

LUNCHBREAK CONCERT
In association with:
THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2011
GEOFF PALMER Cello
PETE STOLLERY Electronics
ABERDEEN ART GALLERY
Saturday, 05 November 2011

Saturday's concert in the Art Gallery gave us a chance to hear Kaija Saariaho's *Petals*, which was performed yesterday at the Institute of Medical Sciences but this time with a very much reduced level of background noise. In his introduction to the piece, Geoff Palmer explained that the composer was particularly interested in the exploration of colours and textures of sound. That was certainly true but it was something that could have been attached to all four pieces in Saturday's programme.

Britten's *Second Suite for Cello, Op.80*, which was premièred by Rostropovich at Aldeburgh in June 1968, takes the range of sounds possible on the cello to something approaching its limits without the addition of electronics which were a core part of the other three pieces in the programme. The last two movements of Britten's work in particular demand a level of technical virtuosity that only a player like Rostropovich could possibly attain fully, but Geoff Palmer certainly gave a spirited and authentic performance of the work that was a real ear-opener. There are some fascinating ideas in the work, for instance Britten takes the idea of fugue without counterpoint further than the piece for organ by Ligeti which Roger Williams played earlier this week. The Andante which Geoff Palmer called a Nocturne combined pizzicato in the left hand with bowed music and later the cello was played "Quasi gitara" and then with double stopping. In the final movement, two lines of music far apart were achieved using harmonics. Britten and Rostropovich were driving the acoustic cello to its outer limits.

Matthew Whiteside's *Dichroic Light I* required the cello to be miked up. This was the first of three such pieces and one which employed the most straightforward techniques of amplification and delay. A basic tonal colour was gradually split and spread out into contrasting washes of sound or as Whiteside himself explained in his introductory comments like the colours produced by an oil slick on water. This was a fascinating essay in pure sound.

Jonathan Harvey's *Ricercare una melodia* used sound recapture and delay in a more structural sense recalling the sounds made by the cello and sending them back at ever lower pitches. The movement of the sounds from right to left also gave structure to the piece.

Finally we heard Kaija Saariaho's *Petals* with her creation of a far wider range of colours, many of them beautifully nuanced. Once again I have to complement Geoff Palmer for his virtuoso performance and Pete Stollery for his no less virtuosic input to the performance. In this last piece, the electronics added a great deal to the sound but were never a disruptive influence. It was just fabulous teamwork in action.