

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Patricia Kopatchinskaja: Everyday Non-sense

Wednesday 24 April 2024, 6pm & 8.30pm

Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall

Classical music is an incredible, centuries-long story. As we at the Southbank Centre – alongside our Resident Orchestras and Resident Artists – share that story with the world today, we're creating as many ways for as many different people as possible to experience this wonderful art form.

Whether this is your first encounter with classical music or one of many, I'm absolutely thrilled that you're joining us for more powerful human experiences. Welcome to Classical Music: Spring/Summer 2024.

Toks Dada, Head of Classical Music, Southbank Centre

Repertoire

Mieko Shiomi Falling Event

Schmit Sanitas No.151

Higgins Danger Music Number Seventeen

Brecht Symphony No.3

Mozart Ein musikalischer Spaß (A Musical Joke) K.522

Kurtág Hommage à Tchaikovsky from Játékok, Bk.1

Cage Living Room Music

PatKop from Ghiribizzi (Whims)

Für Reto ... wo? (For Reto ... where?)

Sonnerie (Ringing)

Friede sei mit Euch (Peace be with you)

Skizzenhaft (Sketchy)

Françaix Mouvement de valse (4th movement) from Octet

Ligeti Fanfare for car horns from Le Grand Macabre

Ligeti Mysteries of the Macabre

Performers

Aurora Orchestra

Patricia Kopatchinskaja *violin, director*

This performance lasts approximately 1 hour without an interval. The performance order may vary from that shown on the programme.

Woodrow Wilson, when US President, would entertain guests and security guards at the White House by singing folk songs. He knew, therefore, of what he spoke: 'Music says nothing to the reason: it is a kind of closely structured nonsense.'

Let it be so, then. As deliberate nonsense, music can be funny – not funny in how it goes as music (though it may be that as well) but funny in asking to be considered as music at all. In making

that outrageous request, however, it can also be very serious, inviting us to reconsider our categories and perspectives. How is the Third Symphony of George Brecht different from that of Ludwig van Beethoven? We'll see. And hear – though events may not quite follow this order:

Fluxus

Founded at the beginning of the 1960s by George Maciunas, a Lithuanian immigrant in New York, Fluxus was all about overturning accepted notions of art. One way of doing that where music was concerned was by abandoning standard notation in favour of recipes in words: text scores. Among artists closely associated with the New York movement were Dick Higgins (1938–98) and George Brecht (1926–2008), both of whom produced large numbers of text scores, or 'event scores', as Brecht called them. Higgins' *Danger Music Number Seventeen* (May 1962) has a text score repeating the same word six times. George Brecht's *Symphony No.3* (1964) could be regarded as a poem, carrying no specific instructions, such as its quite different 'Fluxversion I' certainly has.

Nam June Paik took news of the New York movement to Cologne in 1961 and thereby stimulated the work of, among others, the teenage Tomas Schmit (1943–2006). His *Sanitas No.151* is one of 200 text pieces he produced in November 1962 and reads: 'a room with people, a performer, thousand drawing pins.'

It was again Paik who brought the message to Tokyo, but there a similar group, including Mieko Shiomi (b. 1938), was already at work. Her term for text scores was 'action poems', and *Falling Event*, Fluxversion I, was one she wrote in 1963: 'Concert programs are distributed to the audience as paper gliders thrown from balcony or ladders or thrown as paper balls.' The following year she was invited to New York by Maciunas, and the piece was performed at the Fluxus concert that took place at Carnegie Recital Hall on 25 September 1965, conducted by La Monte Young. Brecht's *Symphony No.3* in its Fluxversion I and a piece by Schmit were also performed. John Cage and Merce Cunningham were photographed among the audience.

Klassik

As far as we know, there was no Fluxus in Vienna in June 1787, which was when Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) entered *Ein musikalischer Spaß* (A Musical Joke) into his catalogue. Indeed, we know nothing of what prompted him to compose this work for strings with a pair of horns – perhaps only the pleasure of entertaining himself and a few friends. Framed in the regular four-movement form of the time, the piece abounds in banalities and plain errors.

The opening allegro is a brainless sonata movement, in oversimplified harmony and thick with bald repetitions that weigh it down in F major. Hardly any better is the minuet, which has a moment where the horns are led astray. The slow movement's exquisiteness is all a glaze on bare scaffolding, which itself is set up haphazardly, with again crunching discords.

Cantering along, the finale goes all over the place, breaking off a couple of times for a patch of fugue that cannot be sustained. The final cadence has four keys colliding.

A Moment with Tchaikovsky

György Kurtág (b. 1926) offers children (and others) the chance to act the great virtuoso in *Hommage à Tchaikovsky*, from the first volume of his *Játékok* (Playing), composed in 1973.

In the Cage

John Cage (1912–92) in his later 20s created a lot of pieces for groups of percussion players, often playing unusual instruments but never more unusual than in *Living Room Music* (1940), where the four performers are asked to make sound with whatever they find in the stated locale. At this stage, Cage was using conventional notation for whatever unconventional ends. The outer movements are rhythmic studies, 'To Begin' varying in loudness, in contrast with the entirely pianissimo 'End'. In 'Story' the musicians turn to their voices and draw on words by Gertrude Stein: 'Once upon a time the world was round and you could go on it around and around.' 'Melody', which may be omitted, gives a highly restricted and repetitive melody to one of the group while the others go on with their found objects. You can see why, 20 years later, Cage was adopted as the godfather of Fluxus, though for him that was not entirely an unalloyed honour.

PatKop's Whims

Whims they are – *Ghiribizzi*, to give them the title she plucked out of Paganini. They can pop up almost anywhere, as a set, mixed in with the movements of a classical work, as encore pieces, always involving the composer-violinist, with one or more companions. Most were composed in 2021, though the series is ongoing. The duration is generally a minute, never more than two.

Promised on this occasion are:

Für Reto ... wo? (For Reto ... where?) for clarinet and violin, Reto being Reto Bieri

Sonnerie (Ringing) for clarinet and violin

Friede sei mit Euch (Peace be with you) for violin, clarinet, percussion and police whistle

Skizzenhaft (Sketchy) for violin and cello

Waltztime in Paris

Jean Françaix (1912–97) had a lot in common with his close contemporary John Cage, who was just three months younger, quite apart from their shared first name. They were both happy in their work and precise. Both wrote a lot for dance. They were in the same place at the same time at least once, in Palermo in 1949, when Cage witnessed his colleague's opera *Le Diable boiteux* and reported to *Musical America* that it 'stood out because Hugues Cuénod, with Gallic wit and brilliance, sang both its tenor and bass parts, thus at the last minute turning an unexpected gap in the cast into a tour de force'.

We hear 'Mouvement de valse', the finale of the Octet Françaix composed in 1972 for Willi Boskovsky's Vienna Octet, formed to play the Schubert Octet.

Ligeti Macabre

Drawn to nonsense from his boyhood immersion in Lewis Carroll, György Ligeti (1923–2006) came up with the greatest nonsense opera of all time, *Le Grand Macabre* (1974–77), which is already outlandish before a note has been sung. Ligeti follows the example of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* in starting with a fanfare but, for his predecessor's orchestra, substitutes carhorns.

Later, in the third of the opera's four scenes, the Chief of the Secret Police (coloratura soprano) arrives at the court of the ruling Prince in three successive disguises, as bird of prey, spider and octopus, to deliver a message of warning in nonsense code made the more undecipherable by musical acrobatics. Elgar Howarth, who conducted the opera's premiere, adapted the moment to make a showpiece of virtuosity gone haywire, with the composer's strong approval.

Programme notes © Paul Griffiths, 2024

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