THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH CONCERT SERIES **SPRING · SUMMER 2012**

Concerts at The University

Friday 16 March 2012
1.10pm
Reid Concert Hall

Duncan Strachan · cello
Simon Smith · piano

Programme of works by BIRTWISTLE, SIMON SMITH, STUART MACRAE and VALENTIN SILVESTROV.

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Two movements from *Bogenstrich* (2006–09)
Harrison Birtwistle (b.1934)

(i) Lied ohne Worte
(ii) Wie eine Fuge

Bogenstrich is a cycle of pieces for baritone, cello and piano which mixes vocal movements with instrumental ones in the manner of Birtwistle's earlier *Pulse Shadows* (1989–96), where songs for soprano and ensemble alternate with movements for string quartet. There the poet was Paul Celan, and here it is Rainer Maria Rilke, a setting of whose *Liebes-Lied* (Love Song) for baritone and piano opens the cycle. This is followed by three movements for cello and piano. *Lied ohne Worte* (Song Without Words) is a traversal of the musical material of *Liebes-Lied* with more intricate textures – and, of course, without the text. This is followed by *Variationen* (Variations), which develops some of the same material in new directions, and then by *Wie eine Fuge* (Like a Fugue), which is effectively the scherzo of the cycle: a very fast and rhythmically intricate movement which is certainly no conventional fugue, but certainly alludes to the texture of one with its interlocking lines and refracted material. The cycle concludes with a second setting of *Liebes-Lied*, this time for baritone and cello. The whole is dedicated to the composer's wife, Sheila.

Chorale Postlude (2011)
Simon David Smith (b.1983)

This short piece is the final section of my *Elegy* for tenor, horn and piano, with the horn part transcribed for cello. It was a late addition to the piece (my original plan for the *Elegy* did not incorporate an extended postlude) but, having decided to add it, it was completed before its parent work, on Christmas Day 2011, and was always intended to be performable as an independent composition. It is a treatment of the chorale melody *O Welt, ich muss dich lassen*, which I had rediscovered while transcribing for piano some of Brahms' Chorale Preludes for organ, Op 122 (his final composition), two of which are exquisite settings of this melody.

Unity (2007)
Stuart MacRae (b.1976)

Unity was first performed at the City of London Festival on 11 July 2007 by cellist Danjulo Ishizaka and pianist Martin Helmchen, and was written to exploit the musical relationship between these two players, who have performed together often. "This meant writing a piece," says MacRae, "that would require a high degree of communication between the players in performance, and to that end the piece uses elements intended to disrupt the regularity of the tempo, such as long streams of grace-notes and very slow tempi. The piece is also a duo of equal partners (rather than, for example, a cello piece with piano accompaniment), with the distribution of foreground and background material shifting between the two players."

Sonata for violoncello and piano (1983)
Valentin Silvestrov (b.1937)

In this sonata the Ukrainian composer Valentin Silvestrov takes the idea of unity even further by writing what is effectively a piece for one single hybrid instrument; he has in fact described it as a 'monodrama'. Throughout the piece the two players shadow each other, one emerging out of or vanishing into the sound of the other, and rarely does either remain in the foreground for long. The distinction between 'foreground' material (melody) and 'background' accompaniment is itself blurred for long stretches of the piece. The sonata is in a single movement lasting a little over 20 minutes.

S.Smith

Duncan Strachan is emerging as one of the most exciting cellists of his generation. He has performed to critical acclaim across the UK and further afield as both a soloist and chamber musician.

Born in Dundee in 1987 and brought up in Lochaber, Scotland, Duncan read music at St Catherines College, Oxford studying cello with Colin Carr, and later at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with Robert Irvine. Upon graduating in 2011 with Distinction, he was selected as an inaugural recipient of the RCS Young Artist in Residence programme. During his studies he won numerous prizes and awards and in 2010 received the Busenhart Morgan-Evans Award from the Worshipful Company of Musicians, and won the Waddell Prize for Scottish String Players.

In 2010 he founded the Maxwell Quartet, who in 2011 were selected as Enterprise Music Scotland Residency Artists. He has also appeared as a guest artist with many ensembles including Florin Trio, Greenwich Trio, and the Edinburgh Quartet. He has appeared at festivals including BBC Proms, Cheltenham Festival and SOUND Festival, and has featured in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio Scotland.

He performs regularly with pianist Simon Smith, and together they focus largely on contemporary repertoire. In 2012 they make their debut at St John's Smith Square, London.

Simon Smith was born in Northumberland in 1983. At St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh he studied piano with Richard Beauchamp and composition with Tom David Wilson, also receiving lessons from John Maxwell Geddes and James MacMillan. At Cambridge University he studied composition with Jeremy Thurlow and Giles Swayne.

As a pianist he has performed many of the landmarks of the 20th-century piano repertoire, most notably several of Karlheinz Stockhausen's Klavierstücke and the piano concerto and complete etudes of György Ligeti, following a performance of which he was acclaimed as "a phenomenon – nothing daunts him, technically or musically" (The Scotsman). For Delphian Records Simon has recorded the complete piano music of James MacMillan along with the Piano Sonata by Stuart MacRae, a disc of piano music by Hafliði Hallgrímsson and solo and chamber works by Thomas Wilson, all of which have met with critical acclaim. Current projects include a recording of the complete piano music of Alfred Schnittke.

Following the premiere of his orchestral piece *Paragon* in May 2001, Simon was recognised as "clearly a composer determined to go places" (The Scotsman). His subsequent large-scale composition *Crucifixus*, premiered in Edinburgh in 2002, was described as "beautifully paced, finely structured, Passion music for today... a direct and emotional work" (The Herald). In 2004 his orchestral piece *Still* won the Cambridge University Music Society Composition Competition, and *The Time That Remains*, for orchestra, was premiered in Bristol in 2007. His most recent orchestral work *Against All Things Ending* was shortlisted in the University of St Andrews 600th Anniversary Composition Competition and was premiered there in April 2011.

Simon also works professionally as a music engraver, having produced scores of several large-scale works by Harrison Birtwistle, James MacMillan and Karlheinz Stockhausen, among others.