

4 November

20:00

Fismer Hall

Entrance Free



Mareli Stolp

(piano)

Messiaen, Tanaka

Ligeti, Rzewski

Mareli Stolp

(Piano)

My sincere thanks to Jill Richards, Marthinus Basson, Athol Fugard, Stephanus Muller, Keith Goodwill and Charl Clayton for the various contributions you made to this evening's performance. I would have been lost without you!

***La Bouscarle* – O. Messiaen**

Cordes á vide and Fanfares from Etudes,

Book 1 – G. Ligeti

***Crystalline* – K. Tanaka**

Short break for the performer – audience please
remain seated

***De Profundis* for speaking pianist – F.**

Rzewski

***La Bouscarle* – Olivier Messiaen**

To engage with the oeuvre of French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) is to engage with some of the most innovative, eclectic and unique music produced in the 20th century. Messiaen's music is inextricably linked to his commitment to Catholicism, although he also showed a marked interest in Eastern philosophy and religion throughout his life. Messiaen was also an ornithologist, and related his fascination with birdsong to his religion: according to him, birds were 'God's own musicians', and to engage with birdsong was to engage with a divine music.

In the Catalogue d'Oiseaux, the largest collection of 'bird pieces', Messiaen constructs in each piece something like a 'tableau vivant': a single habitat serves as the setting within which many birds appear, interacting with each other as well as with their environment. The setting for *La Bouscarle* ('Cetti's Warbler') is the Charenton River in the north of France. The main protagonist is the warbler, whose call is described by Messiaen as 'violent' and 'brusque'. This birdcall usually elicits a response from the kingfisher, from whom one not only hears a short, fairly soft call – one also experiences the shimmering colour of the bird's wings as he takes to flight. The river is given an important position, always

combined with the calls of the blackbird, robin and the black cap. Other role players include the corn crake, song thrush and weaver. The atmosphere is almost pastoral or idyllic, and the work creates an imagined space as much as it recreates actual birdsong.

***Cordes á vide* and *Fanfares* from 'Etudes, Book 1' – György Ligeti**

Although György Ligeti was situated in the modernist school of composition in the early years of his compositional career, his style underwent clear changes after the composition of the opera *Le Grande Macabre* in 1978. This work, in combining various styles and influences (including Rock 'n Roll and medieval plainchant), has been described as being indicative of a shift in Ligeti's aesthetic from modernism into one more relatable to postmodernism. Whether these classifications can be applied to Ligeti's compositional aesthetic at all is debatable, for a defining feature of his compositional philosophy is the innovative and eclectic nature of his creative output which defies easy classification or delineation. Ligeti has described himself as an 'explorer' of sound, and indeed the sound created in these etudes is very distinctive. Ligeti began work on the etudes for piano in the early 1980's, and a defining feature of

these works is the use of superimposition of material, the use of polymetre, textural variety and timbral experimentation.

***Crystalline* – Karen Tanaka**

Japanese composer Karen Tanaka (b. 1961) had her initial schooling in Tokyo, after which she moved to Paris to study with Tristan Murail at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM), an electronic music studio initially set up and run by Pierre Boulez. Murail, together with Gerard Grisey, started experimenting with sound spectra in the early 1970's – Murail has described spectral music as an aesthetic rather than a style, a set of ideas rather than a set of techniques. In his words, "Music is ultimately sound evolving in time". Spectral music is concerned with timbral structures, rather than the traditional constitutive musical elements such as metre, melody or harmony.

Tanaka is attracted to what she describes as 'transformation of timbre in space, analogous to a gradual change of light refraction in crystals and prisms'. She describes *Crystalline* (composed in 1988) as a series of seven 'sound sculptures', where each section reveals a unique soundscape with divergent qualities of colour and timbre.

***De Profundis* for speaking pianist – Frederic Rzewski**

The compositional career of American pianist and composer Frederic Rzewski (b.1938) spans 50 years, covering styles of composition as diverse as serialist music, graphic score notation, experimentalism and collective improvisation. He first began experimenting with the use of speaking voice in combination with instrumental music in the 1970's, with the works *Attica* and *Coming Together*. In these works, a letter written by a political activist imprisoned at Attica prison in the United States is read in combination with an unspecified ensemble of instrumentalists. The strong socio-political position expressed in these works is also clearly present in *De Profundis*, where composed music for the piano is combined with a reading of sections from Oscar Wilde's text of the same title, written while a prisoner at Reading gaol from 1895-1897.

Sections from this text (which is written in the form of a letter to Wilde's lover, Lord Alfred Douglas), have been chosen by Rzewski and are not presented in chronological order. These are combined with extended piano techniques that include singing, whistling, grunting and percussion from the pianist.