

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
CHAMBER CONCERTS

SEASON 1967-68

Eighth Concert

With the support of the Scottish Arts Council

SOLOISTS FROM
LE CENTRE DE MUSIQUE,
PARIS

Percussion

RAOUL WILLY COQUILLAT GASTON SYLVESTRE
JEAN-CHARLES FRANCOIS

Harp

BRIGITTE DESHAIS DE PORTAL

Pianoforte and Conductor

KEITH HUMBLE

with JOSEPHINE NENDICK *Mezzo-Soprano*

REID SCHOOL OF MUSIC

THURSDAY, 22nd FEBRUARY, 1968

AT 7.30 P.M.

PROGRAMME TWO SHILLINGS

PROGRAMME

1. AMORES for prepared piano and percussion (1943) *John Cage*

1. Solo for prepared piano
2. Trio for nine tom-toms and pod rattle
3. Trio for seven wood-blocks, not Chinese
4. Solo for prepared piano

The first trio is written in the rhythmic structure ten times ten. The second employs fixed rhythmic patterns which are never subjected to variation; it was written several years earlier being also a part of the Trio (1936).

The piano preparation is not elaborate. Nine screws, eight bolts, two nuts and three strips of rubber, acting as mutes, are placed between the strings pertaining to eighteen keys. Upon this instrument an attempt is made to express in combination the erotic and the tranquil, two of the permanent emotions of Indian tradition. The second solo is written in the rhythmic structure 3, 3, 2, 2.

2. PHILOMEL

Milton Babbitt

Philomel for soprano and synthesised sound was commissioned by the Ford Foundation for Bethany Beardslee, whose voice is heard on the tape. The text by John Hollander is based on the Philomel-Progne legend and tells the story of the mute and terrified woman rushing through the woods and her gradual transformation into an eloquent songbird.

The strangled cries of the voice at the opening gradually merge into a sustained vocal line that seems to trace a wider arc at each of its appearances. Successions of pitches in the tape accompaniment gradually accelerate into beating and chattering wood noises. The single voice of the soprano is at first counterpointed against its recorded sound, then subdivided into choruses high and low and finally merges into the single sound that sustains the "live" soprano's final note.

3. FRAGMENTATION for one player of harps

Sylvano Bussotti

Born in Florence in 1931 Sylvano Bussotti has studied in Florence at the Conservatoire and in Paris with Max Deutsch. Composer, painter, stage producer and pianist, all his manifold activities have a highly controversial flavour. His stage work "selon Sade", given at Palermo, created a considerable stir even at a Festival where all the manifestations of extreme avant-garde have become an everyday occurrence.

His "Fragmentations" specifies that it is written for one player of harps, which means that at least two instruments are required. It is a highly complex piece written in an aleatoric idiom and with a feeling for all the possibilities that random composition offers to the modern virtuoso.

4. A ROMAN DREAM (Scenes for mezzo-soprano and instrumental ensemble)

Alun Hoddinott

"A Roman Dream" is a narrative poem by Emyr Humphreys. It is cast in the form of a dream—or a nightmare—in order that its structure should reveal something of the essential nature of the relationship between an intelligent and well-meaning academic and the arbitrary violence of a Roman emperor exercising supreme power.

This academic philosopher is delighted to think of himself as one of the Emperor's immediate circle and this makes him eager to justify the system of government and to sing the praises of the seat of power through philosophic dissertation, odes, contributions to the enlightened journals or directed at supporting the regime as the foundation of civilisation and progress.

The poem describes the experience the philosopher is compelled to undergo when the Emperor's dangerous attention is focussed on his person. The plot should have a mythical power from this point onwards, sustaining a growth of meaning that should bring it within our contemporary experience. An emperor could easily be a dictator, a president, or even a prime minister and our desire to enlarge our own importance by loving and serving the source of power could bring blood on our hands and even the ultimate pursuit of the last hiding-place that no longer exists.

A story is never merely a drawing from life: its structure is moral and it should always reveal something of the true nature of an existence.

INTERVAL

5. NIGHT MUSIC I, for soprano, pianoforte and percussion

George Crumb

George Crumb, born in 1929 at Charleston, West Virginia, studied for several years with Ross Lee Finney. He now teaches composition at the University of Pennsylvania. He has received several important awards, including grants from the Fulbright Commission, and the Rockefeller and Koussevitzky Foundations. Recent works include *Variatione for Large Orchestra* (1959, performed by Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra 1965), *Night Music*

I (1963, premiere in Paris, 1964), Six Madrigals after poems of Garcia Lorca for Soprano and Instruments (1965, premiere in Washington, D.C. 1966) and Eleven Echoes of Autumn for Violin, Clarinet, Alto Flute and Piano (1966, commissioned by Bowdoin College, performed by Aeolian Quartet 1967). His most recent work is Echoes of Time and the River (Echoes II) (performed in Chicago, 1967).

In Night Music I, two texts by Federico Garcia Lorca are set as the second and fifth of a series of seven nocturnes. The composer has contributed the following statement:

"The work as a whole is a projection of the violently contrasting moods of two Lorca poems: 'La Luna Asoma' (The Moon Rises) with its aura of almost ecstatic lyricism, and the intense, sardonic 'Gacela de la Terrible Presencia' (Gacela of the Terrible Presence). This conflict of mood remains unresolved at the conclusion of the work. Structurally speaking, the seven movements (Notturmi) of the composition form a readily perceptible arch design in which the Lorca poems stand as buttress points. Elements of chance and free improvisation are integrated into a context of precisely notated music. The composer has endeavoured to enhance Lorca's surrealist images by means of a highly coloured chromaticism and unusual juxtapositions of timbre, register and rhythmic forms."

6. 'CIRCLES' for voice, harp and two percussion players

Luciano Berio

This work, completed in 1960, has become increasingly popular in spite of its advanced idiom. Reasons may well be its dramatic appeal, both musical and visual, and also Berio's intriguing exploitation of a wide variety of vocal and instrumental timbres. The title is apposite in several ways. First, the three evocative poems by E. E. Cummings chosen as the text appear in the order 1: 2: 3: 2: 1: for the five sections of the work. Further, the musical language, like that of the text, is at its richest and most exuberant when it reaches the central movement. Some other "circular" effects are visual. The arrangement of the instruments around the two percussion players (15 apiece) is one example, another occurring during the central movement, where they are both required to make a circular sweep of their instruments, A harp, placed between the two percussion groups, provides much of the colouring of the outside movements. The female soloist has various roles. Her vocal part is a mixture of song and speech so that she is actress as well as singer. She also moves periodically to different parts of the platform, and marks each occasion by taking up and playing a different set of small percussion instruments. Moreover she is musical director in that now and again she dictates the tempo to the ensemble.