

Somatic Music: An Experiment in Music and Embodied Cognition

With Ensemble Thing and Heather Roche (clarinets)

Lemon Tree, Aberdeen

Wednesday 20th October, 6pm

Programme

Lisa Robertson	<i>Heartwood for solo clarinet</i>
Rūta Vitkauskaitė	<i>Azykhanthropéan Tunes</i>
Oli Jan	<i>Three Singers on Planet M</i> *
Björn Heile	<i>3x10 Musical Actions for Three Socially Distanced Performers</i> *
Martin Iddon	<i>Sapindales</i>
Raymond McDonald	<i>Stolen in a Dreamland Heist</i> *

*world premieres

Programme notes

Lisa Robertson *Heartwood for solo clarinet*

As I run through the forest, heart keeping time, the coniferous scent hits me with a flood of nostalgia and the joyful warmth of real-life, the Earth, wellbeing, connectedness. I revel in the bliss of 'back to nature' until I glimpse the harvest. A stack of felled sitka spruce releasing their bitter, sweet perfume. Despite conflicting thoughts on locking carbon and sustaining human life, I am reminded that this is not a natural forest and also of greater forest destruction worldwide. And yet, somehow, my nostalgic reverie persists and, guilt-ridden, I question myself... and everything.

A theory suggests that trees under threat communicate by scent, sending out warning chemical signals to their neighbours. A further theory says that humans can pick up on these chemical signals, even experiencing a raised blood pressure in a forest

which is not thriving. Can our heart rates be raised by the poor health of a forest we have constructed?

nb. In another land, another forest, the endangered Blackwood's heart is also ripped from the ground. It is scraped and contorted, metal keys affixed and a maker's name stamped. 90% of the tree is wasted and such a mellow sound is harvested, for us, at an unsustainable rate.

Lisa Robertson is a composer from the West Highlands of Scotland, particularly interested in combining sounds from nature and traditional music; examining relationships between people and the land and highlighting environmental concerns. Recently profiled in BBC Music Magazine's 'Rising Stars' feature, she has three times been shortlisted for the Scottish Awards for New Music. Her music has been performed by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Red Note Ensemble, Hebrides Ensemble, EXAUDI, Lucy Schauer and Rolf Hind, among others, and has appeared at festivals including Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Cheltenham Music Festival, Sound Festival, West Cork Chamber Music Festival and on BBC Radio 3.

Currently a PhD candidate at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, she has also gained influence from masterclasses with Brian Ferneyhough, Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Sir James MacMillan. As a National Youth Choirs of Great Britain 'Young Composer', Stainer & Bell, Choir & Organ and NMC Recordings released some of her works. She was recently selected for the RSNO Composers' Hub 2021:22.

Rūta Vitkauskaitė *Azykhantropean Tunes*

Imagine the world long long time ago, before us, humans, roamed this Earth.

Nowadays, archeologists can read dawning of protomusical capacities in traces of lithic industry reaching back to an era long before there existed either music or *Homo Sapiens* to make it. It is being debated whether the first tools were made following the concept or idea, or just as an accidental side-effect of playing and engaging in social interactions. A process of using tools to make music slowly formed part of everyday life within communities over a million years. And just relatively recently it culminated in spectacularly complex modern instruments like bass clarinet, accordion, or violoncello, which not many of us can play.

The piece jumps back and forwards in time and space between clarinet and stone playing, demonstrating the distance of these musical tools, or possibly finding the achraic connection still very present in our modern brains.

The piece was initially commissioned by Musarc choir, and premiered in 2019. An instrumental version for Ensemble Thing is a new version of the same piece, much developed in its concept and musical material. Today you will hear a premiere of this new instrumental version of *Azykhantropean Tunes*.

Ruta Vitkauskaite is a composer, performer, producer and researcher. Her works span from ensemble and orchestral, to collaborative opera in the dark, to experimental projects for one listener.

While working in the field of classical composition, she has also dedicated much of her time for research in collaborative music creation and music personalisation. Ruta has received PhD in Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London in 2017.

In 2020, she has been a recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society composers scheme award.

