

**SWISS CONTEMPORARY COMPOSERS PORTRAIT
NOVEMBER 12TH 2014
EWART MEMORIAL HALL, 8 P.M.**

Reduction of music to its essence is the overall theme of this Suisse Composer's Portrait – kindly supported by **Pro Helvetia** – with the title **Assonances**. The musicians of the Egyptian European Contemporary Music Ensemble under the baton of Vyintas Baltakas present various ways of musical reduction be it the concentration on assonating tones or on musical germs that form points of reference, or be it the absolute reduction of music to the sound of breath. Five works of five Suissecontemporary composers go deep into simplicity.

The Egyptian Contemporary Music Ensemble

Hossam Shehata Violin
Rasha Yehia Viola
Khaled Abdalah Dagher Violoncello
Peter Olah Flute
Wessam Amin Oboe
Sherif El Razzaz Clarinet
Nesma Abd El Aziz Percussion
David Hales Piano

Vyintas Baltakas Conductor

making with the flute. Holliger requests various kinds of using breath: the flutist is asked to play fully rounded sounds or to sing into the flute. These controlled uses of "air" are contrasted by the soundless clasped lips around the mouthpiece or – as a half suppressed breath – a whistling noise. The limits of both the instruments and the flutist are being explored. The flute sounds from shrill whistle-tones to the rounded of the low register, while the flutist has to keep a high physical tension at all times, control his breath even in the breaks, is forbidden to breathe at some passages and is asked to play with empty lungs. But also the language of the poem is brought to a limit, so that only the essence of language remains – which is breath.

MICHAEL JARRELL: ASSONANCE VI



Analogies of sounds

Michael Jarrell's Assonance VI for flute, clarinet, oboe, piano, percussion, violin, viola and violoncello gives this Suisse concert its name. Similarly to Berio's Sequenze Jarrell's Assonances form a cycle although they weren't necessarily written for solo instruments. The short pieces are based on the idea of sketch-books, which give the Geneva-born composer "the right to concentrate on a single idea and to feel free

Œuvre towards a reduction of sound. In the piece for flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, violin, viola and violoncello the composer explores timbre and rhythmic patterns. The instruments form small groups within the ensemble and develop simultaneous narratives which overlap and succeed each other. "Gaspra is named after an asteroid of 5km diameter, a lump of rock, fragment of an exploding star which wandered into our solar system's gravitational field" (Furrer). Thus, the composition is pending like an asteroid in space between fields of sound and singular points, between tone and noise. Starting with singular tones evolving tenderly from the different instruments and being passed around in flirring trills, short musical lines develop that at some points condense into fragile sound fields, when several instruments play parallelly.



Vyintas Baltakas, conductor

Vyintas Baltakas is a musical Scheherazade. His music keeps pulling you n and referencing itself, sometimes branching off and reinventing itself, and sometimes returning to where it started. He weaves musical stories that are linked with a delicate interconnected web.

Suitner, who taught him conducting, Furrer has been in a position to perform works by his professor on a regular basis. He is credited, for example, with the world première of the revised version of Haubenstock-Ramati's opera Amerika in 1992. In 1985, Furrer founded the new music ensemble Klangforum Wien, which he led a number of years both as artistic director and conductor. It testifies to his leadership as well as of that of his successors that the ensemble is still going strong and has established itself on the international scene as one of the best groups of its kind world-wide.

Heinz Holliger was born in Langenthal (Switzerland, canton of Berne) on 21 May 1939. During his grammar-school education he already studied oboe with Emile Cassagnaud at the Conservatoire of Berne and composition with Sándor Veress. From 1958 he continued his studies with Yvonne Lefébure (piano) and Pierre Pierlot (oboe) in Paris. Between 1961 and 1963 he studied composition with Pierre Boulez at the Music Academy of Basel.

