

Christopher's Classics - Series XXIV 2019
presents

Mark Menzies
&
Gayle Blankenburg

PIANOS

&
Justin DeHart
&
Roanna Funcke

PERCUSSION

Play:

George Crumb - *Music for a Summer Evening*

Claude Debussy - *En Blanc et noir and Lindaraja*

Steve Reich - *Nagoya Marimbas*

Tuesday, May 21st, 2019, 7.30pm
The Piano, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch

The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.



Presented by
Sunday Classics Inc



Elizabeth Ball Trust



Programme:

Debussy - *En blanc et noir (In black and white; 1915) for two pianos*

Avec emportement (With passion)

Lent sombre (Slow and somber)

Scherzando

- *Lindaraja - (1901) for two pianos*

Steve Reich - *Nagoya Marimbas for two Marimbas*

Interval : 15 minutes

George Crumb - *Music for a Summer Evening for two amplified pianos and percussion (2 players) (1974)*

Nocturnal Sounds (The Awakening)

Wanderer - Fantasy

The Advent

Myth

Music of the Starry Night

Notes

Debussy

Debussy composed his piano duo *En blanc et noir (In black and white; 1915)* during a late creative outburst that also included the *Études* for piano (1915) and the completion of his edition of Chopin's works for the publisher Durand. The three sections of this suite are brilliant and colorful and seem more inspired (if no more original) than the *Études*. The work's originality was, apparently, recognized from the beginning: It was the premiere of *En blanc et noir* that prompted Saint-Saens to exclaim, "*One must at all costs bar the doors of the Institute to a gentleman capable of such atrocities!*"

All three sections are highly effective and convey a depth of feeling occasionally lacking in the *Études*, but which resurfaces in the composer's final works, the *Sonata No. 1 in D minor for cello and piano* (1915) and the *Sonata No. 3 in G major for violin and piano* (1916-1917). The first section, "*Avec emportement*" (With passion) is an energetic waltz that foreshadows the spirit of Ravel's *La valse* (1919-1920) though lacks that work's sardonic nostalgia. "*Lent sombre*" (Slow and sombre) was composed in memory of Debussy's friend Jacques Charlot, killed in World War I. This section, marked by a particular complexity, begins and ends with elegiac passages that flank a central *Allegro*, which itself spans the emotional gamut from despair to elation. (At one point Debussy

quotes from the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.) The concluding section, *Scherzando*, is dedicated to Stravinsky; however, it has more in common with the impish humor of "*Scarbo*" from Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908) than with anything Stravinsky ever wrote. The shortest and least serious section of the suite, the *Scherzando* brings the work to a spirited close.

Lindaraja (1901), never published in Debussy's lifetime, was the composer's first work written expressly for two pianos. The title is derived from the name of one of the garden rooms of the Alhambra, and in this regard the work may be considered something of a forerunner to *La Puerta del Vino* from the second book of *Préludes* (1910 - 13). *Lindaraja* is based on a habanera rhythm and demonstrates a particular subtlety of mood and form.

- With acknowledgment to Steven Coburn

Steve Reich - *Nagoya Marimbas for two Marimbas*

This short piece was commissioned by the Nagoya City Conservatory of Music in Japan for the inauguration of its new hall, Shirakawa Hall. The first performance of the work took place on December 21, 1994.

Nagoya Marimbas is a work in one movement using phase shift techniques developed by Reich in the 1970s. In this piece, the reasons are however more melodically developed, and change more frequently, which brings *Nagoya Marimbas* closer to more recent works of the composer. The piece is also much more difficult to play. It takes about five minutes to complete.

George Crumb

- *Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)*

Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III), for two amplified pianos and percussion, was completed in February 1974. The work was commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and was written specifically for (and is dedicated to) Gilbert Kalish, James Freeman, Raymond DesRoches, and Richard Fitz. These four gifted performers premiered the work at Swarthmore College on March 30, 1974.

