



University
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& Creative Arts

School of Culture and Creative Arts presents

McEwen Memorial Concert
of Scottish Chamber Music

Saturday, 20 November 2010



THE McEWEN COMMISSION

The McEwen Commission has a long and illustrious history. Starting in 1955 with the commissioning of Iain Whyte to write a string quartet, the list of composers reads like a who's who of late twentieth and early twenty-first century Scottish music.

Some names on the list appear more than once, including Edward McGuire and William Sweeney. We will hear performances of music by both composers this afternoon. Significantly, Sweeney celebrates his 60th birthday this year, marked already by a clutch of performances of his music both here in Glasgow and in Finland and Poland.

It is telling that several of the commissions in the past were awarded to composers in the relatively early stages of their careers (some only in their mid twenties). Examples include Edward McGuire's 1975 commission for *Liberation*, John Purser's 1968 commission for String Trio (op. 21), and Martin Dalby's commission in 1967 for Piano Trio. From the start, the commission has helped underpin the emergence of new music and new individuals in Scotland's contemporary music scenes.

This year's commission, given to Glasgow-based composer David Fennessy, comes at a time of major success – currently a Fellow at the prestigious Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart (and invited back for 2011), Fennessy has just won a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Artist Award to support his work over the coming three years; a string of recent commissions has led to high-profile premières by such acclaimed ensembles as the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, Scottish Opera, and Ensemble Modern (Berlin), as well as performances by the London Sinfonietta, Crash Ensemble and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. His music – engaging, delicate, often witty and always deeply and carefully considered – represents a fine balance between attention to compositional detail and emotional presence. Its aesthetic threads, one could argue, place it clearly as 'music of our time'. We are extremely pleased to have been able to ask David to write this piece.

The McEwen Commission aims to promote the work of composers either born in Scotland, or living and working here. This afternoon's program, in addition to David Fennessy's new piece, is an all-Scottish affair. It celebrates the work of composers in Scotland today (Beamish, Sweeney, McGuire). The music is presented by the ever-dynamic Da Vinci Trio, featuring acclaimed performers Robert Irvine, Anthony Moffat, and John Thwaites.

Nick Fells, Head of Music

***Piobaireachd* (1991)**
Sally Beamish (b. 1956)

I became interested in the ancient 'classical music' of the bagpipe when I wrote a piece for schools based on a story by Neil Munro called *The Lost Pibroch*. I incorporated several pipes playing traditional pibrochs mentioned in the story. For the legendary 'Lost Pibroch' - a haunting melody which causes men and animals to desert their home and roam the world - I wrote my own full pibroch, and it is on this that I have based *Piobaireachd*.

The Pibroch, or *Piobaireachd* (Gaelic), is a set of variations on a slow theme, or 'ground'. There are various set types of variation, using a simple paraphrase of the original melody, laced with ever more intricate ornamentation, so that the music builds to a frenzy of rapid gracenotes. At the end the 'ground' is usually repeated. I have done exactly this, but I have also used more contemporary methods of variation, experimenting with separation of ornament and melody into different keys, and even developing the 'drone', which extends downwards by a tone in each variation, so that in the end it encompasses a complete whole-tone scale. The piece is dedicated to the piper Annie Grant, who guided me in my exploration of the fascinating world of Pibroch, in appreciation of her expertise and musicianship.

Note

It is thought by some that the Pibroch may have been brought to Scotland from Cremona in Italy in the Fifteenth Century by the MacCrimmons, and so may well have roots intertwined with those better-known baroque and classical variation forms, such as the Chaconne.

Sally Beamish

Sally Beamish started her career as a viola player, and moved to Scotland in 1990 to concentrate on composition. Her music has been commissioned and broadcast worldwide. She has an ongoing association with the label BIS, who have recorded much of her orchestral and chamber music, including her complete works for cello and piano with cellist Robert Irvine, accompanied by the composer.

Forthcoming projects include a concerto for Colin Currie, and a collaboration with saxophonist Branford Marsalis, as well as a work for actor Samuel West with the group Psappha.

