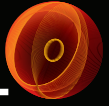


CELEBRATING

2023

YST

Yong Siew Toh
Conservatory
of Music



Late Night

27 OCTOBER 2023, 9PM
YST ORCHESTRA HALL



Performers(?) Present

Programme

OPUSNOVUS

WITH

LIEN BOON HUA, CONDUCTOR

PHILIP GLASS

OUR MOVEMENTS FOR TWO PIANOS

RICHARD BARRETT

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

KEVIN VOLANS

STRING QUARTET NO. 1, *WHITE MAN SLEEPS*

PROGRAMME NOTES

PHILIP GLASS: FOUR MOVEMENTS FOR TWO PIANOS (2008)

Philip Glass (b. 1937) is an American composer. Growing up in Baltimore, he studied flute and enrolled at the University of Chicago, where he studied mathematics and philosophy. His interest in atonal music led to study a master's degree in composition at the Juilliard School of Music.

Finding himself dissatisfied with what was considered modern music then, he went to Paris where he studied under Nadia Boulanger (who also taught Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson and Quincy Jones) and worked closely with sitar virtuoso and composer, Ravi Shankar. Through his acquaintance with Shankar, Glass developed a compositional style which abandoned traditional formal qualities such as harmony, tempo and melody, and delved into Minimalism. Glass preferred to refer to the style as "music with repetitive structures". Much of his early works were based on extended reiteration of brief, elegant melodic fragments that wove in and out of an aural tapestry. He returned to New York and formed the Philip Glass Ensemble - seven musicians playing keyboards and a variety of woodwinds, amplified and fed through a mixer.

Glass is the first composer to win a wide, multi-generational audience in the opera house, the concert hall, the dance world, in film and in popular music simultaneously. His operas such as *Einstein on the Beach* and *Satyagraha* earned him broader acclaim. He has written music for experimental theatre and for Academy Award-winning pictures such as *The Hours*, *Kundun* and *Koyaanisqatsi*, a film that is possibly the most radical and influential in combining sound and vision since *Fantasia*. He has collaborated with many rock, pop and world artists such as Leonard Cohen, David Bowie, David Byrne and Paul Simon. He was awarded the Japan Art Association's Praemium Imperiale in 2012 and was named a Kennedy Center Honoree in 2018.

Four Movements for Two Pianos (2008) was commissioned by the Klavier Festival Ruhr 2008 and premiered by pianists Dennis Russell Davies and Maki Namekawa on 7 July 2008. Unlike Glass's earlier works, this piece is not as minimalistic as before. The compact harmonies and dense texture of the music stand in contrast to his earlier pieces of the past 15 years. Repetition and rhythm still form a substantial part of the structural dynamic of the work, but it no longer dominates. Throughout the piece, Glass has each pianist exchange roles freely, and does not limit each performer to a certain range of the piano.

The first movement starts in mid-melodic flight, showcasing a dense web of cross rhythms. Firm octaves cut through the dense textures. The second movement is slow and contemplative, displaying gentle and small shifting harmonies. The third movement is the most complicated rhythmically and harmonically. The music also goes back and forth between F major and F minor. The fourth movement starts low dynamically and range-wise, performing a chromatic melody on the second piano. Syncopations and fast ostinati propel the music forward, developing the music further.

Notes by Tan Wei Ling Jodi (BMus3, Composition)

PROGRAMME NOTES

RICHARD BARRETT: NEWS FROM NOWHERE (2011)

Born in Swansea, Wales and currently based in The Hague, **Richard Barrett (b. 1959)** is an active composer, performer and writer. After initially earning a degree in genetics and microbiology from University College London in 1980, Barrett studied music and composition with Peter Wiegold and participated in the 1984 Darmstädter Ferienkurse, where he met composers such as Brian Ferneyhough and Hans-Joachim Hespos.

Since then, Barrett has been highly involved and successful in composition, receiving several awards including the Kranichsteiner Musikpreis in 1986 and the Gaudeamus Prize in 1989, and winning the Chamber Music category of the 2003 British Composer Awards. Beyond his long-term collaborations with the ELISION Ensemble, Barrett has also written for Ensemble Studio6, Ensemble Musikfabrik and soundinitiative, among others. Also active as a performer of electronic and improvisatory music, he performs in the electronic duo FURT and electroacoustic octet FORCH (with Paul Obermayer), the Evan Parker Electro-Acoustic Ensemble and improvising ensembles such as SKEIN and Colophony. Barrett is a Professor of Creative Music Research at the Leiden University and teaches at the Institute of Sonology in the Royal Conservatory of The Hague.

Barrett's compositions often form large extensive cycles and incorporate elements of improvisation. Inspired by his experience performing Cornelius Cardew's improvisatory piece *The Great Learning*, Barrett was drawn to the work's incorporation of both precomposed musical frameworks and free improvisation, noting that the "anarchic" free improvisations were imbued with "disciplined" qualities of the preceding material. He experimented in his works with different precomposed improvisatory frameworks which allowed simultaneously for a clarity of musical identity and freedom for performers to "use their imagination and sense of responsibility", akin to how "a society in balance with itself might become self-organised".