Michael Jarrell was born in Geneva in 1958, Michael Jarrell studied composition at the Geneva Conservatory with Eric Gaudibert and at various workshops in the United States (Tanglewood, 1979). He completed his training with Klaus Huber at the Freiburg Staatliche Hochschule für Musik im Brisgau. Starting in 1982, his works have received numerous prizes: prix Acanthes (1983), Beethovenpreis from the city of Bonn (1986) among many more. In 2001 he was named "Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres". In 2004, he was named professor of composition at the Geneva Conservatory.

JEAN-LUC DARBELLAY: A LA RECHERCHE



« Créer des points de repère »

Jean-Luc Darbellay, a composer, conductor, clarinetist and physician originating from Bern, sees an important aspect for in "creating points of reference" in space evolving from a sound cell, which becomes the start, end and connection point, and functions as a kind of punctuation mark. In his piece ... **a la recherché** ... from 1994 this point of reference is the tone a' emerging from 4 tuning forks that are prepared with mutes and held to the instruments. The tone a' functions as a form building element. The Holliger student Darbellay was inspired by his own son, who, as a child, "composed" his own little music piece by sounding a tuning fork against his cello. The sonority produced by this tuning fork reminded Darbellay of his clarinet's sound. In ... **a la recherché** ... the a' of the tuning fork is handed from instrument to instrument and creates a delicate sound continuum. The Marimba for example plays a tremolo struck by fingers, and the strings hold the muted tuning forks to their instrument. By this, the a' becomes "an „Orient" allowing the audience to take its bearings in space and time" (Jean-Luc Darbellay). The fix point a' is contrasted by rapid arabesque passages in the wood and strings. A sound halo of microcanons is formed by phrases being picked up by

to do so". Each piece concentrates on the development of a musical idea. No. VI of the Assonances cycle premiered in Brussels in 1991 is based on the rhyme techniques of the early French lyric, where there was no metric rhyme structure which we know it nowadays but only assonance at the end of a verse. The last stressed vowel or sound is the same. Just as in the poetic model Jarrell's music seems to have no coherence up to the last point of a passage, phrase or section, when the instruments meet in one tone and bring the phrase to a halt.

OSCAR BIANCHI: SEMPLICE



Complexity in Simplicity

Oscar Bianchi, born in Italian Milan, is a Gaudeamus Laureate composer of Italian and Swiss citizenships. *Semplice*, which was premiered by Violinist David Grimal in Les Havres in 2010, is a solo work for violin and was commissioned by L'Instant Pluriel. *Semplice*, which is Italian for "simple" or "natural", was composed as "reaction towards an overwhelming practice within contemporary music of associating all sorts of notions of complexity with musical representation" (Oscar Bianchi).

The story starts in Vilnius, Lithuania in 1972 where Baltakas was born. In 1993 he moved to Karlsruhe, Germany, where he studied composition with Wolfgang Rihm and conducting with Andreas Weiss. From 1994 to 1997 he also worked with Peter Eötvös at the Music Academy in Karlsruhe and at the Hungarian composer's International Institute. Also an accomplished conductor, Baltakas has conducted the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Ensemble Modern, and Klangforum Wien.

It was his physical move to Germany that accompanied a rebellion or break from his Lithuanian heritage. As in most eastern European countries, folk art and culture are often intertwined into composer's music and aesthetics. He felt that Lithuanian music was missing impertinence. This physical and aesthetic break mixed with a modernist harmonic language, demanding virtuosity, and a healthy dose of impertinence was the result. His new story continued with Pasaka (Fairy Tale) that has the pianist performing and simultaneously narrating the Indian mythological version of the creation of the world. It is a serious story, but his version is full of absurdity and irony. It was performed and awarded a prize in 1996 at the Darmstadt Summer Courses. His view of musical composition and conducting is one of reciprocity. He says that both as a composer or conductor "you can influence it, suggest ideas, give it direction, make decisions. You give impulses but you also receive impulses back from the music that you then process again and which then reflects back."

