

LUNCHBREAK CONCERT

In association with:

THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011

CURIOUS CHAMBER PLAYERS with RICHARD CRAIG

ABERDEEN ART GALLERY

Saturday, 29 October 2011

This was the second time I had heard the piece which closed Saturday's performance by Curious Chamber Players. *Buckle in the Air* by the ensemble's conductor Rei Munakata, born in Yokohama, Japan but currently working in Sweden made considerably more sense both because I was hearing it for the second time and because at the performance in the Art Gallery we could see exactly what the "sound person" Malin Bång was using to create her expanded palette of percussion sounds.

The piece was inspired by a journey the composer made on a Ryanair flight when an inebriated passenger had to be forcibly buckled into his seat to keep him from annoying the other passengers. In the performance which I heard in King's College Chapel we could hear Malin Bång making scraping percussive sounds against the seat of a chair next to her but I could not tell what it was. On Saturday, it became evident that this was in fact a strap with a buckle! Furthermore metallic sounds were made with a beer can. Suddenly the story behind the piece came more clearly into focus. At one point, a couple of the performers are required to crunch and chew almonds to add to the unusual sound colours. The echoes of Japanese music were also clearer not only in the vocalisations at the end of the piece but also in the writing for guitar earlier on.

This was not the only piece in the programme that had an element of humour in it. The second piece in the programme specially commissioned by Curious Chamber Players for the sound festival from the Finnish composer Tomi Räisänen was for guitar and three balloon players. To get just an inkling of this fun piece, if you google "Cadbury eyebrows", you will see an advert in which near the end, a little girl makes squeaky noises letting the air out of a balloon. Much of the sounds in this piece are made in this way although just blowing up the balloons or rubbing them to make them squeak was also included. I said that there was also a guitar in this piece, but it was used solely as a drum. I had a look at the score for the piece after the concert and indeed it is notated purely as a percussion piece. I liked the ending when the balloon players let go of their "instruments" and let them fly towards the audience.

In addition to being the ensemble's "sound person," Malin Bång is also their composer in residence. She introduced her piece, *Hyperoxic for bass flute and sound objects* (2003) by explaining her fascination with air sounds. She was joined in this performance by an old friend of sound and Aberdeen University Music, Richard Craig. He began using just the mouthpiece section of his bass flute to make breathy sounds which reminded me of the attack you hear on the deeper Andean flutes (google El Condor Passa) if you like. Breathly sounds and other vocalisations were amplified along with a fan to make up the sound world of this piece.

The concert began with music in a more traditional vogue as violinist Karin Hellqvist performed *The 5th String, for violin* by the Swedish composer Henrik Strindberg. This

was a remarkably delicate sounding virtuoso performance made up largely of ever expanding and more complex arpeggiations that had the bow seesawing over the strings and at one point the bow ran almost silently over the edge of the violin body no doubt playing on the eponymous 5th String.