

# Dublin Sound Lab

in association with  
Centre Culturel Irlandais, and Culture Ireland  
presents

## Sketch!

12 April 2011, 7h 30  
Centre Culturel Irlandais,  
Rue de Irlandais, Paris

Garth Knox, viola  
Michael Quinn, harpsichord  
Bryan Quinn, voice  
Fergal Dowling, computer

- Karlheinz Essl, *More or Less* (for computer-controlled soloists)
- Fergal Dowling, *Sketch* (for viola, voice, harpsichord and computer)
- Jean-Claude Risset, *Pentacle* (harpsichord/electronics)
- Luca Francesconi, *Animus II* (viola and electronics) (Benoit Meudic computer realisation)

*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*



### **More or Less (for computer-controlled soloists)**

*More or Less* is a computer-driven real-time composition where the musicians do not reproduce parts of a fixed score. Instead they have computer monitors that display random-generated playing instructions to perform one of five loosely-defined structures.

**Karlheinz Essl** (born 1960, Vienna) is an Austrian composer, improviser and performer. He studied composition with Friedrich Cerha and musicology in Vienna (doctorate 1989 with a thesis on Anton Webern). As a double bassist, he played in chamber and jazz ensembles. Besides writing instrumental music and composing electronic music, he performs on his own electronic instrument *m@ze*<sup>2</sup>, develops software environments for computer-aided composition and creates generative sound and video environments – often in collaboration with artists from other fields. Essl served as composer-in-residence at the Darmstadt summer courses (1990-94) and completed a commission for IRCAM. Since 1994, Karlheinz Essl has been curating experimental music concerts and sound installations at the Essl Museum in Klosterneuburg. Since 2007 he is professor of composition for electro-acoustic and experimental music at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna.

### **Fergal Dowling, *Sketch* (for viola, voice, harpsichord and computer)**

Based on the text of Samuel Beckett's 'Worstward Ho', *Sketch* (for actor, viola, harpsichord and computer) (2011) is part of a series of compositions for instrumentalist(s) and computer. One aim of these works is to rebalance the erstwhile independent roles of composer and performer more equally between the instrumentalist(s) and the computer operator. The composition takes the form of a computer-based strategy that the players 'sound out'.

Here, sound-events generated by the instrumentalists are recognised and automatically recorded by the computer. As more sound-events are detected and recorded, the sound-event start and/or end points are used to trigger multi-part playback of previously recorded cues.

The works in this series have other common musical objectives and formal and stylistic features; the sounded material is always produced in the performance space in real time; there is no pre-recorded or prepared material; the sounds are never processed or treated in any way (other than being recorded and replayed), and there is no sound synthesis; the detail of when and what to record is decided during the performance, and the decisions are based on details of the ongoing performance; the process uses extensive direct quotations of the actual performance to create sequential repetitions and layerings.

These processes result in frequent elisions, gaps and re-orderings of the temporal flow, thus rendering self-contained, self-referential and concentrated musical arguments, which reveal an evolving relationship between instrumentalist(s), performers, computer (operator), the material and its context.

In English theatre a *sketch* is a short, partially devised ensemble piece, often comic or satirical in

nature. In Dublin slang, a group of mischievous boys might appoint one of their number to 'keep sketch' (look out). If he spots an approaching adult he will shout the warning 'Sketch!', at which the others will disperse in all directions.

### **Worstward Ho**

Samuel Beckett was an accomplished pianist who played regularly in company as a young man. He is also remembered by contemporaries playing the tin-whistle during his time at the École Normal Supérieure in Paris. Despite his ability, music seems to have been problematical in relation to his literary project. He enviously described it as "The highest art form [as] it's never condemned to explicitness" and claimed, resignedly that in a competition between music and words "music always wins".

Though snatches of song appear in some of the theatre work, it is mostly in Beckett's radio drama that the possibility of the incorporation of music is fully explored. The two most complete meditations on musical representation come in the radio plays *Words and Music* and *Cascando* (both 1962). Both pieces present an attempt at representing a short narrative through the media of speech and of music, with both words and music assuming separate and individual character roles. An attempt is made to synthesise the representations of both but it ultimately ends in failure. Inevitably the process is bound to fail, not through any lack of ability or intention on Beckett's part but by his claiming an inherent inability of successful mimesis through conventional artistic form, even with the addition of musical grammar.

