

OPUSNOVUS

TUESDAY, 12 APRIL 2022, 7.30 PM
YST CONSERVATORY CONCERT HALL

PROGRAMME NOTES

GYÖRGI LIGETI

Ramifications (1968)

Born in Transylvania, Romania, György Ligeti (1923-2006) was a Hungarian composer. Studies in composition commenced after high school at the Cluj Conservatory (1942-43) under the tutelage of Ferenc Farkas. He also took private lessons from Hungarian composer Pál Kadosa during summers in Budapest.

After 1943, due to the Second World War, Ligeti's musical studies were halted. He was forced to join the Jewish labor battalion in January 1944, but in October the same year, he escaped and returned to Transylvania. After the war, Ligeti resumed his music education with Farkas at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, graduating in 1949. With the help of Kodály, Ligeti received a teaching position in the Franz Liszt Academy of Music as a Professor of Harmony, Counterpoint and Analysis in 1950. During the Hungarian revolution in 1956, he fled to Vienna and became an Austrian citizen.

Ligeti then went to Cologne, where he met contemporaries such as Stockhausen and Herbert Eimert and learnt techniques of avant-garde music. He was also exposed to electronic sound manipulation techniques from working in centres of new music such as the West German Radio Studio, creating works like *Artikulation* (1958). While Ligeti's early compositions show influences from Wagner, Richard Strauss Stravinsky, and especially Bartók, it was during this period that Ligeti's style transitioned from one that synthesizes folk music to one with more radical avant-garde approaches.

Around this time, Ligeti composed some of his most influential orchestral works, *Apparitions* (1958-59) and *Atmosphères* (1961). These consists of an extensive use of micropolyphony, a technique inspired by the polyphony of Renaissance composers like Ockeghem and Palestrina that uses multiple melodic lines, each with an identical series of pitches but with their own unique rhythmic pattern, layered to create a dense polyphonic texture.

Ramifications, scored for 12 solo strings, was composed in 1968. Related to micropolyphony, this work employs the technique of "net-formations", small musical motifs that repeat and overlap with each other within a similar range, creating the effect

of a single voice, which Ligeti termed unification. As the parts diverge from each other, widening in range, a ramification, as per the composer's terminology, is manifested. The alternation between unification and ramification makes up the form of this piece.

In addition to the concepts of unification and ramification, the piece employs "hyperchromatic harmony" wherein half the performers tune their instruments a quarter-tone higher.

**Contributed by Alicia Diva Chandra, BMus1,
Composition**

JOHN CAGE

Three Dances (1944)

John Cage, an experimental avant-garde composer, was born in Los Angeles on 5th September 1912. His ideas involved a wide range of influences from different cultures - most notably, the I Ching, Buddhism and Hindu rasas. Cage is best known for the controversial 4'33", where he instructs the performer(s) to refrain from playing their instrument(s) throughout the performance. The result is a total of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, or as Cage describes: "There is no such thing as an empty space or an empty time. There is always something to see, something to hear. In fact, try as we may to make a silence, we cannot."

Three Dances was commissioned by the piano duo Arthur Gold and Robert Fizdale. It was composed in 1944 and premiered in 1945, originally used as music for Merce Cunningham's dance piece *Dromenon*. (Cunningham and Cage were lifelong partners, collaborating consistently until Cage's death in 1992.) The work uses two amplified pianos, each receiving 36 unique preparations via the insertion of objects - coins, screws, pieces of plastic, furniture bolts and weather stripping - between the strings.

The piano works of one of his composition teachers, Henry Cowell, might have been the catalyst to Cage's innovation of the prepared piano. Cage was particularly fond of Cowell's *The Banshee*, in which the pianist plucks and mutes the piano strings with his fingers and hands. Cage's piano preparation experimentation first began in 1938, when he needed a percussion ensemble to perform in a small space with only a piano available. What resulted was a collection of new timbral possibilities for the piano: some sounds retain a degree of pitch while others become entirely percussive. The sound has often been compared to Indonesian Gamelan, which Cage clearly evokes with the use of polyrhythms, metrical shifts, and a sense of continuous musical drive.