The combination of two pianos and percussion instruments was, of course, first formulated by Bela Bartok in his Sonata of 1937, and it is curious that other composers did not subsequently contribute to the genre. Bartok was one of the very first composers to write truly expressive passages for the percussion instruments; since those days there has been a veritable revolution in percussion technique and idiom and new music has inevitably assimilated these developments. The battery of percussion instruments required for *Summer Evening* is extensive and includes vibraphone, xylophone, glockenspiel, tubular bells, crotales (antique cymbals), bell tree, claves, maracas, sleighbells, wood blocks and temple blocks, triangles, and several varieties of drums, tam-tams, and cymbals. Certain rather exotic (and in some cases, quite ancient) instruments are occasionally employed for their special timbral characteristics, for example: two slide-whistles (in "*Wanderer-Fantasy*"); a metal thunder-sheet (in "*The Advent*"); African log drum, quijada del asino (jawbone of an ass), sistrum, Tibetan prayer stones, musical jug, alto recorder; and, in "*Myth*", African thumb piano and guiro (played by the pianists). Some of the more ethereal sounds of *Summer Evening* are

produced by drawing a contrabass bow over tam-tams, crotales, and vibraphone plates. This kaleidoscopic range of percussion timbre is integrated with a great variety of special sounds produced by the pianists. In "*Music of the Starry Night*", for example, the piano strings are covered with sheets of paper, thereby producing a rather surrealistic distortion of the piano tone when the keys are struck.

As in several of my other works, the musical fabric of *Summer Evening* results largely from the elaboration of tiny cells into a sort of mosaic design. This timehallowed technique seems to function in much new music, irrespective of style, as a primary structural modus. In its overall style, *Summer Evening* might be described as either more or less atonal, or more or less tonal. The more overtly tonal passages can be defined in terms of the basic polarity F#-D# minor (or, enharmonically, Gb-Eb minor). This (most traditional) polarity is twice stated in "The Advent" - in the opening crescendo passages ("majestic, like a larger rhythm of nature"), and in the concluding "*Hymn for the Nativity of the Star-Child*". It is stated once again in "*Music of the Starry Night*", with the quotation of passages from Bach's D# minor fugue (*Well-tempered Clavier*, Book II) and a concluding "*Song of Reconciliation*" in Gb (overlaid by an intermittently resounding "*Fivefold Galactic Bells*" in F#). One other structural device which the astute listener may perceive is the isorhythmic construction of "*Myth*", which consists of simultaneously performed tales of 13, 7, and 11 bars. I feel that *Summer Evening* projects a clearly articulated large expressive curve over its approximately 40-minute duration. The first, third, and fifth movements, which are scored for the full ensemble of instruments and laid out on a large scale, would seem to define the primary import of the work (which might be interpreted as a kind of "cosmic drama"). On the other hand, "*Wanderer - Fantasy*" (mostly for the two pianos alone) and the somewhat atavistic "*Myth*" (for percussion instruments) were conceived of as dream-like pieces functioning as intermezzos within the overall sequence of movements. The three larger movements carry poetic quotations which were very much in my thoughts during the sketching-out process, and which, I believe, find their symbolic resonance in the sounds of *Summer Evening*. "*Nocturnal Sounds*" is inscribed with an excerpt from Quasimodo: "*Odo risonanze effimere, obliò di piena notte nell'acqua stellata*" ("I hear ephemeral echoes, oblivion of full night in the starred water"); "*The Advent*" is associated with a passage from Pascal: "*Le silence Éternel des espaces infinis m'effraie*" ("The eternal silence of infinite space terrifies me"); and the last movement, "*Music of the Starry Night*", cites these transcendently beautiful images of Rilke: "*Und in den Nächten fällt die schwere Erde aus allen Sternen in die Einsamkeit. Wir alle fallen. Und doch ist Einer, welcher dieses Fallen unendlich sanft in seinen Händen hält*" ("And in the nights the heavy earth is falling from all the stars down into loneliness. We are all falling. And yet there is One who holds this falling endlessly gently in His hands.")

In closing, I feel that it would be most appropriate to emphasize the critically important role of the performer in the evolution of any new musical language. New music, with its enormous technical and expressive demands, depends for its very existence on a type of pioneer performer, who, in fact, is engaged in creating and codifying the *Aufführungspraxis* of our own time. The number of such dedicated performers is perhaps not large; fortunately, however, they do exist, and I have enjoyed my collaboration with four of them in this recording of *Music for a Summer Evening*. Their efforts were tireless, their artistic purpose single-minded and uncompromising. For this I am most grateful.

