

***MUSIC IN THE UNIVERSITY***  
***In association with:***  
***THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011***  
***CURIOUS CHAMBER PLAYERS***  
***KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL***  
***Thursday, 27 October 2011***

One of Sweden's most active contemporary music ensembles, Curious Chamber Players represent one of this year's special **sound** themes, Scandinavian music. They champion the works of some of Scandinavia's most progressive young composers and last night we heard pieces from Sweden, Denmark and Norway with just a bit of Japanese influence included for good measure.

Malin Bång is currently the Ensemble's composer in residence and Thursday evening's concert began with *her* "när korpen vitnar" for solo violin played by Karin Hellqvist. The piece was originally composed with the Norwegian hardingfela or folk fiddle with its sympathetic strings in mind. The title comes from an old Swedish ballad in which one Sven i Rosengård is saying farewell to his mother when he has to flee into exile having murdered his brother. The idea sounds remarkably similar to our own home grown Scottish ballads. The mother asks Sven, "When will you return" and he replies, "när korpen vitnar – when the raven turns white".

Karin Hellqvist on classical violin gave us a virtuoso solo performance of a piece that was packed with classical, folk and avant garde technical wizardry from beginning to end, a remarkable introduction to a concert that was to be an amazing adventure in listening.

This was followed by a more traditional piece for solo flute composed in 1949 by the Swedish composer Sven-Erik Bäck (1919-1994). It has become a classic of the solo flute repertoire and although personal and individual in its inspiration follows in the tradition of Debussy. It was beautifully played by Anna Melander.

For the next piece, Axel Rudebeck's *Piece for flute, saxophone, acoustic guitar and violin*, Karin and Anna were joined by saxophonist Mathias Björnstad and guitarist Fredrik Munk Larson. I was reminded, if only by the special silent pauses at the outset of the piece of *Le Marteau sans Maître* by Boulez but the instrumentation is quite different and in some ways still more adventurous in its use of an expanded sound palette and therefore quite specifically personal.

The Ensemble was directed by Rei Munakata who was born in Yokohama, Japan. He is also a composer and the following piece was his new work *Buckle in the Air*. It was inspired by a flight on Ryanair where an inebriated passenger (not the composer) had to be buckled into his seat to keep him quiet – hence the buckle and the air of the title. This was the most adventurous piece and the players were joined by Malin Bång herself, listed as "sound person" who added a bewildering array of special percussion effects to the piece. This was an amazing work in which, if anything, the live instruments and percussion effects went at least as far as anything achieved in the

world of electro-acoustics. I particularly liked the vocalisations towards the end which reminded me of some Japanese film music.

After the interval, guitarist Fredrik Munk Larsen performed four movements of the Danish composer Bent Sørensen's *Melancholy Dances for guitar*. These rather quiet pieces sounded quite beautiful in the acoustic of the Chapel especially where the guitar imitated church bells.

We thought by then, especially after the pieces by Rudebeck and Munakata, that we had heard everything, but the final piece by Norwegian composer Ørjan Matre entitled *Bellows/billows* took us farther into the realm of sound imagination than we had thought possible. There were indeed bellows which produced a special rhythmic undercurrent to the music. An autoharp and the voice of a young woman singing a Norwegian folksong reproduced on a Dictaphone were just some of the astonishing effects in what one audience member described as an often hauntingly beautiful piece of music or as I would say, an adventure in sound.