Her collaborative electro-acoustic opera for blind-folded audience, *Confessions*, created by Spatial Opera Company has won Golden Stage Cross in Lithuania, and since then has toured across Lithuania, Sweden and EU with 47 shows to date. Her *Walking Opera* (opera co-created with local communities and presented as sound-walk around local areas), has been premiered in Aarhus Capital of Culture 2017, and re-created in Notting Hill, London. Her ensemble and orchestral compositions have been five times awarded as Best Composition of the Year by Lithuanian Composer's Union, while her music has been performed in festivals across EU, including Gaudeamus, Operadagen (NL), Apeldoorn, Sound (UK), Nordbeg, BZZZ, Halland (SE), Gaida, NOA (LT), Q-O2 Winter fest (BE), SUSANA (DK) and elsewhere, and has been broadcast on Lithuanian National TV, LRT Classic, BBC Radio 3, Deutschlandradio Kultur (a special one hour long portrait) and many independent radio stations.

Ruta has also been active initiator of experimental music projects, from collaborative groups to large scale festivals: she was director of Druskomanija festival and workshop series the Process in Lithuania for several years, facilitator of New Music Incubator in Nordic and Baltic countries and across EU, facilitator and tutor at ComposersPlus summer academy in Lithuania, and currently – initiator of CoMA, Contemporary Music for All, Glasgow branch.

Oli Jan *Three Singers on Planet M* *

Planet M is a tidally locked planet. It does not rotate; hence, one side is constantly bright and another constantly dark.

Most creatures on planet M inhabit the twilight zone between the scorching bright side and the bleak dark side. For the intelligent life there, such an in-betweenness is an essential motif in their existential experience.

Vocal trio is a common music form in many cultures. In these trios, three singers would spread out diagonally across the ground. One singer is close to the bright side, another close to the dark side, and the third singer in the middle. The themes of such pieces are usually phrases which the three singers would repeat several times in parallelism. They then transpose the phrases individually, recreating the themes in the same intervals but slightly different timbres each time. Subsequently, more singers would move to join the twilight zone in the middle.

When there is one singer on each side, the parallelisms consist of simple ratio intervals. When there are more singers on the twilight zone, the intervals start to become more complex, and dissonances emerge. This correspondence between simple ratio intervals and evenly distributed voices on the three side represents Planet M inhabitants' idea that harmony occurs only when equilibrium is kept. Thus, these pieces could be performed, but they also have non-performative nature. They can be practiced with the three singing members alone, which would be an exercise where they transform their experience of in-betweenness, balance and harmony metaphorically into music.

Oli Jan has degrees in both linguistics and music composition, and often tries to write music consisting of audio-semiotic and audio-visual interplay that seeks to incorporate core aspects of emotional expression and musical perception. His works, sometimes combined with ceremony, film, theatre and other media, have been performed at Japanese Shinto festivals, continental European film festivals and Scottish art festivals as well as in concert settings. In 2017 he received a recommendation from Sir James MacMillan and an endorsement from Arts Council England for his residence in UK as an exceptional talent artist. Since 2018 he has held the LKAS PhD studentship at University of Glasgow, where he focuses on experimental music theatre composition and embodied cognitive research, under the supervision of Professor Björn Heile, Dr. Michael Bachmann and Professor Frank Pollick. Excerpts of his PhD works have already been invited to be performed at international music festivals, for instance Tongyeong International Music Festival, in Goethe Institut Korea, 2021.

Björn Heile ***3x10 Musical Actions for Three Socially Distanced Performers*** *

Informed by recent discoveries in embodied cognition in Psychology and Neuroscience, according to which sound is perceived through the sensorimotor system as bodily motion, the piece explores the notion of a musical action, in terms of the combination of physical action and sounding result. These actions are scored in different ways, ranging from conventional staff notation, through forms of approximate and graphic notation to text scores, thereby examining the nature of notation as an instruction for action, rather than a codification of sound. There is no overall score, but instead the performers play from automated Powerpoint presentations, and the succession and simultaneous combination of actions is left to the discretion of the performers or to chance. The result is a game-like event that is intended to feature different relations and synchronicities and asynchronicities between bodily movement and sounds, playing with the audience's embodied responses.

Björn Heile is Professor of Music (post-1900) at the University of Glasgow. He specializes in new music, experimental music theatre and jazz, with particular interests in embodied cognition, global modernism and cosmopolitanism.