Programme notes in CD booklet, Elektra Nonesuch 9-79149-2 by George Crumb

Biographies

Mark Menzies

Described in the *Los Angeles Times* as an “extraordinary musician” and a “riveting violinist”, Mark Menzies’ career as a viola and violin virtuoso, chamber musician, pianist, conductor and advocate of contemporary music, has seen performances in Europe, Brazil, Mexico, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and across the United States. Committed to performing a wide range of contemporary repertoire, Mark Menzies has collaborated closely with composers as well known, and varied, as Sofia Gubaidulina (including 5 concerts of her music at REDCAT, LA in 2011); Sylvano Bussotti (*di Rocco sesanta fest alla viola* is written for him); Brian Ferneyhough (most notably for concerts in New York in 2001 at Carnegie Hall); Roger Reynolds (a recent world premiere recording of *imAge viola* written for him); Michael Finnissy (the world premiere recording of his violin concerto *...above earth’s shadow* with Mark as soloist will be released this year); Helmut Lachenmann (including a New York performance in 2001, of Nono’s *La Lanontananza* with Lachenmann realizing the tape parts); Peter Maxwell Davies (Dartington Festival devoted to Davies’ music in 2008, including Menzies’ conducting the opera *The Lighthouse*); Elliott Carter (with his supervision of the recording of *Tempo e tempi* on Mode records a highlight); Liza Lim; Rand Steiger (*Template 2* is a violin concerto written for him); Christian Wolff (resulting in, amongst other performances and recordings, a forthcoming release of the complete string quartets with the Formalist quartet).

Not interested in being a ‘specialist’ in anything, Mark Menzies’ repertoire is very varied and as a recitalist will play anything from Medieval repertoire to the most recent, including music from ‘crossover’ concepts. Menzies’ professional performing career began with a concerto appearance at the 1988 International Festival of the Arts in Wellington New Zealand, with Bruch’s First Violin concerto live-televised - Maxim Shostakovich conducting the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Subsequently, Mark performed frequently as a concerto and recital violin soloist in New Zealand, the US and Great Britain, with highlights including the Alban Berg Violin concerto with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra in 1991, the Brahms Double concerto with the same orchestra in 1992, and the Vivaldi *Four Seasons* in a tour with the Auckland Philharmonia in 1997. Since then, Menzies’ interest in more collaborative musical ventures has meant that recital and concerto appearances have been a rarer occasion: however, in 2000 the Atheneum of La Jolla invited Mark Menzies and Sandra Brown to present the complete Beethoven violin sonatas; in 1998 (Porto Alegre, Brazil), 1999 (University of California, San Diego) and 2008 (California Institute of the Arts) a single-concert complete performance of the Bach 6 sonatas and partitas; soloist with the Santa Cecilia orchestra, Los Angeles (2008, 2010); and with more recent concerto performances including the premiere of Rand Steiger’s *Template 2* (written for Menzies) at the SICPP festival in Boston, US, in June 2015; Schnittke’s epic and rarely performed *Concerto grosso No 2* with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra and cellist Ashley Brown in June 2014.

Mark Menzies has a considerable reputation as a chamber music performer; currently he is violist and violinist in the Formalist Quartet (founded in 2006), whose discography includes a forthcoming release of the complete quartets by Christian Wolff. A significant number of Menzies' (solo) recordings are premiere performances: Michael Finnis's *...above earth's shadow* (with 175 East); Roger Reynolds' *Process and Passion* (with cellist Hugh Livingston) and *imAge viola*; Barry Shrader's *Fallen Sparrow*; James Newton's *In a moment...* (as pianist on a compilation album); Stuart Saunders Smith *Time Comes Full Circle* (with cellist Frank Cox); Anne LeBaron *Pope Joan* and *A to Zythum* (as conductor); Mark Applebaum *56 1/2 FT* (conducting inauthentic). Collaborative musical ventures have been an important part of Mark Menzies' musical contribution. While living in London 1988-1993, with conductor Thomas Dausgaard, was the co-founder and artistic director of The Salomon Ensemble: in addition to considerable concertizing, the group's first CD of Edvard Grieg's complete string orchestra repertoire, was nominated for the European equivalent of the Grammy. Upon moving to the US in 1991, Menzies had a leadership role in the Bloomington, Indiana-based New Vienna Ensemble. In 1998 he joined Ensemble Sospeso, where he became first violinist and artistic advisor to the board when the Ensemble moved to New York.

