

Sonorities

FESTIVAL OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC

Concert 3: Curator – Pedro Rebelo
Friday 8th April, 20:00
Sonic Arts Research Centre

Xinh-Xo Nguyen - The Road Home
John Ferguson and Robert van Heumen - Whistle Pig Saloon
Frances Lynch - Works by John Cage and Alejandro Viñao

Xinh-Xo Nguyen - The Road Home

The Road Home is written for the traditional Vietnamese 16 strings zither and live electronics, which is processed in Max/MSP. The interactivity between the two is achieved by various real-time effects controlled by different algorithms based on the audio analysis of the zither performance. The piece features a sonic mixture of East and West with various sound elements from the acoustic instrument, vocalization and electronics.

"Just close your eyes. Let me bring you with me on a journey back to the East, where I used to run with bare feet and breath in the moistened air."

Xinh-Xo Nguyen was born in Hanoi, Vietnam in 1978. He started to study classical violin at age of 5 at Hanoi Conservatory of Music under the instruction of his mother, a violin professor. He moved to the US in 1999 to pursue a degree in Computer Technology and has since been active as a composer, improviser and electronic musician. Xinh-Xo has won many awards at the Songwriting Competition in Vietnam. He is currently a MFA student in Electronic Music & Recording Media Program at Mills College, California, where he is studying with Chris Brown.

John Ferguson and Robert van Heumen - Whistle Pig Saloon

Wide and disjointed, blending a fractured pulse with dynamic texture, this is an immersive and disorientating music; sometimes subtle, often invasive, always close. This live-audio duo foregrounds liveness and real-time decision making, there is no score, each performance features a combination of structured parts with improvised sections. Whilst human effort is celebrated and is clearly discernable, this project aims to extend notions of virtuosity beyond those that emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries. We do not seek to portray 'effortless' technique, but believe that the 'on-stage' relationship between human performers and computer technologies need not be hierarchical. Utilising a hybrid guitar (extended with motion-sensitive electronics) alongside an advanced table-top computer instrument, this collaboration focuses on filtering and constraining computational automation as often as contributing directly legible actions. By negotiating tactile physical controllers we amplify the exertion of physical gesture, but via the creative possibility of

computational inertia, the virtuosity of the interface is perceived (almost) as a third performer. We do not seek to dominate and control our technologies, but to provoke a series of engaging struggles in a lively and cohesive form, thus articulating the question: are we performing the technology or is it performing us?

John Ferguson is a post-digital/electronic musician and lecturer in music at Kingston University: London. He completed his PhD at Newcastle University in 2009, this project charts an idiosyncratic zone within the continuum of what it is to be a live musician at the dawn of the 21st century. John's current research focuses on tactile approaches towards the live manipulation of audio/visual materials, his pseudo-anthropomorphic practice raises questions of causality, agency and legibility. From his perspective, music is an emergent form, radiating from pre-composed situations and instrumental ecologies, the performance of and in which it is improvised.

<http://johnrobertferguson.com>

Robert van Heumen is an electronic musician-composer using an extended laptop instrument to perform highly immersive and hyperdynamic electro-acoustic music. With a joystick and other tactile controllers, live sampled source sounds are gesturally manipulated and reworked within open ended narratives, exploring cycles of repetition beyond episodic improvisation. He is constantly searching for new strategies for live sampling and for the perfect balance between free improvisation and structure. The laptop is used in an instrumental, tactile way, connecting action to sound like any acoustic instrument. Robert is also a composer of fixed-media works and former project manager of STEIM.

<http://hardhatarea.com>

Frances Lynch - Works by John Cage and Alejandro Viñao

Alejandro Viñao – Chicos del 21

The theme of Chicos del 21 is the fate of deprived children in the 21st century, both in urban and rural areas, in rich and poor parts of the world. In spite of all the technological and social developments of the second half of the 20th century the number of children living in extreme poverty and surrounded by violence and war has dramatically increased in that last few decades. This composition is not a protest or political work in that I do not believe that a piece of music can significantly alter the condition of the world. The work is rather a reflection or impression caused on me by the fate of these children.

The first movement 'Tamara' is about a young girl playing hide-and-seek in a war torn area somewhere in the third world.

