

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES SPRING · SUMMER 2012

Concerts at The University

Tuesday 13 March 2012

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Peter Furniss · clarinet and bass clarinet
Martin Parker · electronics

Programme of works by STRAVINSKY, THEA MUSGRAVE,
ALEX HARKER, MARTIN PARKER and STEVE REICH.



Three Pieces for Clarinet Solo (1919)

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Stravinsky composed these pieces for solo clarinet whilst staying in Switzerland towards the end of the First World War. They are among the first works for an unaccompanied wind instrument, and have served as a prototype for many subsequent works.

After completing *The Rite of Spring* a few years earlier, Stravinsky had begun to focus on miniatures and small-scale pieces. They were written for Swiss philanthropist Werner Reinhart, himself an amateur clarinettist, in appreciation for his support of the original production of *L'histoire du soldat* (The Soldier's Tale).

The first of the pieces is inward and rather Russian in character. It explores the instrument's low register only and began life as a song sketch in 1916. The second is like a rhapsodic improvisation (jazz had recently arrived in Europe) and emphasises the wide range of the clarinet, contrasting the fluid brilliance of the upper registers with a dark, dance-like middle section. The third is a wild and frenetic *moto perpetuo*, marked 'loud from beginning to end' and reflects elements of circus music and ragtime.

The pieces are loosely linked by an implied sense of the Phrygian mode and unusually, Stravinsky prefers the performer to select the slightly lower, darker-toned clarinet in A for the first two pieces, swapping to the more common B flat instrument for the finale.

P. Furniss

Narcissus (1987) for solo clarinet in Bb with digital delay

Thea Musgrave (b.1928)

This work was written in 1986-87 for four American flautists, in response to a commission from the National Endowment for the Arts. The composer subsequently arranged the work for solo clarinet especially for F. Gerald Errante.

It is intended as a concert work but it can also be performed as a ballet for two dancers (Narcissus and his reflection).

The work follows the myth of Narcissus closely: the "live" flute taking the part of Narcissus and the echo effects produced by the digital delay system evoking Narcissus' reflection.

Perhaps the story is best summed up in the quotation from Hermann Melville's *Moby Dick*: "And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life...."

T. Musgrave

Today's performers are indebted to Richard Dudas for his extensive work, especially with regard to producing a quadrophonic version of the tape delay.

Synopsis: Narcissus wanders through the forest, observing, enjoying...unselfconscious but self-absorbed. He sees a pool of water and then as he approaches, notices his reflection in the water. He is intrigued and then jumps back in fright. Once more he approaches... it is still there. Narcissus steps away from the pool to consider this phenomenon. Several times he approaches, the figure is always there watching him.

In the shimmering sunlight Narcissus seems to see this glorious and attractive being move in the rippling water. He is dazzled and slowly holds out his arms. To his amazement the figure responds. In awe and wonder Narcissus approaches closer and closer.

With a sudden change of mood Narcissus dances happily and playfully...the figure echoing him. But then Narcissus begins to question anxiously the lack of any independent response... Is he being mocked? He gets more and more agitated and finally in a fury he rushes headlong into the water to grapple with the figure. The waves surge up and Narcissus is drowned. There is a distant shimmering vision of Narcissus and his reflection. Then in the setting sun the vision disappears. The forest is empty and the pool lies undisturbed.

[Novello]

Fluence (2010)

Alex Harker (b.1983)

In several recent pieces I have explored the idea of the co-existence of two musical worlds. In one time and pitch are articulated clearly and cleanly, as if on a grid, in the other things are blurred, unclear and constantly morphing. *Fluence* takes this idea and places the two worlds side-by-side, although the temporal grid in this case is treated as if it were elastic, constantly stretched and compressed.

In *Fluence* I was able to, for the first time, devise a system in which I could create a kind of 'real-time tape' music, constructing the electronic part from samples in a way that remains flexible in performance. Each gesture in the electronic part is constructed from a bank of over a thousand clarinet samples. Samples are almost never specified directly, rather the computer selects samples using audio descriptor matching, according to certain shapes and parameters. Thus, each time the electronic part is realised it is slightly different.

Fluence was commissioned by Ergodos (ergodos.ie) with funds from the Irish Arts Council.

