

Inventions: The Harpsichord Across Time and Borders

Tiffany Vong, harpsichord

Thursday 24th October 2024, 12.45pm

Cowdray Hall

Programme

Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre *Prelude from Suite No. 1 in D minor*

Janet Oates *Night Shall Hide Thee (World Premiere)*

in dialogue with

Elisabetta de Gambarini *Lover, go and calm thy sighs*

Anon. Irish (16th C.) *Ho-Hoane*

Evangelia Rigaki *Keening (World Premiere)*

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser
arr. Lisa Robertson *Mull Fisher's Love Song (O Mhairead
Òg) from Songs of the Hebrides*

Lisa Robertson *dorchadas, duilichinn, dòchas
(darkness, regret, hope) (World Premiere)*

Inventions: the harpsichord across time and borders is a trans-national project to promote and present unusual music for solo harpsichord, drawing primarily on historical and contemporary music by female composers from Scotland, Ireland and England. Three new commissions are set alongside historical works, making links between different countries and centuries. Parallel recitals will be given in Ireland and England this autumn.

The Inventions project is part of the Theorbo Today project, which explores and promotes new music for old instruments. <https://www.theorbotoday.com/inventions>



Programme notes

Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre *Prelude from Suite No. 1 in D minor*

Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre (1665-1729) was described as “The marvel of our Century” (contemporary critic, French journal *Mercure Galant*). De La Guerre was a renowned composer, harpsichordist and organist, and the first woman in France to compose an opera. She made her debut as a singer and harpsichordist at the court of Louis XIV at quite a young age, and at about age 15 she was taken into the court as a musician and placed under the care of the king’s mistress, Madame de Montespan. De

La Guerre left the regular service of the court in 1684 but maintained her royal connections. Her first published collection of works was the *Pièces de clavessin* (1687; “Harpsichord Pieces”), noteworthy especially because publication of harpsichord music was still rare in France in the 17th century, even for male composers. As well as her opera *Céphale and Procris*, she wrote beautiful, expressive cantatas.

De La Guerre’s music is in the popular *style brisé*, an attractive arpeggiated, or broken, style borrowed from lute playing. This can be particularly seen in the unmeasured preludes which open her suites: modelled on the improvisations of lutenists, in her hands they are expressive and dramatic pieces. The preludes are followed by movements based on stylised dance forms and styles.

Janet Oates *Night shall hide thee*

Janet Oates is a composer, performer and conductor living in London. She has a PhD in composition from Royal Holloway, University of London. She has written prize-winning songs, 2 short operas, an oratorio for baroque forces and a cantata for 6 solo voices and theorbo. She is a singer, conductor and teacher, and is artistic director of the vocal ensemble Philomel, specialising in 17th century works and new commissions, with a focus on female composers. Her current projects are writing/commissioning new works for baroque instruments, and creating accessible experimental music for choirs, children and instrumental students, with the aim of taking creative contemporary music into mainstream choirs and schools. www.janetoates.co.uk

Night shall hide thee (project commission, 2024) is a dialogue with the song and variations by Gambarini. The song words (the title is the start of the second line) suggest a clandestine meeting, with the singer urging her lover on – Janet’s work evokes the intimacy, waiting, expectation and the emotions elicited by the song and the meeting. There is also a second version of the piece which stands alone from the Gambarini.

Elisabetta de Gambarini *Lover, go and calm thy Sighs*

Composer, harpsichordist, conductor, painter and singer Elisabetta de Gambarini (1731 (Middlesex) – 1765 (Westminster)) performed in many of Handel’s oratorios. She was the first female composer in Britain to publish a collection of keyboard music, *The Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, which was published when she was still a teenager, and which was dedicated to Viscountess Howe of the Kingdom of Ireland. She also published songs and small-scale instrumental works.

Lover, go and calm thy Sighs is a simple song in the typical style of the day, such as written by William Jackson (Jackson of Exeter) and, in the generations before them, Daniel Purcell. The tune is light, the accompaniment simple, and the whole is accessible to domestic musicians and audiences wanting light entertainment such as at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The song is followed by a gavotte based on the song, and two variations upon that, finishing with a whirling giga (gigue) as a final variation.

anon. *Ho-Hoane*

Irish (16th c.), collected in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. The tune is a lilting lament in compound time - its title is a corruption of the Gaelic *ochóin*: ‘oh, alas’.