The second movement 'El Sueño de Mobila' (Mobila's Dream) is about a child who is still hungry when he goes to sleep. The text resembles a lullaby (berceuse).

The third movement 'Street Kids' is about the children who live in the streets of cities around the world and are known by a multitude of names in different languages. The very fact that every language has at least one name for these children of the streets illustrates how generalized the problem is. As the text of this movement I chose the simple enumeration of the names by which street kids are known, such as "straßenkinder" in Germany, "polillas" in Bolivia, "balados" in Congo, "street kids" in England, "scugnizzi" in Naples, etc.

Chicos del 21 was jointly commissioned by Arts Zoyd and le Groupe du Recherches Musicale (GRM). Carl Faia was responsible for the research and development of musical computer programmes.

John Cage – Song Books

Song Books (Solos for Voice 3-92) is a collection of short works by John Cage, composed and compiled by the composer in 1970. It contains pieces of four kinds: songs, songs with electronics, directions for a theatrical performance, and directions for a theatrical performance with electronics.

Song Books was published by in 1970 as three volumes: volume one contained Solos for Voice 3-58, volume two contained Solos for Voice 59-92, and the third volume, titled "Instructions", contains various tables and other materials necessary for performance of some of the pieces. The work explores a very wide variety of notation systems. Some Solos are given in standard notation, others employ a special brand of notation with circles of different sizes and lines instead of notes, still others are systems of dots and lines, etc. Some are not notated at all: the text is given using different fonts and font sizes for different words, or sometimes changing in mid-sentence. Certain Solos consist only of instructions to the performer, ie. what he or she should do and how, although these instructions may be rather free (for instance, "Perform a disciplined action" may be an instruction, and according to Cage it does not mean "Do whatever you want", but rather a request to discipline oneself and/or free oneself of one's likes and dislikes).

Most of the texts are from Henry David Thoreau's journals (and Volume 3 contains a photograph of Thoreau as material for one of the Solos); other authors whose texts Cage used in the work include Norman O. Brown, Marcel Duchamp, Buckminster Fuller and Marshall McLuhan.

Frances Lynch was born in Glasgow, Scotland. As the Artistic Director of electric voice theatre Frances has performed for Radio France, ZKM in Germany; Gothenburg Opera, Sweden; IRCAM, Paris; & the Almeida, London, and produced new works by Judith Weir, and staged versions of pieces by Berio and Kagel among others.

The company has been touring Alejandro Viñao's "*Baghdad Monologue*" to France, Portugal, Scandinavia and England; is developing a new opera with Paul Barker entitled "Nye tand eh?", and regularly take part in projects for The Centre for research in Opera and Music Theatre at the University of Sussex with Nicholas Till. The electric voice theatre is currently engaged in the Grid Project, a human sequencer for audiences! - which is touring to Festivals all through the summer.

As a soloist Frances has appeared with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and performed John Cage's *Songbooks* for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Her solo voice and electronics programmes have travelled to festivals worldwide for many years. In June last year she premiered Alejandro Viñao's "Chicos del 21" for GRM at Radio Frances, Paris. Later this year she is performing a programme of Shakespeare-centred works by Portuguese composer Isabel Soveral in Aveiro, and will give a solo concert at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge in May, using both works performed here.

She is an associate of SOND'AR-te Electric Ensemble in Lisbon, appearing with them last year in Toulouse; gave Schönberg's "*Pierrot Lunaire*" in the Azores, and, at the City of London Festival, she sang "*VOI(REX)*" by Philippe Leroux, and a new commission from Miguel Azguime.

Frances is in partnership with pianist Mark Troop. As Big Mouth Piano Tales they tour the UK presenting interactive concerts for children.

Her composition work includes writing for the London Gaelic Choir and Big Mouth Piano Tales; developing new repertoire for children's choirs in Berkshire, and creating media music with partner Herbie Clarke.

She runs a small specialist teaching practice in London and last year was engaged on a Project with Errollyn Wallen and Pegasus Opera working on a new children's opera and training young singers in schools across London. She gives workshops for all ages in the UK and is at the moment working with Baytree Centre, Brixton, with whom she has developed a number of projects.