

MUSIC AT AN EXHIBITION

NOTATING
BEAUTY

THAT
MOVES

17.3.2018 SAT 6PM
18.3.2018 SUN 3PM

VOCALIZING

MOTION



Programme

Luciano Berio **Sequenza III** (1965)
Cathy Berberian **Stripsody** (1966)
Alain Chiu / John Cage **Aria** (1966), with Fontana Mix:
 Repetition and Difference
 (World première of Alain Chiu's version of Fontana Mix,
 commissioned by Hong Kong Sinfonietta)

Performers

Voice Artist/Mezzosoprano
Lore Lixenberg (guest performer)

Laptop
Alain Chiu (guest performer)

Violin
Eiko Hosaka

Cello
Park Si-won

Clarinet
Fong Hiu-kai Johnny

Piano
Alan Chu

The malleability of the human voice makes it ideally suited to musical representation of visual motion. This concert focuses on the legacy of composer and vocalist Cathy Berberian, a pioneer in graphical notation, who appropriated the moving bubbles and exploding gestures of comic strips as notational tools in *Stripsody*. Berberian was perhaps better known for her association with composers Luciano Berio and John Cage, two lifelong professional partnerships that resulted in the birth of two groundbreaking works in unconventional notational technique – *Sequenza III* and *Aria*. The three compositions together chart a continuum of approaches in inscribing the voice.

Programme Notes

Luciano Berio
Sequenza III (1965)

The composer wrote: "The voice carries always an excess of connotations, whatever it is doing. From the grossest of noises to the most delicate of singing, the voice always means something, always refers beyond itself and creates a huge range of associations. In *Sequenza III* I tried to assimilate many aspects of everyday vocal life, including trivial ones, without losing intermediate levels or indeed normal singing. In order to control such a wide range of vocal behaviour, I felt I had to break up the text in an apparently devastating way, so as to be able to recuperate fragments from it on different expressive planes, and to reshape them into units that were not discursive but musical. The text had to be homogeneous, in order to lend itself to a project that consisted essentially of exorcising

the excessive connotations and composing them into musical units. This is the 'modular' text written by Markus Kutter for *Sequenza III*:

*Give me
a few words
for a woman
to sing
a truth
allowing us
to build a house
without worrying
before night comes*

"In *Sequenza III* the emphasis is given to the sound symbolism of vocal and sometimes visual gestures, with their accompanying 'shadows of meaning', and the associations and conflicts suggested by them. For this reason *Sequenza III* can also be considered as a dramatic essay whose story, so to speak, is the relationship between the soloist and her own voice.

"*Sequenza III* was written in 1965 for Cathy Berberian."

Cathy Berberian

Stripsody (1966)

Between 1965 and 1966, Luciano Berio was composing his *Sequenza III*. Cathy Berberian – who at the time was still Berio's muse and fellow worker, but no longer his wife (they had divorced in 1964) – was writing a composition in which she used sonic material derived from comic-strips. In the mid-1960s, comics were undergoing an artistic re-evaluation and a scrupulous semiotic investigation. Umberto Eco, for instance, wrote about comics in *Apocalypse Postponed*, originally published in 1964. On the other hand, since 1961, and precisely with his *Look Mickey*, Roy Lichtenstein had started using the style of comic-strips and in 1963 he depicted his famous *Drowning Girl*. Nevertheless, we cannot consider Berberian's composition merely as a musical reflection on comics, nor the acoustic counterpart of these innovative tendencies. Her decision to use comics onomatopoeias as raw material for a musical composition does not simply mirror Berio's intent, but also represents a radically new paradigm and a totally different musical conception (Andrea Garbuglia).

John Cage

Aria (1985) (performed with Fontana Mix)

The score for this virtuosic work consists of 20 pages of graphically-notated music, each equating to 30 seconds in performance. That said, pages may be performed over longer or shorter time spans to create a program of a determined time-length. *Aria* may be performed as a solo, or with *Fontana Mix* and/or with any of the parts comprising *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*. The text consists of isolated vowels and consonants, as well as words, from Armenian, Russian, Italian, French, and English. The notation is colourful and graphic, consisting, essentially, of wavy lines in different colours and 16 black squares denoting "non musical" vocal noises. The colours denote different singing styles, which are determined by the singer prior to performance. Cage used *Fontana Mix* as his composing means to create *Aria*, a work with which it is

frequently performed. *Aria* was dedicated to Cathy Berberian (excerpted from the John Cage Foundation website, http://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=29, accessed 16 March 2018).

In this concert, *Aria* will be performed with a new interpretation of *Fontana Mix* by composer Alain Chiu.

Alain Chiu

Fontana Mix: Repetition and Difference

(World première commissioned by Hong Kong Sinfonietta)

The composer wrote: "The title, *Repetition and Difference*, is a literary inversion of the title of a book written by Gilles Deleuze. There is not one binding philosophy behind this piece but rather, multi-fold inspirations taken from Deleuze's epistemology, *mono no aware* and psychoacoustics. The one recurring topic that unifies these seemingly unrelated school of thoughts is their fascination of time and repetition. *Repetition and Difference* is an attempt to 'find', recreate and experiment on the effects of recurring events. More precisely, an attempt to explore the aesthetic and psychoacoustical implications of repetition.

"*Mono no aware* (物の哀れ) describes an indescribable sadness one feels about the passing of time and things. A Japanese version of nostalgia, if you would, that is exemplified by cyclical events. The emotion comes from the ability to recognize such patterns and the inability to change. It is this inexplicable feeling that *Repetition and Difference* is trying to capture.

"Five Japanese *haikus*, old and new, are deconstructed to their syllabic essences and reconstructed with musical transcription. These transcribed phrases form the backbone of the work: some phrases are cut up to micro-second chunks while others are lengthened from a 3-second intelligible phrase to a 15-minute nonsensical ambient sound.

"Repetitions or different lengths are scattered throughout the piece in a seemingly random order. The recurring repeats are interrupted by spasmodic 'musical' intrusions. Juxtaposition of the nonsensical and musical ideas creates a disjunct yet organic stream of thought.

"In response to John Cage's *Aria*, *Repetition and Difference* requires musicians to perform the piece in ten different techniques and styles. Each signified by a corresponding 'movements'. These movements are re-organised in reference to another piece by John Cage: *Fontana Mix*. This piece may be performed as a standalone work or in conjunction with John Cage's indeterminate works. For the première, John Cage's *Aria* is performed alongside."