

CeReNeM VISITING ARTIST SERIES
ELISION Ensemble

Monday 29 April, 2019

CeReNeM

PROGRAMME

Richard Barrett : entoptic (2017-18)
for solo percussion and live electronics
world premiere

Liza Lim : The Green Lion Eats the Sun (2014)
for adapted trombone

James Bradbury : Refracted Touch (2019)
for solo lap steel guitar and electronics
world premiere

Joel Kirk : in-side (2018-19)
for quarter-tone flugelhorn and percussion
world premiere

Richard Barrett : mask (2017-19)
for solo trombone

ELISION Ensemble : improvisation



ELISION Ensemble

Daryl Buckley – electric lap steel guitar and effects
Callum G'Froerer – trumpet, quarter-tone flugelhorn
Benjamin Marks – trombone
Peter Neville – percussion
Aaron Cassidy – live electronics

Richard Barrett : entoptic (2017-18)
for solo percussion and live electronics
world premiere

entoptic for solo percussion with live electronics is the present result of an extended collaboration with Peter Neville. While performing in a succession of improvisational pieces I have written for ELISION and other ensembles (codex I, III, IV, IX, XI, XIV, XVIII, XIX, XX), he has been gradually evolving a percussion setup which combines maximum timbral flexibility with portability, utilising a wide selection of small instruments and other objects. This solo was conceived around Peter's setup by "systematising" it as a 4x4 grid of principal instruments placed on a table, with an additional 3x3 grid of smaller objects in the gaps between them. The setup is then amplified by microphones at its corners, which allow a "spatialisation" of the grid onto the size and shape of the performing space itself, and for instruments to be picked up and actuated next to a microphone for a "close-up" sound or moved between them for "panning". Additionally, the microphones are used to pick up percussion sounds for the live electronic part, programmed by Patrick Delges of the Centre Henri Pousseur in Liège. In the first of the three phases of the piece, no electronic sounds appear. In the second, the computer selects certain partials from the (not all clearly pitched) percussion sounds and extends them in time, triggered by a sustain pedal played by the percussionist. In the third, this processing continues but the percussive sounds now also actuate prerecorded electronic sounds and textures which expand the timbral and articulative range of the "instrument" even further.

The title refers to visual phenomena which are generated within the nervous system rather than sensed by the eyes, for example the patterns known as "form constants" which recur in descriptions of altered states of consciousness throughout many shamanistic cultures as well as experiences with hallucinogenic substances. These patterns of dots, zigzags, spirals and so on could be said to form a "map" of the visual cortex of the brain – what is being seen is in a real sense the "workings of the mind". This music uses such "form constants" as patterns of movement across the two-dimensional array of struck objects, and in the course of its three parts transforms these through electronic processing into new sound-forms, analogously to the way that the transition from waking consciousness into sleep or trance might first involve abstract patterns which the mind gradually "interprets" as the contents of dreams or (in shamanic practices) of the spirit world. In the early 1990s, Daryl Buckley remarked to me that in working with the "grain of the instrument", as I'd been doing in the context of what I subsequently came to call "radically idiomatic instrumentalism", I was also working with the "psyche of the musician", a remark that has resonated more deeply with me as the years have gone by. *entoptic* forms part of a cycle of interlocking works under the collective title PSYCHE, which attempt, from various angles, to confront that interface between the inner and physical worlds (which may or may not ultimately be two sides of the same thing) that is at the heart of all musical activity. Here I've also been strongly influenced by David Lewis-Williams's book *The Mind in the Cave*, an exploration of the origins of art and creativity in altered mental states with particular reference to Palaeolithic cave paintings. For me musical activity (composition – performance – listening) is as meaningful a way of trying to understand the world as any other: what it might be thought to lack in specificity relative to science and philosophy might in the end, in some contexts, be an advantage and a way of liberating thought from language and its dualisms.

entoptic was commissioned by ELISION and Peter Neville, and completed in October 2018.

Liza Lim : The Green Lion Eats the Sun (2014)

for adapted trombone

The Green Lion Eats the Sun was written especially for Melvyn Poore and the double-bell euphonium that he developed in collaboration with the instrument builder Gottfried Büchel during 2011-12. 'The Green Lion Devouring the Sun' is one of the classic images of alchemy with a great variety of interpretations as to its possible meaning. The green lion usually represents a powerfully volatile corrosive agent (aqua regis) which swallows seven metals, even dissolving gold in a process of purification.

