

Dublin Sound Lab

Garth Knox

Music for viola and electronics

26 November 2009 at 8.00 pm

St Werburgh's Church, Dublin

- Gérard Grisey, *Prologue* for viola and electronics
- Salvatore Sciarrino, *Tre notturni brillanti* for solo viola
- Kaija Saariaho, *Vent Nocturne* for viola and electronics
 - Garth Knox, *Viola Spaces* for solo viola
- Luca Francesconi, *Animus II* for viola and electronics

Dublin Sound Lab is a contemporary music performance group specialising in new electroacoustic music and computer-mediated performance. The group was formed in 2008 by organist Michael Quinn and composer Fergal Dowling to promote and perform new and established works by Irish and international composers.

Gérard Grisey *Prologue* for viola and electronics

Gérard Grisey studied at the Trossingen Conservatory in Germany (1963-65) before entering the Paris conservatory in 1965. There he worked with Olivier Messiaen, eventually earning prizes in composition and other subjects. At the same time, Grisey took courses with Henri Dutilleul at the École Normale de Musique (1968), and also studied in Siena, Italy at the Accademia Chigiana (1969). In 1972, Grisey attended seminars at Darmstadt with Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Ligeti and Iannis Xenakis.

Grisey's studies in electroacoustic music and acoustics date from the early 1970s, training he accomplished under the tutelage of Jean-Etienne Marie and Emile Leip at the Université de Paris VI. In 1972, he was awarded a grant to study at the Villa Médicis in Rome, where he stayed for two years, and it is also during this period that he formed the *Itinéraire* ensemble with Tristan Murail, Roger Tessier and Michaël Lévinas (Hugues Dufourt joined the ensemble later). In 1980, Grisey became attached to IRCAM, and following a period in Berlin, was appointed professor at the University of California at Berkeley (1982–1986). On returning to Europe from the United States, he taught classes at the Paris conservatory, and gave a number of seminars both in France (Centres Acanthes, Lyon, Paris) and beyond (Darmstadt, Fribourg, Milan, Helsinki, Moscow, Los Angeles, Stanford, London).

Grisey's *Dérives*, *Périodes* and *Partiels* figure amongst the seminal works of the spectral music movement. Moreover, works such as *Les Espaces Acoustiques* (1974–1985), *Les Chants de l'Amour* (1982-1984), *Le Noir de l'Etoile* (1991), *Vortex Temporum* (1994–1996), *L'icône paradoxale* (1996), and *Quatre Chants pour franchir le Seuil* (1994–1996), commissioned by the Ensemble Intercontemporain and the BBC, are frequently broadcast and programmed for international festivals. They have become a staple in the repertoire of some of the most celebrated European and North American instrumental ensembles.

Begun in 1974 and completed in 1985, the *Les Espaces Acoustiques* ('Acoustic Spaces') cycle is made up of six instrumental pieces. The unity of this cycle is achieved through the formal similitude of the various pieces and two acoustic reference points: the spectrum of harmonics and periodicity.

I would sum up the language used in these pieces as follows:

- no longer composing with notes but with sounds
- no longer composing only sounds, but the difference that separates them (the degree of pre-audibility)
- acting on these differences, that is to say, controlling the evolution (or non-evolution) of the sound and the speed of its evolution
- taking the relativity of our auditory perception into account
- applying to the instrumental sphere the 1) phenomena experimented upon for quite some time in electronic music studios. These applications are much more radical and perceptible in *Partiels*, and *Modulations*, seeking a synthetic writing in which the different parameters participate in the development of a unique sound; e.g. the ordering of non-tempered pitches creates new timbres, and from this ordering come durations, etc. The synthesis aims, on the one hand, at developing the sound (material), and on the other, the various relationships existing between the sounds (forms).

Prologue (1976) for solo viola or viola and resonators received its world premiere on 16 January 1978, Paris, with Gérard Caussé (viola). It was commissioned by the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs and dedicated to Gérard Caussé.

One can perceive and memorise a melody in two ways: by the notes that it is made up of, or by Gestalt, by the form of the melodic curve. *Prologue* is constructed entirely according to the latter type of perception.

Here one finds a melodic outline and its transformations that constantly return in a sort of spiral form. The definition, point by point, of these outlines is in motion, because the pitches

they are made up of are going to gradually move away from the original spectrum to reach a state of noise in passing through different degrees of inharmoniousness. This melodic outline also governs the large form the tempi and the appearance of two kinds of inserts: the heart-beat (short/long) and echo.

A solo voice, the ghostly response of unoccupied instruments, but also an abstract, unbending structure... I hope I have succeeded here in stammering out what I believe music to be: a dialectic between form and frenzy.

Gérard Grisey

Salvatore Sciarrino *3 notturni brillanti* for solo viola

Salvatore Sciarrino likes to boast that he was born free and not in a school of music. Self-taught, he began to compose when he was twelve. His first public concert was given in 1962. But Sciarrino considers what he wrote before 1966 as immature works of apprenticeship, for it is then that his personal style came to the fore. There is something truly special about this music: it induces a different way of listening, projecting a thrilling awareness of reality and of the self. And after forty years his huge catalogue of compositions is still in a phase of astonishing creative development.