Evangelia Rigaki *Keening*

Evangelia has a diverse compositional portfolio ranging from instrumental works to experimental music theatre, dance, performance art, installation and opera. She is

particularly interested in theatre works, including instrumental theatricality. She has written several operas produced by Irish National Opera, and the opera-installation 'The Pregnant Box' (2014), libretto by W.N. Herbert & Catherine Conlon, written for one audience member at a time in a specially constructed confession box with a wandering choir. Evangelia gained her PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London, followed by Post-doctoral research at Humboldt University in Berlin; she is currently Head of Music Department at Trinity College, University of Dublin.

The word 'keening' originates from the Gaelic 'caoineadh' meaning crying. The performer should feel and perform this piece as a ritual inspired by keening/lamentation. The piece also demands the use of vocalisation and an e-bow (which creates a drone from the vibrations of the strings) and requests the performer to choose tempos 'from excruciatingly slow to frenetically fast'!

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser *Mull Fisher's Love Song (O Mhairead Òg)*

Marjory Kennedy-Fraser CBE (1857 (Perth) – 1930 (Edinburgh)) was daughter of the singer David Kennedy, known internationally as a singer of Scots songs, whom she often accompanied. Her life work was the collection (and recording onto wax cylinders), arrangement, and publication of the songs of the Hebrides, of which she gave innumerable recitals. The best-known of the songs became to be known as the *Eriskay Love Lilt*. Writer of an autobiography and of the libretto to Granville Bantock's opera *The Seal Woman*; lecturer, singer, and supporter of women's suffrage, Scottish independence, and pacifism.

Mull Fisher's Love Song tells of a man who is haunted by the beauty of the girl he loves, and is unable to find rest. It is a misrepresentation of the original, O Mhairead Òg, which is a lament by a man haunted by guilt and is unable to find rest, having accidentally shot his love to death while shooting ducks.

Lisa Robertson *dorchadas, duilichinn, dòchas (darkness, regret, hope)*

Lisa (PhD, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) 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. She was featured in BBC Music Magazine's 'Rising Stars' column. Her music has been performed by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, The Sixteen, EXAUDI, Red Note Ensemble, defunensemble, Psappha Ensemble, Hebrides Ensemble, Lucy Schauer, and Heather Roche, among others. Her piece, *am fìor-eun*, was performed by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra with Thomas Søndergård in their 22:23 season. Her music has won numerous awards, and has appeared at festivals including Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, where she also performed her own solo violin piece in 2019, Cheltenham Music Festival, Musica Nova Helsinki, West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Sound Festival and on BBC Radio 3, BBC World Service and BBC Radio Scotland.

Inspired by Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's arrangement of the Gaelic song she calls *The Mull Fisher's Love Song*, this piece explores its timeless theme, which warns against the human destruction of that which is most precious. Based on fragments of the original song while evoking the wire-strung clàrsach, this piece ends with the hope of an end to such destructiveness before it is too late.

Biography

Tiffany Vong is an organist, harpsichordist and choral conductor based in Glasgow. She is the Organist and Director of Music at Jordanhill Parish Church. She works regularly




with Kelvin Choir, University of Glasgow and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland as a conductor and accompanist. Previous posts include Choral Music Assistant at St Aloysius' College, Musical Director at Cunninghame Choir and Conducting Fellow at the National Youth Choir of Scotland. Originally from Hong Kong, Tiffany was organ scholar at Oriel College, Oxford and completed postgraduate degrees at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (Organ and Harpsichord Performance) and University of Glasgow (Historically Informed Performance Practice). Her studies at the RCS were generously supported by the RCS Trust and the ABRSM. Awards include the Governors' Recital Prize for Keyboard (Highly Commended), Bach Prize (Commended), and the Early Music Prize. As a chamber musician, she has performed with the International Baroque Consort, Caccini Ensemble and Piccadilly Sinfonietta. She is a keyboard tutor at St Aloysius' College, Vice-President of the Glasgow Society of Organists and an Associate of the Royal College of Organists.

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The Inventions project is gratefully supported by Creative Scotland, Arts Council England, the Hope Scott Trust, The Marchus Trust and the Francis Routh Trust.

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