

CANADA CONNECTIONS

Philip Thomas *piano*

Tuesday 30th October 2012

Christopher Fox *L'ascenseur* (2012)

Richard Glover *Logical Harmonies (1)* (2011)

Martin Arnold *Points and Waltzes* (2012)

-- INTERVAL --

Linda C Smith *Thought and Desire* (2007)

Michael Osterle *Luke* (1996)

Cassandra Miller *Philip the wanderer* (2012)

I. Gently rumbling without direction

II. Broadly, surveilling the great expanse

III. Joyfully, jauntily, as if running away from regret itself

This is the second of two programmes which have sprung from recent discoveries of music from Canada. As I've come to know the music of a number of Canadian composers I've felt strongly that there are similar areas of exploration between their music and that of many of the composers with whom I feel an affinity in the UK. In particular the influence of the American experimentalists John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff (as well as others such as Alvin Lucier and James Tenney) is keenly felt in their music but is more a point of aesthetic connection than a concerted effort to develop an 'experimental' movement.

What unites all the composers here is a rejection of traditional dramatic narratives. Instead there is a focus upon the immediacy of the moment and the 'now-ness' of the musical material. In the pieces featured tonight however there is a difference between the two nations – the British composers work their material through process, albeit large-scale processes which may or may not be immediately perceptible in the detail. The Canadians, however, adopt a looser approach to the material, allowing it to unravel, stop and start, meander. This makes for quite a radical contrast, and throws into question previous assumptions and ideas about musical form. With all the composers included in this programme there is an element of curiosity – how does this music function? How does it hold together? And how do we perceive music through time?

Christopher Fox *L'ascenseur* (2012)

What happens if a title tells us all we need to know? The activity begins like this, so it must end like that.

Or, how to draw attention to the relationship between the pianist's fingers, the keys, the strings, the soundboard, the lid, the room, our ears.

L'ascenseur is dedicated to Philip Thomas who commissioned the work with funds generously provided by the Britten-Pears Foundation. He gave the first performance as part of the 2012 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

[CF]

Christopher Fox was born in York in 1955, grew up in the north of England and now lives in London. In 1981 he won the composition prize of the Performing Right Society of Great Britain; since then he has established a reputation as one of the most individual composers of his generation. Fox's work has been performed and broadcast world-wide and has featured in many of the leading new music festivals, from the Amsterdam PROMS to the BBC Promenade Concerts and from St Petersburg to Sidney. In recent years he has established particularly close relationships with the Ives Ensemble in the Netherlands, for whom he wrote the evening-long ensemble installation, *Everything You Need To Know* (2000-1) and with Apartment House in the UK. Fox's music is widely available on CD, with a portrait CD on NMC, four portrait CDs on Metier and other recordings on Artifact, BVHaast and FMR. Fox has been hailed by Andy Hamilton in *The Wire* as "a tantalising figure in British Music"; Paul Driver in the *Sunday Times* has described his music as "impressive, thoughtful, entertaining and extremely varied". Paul Griffiths, writing in the *Times*, has said of Fox's work that "he takes simple ideas but he makes them sound quite wonderful".

Richard Glover *Logical Harmonies (I)* (2011)

I made this piece with the idea of 'non-arbitrary music' in mind. [RG]

Richard Glover (b. 1981) is a composer and writer based in Huddersfield, UK. He is interested in minimal approaches to process in music, and what can be revealed by gradual transformation. He has a portrait disc out in Spring 2013 with the Sheffield label another timbre. His writing covers experimental approaches to music making, and the temporal experience of such musics.

Martin Arnold *Points and Waltzes* (2012)

In 16th century England a "point" was a piece of contrapuntal composition (no doubt related one way or another to "counterpoint") and *Points & Waltzes* is to a large extent that. But when I first heard "point" applied to the wonderful, non-narrative polyphonic meander of Elizabethan *fantasies*, I liked to think of it as the smallest instance, a moment; music as a succession of particular details being passed through as part of a continuum. And for *Points & Waltzes* the continuum is a waltz—it's always a waltz, obscure or not—though not the rolling, whirling psychedelia of the Viennese sort, but a slow dance: at the tempo of Richard Thompson's *Waltzing's for Dreamers*.

The first time I encountered the word "point" together with a reference to dance was in the mid-1970s when I picked up a recording of Peter Maxwell Davies' *Points and Dances from 'Taverner.'* It was one of a number of recordings that changed my life then. *Points & Waltzes* is dedicated to Philip Thomas with deepest gratitude.