After completing his schooling and a few years of university in his hometown, he moved first to Rome in 1969 and then to Milan in 1977. Since 1983 he has been living in Umbria. He published for Ricordi from 1969 to 2004.

His discography is particularly large: around 80 CDs, issued by the major international labels, have been acclaimed and often awarded prizes. As well as the librettos of his own works of music theatre, Sciarrino has written many articles, essays and texts of various kinds; some have been chosen and collected in *Carte da suono* (Cidim – Novecento, 2001). Also important is his interdisciplinary book on musical form: *Le figure della musica, da Beethoven a oggi* (Ricordi, 1998).

He has taught at the conservatories of Milan (1974–1983), Perugia (1983–1987) and Florence (1987–1996).

He has also held courses of specialization and master classes: particularly worth mentioning are those of Città di Castello from 1979 to 2000. Between 1978 and 1980 he was artistic director of the Teatro Comunale of Bologna. An Academician of Santa Cecilia (Rome), Academician of the Fine Arts of Bavaria and Academician of the Arts (Berlin), he has won numerous prizes, the most recent ones being the Prince Pierre de Monaco (2003) and the prestigious Premio Internazionale Feltrinelli (2003). He is also the first winner of the new Musikpreis Salzburg (2006).

The *Tre notturni brillanti* (1974) embody this sound world: not a single note is played 'normally' - everything is a whirl of harmonics, trills, tremoli and *jetés*, an instrumental tightrope walk executed at lightning speed (the markings of the three pieces are *Divolo*, *Scorrevolee animato* and *Prestlssimo precipitaodo*). But unlike many of the 'extended' instrumental techniques explored around in the early seventies (most notably by Globokar and Lachenmann), Sciarrino's are not intended to act against the instrument, but rather at pushing its natural characteristics to an extreme – the ghost of Paganni is never faraway. Though Sciarrino was to apply the same techniques to the other string instruments, on the viola they have a particular quality, both dark and glistening, which more than justifies the slightly paradoxical, post-Chopinesque notion of brilliant nocturnes' This quality is also evoked by the lines from the anthropologist Alfred Metraux which are given at the beginning of the score: "The stars are women who light up the night with icy fire. It is dangerous to touch them, for they explode."

The first piece is a mercurial mosaic in which half a dozen elements constantly recur, but almost always in slightly varied form – the same but not the same, a whirling stasis. The second begins with a stream of harmonics at the verge of audibility, interrupted and for a

while, overwhelmed by abrasive vibrato-glissandi. The third is an interplay of stratospherically high glissandi, and rapid grace-note whose exact identity is constantly subverted by the bow skating to and fro from bridge to fingerboard.

Kaija Saariaho *Vent Nocturne* for viola and electronics

Kaija Saariaho studied composition in Helsinki, Freiburg and Paris, where she has lived since 1982. Her studies and research at IRCAM have had a major influence on her music and her characteristically luxuriant and mysterious textures are often created by combining live music and electronics. Although much of her catalogue comprises chamber works, from the mid-nineties she has turned increasingly to larger forces and broader structures, such as the operas *L'Amour de loin* and *Adriana Mater* and the oratorio *La Passion de Simone*.

The idea for *Vent nocturne* ('Night Wind') first occurred to me while I was reading a bilingual edition on the poems of Georg Trakl. This synchronicity of the two languages - German and French - led me to muse on the relationship between the viola and electronics.

The work is in two parts: *Sombres miroirs* ('Dark Mirrors') and *Soupirs de l'obscur* ('Breaths of the Obscure'). These, as their names suggest, focus first on symmetrical thinking and then on the variation of the glissando, not unlike a sigh, that rounds off the phrases.

To me the sound of the viola has always suggested that of breathing, which, along with the wind, became a major element of the electronic part.

Vent nocturne was commissioned by the Holland Festival and premiered there in 2006. The piece is dedicated to Garth Knox.

Kaija Saariaho

Garth Knox – *Viola Spaces 3, 2, 8* (2005-07)

Interpreters of classical music can study technical exercises (scales, arpeggios, finger exercises etc) confident in the knowledge that these patterns will be useful in playing classical pieces. Due to the extreme diversity of styles in new music today, it is now more often a case of constructing a new technique to reply to the demands of a new piece. There are however recurring techniques, which can be studied, among these the so-called "extended techniques" (usually meaning classical techniques taken a little further). These pieces, or "spaces", are really concert studies designed to give players the chance to learn and explore contemporary viola techniques. Each space concentrates on one specific technique, and in this program we hear three:-

"Nine Fingers" is all in pizzicato, without the bow (the only finger not used for pizzicato in this piece is the left thumb), "Ghosts" is a study in a special floating bow technique called "sul tasto flautando", and "Up, down, sideways, round" explores the possible directions of the bow.