Sociopolitical commentary often forms the subject of his works. His 20-work cycle *CONSTRUCTION* was conceived as the finale of an even larger cycle titled *Resistance & Vision*, motivated by his resistance against the penetration of corporate values in modern culture and his vision for counteracting this through music. *CONSTRUCTION* itself was inspired by Soviet architect Vladimir Tatlin's unrealised architectural project – the *Monument to the Third International* – a key symbol of the Constructivist movement which also symbolised for Barrett a "monument to all unrealised and unrealisable utopian visions".

news from nowhere (2011) is the tenth work from CONSTRUCTION. Its title references that of a late 19th Century post-technological “utopian romance” written by William Morris, which envisions 21st century society as a utopian neo-medieval world where private property and government are abolished. Reflecting Morris’ “naïve fantasy of a non-futuristic future”, the piece presents the ancient concept of an “ornamented melody” in modern musical contexts.

Barrett provides many detailed but open instructions for the instrumentation and performance techniques to be used. The ensemble is split into 3 layers: 4 wind players, each specified to use at least 3 different instruments – preferably early or folk ones – and change them frequently; a percussionist with a single instrument capable of producing at least 4 distinct timbres in rapid succession; and an unspecified section of at least 3 drone instruments. A single melody line is notated throughout the piece and performed by the winds, each instructed to follow it, ornament or accompany it with specified or optional playing techniques, or freely improvise over it. The piece gradually tends towards more and freer improvisations as it progresses, culminating in a climactic crescendo leading into its intended following work.

Notes by Ong Ping Din (BMus2, Composition)

PROGRAMME NOTES

KEVIN VOLANS: STRING QUARTET NO. 1, "WHITE MAN SLEEPS" (1986)

Kevin Volans (b. 1949) was born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, but is currently an Irish citizen. He completed his Bachelor of Music at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and proceeded to study in Cologne, principally with Karlheinz Stockhausen, later becoming his teaching assistant. Kevin first became known as one of the 50 most important living composers on the list by BBC Music in 1997. He was described by the Village Voice, a New York newspaper, as "one of the most original and unpredictable voices on the planet".

Volans first embarked on a series of pieces based on African compositional techniques in 1979, which led to him discovering his distinctive voice on the European new music circuit. In 1986 Volans began a productive collaboration with the Kronos Quartet. His works *White Man Sleeps* for string quartet and *Pieces of Africa* broke all records for string quartet disc sales. He brought his pieces to a wide audience thanks to performances in festivals such as the Salzburg Festival, Montreal Jazz Festival, Berliner Festwoche, Tokyo Inkspot, Adelaide Festival, Next Wave Festival (New York) and New Music America. In 2009 he was given the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award for the best chamber work performed in Britain. He has been the featured composer in several European festivals of contemporary music and was the featured composer in Prague in November 2017.

Volans' artistic journey has been influenced by a remarkably diverse range of experiences, including his studies under Stockhausen in Cologne, field trips to South Africa to study traditional music, active participation in the New Simplicity movement, his passion for collecting contemporary art and African textiles, friendships with composers like Morton Feldman and Gerald Barry as well as his deep appreciation for virtuoso piano music, which has led him to not only perform but also broadcast and record such music. While Volans possesses a distinctly recognizable and unique musical voice, his compositions resist compartmentalisation. He comfortably traverses conventional musical genres while also venturing into collaborations with artists of other disciplines, including novelist Bruce Chatwin, choreographers Jonathan Burrows, Siobhan Davies, and Shobana Jeyasingh, as well as visual artists William Kentridge and Juergen Partenheimer. A committed modernist, he lives by the tenet: Nothing is given - there should be no received language.

String Quartet No. 1 "White Man Sleeps" (1986) was originally written for two harpsichords, viola da gamba and percussion in African tuning, however, Volans reworked his piece into a string quartet dedicated to the Kronos Quartet. The change from African tuning to Western tuning of equal temperament conceals the source material and makes Volans's musical intentions more obvious to the listeners. The music is largely inspired by African folk music – In the first movement, Volans borrows from the style of Basotho concertina music and features a cyclical 13-beat pattern which fades into the background, making way for a prominent melody led by the violins. This call and response between the two materials eventually leads to the 13-beat pattern being the focus and building up to the climax. The second and fourth movements are inspired by traditional Nyungwe music, the third from San bow music and Volans inserted his own folklore into the fifth movement. All of these African inspirations were placed contrastingly in Western musical molds, such as the 13-beat patterns as well as using interlocking techniques which were not present in the original musical source. This intertwining of cultures also reflects Volans's unique cultural background as being born in South Africa as a white man. The title originates from a moment in nyanga panpipe music where the performers leave off playing their loud pipes for a few cycles and dance only to the sound of their ankle rattles, to let the white landowner sleep – for a minute or two.

Notes by Xiao Wen, Anyamanee Phakhaponwiwat and Lee Yi Xuan (BMus1, Composition)

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