[MA]

Martin Arnold is a composer and performer of music, an arts administrator, a writer and a teacher based in Toronto, Canada. Martin's compositions have been played nationally and internationally by performers/ensembles including Roger Admiral, Arraymusic, Aventa, Belladonna, The Burdocks, The California E.A.R. Unit, Stephen Clarke, Continuum, Les Coucous Bénévoles, Marc Couroux, Cowpaws, Ensemble Kore, Ensemble QAT, Eve Egoyan, Lori Freedman, Jürg Frey, Gay-Jordan Duo, Hemispheres, Marmots, Natalie Michaud-Alain Trudel-Geneviève Soly, the Modern Quartet, Motion, Opera Aperta, Cléo Palacio-Quintin, Helen Pridmore, Quatuor

Bozzini, the rioT Trio, Sabat-Clarke Duo, Marc Sabat, Sound Pressure, Strange Companions, and Philip Thomas.

Martin is also an active member of Toronto's improvisation and experimental jazz/roots/rock communities performing on live electronics, banjo, melodica, guitar, and hurdy-gurdy. In particular, he performs and records with Eric Chenaux in a number of contexts and is electric guitarist in the Ryan Driver Quartet.

Linda C Smith *Thought and Desire* (2007)

The other two, slight air and purging fire,
Are both with thee, wherever I abide;
The first my thought, the other my desire,
These present-absent with swift motion slide.
For when these quicker elements are gone
In tender embassy of love to thee,
My life, being made of four, with two alone
Sinks down to death, oppressed melancholy,
Until life's composition be recured
By those swift messengers returned from thee,
Who even but now come back again assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.
This told, I joy, but then no longer glad,
I send them back again and straight grow sad.
- William Shakespeare, Sonnet 45

Linda Catlin Smith moved to Toronto in 1981, where she produced a series of concerts at Mercer Union Gallery. She was Artistic Director of Arraymusic, one of Toronto's major contemporary music ensembles in Toronto, from 1988 - 1993. She is a member of the performance collective, URGE. She has given lectures at many universities in Canada, and has taught composition privately and at Wilfrid Laurier University. Outside of teaching, her time is devoted to writing music.

Drawn to an ambiguity of harmony and narrative, her work is informed by her appreciation of the work of writers and painters, including: Marguerite Duras, Cormac McCarthy, Cy Twombly, Giorgio Morandi, Mark Rothko, Agnes Martin and Joseph Cornell, among many others.

Her works have been performed by many Canadian ensembles including: Arraymusic, Ensemble Kore, Ergo, Continuum, Vancouver New Music, CBC Vancouver Orchestra, Tapestry new Opera, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, Pacific Baroque Orchestra, Penderecki Quartet, the Bozzini Quartet, and Les Coucous Bénévoles as well as by ensembles and soloists abroad and in the US; she has written works for soloists Elissa Poole (baroque flute), Barbara Pritchard, Eve Egoyan, Stephen Clarke and Anthony de Mare (piano), Colin Tilney (harpsichord), Richard Sacks (percussion), Joseph Petric (accordion) and Robert W. Stevenson (clarinet). Her works have been performed nationally and/or internationally by Arraymusic, the Modern Quartet, Eve Egoyan, Les Coucous Bénévoles, Fibonacci Trio, Bozzini Quartet and the Penderecki Quartet.

Michael Oesterle *Luke* (1996)

Michael Oesterle was born in Ulm, Germany, in 1968. He immigrated to Canada in 1982, and since 1996 has been living in Montréal. He has received several awards, such as the Gaudeamus Prize, the Grand Prize at CBC Radio National Competition

for Young Composers, the Canada Council Jules Léger Prize, and the Canada Council Victor Martyn Lynch-Staunton Award.

Oesterle's works have been performed and commissioned by ensembles and soloists including Ensemble Modern (Frankfurt), Nouvel Ensemble Moderne (NEM), cellist Yegor Dyachkov, Ensemble contemporain de Montréal+ (ECM+), the Ives Ensemble (Amsterdam), sopranos Karina Gauvin and Suzie Leblanc, Ensemble Intercontemporain (Paris), Quatuor Bozzini, Groundswell, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra (MCO), Soundstreams Canada, Asko/Schoenberg Ensemble (Amsterdam), and les Percussions de Strasbourg.

His orchestral works have been performed and commissioned by the Montreal, Winnipeg, Victoria, Calgary, and Vancouver Symphony, as well as The National Arts Orchestra, the Chicago Civic Orchestra, and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra.

He has produced projects in collaboration painter Christine Unger, video/installation artist Wanda Koop and Bonnie Baxter, as well as choreographers Isabelle Van Grimde, Barbara Bourget, and Dominique Porte. He frequently collaborates with animation artist Christopher Hinton, having composed music for several of his films, including CNOTE, which won the 2005 GENIE award for best animated-short.

In 1997 he founded the Montréal based Ensemble KORE with pianist Marc Couroux, and between 2001 and 2004 he was composer-in-residence with l'Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal.

Cassandra Miller *Philip the wanderer* (2012)

commissioned by Philip Thomas with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts

This piece is a transcription of sorts, or an adaptation, a translation, I'm not sure what the right word is. My process began with a short sound file from an album I'd heard once twenty years ago and rediscovered recently, traditional music from Mozambique. Although I react physically to this music, it is certainly exotic - exotic in the sense that it is not me, not my tradition in any way. It feels like an escape. Somehow, I feel much the same way about the piano - it resonates me, but it isn't my native voice.