A. Harker

Alex Harker composes electroacoustic, instrumental and interactive music. His most recent work focuses on strategies for bringing together these sometimes disparate fields to create an engaging and coherent whole.

He first studied composition formally with Gwyn Pritchard in Bristol and has since had numerous composition teachers, including Vic Hoyland, Jonty Harrison, Eric Oña, David Berezan and Scott Wilson. In October 2006 he moved to York to start his PhD study with Ambrose Field and Roger Marsh. His PhD study was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. He is currently a Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield, working both as a composer, and also as a developer for the HISSTools project.

His works have been performed and workshopped in the UK, France and Switzerland by the Worldscape Laptop Orchestra, Darragh Morgan, Elastic Axis, BEAST, the University of Birmingham New Music Ensemble and Birmingham Contemporary Music Group.

He is also active as a performer of contemporary music in the roles of conductor and laptop performer.

GruntCount for bass clarinet and real time electronics

Martin Parker (b.1975)

Whilst *GruntCount* is described as an improvisation, it is also to some extent a repeatable and rehearsable piece of music. Notation instructions have been replaced by a pre-defined structure that is learned as the player rehearses. However, the duration of the piece and the sounds the instrumentalist will play are largely open and versions of the piece could be configured to last anywhere between 5 and 20 minutes depending upon the needs of the performance. Such extremes are possible (and permissible), because this is part of the fundamental concept of the piece. Not only should this piece of computer music be accessible and reliable enough for players to be able to rehearse alone, the player also gets autonomy to change the scope and scale of the piece by changing the number of "grunts" to count before the piece finishes. A player who has rehearsed the piece several times will develop an understanding of how the improvisatory tension develops and will give the player confidence to find musical solutions to some of the unexpected events the computer may throw up as the piece runs.

The computer responds to the player by being pushed through a map of interleaved presets with each sound (or grunt) the player makes, no sophisticated score following algorithms are used. The computer part responds to the live input if sound input crosses a threshold specified in advance. Close integration between player and electronics is achieved by connecting the threshold crossing event with a range of interconnected parameter changes that are nested within one another. Unless the settings are configured to remain the same when the threshold is crossed, any sonic event will result in a change across multiple parameters leading to a discernible sonic result. The responsiveness of such a system offers the player chance to respond back. To add to the excitement, a few parameter changes are not absolute, rather a change may simply offer permission for a meso-sonic sound element to be randomised.

GruntCount was designed so that the computer plays its part unassisted. The computer will ideally be present on stage and the player will start the piece off who then must leave the computer alone until the preset map is complete. The computer will dutifully stop making sound once the journey through the preset map is complete. Because there is no score, there are no limits as to how much input is enough to push the piece along and this leaves enough of a certainty vacuum to justify its status as an improvisation.

New York Counterpoint (1985) for solo clarinet and 10 part tape

Steve Reich (b.1936)

New York Counterpoint was commissioned by The Fromm Music Foundation for clarinetist Richard Stolzman. It was composed during the summer of 1985. The duration is about 11 minutes. The piece is a continuation of the ideas found in Vermont Counterpoint (1982), where as soloist plays against a pre-recorded tape of him or her self. In New York Counterpoint the soloist pre-records ten clarinet and bass clarinet parts and then plays a final 11th part live against the tape.

The compositional procedures include several that occur in my earlier music. The opening pulses ultimately come from the opening of Music for 18 Musicians (1976). The use of interlocking repeated melodic patterns played by multiples of the same instrument can be found in my earliest works, Piano Phase (for 2 pianos or 2 marimbas) and Violin Phase (for 4 violins) both from 1967. In the nature of the patterns, their combination harmonically, and in the faster rate of change, the piece reflects my recent works, particularly Sextet (1985). New York Counterpoint is in three movements: fast, slow, fast, played one after the other without pause. The change of tempo is abrupt and in the simple relation of 1:2.

The piece is in the meter $3/2 = 6/4 (=12/8)$. As is often the case when I write in this meter, there is an ambiguity between whether one hears measures of 3 groups of 4 eight notes, or 4 groups of 3 eight notes. In the last movement of New York Counterpoint the bass clarinets function to accent first one and then the other of these possibilities while the upper clarinets essentially do not change.

