



Robin Michael (cello) and Rolf Hind (piano)

Sunday 29th October 2023, 2.30pm

Fountainhall Church at the Cross, Aberdeen

Programme

John McLeod	<i>The Song of Leda</i>
Rolf Hind	<i>An Eagle Darkens the Sky</i> [8-9']
Joe Cutler	<i>Music for Parakeets</i>
James MacMillan	<i>Cello Sonata no.2</i>

Programme notes

John McLeod *The Song of Leda* (2010)

The Song of Leda is the fourth of my on-going series of pieces taking inspiration and ideas from classical mythology, the others being *The Song of Phryne* for clarinet and piano (with pre-recorded tape), *The Song of Icarus* for violin and piano and *The Song of Dionysius* for percussion and piano (commissioned and premiered by Evelyn Glennie and Philip Smith at the 1989 BBC Proms). I use the term 'song' in its narrative or dramatic sense as used in some forms of poetry - e.g. *La Chanson de Roland*, that great French narrative poem from the 12th century. The piece is, therefore, in the style of a 'scena drammatica'.

According to Greek legend, Zeus (Jupiter or Jove), lord of the skies, was prone to throwing thunderbolts at anyone who displeased him and to changing himself into a variety of forms. He turned into a swan in order to seduce Leda who was also pregnant at the time by her husband Tyndareus. This resulted in the births of Helen of Troy and the twins Castor and Pollux. The story inspired W B Yeats to write what many consider to be his finest poem, 'Leda and the Swan'. It illustrates dramatically the way in which a single event can change the face of history - i.e. the birth of Helen of Troy, the subsequent destruction of early Greek civilization, and the beginning of a new era.

Leda and the Swan

*A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush,
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower*

*And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up,
So mastered by the brute blood of the air
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?*

William Butler Yeats Programme Note © John McLeod 2011

Rolf Hind *An Eagle Darkens the Sky* (2013)

The title refers to the first line of Roberto Calasso's amazing book *KA*, which is nothing less than a retelling of Hindu myth as a story: a vast, confusing, circular story but nonetheless one which makes much sense of some baffling and chaotic ideas. I have long been fascinated by it, and based a couple of previous pieces on passages from it. I'm also fascinated by Indian culture and travel and the book is the best expression of the experience of India I've ever read.

The eagle referred to is no ordinary bird, but Garuda, the enormous steed of the great God Vishnu. Eagle is also the name of a particular meditative yoga asana, and a movement of my piece for piano quintet called *The Eye of Fire*, which strongly features the cello, wonderfully played in the original performances by Sophie Harris. So, in dedicating a piece to Sophie, it seemed natural to combine these two Eagle references.

After a brief passage introducing some of the piece's unusual sounds (prepared piano which bears some resemblances to Indian instruments like santoor and sitar; mysterious pulsings; the beating of wings) the two instruments rise together gradually from the depths. A climax is reached with a high and fierce – almost screaming – cello line, and then the music subsides through a long melodic section which is a kind of raga, the music developed from its original place in the Eagle movement referred to above. Fading, and growing more and more disembodied, it's as if in the end only the dark silhouette of the huge bird is perceptible on the distant horizon, its wing-beats thickening the air.

Joe Cutler *Music for Parakeets* (2008)

Music for Parakeets is one of a series of pieces inspired by things I like. The sight of parakeets all over London parks is now extremely commonplace. Whilst reactions to them are mixed, I'm definitely on the side of the parakeet. Grey rainy days are brightened up by their vociferous squawking and mechanical flight. Various theories abound as to how they came to be here. Some say they escaped from a filmset at Ealing studios, whilst others say that they come from escaped pets. It's certainly surprising that they adjust so well to the UK climate, but in fact in India they live far up into the Himalayas so they seem to handle cold pretty well.

James MacMillan *Sonata no.2 for cello and piano* (2000)

The second Sonata is written in one movement, in a seven sectioned palindromic arch. The first three sections present different materials and culminate in a mysterious central section after which the materials go into reverse and retreat back to the opening idea through sections 5,6 and 7.

The work opens with the cello on a high trill under which the piano presents a series of fragmented chords, clusters and single tolling tones. Section two is given over to a

rollicking dance-like theme on unaccompanied solo cello, before being joined by delicate, glistening, scurrying material on piano. Section 3 is based on a melody of 50 notes of different durations on the cello, accompanied by some of the previous glistening material - but the piano now introduces its own rhythmic dance fragments. The middle section brings back the opening fragmented material on the piano but now the cello takes up the piano dance music on ethereal high harmonics.