Viola Spaces is dedicated to Nobuko Imai and the team of the Viola Space festival in Tokyo.

Garth Knox

Luca Francesconi – *Animus II* for viola and electronics

Luca Francesconi studied piano at the Conservatory of Milan and composition with Azio Corghi, Karlheinz Stockhausen (in Rome), Luciano Berio (at Tanglewood) and jazz in Boston.

He also worked as an assistant of Berio between 1981 and 1984. In 1990 he founded Agon Acustica Informatica Musica, a centre for production and musical research with new technologies based in Milan, which he led until 2006. He has received, among others, the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis (Darmstadt 1990), the Förderpreis der Ernst-von-Siemens-Musikstiftung (Munich 1994) and the Prix Italia 1994.

So far, he has written about a hundred works ranging from solo pieces to works for large orchestra, from opera to multimedia, most of these commissioned by leading musical institutions and radio corporations. He has written five Radio-Operas for RAI Corporation and six stage or open-air operas, frequently using multimedia technologies.

His works are commissioned and played by major international institutions like IRCAM, Ensemble Intercontemporain, ASKO, Arditti Quartet, Sudwestfunk Baden Baden, SudDeutscherRundFunk, WestDeutscherRundFunk, Nieuw Ensemble, London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Modern, BBC Symphony, Philharmonia, Swedish Radio Orchestra and Choir, Oslo Philharmonic, Gotheborg Symphoniker, La Scala Philharmonic, RAI Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philharmonique de Radio France, Santa Cecilia Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic, Gewandhaus Leipzig and many others. We mention operas for LaMonnaie in Bruxelles (*Ballata*), Holland Festival Amsterdam (*Gesualdo Considered as a Murderer*), Piccolo Teatro Milano (*Buffa Opera*), and Aix en Provence Festival.

Luca Francesconi also conducts and has been teaching for 25 years both in Italian conservatories and in masterclasses all over the world. His next projects include several operas among which commissions from La Scala Milano, Oslo Opera House, English National Opera London. He is artistic director of Biennale Venice Festival and at present he is professor and head of the department of composition at the Musikhögskolan of Malmö in Sweden.

Animus II

This piece was composed in the IRCAM studios, Paris, with the cooperation of Benoit Meudic, who provided technical assistance. It was commissioned by Françoise and Jean-Philippe Billarant.

Animus II is the second in a series of works which employ digital techniques in order to explore a range of sonorities. In each piece, a soloist is confronted by a computer; *Animus I* (which has been released on CD) featured a solo trombone, and *Animus II* involves a solo viola.

My research for these works concentrates on certain minute details found in otherwise banal material. Using a computer, it explores these details, and the connections between rhythm and colour. But this craft (*techne*) has the potential to overcome our intimate world.

Animus II resulted from a period of collaboration with Garth Knox which began fifteen years ago. After hearing Garth perform the viola solo from my Quartet No. 3 during a recording for Cologne Radio, I thought of developing this soloistic fragment into a larger piece – one resembling a ‘concerto’ for viola and electronics. This idea generated many of the compositional decisions and expressive gestures of the work, imbuing it with a degree of semantic tension.

Luca Francesconi

Garth Knox is one of the most sought after-contemporary musicians of his generation. Born in Dublin, he studied at the Royal College of Music in London where he won several prizes for viola and for chamber music. Thereafter he played with most of the leading groups in London in a wide variety of repertoires, from baroque to contemporary music.

In 1983 he was invited by Pierre Boulez to become a member of the Ensemble InterContemporain in Paris, where he had the chance to do much solo playing (including concertos directed by Pierre Boulez) and chamber music, touring widely and playing in international festivals.

In 1990 Garth Knox joined the Arditti String Quartet, playing in all the major concert halls of the world, working closely with and giving first performances of pieces by most of today's leading composers including Ligeti, Kurtag, Berio, Xenakis, Lachenmann, Cage, Feldman and Stockhausen (the famous ‘Helicopter Quartet’).

In 1998, Garth Knox left the quartet to concentrate on his solo career. As a soloist, he has given premieres by Henze (the Viola Sonata is dedicated to him), Ligeti, Schnittke, Ferneyhough, James Dillon, George Benjamin and many others. He also collaborates regularly in theatre and dance projects, and has written and performed a one-man show for children.

He has recently become a pioneer of the viola d'amore, exploring its possibilities in new music, with and without electronics, and is in the process of creating a new repertoire for this instrument.

Garth Knox now lives in Paris, where he enjoys a full-time solo career, giving recitals, concertos and chamber music concerts all over Europe, the USA and Japan. His first solo CD (MO 782082) won the coveted Deutsche Schallplatten Preis in Germany, his second CD 'Spectral Viola' (edition zeitklang) has been highly acclaimed, and his latest one, 'D'Amore' for ECM has been nominated for several prizes.

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