'memorability' of musical material, accompanied my working process on my third string quartet.

On the one hand, I considered it in relation to my intention to form this material memorably. The listener recognises (probably) recurring things as such, remembers 'back' and follows 'forward' some of the processes with which I structure the unfolding and re-interpretation of two recurring 'main cells'.

On the other hand, I thought of memory as something that extends beyond the individual work. Firstly and most obviously, the instrumentation: string quartet. In addition, I worked with procedures or sounds signifying historical music, for example the isorhythmic approach of the late Middle Ages/early Renaissance; then, in the third movement, with a major chord (in second inversion), which is gradually

'detuned'. Underlying this, I also allude to the bass line of Lauryn Hill's *The Sweetest Thing*, which is embedded in the piece through various motivic references. (The song builds up over a chromatically ascending and descending bass ostinato, which in turn is itself reminiscent of an early Baroque chaconne.)

During the precompositional work I also engaged with Albrecht Wellmer's *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*. Two trains of thought inspired me: Wellmer writes that 'works of art put us in a reflexive relationship to the horizons of significance and patterns of experience that determine our practical life; if they were to digress from this moment altogether, they would be irrelevant' (p.162). He pleads for a 'modernity without promises of salvation', but with the 'critical potential of a reflexive self-transcendence' – taking up the horizon of experience of contemporary listeners, not to 'fraternize', but to intervene critically in experiences and perceptions (p.316f.).

I find that exciting, but it simultaneously provokes disagreement in me. In numerous works of recent decades, I am inspired by the melodic, tonal and formal invention – and not a hard-to-place quality of 'worldliness'. Nevertheless, I do admit that the work of Gustav Mahler, and the way he plays with references, is always an important inspiration for me. The resistance stemming from these contradictions also drives the formal development of my third quartet.

© Sven-Ingo Koch (translated: Philippa Allan)

Hilda Paredes Canciones Lunáticas

Hilda Paredes, married to Irvine Arditti, has composed several works for the quartet, including this one, from 2008-9, intended also for her stepson as soloist. For this combination of forces, ready for twilights and strangeness, she found texts in a set of poems by her fellow Mexican Pedro Serrano. The strings, in their wide diversity of textures and sounds, project a landscape, within which the voice, always lyrical, wanders.

The first song is explicitly a landscape piece, cold and wide. In the composer's words, it 'sets up the imagery of a dark, lonely night and how the moon is the only witness to a despairing loneliness.

'In the second song we deal with lunacy, as the music sets up the sound imagery by means of superimposing four contrasting ideas to portray the idea of madness, before the four instruments set off with the material set up firstly by the viola, just before the voice comes in to spell out that we are dealing with lunatics. The phonetics of the language are enhanced by techniques connected to the sound 's' in Spanish. This also adds a dramatic gesture by insinuating we have to speak in whispers, or perhaps suggesting the singer is just as mad.'

Indeed, madness enters the vocal writing in the sudden leaps, the verbal tics (the snatched rhythm of '(lu)náticos', for instance), the swaying glissandos and the, however sparing, use of speech-song – and yet this is still a lyrical piece, the voice's shine sometimes beautifully prolonged by the quartet. In the much shorter last song it is as if the singer takes possession of his madness and begins to dance, in an alternation of 3/4 and 6/8 bars that represents, the composer informs us, a decelerated *huapango*.

© Paul Griffiths

Hilda Paredes (b.1957)

Canciones Lunáticas (2008-9)

Pedro Serrano

I

Hace frío en la vasta y desabrigada carnicería del cielo, un sufrimiento ausente y desprotegido, el peso enorme de nubes y de ráfagas, hecho jirones el paisaje asolado, hecho jirones a campo traviesa. Por los desabrigados campos, el baile todo de sargazos y voces excluidas, ahogos y murmullos del ahogo. En el pantano negro y estancado que no refleja nada, desierto y aterido como pálido piso que nadie viera, que nadie recorriera paso a paso, en un desliz sobre ese mármol negro, sin una voz, sin una condolencia, pasa la luna, inquieta. Como una incandescencia la luna mira, como un encantamiento la luna manda, como una inusitada cenicienta huye la luna. Ronda el viento, ronda el hado. La noche fija sus atónitos ojos azulados en tanto Cielo extenso. Allá tan lejos, la luna vaga en brama, a la deriva. A su merced las aguas y la vida.	It is cold in the vast and unprotected slaughter-house of the heavens, a suffering that is remote and without defences, the enormous weight of clouds, of squalls and gales, torn into tatters a landscape laid waste, torn into tatters across the country. Over the unprotected fields, the dance is all of kelp and seaweed and of excluded voices, of drownings and murmurings of drowning. Out in the marsh that's black and still and stagnant, where nothing is reflected, deserted and benumbed like a pallid cloth that no one may see, that no one will wander over footstep by footstep, in a slithering slide across that black marble, without any voice, or any condolence, the moon passes by, disquiet. Like an incandescence the moon is staring, like an enchantment the moon holds sway, like an unwonted Cinderella the moon runs away. The wind is patrolling, fate is patrolling. The night fixes its bluish, astonished eyes at so great a span of sky. Away, far off, the moon goes wandering, in rut, and adrift. At her mercy the waters and life.
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II

A los lunáticos hay que encerrarlos siempre en estos días, los candados que pesen y ni un solo visillo para la luz, lunar alucinante, a los lunáticos, que el corazón les come el alma en estas noches, aunque haya nubes, aunque haya cielo bajo y enterrado, encapotado en sí, a los lunáticos hay que vaciarles ojos y lengua para que no se ahoguen y se hundan, para que no se vayan como una láctea vía que fuera luz y huella, como si la saliva les huyera, como si en ellos en ella fueran y en esta vista despavorida, a los lunáticos, ay, habría que acompañarlos de la mano para que no se pierdan y se ofusquen, ay, a los lunáticos.	As for the moonstruck, they must be always locked up on these days, let padlocks be heavy and not a single net curtain for the moon's illusive light, for the moonstruck, whose heart devours their spirit on these nights, though there may be clouds, though the sky may lower, overcast, muffled up in itself, the moonstruck must have their eyes gouged and tongue torn out so that they do not drown, confounded, so that they do not wander off like a milky way that might be light and footprint, as though their saliva might flee from them, as though they were within her and in that terrifying light, as for the moonstruck, oh, they should be led by the hand so that they do not get lost or be blinded, alas, the poor moonstruck.
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III

La luna va tan ella consigo misma que no se acuerda. La luna va redonda, sería una suerte que no se hunda. La luna se ha soltado, baila la luna sola en el prado.	The moon goes so much herself with her very own self that she does not remember. The moon goes rounded, it would be a piece of luck for her not to founder. The moon has broken free, the moon is dancing by herself in the meadow.
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Translations by Anna Crowe.