Jean-Luc Darbellay graduated at the Berne Conservatory and studied clarinet and composition with Cristóbal Halffter and Dimitri Terzakis. He then attended masterclasses at the IMF Lucerne with Heinz Holliger, Klaus Huber and, as his assistant with Edith Denivson. Furthermore, he

Program

Jean-Luc Darbellay: A la Recherche (1994)

Heinz Holliger: (T)air(e) (1983)

Beat Furrer: Gaspra (1989)

Oscar Bianchi: Semplice (2010)

Michael Jarrell: Assonance VI (1991)

other instruments that transform the phrases just marginally, so that the development of the phrases is hardly being heard, but – like in nature – an organic continuum that spreads into all directions.

HEINZ HOLLIGER: (T)AIR(E)



Breath and silence as part of music making

„My whole relation to music is that I'm always trying to reach its limits." (Heinz Holliger) This is what Heinz Holliger is also striving for in his piece (t)air(e). Part of his Scardanelli cycle it is based on poems by the German romanticist Friedrich Hölderlin, whose texts Holliger has worked on since his school days in the Suisse town of Langenthal. It's especially the purity of the poems with "extremely apparent simplicity" that inspired the composer, who studied composition with Sándor Veress and Pierre Boulez. Holliger wrote (t)air(e) as solo piece for Hölderlin's favourite instrument: the flute. The title (t)air(e) plays with the two words "taire" – French for "silence" – and "air", which itself stands for air, but also song, aria and breath. And so the music is a game of different breathing and playing techniques, which demonstrate the different ways of music

The composition aims towards a simple, organic way of the presentation and an easily understandable performance of complex musical material. Oscar Bianchi found the model for his composing – just like the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí – in nature, where the most complex structures and highly articulated forms can be found in the simplest creations. Bianchi compresses his complex musical structures into an animated brilliance, like a human voice that is speaking spontaneously, vividly and in different sound colours. Only a closer look conveys micro-intervals, quarter-tonal inflections, timbral definitions and a broad range of dynamics, which almost unheard form a complex music structure.

BEAT FURRER: GASPRA



Points and fields between music and noise

The works by **Beat Furrer**, born in Schaffhausen and holder of the Grand Austrian State Prize, have already found their place in the canon of classical music. *Gaspra for ensemble*, which celebrated its world premiere in the Vienna Konzerthaus in March 1989 by Furrer's own ensemble Klangforum Wien, marks a turning point in Beat Furrer's

attended the seminars of Pierre Boulez in Paris and conducting classes with Franco Ferrara. Several times pieces of J.-L. Darbellay were included in the program of the ISCM World Music Days (Bucarest, Luxemburg, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Slovenia, Switzerland, Sweden and Croatia). He premiered *Mégaliithe - Lutèce* for horn and ensemble in Paris, Cité de la Musique, with the Tokyo Sinfonietta at the Festival Présences under the direction of Yasuaki Itakura. The Swiss premiere of *Requiem* with the conductor Emilio Pomarico took place in the frame of the Lucerne Festival, *Dernière lettre à Théo* (text: Metin Arditi) was premiered by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in the Victoria Hall in Geneva with the soloist Rudolf Rosen (baritone). 2011/12 he was composer in residence with the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne.

Oscar Bianchi Born in Milan in 1975, holding dual Italian-Swiss citizenships, Oscar Bianchi completed degrees in composition, choir conducting and electronic music at the Giuseppe Verdi conservatory of Milan. He pursued studies in composition taking part in master programs such as at IRCAM - Centre Pompidou and with a doctoral degree at Columbia University in New York. Vitality, pulsing rhythms, and virtuosity are the hallmarks of the music created by Bianchi, who reveals a sensible interest in new phrasings and new ornamentations, something to be expected from someone whose ears are finely attuned to the music from all corners of the globe. A vocal quality, even in his instrumental work, can strike us as a prominent feature of his music.

Beat Furrer was born in Schaffhausen, Switzerland in 1954 and moved to Vienna in 1975. He studied composition with Roman Haubenstock-Ramati and they developed a close friendship based on mutual esteem which lasted until the older composer's death in 1994. Thanks to Otmar