Although failure may be inevitable, the impulse to continually produce narrative or meditation is ever-present and is elegantly summed up by the voice of *The Unnamable*: 'I must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on'. The inevitability of this Sisyphean cycle provides the basis for *Worstward Ho* from which Fergal Dowling's piece draws inspiration. It foregrounds its knowledge of the impossibility of successful representation coupled with the need to constantly attempt it: 'Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better'. The piece maps the attempt to represent the impossibility of progress within the process of artistic creation. By attempting to strip out the unimportant in language, its focus is shifted to the absences and the silences. By acknowledging its own narrative failure, it demands rehearsal and re-rehearsal in the manner of a prayer.

*Feargal Whelan (March 2011)*

On say on  
No matter  
Fail again better  
Say bones  
Say remains  
No future  
Time to lose  
Gain time to lose  
Unchanging high and low  
Unchanging high and low  
Unchanging high and low  
Add never then sudden back unchanged  
First one then two or first two  
Time to  
How long no stretch more so little longing no more  
less back blanks  
Such last state  
Enough no farther still on still still

**Fergal Dowling** is a composer of electro-acoustic and instrumental music. Born in Dublin, he studied composition at Trinity College Dublin (2002) and at the University of York (2006). He lectured in music technology at Dundalk Institute of Technology (2006–2008) and his work as a researcher has produced software-based compositional aids and audio processing tools dealing mainly with sound spatialisation and real-time interactive strategies.

Many of his works make use of computer-mediated performance strategies to combine electronic parts with instrumental or vocal forces. Since 2001 he has employed 'granular spatialisation' to render multichannel works for large, three-dimensional loudspeaker arrays.

His works have been presented in concert and as installations in Ireland, England, Germany, Sweden, Canada, the USA, Spain, Brazil and Japan. He has performed his own computer-based interactive music throughout Europe with various groups such as Ex-Machina, Concorde, Ensemble Chimera, Projektgruppe Neue Musik Bremen, Electro Acoustic Revue, Grup XXI, notes inégales, and Dublin Sound Lab.

#### **Jean-Claude Risset, *Pentacle* (harpsichord and 8-track tape)**

My work *Pentacle*, commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture for GMEA (Groupe de Musique Expérimentale d'Albi-Tarn) (2006), is dedicated to Elizabeth Chojnacka, one of the rare performers who inspire contemporary creation: thanks to her, the modern harpsichord has become a most significant resource for contemporary music. Synthesis and processing is used to echo and extend the live performance and to implement a spatial « scenography » and « dramaturgy » taking advantage of the 8 sources of sound placed around the audience.

*Pentacle* lasts about 15 mn. It comprises five sections: I, *Portique (Portal)*, 2m 10s ; II, *Accords(Chords)*, 2mn ; III, *Volute (Volutes)* 3mn ; IV *Résonances (Resonances)*, 5mn ; V *Vers le chaos (Toward chaos)*, 2mn50s. The title evokes a five limbs star, but the word *Pentacle* has many other esoteric connotations, from Sumer to Pythagoras, medieval alchemy and beyond. In particular it refers to feminine energy and inspiration, brilliantly illustrated by Elizabeth Chojnacka.

The performer dialogues with digital sounds, most of which have timbres related to that of the harpsichord. These sounds come from either digital synthesis of recordings of the harpsichord constructed by Anthony Sidey for Elizabeth Chojnacka; they have been processed by computer using software such as *Peak* or *MaxMSP*, to modify the sounds but mostly to perform compositional developments by generating echoes, arpeggios, transpositions and proliferations. A eight-channel spatialization has been realized using the software *Holophon*, written by Laurent Pottier at GMEM (Groupe de Musique Expérimentale de Marseille) and implemented with the help of Charles Bascou and Benjamin Maumus : the software allows to prescribe a detailed control of the spatial diffusion, almost like a score.