Menzies' compositions are increasingly played across the globe, with recent premieres in The Netherlands, Italy, Los Angeles, San Diego and Christchurch.

Mark is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, London, an honour bestowed in 2014.

Viola, violin professor and coordinator of conducted ensembles at the California Institute of the Arts, from 1999-2016, where he curated a remarkable series of concerts at REDCAT at Disney Hall in downtown Los Angeles, Mark Menzies has taken up a Professor of Music position at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand, since June 2016. Now based in the New Zealand, he is, for parts of the year, resident in the US and other places abroad.

Gayle Blankenburg

Gayle Blankenburg has performed extensively to great critical acclaim as a solo pianist, chamber musician, and vocal accompanist. She was a roster artist with Southwest Chamber Music from 1996 to 2003, with whom she regularly performed and recorded. Among nearly a dozen award-winning CDs recorded for Southwest Chamber Music on Cambria Records are her performances of Elliot Carter's song cycle *Of Challenge and of Love* (with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson) and the Carlos Chavez *Invention for solo piano*. She has also performed with Phyllis Bryn-Julson at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, in New York City at Cooper Union, and in Vienna, Austria in a residency at the Schoenberg Institute. Her recording of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with the LA-based ensemble "inauthentic" has received the highest critical acclaim from *Gramophone Magazine*, *Opera News*, and *The American Record Guide*. Released recently was a CD of solo piano and chamber music works of composer Richard Cameron-Wolfe.

The Los Angeles Times has reviewed her playing on numerous occasions, saying, "Blankenburg played with elegant power and poise... Her crisp touch and light

pedaling produced crystalline, pensive, haunting sequences... This is a gratefully idiomatic piece for a pianist with both power and a palette, requirements Blankenburg met easily.”

Recent performances include a concert at the National Opera Center in New York City last October, four concerts of modern music in New Zealand in mid-March, and all-Beethoven concerts in the Sacramento area in April and May.

Ms. Blankenburg was a student of the distinguished pianists Menahem Pressler (of the Beaux Arts Trio) and Abbey Simon at Indiana University, where she received the Bachelor's and Master's degrees in piano performance, and was also awarded the coveted Performer's Certificate. She is currently on the piano faculties of the Claremont Colleges, teaching at Pomona College and at Scripps College.

Justin DeHart

From Sacramento, California, Justin DeHart is a GRAMMY-nominated performer of contemporary musical styles from classical to pop, and from world to electronic. Justin is a current member of Los Angeles Percussion Quartet (LAPQ) and his musical resume includes performances with the San Diego symphony, pipa master Wu Man, and various pop legends, including Cheap Trick. His debut solo album entitled *Strange Paths* on Innova Recordings (works by Brian Ferneyhough, Iannis Xenakis, Michael Gordon and Stuart Saunders Smith) was lauded as “mesmerizing” by *Percussive Notes* for his “palette of sounds and intricate weaving of lines”. Justin was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship for percussion studies in India and his talents have been featured at concerts around the globe.

Justin holds a B.M. degree from CSU Sacramento, a M.F.A. from the California Institute of the Arts, and a D.M.A. from UC San Diego. He has solo, chamber and contemporary recordings on MCA, Sony, Mode, Innova, Sono Luminus, Albany, New World, HatHut, Populist, Sub Pop, and Skunk Records. A Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Canterbury, in Christchurch, New Zealand, Justin is a Yamaha Performing Artist and an endorser of Black Swamp Percussion, REMO, Sabian, and Innovative Percussion Inc.

Roanna Funcke

Roanna Funcke completed her MusB(hons) Percussion at the University of Canterbury where she has also served as a tutor in percussion performance.

She is Associate Principal Percussionist with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra, and also performs with Pandemonium and the Christchurch Bicycle band.

Roanna has been ‘Artist in Residence’ at three Christchurch schools. She has also toured internationally with the National Band of NZ and Woolston Brass, and studied marimba performance in America.

Roanna is Assistant Music Director and percussion tutor at the Christchurch School of Music. She is also mum to one, and loves taking in the fantastic scenery of New Zealand via running events and tramping.

Next Concert:

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Kenneth Young - *Trio for Horn, Violin & Piano*
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