The retrograde, from section five to the end, is not a literal one, but rather the roles of the two instruments are swapped. The dance music ideas previously played by one instrument are given to the other, the long spaced out durations on the cello are given to the piano, and the piano's earlier glistening and scurrying are transformed to the cello. In the final section we hear the cello sustain double-stopped octaves while the piano's isolated chords from the opening go into a literal retrograde. The work ends with an abrupt, aggressive codetta on low piano.

Biographies

Robin Michael studied at the Royal Academy of Music with David Strange and Colin Carr and later with Ferenc Rados. He is principal cellist in John Eliot Gardiner's Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, Solo cellist with Orchestre Les Siècles (Paris) as well as regular guest principal cellist with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, RTE Concert Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, English National Opera and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Robin was the cellist in the Fidelio trio for over ten years with whom he toured Europe, North America, Asia and South Africa. He has also appeared in collaboration with the Dante and Eroica quartets. Highlights in his discography include the premier recording of Joe Cutler's cello concerto with the BBC CO (NMC), Brahms/Schumann sonatas with Daniel Tong (Resonus), complete works by Beethoven for cello and piano (Resonus), first recording of the original version of Mendelssohn's Octet on period instruments (Resonus), Vivaldi cello concertos with Barocksolisten München (Hanssler Classics) and Fidelio trio recordings on Naxos, NMC, Métier and Delphian records.

Recent concert highlights include complete Bach and Britten suite cycles in France and London, the South Korean premier of Jonathan Harvey's Advaya for cello and electronics, UK premier of Steve Reich Cello Counterpoint, Elgar concerto in Romania, both Haydn concertos at the Spier fesval in South Africa as well as fesval appearances in Buenos Aires, Library of Congress, Washington, and European fesvals including Cheltenham, Aldeburgh and St Magnus.

Robin has a close artistic partnership with chamber orchestra Musica Vitae in Sweden with whom he appears regularly as soloist and conductor.

Robin is also artistic director of the Kinnordy Chamber Music festival in Scotland, now in its seventh year and is cello professor in Paris and Saintes, Bordeaux.

Robin plays on a cello made for him by the German luthier Stephan von Behr, 2010 and bows by Pierre Nehr, and John Dodd.

Rolf Hind's career has established him as a major force as soloist, composer, recording artist, chamber musician, pedagogue, collaborator and concert planner. He has given recitals at many of Europe's leading new music festivals, and at Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House and on tours of Korea, Taiwan and Cuba.

Rolf has worked with many leading conductors, including Ashkenazy, Knussen, Rattle, David Robertson and Andrew Davis and appeared seven times at the BBC Proms. Orchestras he has worked with include the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Munich Philharmonic, Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Malmö Symphony, and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, many appearances with the London Sinfonietta, the LPO, RPO, and with all the BBC orchestras.

Composers who have worked with Rolf or written for him include Tan Dun, John Adams, Helmut Lachenmann, Unsuk Chin, Elliott Carter, George Benjamin and James MacMillan. Rolf's compositions include a piano concerto, *Maya-Sesha* (nominated for a British Composer's Award) and a concerto for accordion, premiered at London's Barbican Centre. Much of his music is inspired by India, where he travels often, while drawing on the technical adventurousness of performers including himself. An interest in new dance resulted in collaborations including with choreographer Rui Horta on a large-scale tour of a new work, *Danza Preparata*, featuring John Cage's Sonatas and Interludes for prepared piano, with dancer.

As pianist Rolf curated and performed in *Occupy The Pianos*, a piano festival which became a regular feature at St John's Smith Square in London and also travelled to France and Denmark. He initiated a project in March 2020 which produced over 100 new short piano pieces from composers far and wide, intended as responses to lockdown, a fascinating range of pieces which he is now including in recital and which has been performed in London, Glasgow and Zagreb. He re-visited a masterpiece in the form of Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'enfant Jesus*. His first opera, *Lost in Thought*, a 'Mindfulness opera' commissioned by Mahogany Opera Group was premiered at The Barbican in London. Current composition plans include an operatic project about the poet Sufi Rumi, working with Rolf's long-time collaborator Frederick Wake-Walker and the Anglo-US poet Dante Micheaux. He is also writing a song-cycle for Elaine Mitchener and Apartment House for the Wigmore Hall in 2024.

*This year's **sound** festival is dedicated to the memory of Angela Michael and of Ian Spink. We very much valued each of their contributions to **sound**, and they will be greatly missed.*

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