Finding myself in new territory with the solo piano, I had to leave my regular way of working. This is where the idea of adaptation came into play: my task with this piece was not to find out how to say something I already felt, but rather, to root around until I found myself in material that already existed. Simply put, I worked with the source material and with the piano until I found something there which really moved me. I amplified some things, thinned other sections etc., and I found I was carving out the shape of some kind of imaginary story.

The result is a piece which obsesses over the rhythm of the source material, with its danceable irregularity. I've kept the original pitches intact, amplifying them with blocky triads - and I've kept the rhythm fetishistically accurate to the original, save for a magnifying of the tempo fluctuations. I did not much else really - I played with register, hid a descending scale just about everywhere (out of habit?) - but for the rest, it is simply a transcription of the humanity of a stranger from Mozambique.

The sound world and storyline which surface, however, have nothing at all to do with Africa. The piece turns out to be very much about me, resulting from my personal tastes and my ability to pay absolutely no respect to the original intention of the source material. It is also about Philip - it was constructed as something of a canvas for him to work with: the notation may be precise, but the emotional content (though earnest) is somewhat arbitrary. I've given clues to possible interpretations through

some obscure titles and instructive notes, but I've left it very much in Philip's hands to make sense of the wandering.

[CA]

Composer Cassandra Miller (1976) is the artistic director of Innovations en concert, a non-profit organization which presents experimental music concerts in Montreal. In 2011, she received the Jules-Léger Prize for New Chamber Music for her composition *Bel Canto*. Composition teachers included Christopher Butterfield (University of Victoria), Richard Ayres and Yannis Kyriakides (Royal Conservatory of the Hague), and Michael Finnissy (private study 2012)

Philip Thomas specialises in performing new and experimental music, including both notated and improvised music. He places much emphasis on each concert being a unique event, designing imaginative programmes that provoke and reveal connections. Philip's most recent solo projects have included a showcase of British experimental music in Basel, Switzerland; a 12-hour solo performance of John Cage's *Electronic Music for Piano* as part of hcmf 2010 (subsequently broadcast in part, with interviews, on BBC Radio 3); the UK premiere of Tom Johnson's *The Chord Catalogue*, portrait concerts of Markus Trunk and Laurence Crane; and a survey of the music of Christian Wolff, including a number of UK premieres along with newly commissioned works by Steve Chase, Tim Parkinson and Michael Parsons.

Philip has recently released three CDs: *Fields have Ears*, featuring two solo and one ensemble works by American composer Michael Pisaro; one of improvisations with pianist Chris Burn and bassist Simon H Fell (which has received numerous favourable reviews, including Paris Transatlantic: "a truly outstanding album, one that any self-respecting fan of new music in whatever form can't afford to be without") on the *another timbre* label, and piano music by Tim Parkinson on *Edition Wandelweiser*. His debut solo CD 'Comprovisation' was released in 2007 on the Bruce's Fingers label (BF66). Based upon his recent series of concerts featuring music exploring improvisation and notation, it features music by Mick Beck, Chris Burn, John Cage, Simon H Fell, Michael Finnissy and Paul Obermayer. He also features on the recent James Saunders portrait CD (on *another timbre*). Future releases include the complete piano works of Christian Wolff

Philip is a regular pianist with leading experimental music group Apartment House, winners of the 2012 Royal Philharmonic Society award for Chamber Music and Song, and with whom he has appeared at numerous festivals across Europe and the UK and given a number of broadcasts for the BBC and WDR. Recent performances with them have included a sold-out portrait concert of John Cage at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the International Chamber Music series ('Their performances are always revelatory, and the concert of John Cage's music at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in September 2011 was an epiphany, confirming the status of Apartment House as one of the most innovative and exciting chamber ensembles in Europe.', Royal Philharmonic Society); a performance of John Cage's *Winter Music + Atlas Eclipticalis* at hcmf 2010; a performance of Stockhausen's *Kurzwellen* as part of the BBC/Sound and Music's festival 'Cut 'n' Splice' (subsequently broadcast on BBC Radio 3); John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, James Clarke, Philip Corner, Laurence Crane, Christopher Fox, Rytis Mazulis and Christian Wolff. Recently he performed

John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* with Apartment House as part of a programme which he directed celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1958 New York Town Hall Cage retrospective.

In 2010-11 Philip performed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, as part of their 'Legacy Tour', at the Barbican, London (part of the MCDC's last-ever UK appearances), and in Clermont-Ferrand. Other recent collaborations have included programmes of experimental music with the pianist Ian Pace and a piano and electronics duo with composer James Saunders.

He is currently a Reader at the University of Huddersfield, where he heads the performance curriculum. He writes frequently about performing experimental music and has recently co-edited and contributed to a book of essays about Christian Wolff for Ashgate Publications, *Changing the System: the Music of Christian Wolff*.