The arpeggiated chords of the first, diffused from the stage, act like a portico or a propyleum. The second section presents chords with increasing densities; certain stressed chords trigger the invasion by the

accompaniment of different areas of the hall (while preserving axial symmetry between left and right). The third section presents various volutes around polar pitches. Whenever the volutes escape equal-temperament tuning, sounds disperse and emanate from different locations; then fast melodic lines start to rotate around the audience. In the fourth section, by far the longest, the sound gets more aerial, and the harpsichord responds in filigree to resonances and furtive sounds coming from the stage. The fifth section is an implacable descent which gets lost into chaotic tenebrae. This descent is soon accompanied by a gyration - faster and faster, here and there retracing one's steps; at times, the sound splits into two voices which rotate at different speeds to reach diametrically opposite positions. Toward the end, the descending scales turn to chaos: the sounds motion becomes random, then it diffuses everywhere and finally comes back on stage around a resonance from the harpsichord.

*Jean-Claude Risset*

**Jean-Claude Risset** (b. 1938), French composer of mostly orchestral, chamber, vocal, piano, and electroacoustic works that have been performed throughout the world.

Risset studied composition with Suzanne Demarquez and André Jolivet and piano with Huguette Goullon and Robert Trimaille at the École Normale Supérieure de Paris from 1957-61. There he also had studies in mathematics and physics and earned his Doctorat ès Sciences in 1967. He was later awarded honorary doctorates from the University of Edinburgh in 1994 and the Universidad de Córdoba in 2000.

Among his honors are the UFAM Prix pour Piano (1963), the Prix du Groupement des Acousticiens de Langue Française (1967), a prize in the Dartmouth electronic music competition (1970, for Mutations), and the Bronze, Silver and Gold medals from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Marseille (1972, 1987, 1999). He has also received First Prize, Euphonie d'Or and the Prix Magisterium in the Concours International de Musique Électroacoustique de Bourges (1980, 1982, 1998), the Grand Prix SACEM de la promotion de la musique symphonique (1981) and the Golden NICA from the Ars Electronica competition in Graz (1987). Recent honors include the Grand Prix National de la Musique (1990), the Grand Prix Musica Nova in Prague (1995), the Ars Nova Prize in Prague (1996), and the EAR Prize in Budapest (1997). In addition, he was named an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 1986 and a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur by the government of France in 1989.

Among the soloists who have played his works are flautists Robert Aitken, Pierre-Yves Artaud, Roberto Fabbriciani, Gérard Garcin, and Katrin Zenz, pianists Ancusa Aprodu, Christian Ivaldi, Martine Joste, Michel Oudar, Jean-Claude Pennetier, Georges Pludermacher, Jacques Raynaud, and Dimitri Vassilakis and bass Jacques Bona. Other soloists include clarinetists Serge Conte, Michel Lethiec and Michel Portal, organist Marie-Hélène Giespieler, sopranos Linda Hirst, Janice Jackson, Irène Jarsky, Rovena Koreta, Jane Manning, and Maria Tegzes, saxophonist Daniel Kientzy, violinist Mari Kimura, Celtic harpist Denise Mégevand, and percussionist Thierry Miroglio.

Mr. Risset is also active in other positions. He worked with Max Mathews at Bell Laboratories in 1965 and from 1967-69, initially on brass synthesis and later on pitch paradoxes, sonic development processes and

the synthesis of new timbres. There he also had important encounters with F. Richard Moore, John Pierce, James Tenney, Vladimir Ussachevsky, and Edgard Varèse. He worked at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique in Marseille from 1969-72, where he has served as Directeur de recherche at the Laboratoire de Mécanique et d'Acoustique since 1985 and was named its Directeur de recherche émérite in 1999. He established the computer sound systems at the Faculté d'Orsay and the Université de Paris in 1970-71 and served as chair of the computer department at IRCAM from 1975-79. In addition, he served as composer-in-residence at the Media Laboratory at MIT in 1987 and 1989.

As a writer, he has written many articles about computer and electronic music that have appeared in numerous journals and magazines, as well as the book *An introductory catalogue of computer synthesized sounds* (1969, second edition, 1995, Wergo).

He taught at the Université d'Aix-Marseille from 1972-75 and 1979-85, where he established its computer sound system in 1974. He has also lectured in Argentina, Australia, Finland, France, Japan, and the USA.

#### **Luca Francesconi, *Animus II* (viola and electronics)**

*Animus II* was composed in the IRCAM studios, Paris, with the cooperation of Benoit Meudic, who provided technical assistance and 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 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*

**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 master-classes 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.

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#### **Credits**

Technician, Philippe Saltel

#### **Thanks**

Sheila Pratschke  
Centre Culturel Irlandais  
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#### **Contact**

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