The solo work explores the sonic worlds of the two bells of the instrument: a muted bell is used to filter fragments of a carnival of sound that are played through the open bell. The muted echoes represent the level of our conscious knowledge that barely catches hold of a riot of activity arising and falling away at the pre-conscious level. Every now and then a more intense communication between the two sides occurs as the bells flutter open and closed.

James Bradbury : Refracted Touch (2019)

for solo lap steel guitar and electronics

world premiere

Refracted Touch is a piece for slide guitar and interactive electronics. The form of the piece is guided by the electronics, which progress through various modes of listening that determine the type and behaviour of the active processing. The guitarist is prompted to engage with the electronics and to exploit the way it listens and responds to various features of their playing. This can cultivate a relationship between the guitar and electronics in which they are woven together, acting synergistically. However, there are times in which the electronics dominate and aim to be at the forefront of the musical surface positioning two equally agent forces against each other.

Joel Kirk : in-side (2018-19)

for quarter-tone flugelhorn and percussion

world premiere

"The characteristic polarity of life is at the level of the membrane...the entire mass of living matter contained in the internal space is actively present to the external world at the limit of the living...To belong to interiority does not mean only to be 'inside', but to be on the 'in-side' of the limit...At the level of the polarised membrane, internal past and external future face one another"

- Gilbert Simondon

Richard Barrett : mask (2017-19)

for solo trombone

mask for solo trombone forms part of membrane for trombone and electronics, itself a component of the extended composition PSYCHE which also involves music for ensemble as well as purely electronic music. One of the strands running through this cycle is a contemplation of the origins of human artistic expression in the cave paintings of the Palaeolithic period, as well as of the ways in which these paintings might have been intended, understood and experienced in their own time, being as they are for the most part hidden in quite inaccessible recesses of cave systems, so that viewing them might well have been an element in a shamanistic spiritual journey, associated with altered states of consciousness.

In the furthest part (known as the "horse's tail") of the cave system of Altamira in northern Spain are natural rock formations resembling faces, whose features were emphasised by painting for example a circle in one of the "eyes". Several of these "masks" seem to peer from the rock face at a visitor who has undertaken the difficult task of reaching the end of the last and narrowest of the Altamira chambers and who then turns around to begin their return to the outside. "The figures are not merely painted onto the surface; they become part of the cave itself, of the nether realm. (...) It is as if the rock were a living membrane between those who ventured in and one of the lowest levels of the tiered cosmos; behind the membrane lay a realm inhabited by spirit animals and spirits themselves, and the passage and chambers of the caves penetrated deep into that realm." (David Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave*) The composition *mask* occupies a central point in the "journey" undertaken through the 30 minutes of membrane, a lonely monologue which constantly reconfigures the relationship between the lips and slide of the player into a complex evolving thread.

mask was commissioned by ELISION and completed in July 2018.

ELISION Ensemble : improvisation

ELISION has been celebrated for its unique instrumentarium, close and longterm artistic relationships with composers, its virtuosity, and the ability and deep commitment of its musicians to renegotiate and re-invent performance practice and technique. Notable ELISION achievements include the first-ever appearances of Australian contemporary opera at the Opéra National de Paris and the Fomenko Theatre in Moscow; the curation of a concert series at Kings Place London from 2009-12; residencies at the Universities of Harvard, Stanford, Huddersfield, and Southwestern Texas; and the premiere of Richard Barrett's CONSTRUCTION – a two-hour cycle commissioned by the European Capital of Culture programme at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 2011 for live broadcast by BBC Radio 3. ELISION has commissioned over 200 new works, including repertoire classics such as Liza Lim's *Mother Tongue*, co-commissioned with the Ensemble Intercontemporain and Festival d'Automne à Paris. ELISION has also joined with leading groups Ensemble Modern (Frankfurt), CIKADA (Oslo), Line Upon Line (Austin) and MusikFabrik (Köln) for large-scale projects. Conductors worked with include Jean Deroyer, Franck Ollu, Christian Eggen, Manuel Nawri, Simon Hewett, Denis Cohen, Carl Rosman, Pierre-André Valade and Eugene Ughetti. Of singular importance to ELISION was the relationship with Italian conductor Sandro Gorli, established in the early 1990's, which led to him becoming a resident conductor for the ensemble for the better part of that decade. The group's discography extends to twenty-two compact discs including recordings made at the Deutschlandfunk, Radio Bremen and BBC Maida Vale Studios for release on HCR, KAIROS, NEOS, NMC and MODE, reviewed to acclaim in Gramophone, The Wire, New York Times, the Sunday Times and BBC Music Magazine.

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