3x10 Musical Actions for Three Socially Distanced Performers is his first composition for almost 30 years, and the first to be performed at an international festival, but then he is the same age as Janáček was when he composed *Jenůfa* (he is not going to give up his day job, though).

Martin Iddon ***Sapindales***

In 2013, Heather Roche asked me for a piece for bass clarinet, which became *Ptelea* (2014), part of my hamadryads sequence of pieces, each one of which is named for a particular hamadryad, in *Ptelea's* case the hamadryade bonded to the elm, and each of which derives its musical material from Josquin's *Nymphes des bois*. In 2015, Rob Philips composed a piece for Heather which responded to *Ptelea*, 'generalising' some of what it did, calling his piece *Rutaceae*, that is, the name of the family to which the elm belongs. *Sapindales* (2016–20) is a further 'generalisation' of the material shared

by *Ptelea* and *Rutaceae*, a simplification and condensation of the original material, but also an expansion, not least in scale, but also possibility.

In *Ptelea*, the performer was called upon to negotiate a tightly constrained, intricate choreography, retaining as much of four intersecting, conflicting lines, to be performed simultaneously on an instrument, traditionally speaking, capable of performing only one. In *Sapindales*, the performer is given sixty-four individual lines and asked to combine them into a sequence of duos—an upper and a lower line, some pre-recorded, some performed live—again with the same restriction: to preserve as much as is possible of a pairing which cannot be presented in full.

The sapindales are the order of flowering plants to which the rutaceae family belongs, and includes citrus, maples, horse-chestnuts, lychees, mangoes, frankincense, and myrrh. The fixed media part for the piece was recorded at Moorlands Nature Reserve in York, at the site of a felled snake bark maple.

Sapindales, like *Ptelea*, was written for Heather Roche.

Martin Iddon is a composer and musicologist. He studied at the Universities of Durham and Cambridge, and is presently Professor of Music and Aesthetics at the University of Leeds. A portrait CD, *pneuma*, was released by Another Timbre in 2014, with a second, *Sapindales*, scheduled for release in 2021. His books, *New Music at Darmstadt*, *John Cage and David Tudor*, and *John Cage and Peter Yates* are published by Cambridge University Press, while *John Cage's Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (co-authored with Philip Thomas) is published by Oxford University Press.

Raymond McDonald *Stolen in a Dreamland Heist*

This piece began as dream; there were fragments of melody functioning as a sound track to a large beautiful creature, a Neo-Platypus, pulling a golden cartridge slowly up a New York-esque city street, while I watched from an apartment window at the top of a building. The piece itself is graphic score - a composition that uses non-conventional music notation. The score takes the form of small paintings, with fragments of conventionally notated music incorporated as a type of collage. The piece is in three sections and while the general type of musical material for each section is predetermined by the score, the performers will be making important choices about how to navigate the score which will crucially influence the shape and sound of the composition. The piece will sound different every time it's played but it will also retain fundamental elements that make it distinctive and recognisable each time it is performed. Thus, the creativity involved in composing this piece is distributed across everyone involved, and the in-the-moment decisions made by the performers are crucial. The piece attempts to expand individualist notions of virtuosity by hinting at group based social virtuosity, virtuosic listening and virtuosic decision making. The piece celebrates collectivity and community over individualism and the ending is a very clear attempt to unite as one while exploring a fundamentally human type of musical embodiment (voice). Musicians have also been invited to listen to any piece of music the day before the concert and include a reference to it in the performance.

The Neo-platypus of my dream:



Raymond MacDonald is a saxophonist, composer and psychologist with an extensive career in music, cross-disciplinary arts and academia. As a saxophonist and composer, MacDonald has released over 60 CDs, toured and broadcast worldwide and has composed music for film, television, theatre, radio and art installations.