Cage structured the dances around tempo and rhythm. He grouped the music into nine sections with a pattern of 2-5-2; 2-6-2; 2-7-2, which amounts to 30 bars of music per section. This pattern is consistent across each section, but the rhythms vary according to the small rhythmic groupings. This means that the contents of each section are not always the same, except for the ninth section, which is a repeat of the eighth. With that, we can see the influence of Indian rhythmic concepts, specifically the *tala*, affecting the way Cage treats groupings. The phrase lengths change with the tempo, and

some phrases are repeated on a different beat. This rhythmic play can be heard throughout the piece, and by the end of it, one might wonder if they had sat through a performance by a virtuosic piano duo or an African percussion ensemble.

**Contributed by Tan Soon Chai Cliff, BMus4,
Composition**

RUDOLF KELTERBORN

Oktett (1969)

Rudolf Kelterborn was a Swiss musician and composer born on 3 September 1931 in Basel. Among his best-known works are his operas *An Angel Comes to Babylon* and *The Cherry Orchard*, both of which were premiered at the Zurich Opera House in 1977 and 1984 respectively, gaining international recognition. In the later years of his life, Kelterborn found a very personal tone in his works, described as “almost a kind of musical exuberance”. These compositions were like “old works” full of freshness, directness and depth.

Kelterborn studied at the Basel Academy of Music under the tutelage of Gustav Güldenstein and Walther Geiser for composition and Alexander Krannhals for conducting. He went to Zürich, Salzburg and Detmold in the early 1950s to further his composition studies. After his studies, he taught at the Basel Academy of Music (1955-60), the North-West German Music Academy (1960-68), the Zürich University of the Arts (1968-75), and the Staatlichen Hochschule für Musik in Karlsruhe (1980-83). He was the editor-in-chief of the *Schweizerische Musikzeitung* from 1969–75. In the 1970s, he became the head of the music magazine and

music department of Radio DRS (now SRF) and was the director of the Basel Academy of Music from 1983, launching the Basel Music Forum in 1987. In 1984, he was awarded the composer's prize of the Association of Swiss Musicians and the Kunstpreis of the City of Basel for his contributions to the music scene. Kelterborn regularly appeared as a guest conductor in performances of his own works until 1996 and lectured in various countries before withdrawing from public life.

Oktett from 1969 is scored for clarinet, horn, bassoon, 2 violins, viola, cello and double bass. The composer applies a precisely coordinated serial organization in which quantitative values of duration form a recurrent series; changes in tempo are also subjected to serialization. Both melody and harmony are derived from a tone row in which the dissonant intervals of the major seventh and minor second are prominent. Also notable is a clear juxtaposition of different layers of sounds - for instance, a low bassline against music in a higher register. Throughout the music, there are also instances where a quickly running line or detached musical line is played while other instruments hold long notes. Smoothly flowing lines reoccur with variation. They are blurred through polyrhythm,

changing meter, and canon.

*Contributed by Rachel Aow (Access to
Composition, YST)*

KLAUS LANG

The Ocean of Yes and No (2008)

Klaus Lang (*1971 Graz / Austria) lives in Steirisch Lassnitz (Austria). He studied composition and theory of music (with H.M. Preßl, B. Furrer and Y. Pagh-Paan) and organ. Klaus Lang loves tea and dislikes lawnmowers and Richard Wagner. Klaus Lang's music is not a means to convey extramusical contents, such as emotions, philosophical or religious ideas, political propaganda, advertisement etc... His music is no language used to communicate non-musical content. Music is seen as a free and selfstanding acoustical object. In his work he is not using sound, sound is explored and given the opportunity to unfold its inherent rich beauties. Only when sound is just sound it is perceivable as that what it really is: a temporal phenomenon – audible time. Klaus Lang sees time as the genuine material of a composer and at the same time also the fundamental content of music. In his view musical material is time perceived through sound, the object of music is the experience of time through listening.

Courtesy of Klaus Lang's website