The effect, by change of accent, is to vary the perception of that which in fact is not changing.

Steve Reich

The recording used in this concert was made in London by Peter Furniss in 2006, and was produced by James Shannon. American composer Richard Dudas has worked with to produce a MaxMSP patch for the recording, which place the sounds of each channel across 4 speakers in the hall, creating a unique and dynamic 'spatialisation' of the piece. This version was first performed in Stuttgart in 2006 at the Forum Neues Musiktheater.

Peter Furniss

Peter Furniss was born in Manchester has performed extensively in the UK and Europe, giving recitals at venues such as the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, London's Purcell Room, as well as in New York, Seoul and Edinburgh.

He performs with many contemporary and chamber ensembles, such as Red Note, Music at the Brewhouse, Okeanos, Hebrides Ensemble and Edinburgh's Artisan Trio. He has played at festivals including the Vale of Glamorgan, London Soundings, Windsor, York Late Music, St Magnus, Jerusalem's Classical Winter and at the 1st Festival of Contemporary Music in Baku (Azerbaijan). He works regularly as a guest with many British orchestras, as well as touring with Camerata Ireland under the direction of pianist Barry Douglas.

Peter has widely explored the repertoire for clarinet with live electronics, giving concerts at the Forum Neues Musiktheater, Stuttgart, ICMC Copenhagen, Edinburgh University Informatics (in association with IRCAM, Paris). At the Seoul International Computer Music Festival, South Korea, he played Boulez's Dialogue de l'Ombre Double among other works with cellist Robin Michael and pianist Sarah Nicolls.

Peter's recordings include the Mendelssohn Concert Pieces with Dimitri Ashkenazy and Karl Andreas Kolly (Pan Classics 510 070) and the recital disc 'Time Pieces' with David Leifer Jones (Clarinet Classics CC0054). He also contributed to the recording of 'Samaagam', improvising with Indian sarod master Amjad Ali Khan and soloists from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

As an improviser he has performed with Fritz Welch, Anne La Berge, Susan Alcorn, Diemo Schwarz, Michael Edwards, Spontaneous Broadway, Impropera and the London Improvisers' Orchestra, and is a member of both Edimpro and Impropera. He a member of the Not So Silent Movies band, playing unseen to classic silent films with guests including Evelyn Glennie, Roger Eno and members of Pink Floyd, Bond and Goldfrapp.

With Impropera - "the world's only (and arguably best) improvising opera company" - Peter has taken part in completely spontaneous operatic performances at festivals worldwide. The company is currently resident at Kings Place in London.

As a committed teacher for over 20 years, Peter is involved as animateur, composer and conductor in a number of innovative projects. He is also a founder, tutor and arranger for Tinderbox Orchestra.

A composer, improviser and soloist with laptop, Martin Parker's work focuses on encounters between computers, people and places. Based in Edinburgh, he has performed and collaborated internationally with theatre companies, symphony orchestras, visual artists and ensembles; recent projects include 'Songs for an airless room', an 'opera' for cinemas performed by Joby Burgess and Phil Minton.

Martin has been Artistic Director of Edinburgh's Dialogues Festival (www.dialogues-festival.org) for 10 years and is one third of free improvisation trio Lapslap (www.lapslap.net). He is Academic Director of the University of Edinburgh's MSc in Sound Design.

For further information see www.tinpark.com

FORTHCOMING CONCERTS:

Wednesday 14 March

7.30pm

National Museum of Scotland

The City Sings

Music and the Community in collaboration with the National Museum of Scotland.

300 children from Hermitage Park Primary perform songs from around the world, plus a new commission from composers Dee Isaacs and Victor Gama incorporating new instruments made by the children.

ADMISSION FREE

Tickets available from the National Museum of Scotland

www.nms.ac.uk/citysings or 0300 123 6789

Friday 16 March

1.10pm

Reid Concert Hall

Duncan Strachan · cello

Simon Smith · piano

BIRTWISTLE Two movements from 'Bogenstrich'

SIMON SMITH Chorale Postlude

STUART MACRAE Unity

VALENTIN SILVESTROV cello sonata

ADMISSION FREE