MacDonald has collaborated with musicians across the spectrum of international contemporary music, such as Marilyn Crispell (US), George Lewis (US), David Byrne (UK/US), Jim O'Rourke (US), Damo Suzuki (JP/DE), Kang Tae Hwan (KR), Axel Dorner (DE), Tatsuya Nakatani (JP), Tony Buck (AU), Michael Zerang (US), Fred Lonberg-Holm (US) Satoko Fujii (JP) and Natsuki Tamura (JP). His list of UK collaborators is equally extensive, and includes Evan Parker, Nurse with Wound, Fred Frith, Keith Tippett, Barry Guy, Harry Beckett, Keith Rowe, Lol Coxhill, Maggie Nicols, Steve Noble, Steve Beresford, the London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO), and Future Pilot A.K.A. He is a founding member of the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (GIO) and co-leads the George Burt-Raymond MacDonald Quartet. He plays with Australian musicians Alister Spence and Sia Xray in *Sensaround* and has long standing duo partnerships with Marilyn Crispell and Gunter "Baby" Sommer.

MacDonald instigates and collaborates on cross-disciplinary projects and has worked with visual artists, dancers, writers and filmmakers. Cross-disciplinary projects include collaborations with visual artists Christine Borland, Simon Starling, turner prize winner Martin Boyce and an ongoing collaboration *Scarecrows & Lighthouses* with Boyce and Oscar nominated director David Mackenzie.

He is currently *Professor of Music Psychology and Improvisation* at Edinburgh University and his recent book, *The Art of Becoming: How Group Improvisation Works* (co-authored with Graeme Wilson) explores the nature of improvisation. His ongoing academic research focuses on issues relating to improvisation, musical communication, music health and wellbeing, music education and musical identities. He studies the processes and outcomes of music participation and music listening and has a particular interest in collaborative creativity. His work is informed by a view of improvisation as a social, collaborative and uniquely creative process that provides opportunities to develop new ways of thinking and working creatively.

He published over 70 peer reviewed papers and has co-edited five texts, *Musical Identities* (2002) and *Musical Communication* (2005), *Musical Imaginations* (2012) *Music Health & Wellbeing* (2012) and, *The Handbook of Musical Identities* (2017) He was editor of the journal *Psychology of Music* between 2006 and 2012 and Head of Music at University of Edinburgh 2013-2017.

Biographies

Ensemble Thing

Alex South, clarinet

Djordje Gajic, accordion

Emily De Simone, cello

Thomas Butler, musical director

Since 2004, Ensemble Thing have produced and performed new music that engages with contemporary society. Their shows include themes of autobiography and folklore; political and personal narratives; human-technology relations and the environment. Recent performances have included Independence by John De Simone, the collaborative You Can't Get There From Here at Sound Festival, Emily Doolittle's opera Jan Tait and the Bear, and systems_theory – a meditation for cello, electronics and video – as part of the Being Human Festival.

Twitter/Facebook/Instagram: @EnsembleThing

<http://www.ensemblething.com/>

Heather Roche

Born in Canada, clarinetist Heather Roche lives in London. Recently referred to as “The Queen of Extended Techniques” and “a figurehead for contemporary music performance practice” on BBC Radio 3, she appears regularly as a soloist and chamber musician at European festivals, including the London Contemporary Music Festival, Acht Brücken (Cologne), Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik (Germany), Musica Nova (Helsinki), MusikFest (Berlin), BachFest (Leipzig), Manifeste (Paris), etc. She was a founding member the Cologne-based hand werk, and currently plays with Apartment House (London) and Mimitabu (Gothenburg). She has a longstanding duo collaboration with the German accordionist Eva Zöllner, with whom she has recently performed at the Venice Biennale and Mixtur Festival (Barcelona), as well as on tour in Mexico and Sweden. She has also worked with the Musikfabrik (Cologne), the WDR Symphony Orchestra (Cologne), the London Symphony Orchestra, the London Sinfonietta, Alisios Camerata (Zagreb), and ensemble Proton (Bern), among others. She wrote her doctoral thesis at the University of Huddersfield. Her blog on writing for the clarinet attracts 90,000 viewers each year. In 2014 she was the recipient of a Danish International Visiting Artist's stipendium. She is also reviews editor of TEMPO, published by Cambridge University Press, and teaches clarinet at Goldsmiths University, London. Her debut solo CD, Ptelea, is out on HCR/NMC, and her CD featuring the clarinet works of Christopher Fox, Headlong, appears on Métier. She also records regularly for the Another Timbre label. www.heatherroche.net

Tonight's concert is supported by the Royal Society of Edinburgh.



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