She is writing a piece for the Elias Quartet for the 2011 BBC Proms.

Her new cello concerto, 'The Song Gatherer', premiered by Robert Cohen with the Minnesota Orchestra and Osmo Vanska last year, will receive its UK premiere with the Halle and Sir Mark Elder in December 2010, and broadcast on Radio 3.

Yet Ha'e I Silence Left (1992)

William Sweeney (b. 1950)

Yet ha'e I Silence left, the croon o' a'.

No' her, wha on the hills langsyne I saw
Liftin' a foreheid o' perpetual snaw.

No' her, wha in the how-dumb-deid o' nicht
Kyths, like Eternity in Time's despite.

Reveals

No' her withooten shape, wha's name is Daith,
No' Him, unkennable abies to faith

except

God whom, gin e'er he saw a man, 'ud be
E'en mair dumfooner'd at the sicht than he

-But Him, whom nocht in man or Deity,
Or Daith or Drejd or Laneliness can touch,
Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.

From *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, by Hugh MacDiarmid

A year or so after the first performances of my setting of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, Robert Irvine asked me if I could arrange the song which ends the piece for Piano Trio. In the original it marks the Drunk Man's achievement of some sort of resurrection of the spirit after a psychological journey from anger through despair and self-disgust, purging his senses through overdosing on the intellectual and sensual images which rush through his mind. The music echoes the multiplicity of philosophical viewpoints in the poem by deploying stylistic discontinuities, and this closing number aimed at being a "Hommage" to Messiaen. MacDiarmid's protagonist ends with silence, but is undercut by the ironic, imagined voice of his wife. Listeners to the piano trio version will have to imagine this for themselves, if they wish:

O I ha'e silence left

- "And weel ye nicht,"

Sae Jean'll say, "efer sic a nicht!"

William Sweeney 2010

Born in Glasgow, 1950. Educated at Knightswood Secondary School, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama: W.T.Clucas (Clarinet), Frank Spedding (Harmony and Counterpoint), Royal Academy of Music: Alan Hacker (Clarinet), Harrison Birtwistle (Composition). Currently Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow.

Many works have been written for the clarinet, but his output covers a wide range of instrumental, orchestral, electronic and vocal forces. Commissions have been from

such diverse organisations as the BBC, Paragon Ensemble, St Magnus Festival, Musica Nova, Capella Nova, Mayfest, the STUC, Glasgow University, RSAMD, Moving Music Theatre, McNaughten Concerts, Theatre Cryptic and the Jim Henson Organisation.

In 2006, a Creative Scotland Award led to the creation in 2007 of *Schemes, Blues and Dreams*, a composition combining live performance and electro-acoustics, exploring the sensibility of Scottish musicians of the 1960s who defined their identity through the music of Black America. The project featured internationally recognised blues harmonica player Fraser Spiers, placed in an electro-acoustic setting based on live processing of sampled and performance material.

More recent works have included "Songs of Connacht" for the Dunedin Consort, and a Sonata Cello and piano. Plans for 2010-11 include a setting of Brian Merriman's "The Midnight Court", and a new work for Chorus and Orchestra.

During April and May 2010, he was in residence at the Kone Foundation's Saari Manor in South West Finland.

Da Vinci Trio

Anthony Moffat

Hailing from the Borders Anthony Moffat was trained at the Royal Academy of Music, London by Armenian Soloist and Orchestra Leader, Manoug Parikian. He gained the highest award for violin on his graduation in 1987 winning the Marjorie Hayward Prize. His passion for Chamber music was encouraged and nurtured for many years by the members of the Amadeus Quartet but it is as devotee of the Piano Trio that he is best known outwith the orchestra. As member of the Da Vinci Piano Trio he has toured the breadth of the country and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. His career as Orchestra Leader began as Co- leader of the Halle Orchestra until taking the post of Leader of the Orchestra of Scottish Opera in 2000. He has appeared as Guest Leader with BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of Welsh National Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland.

He plays on a fine violin by C.G. Testore of Milan ca. 1705

Robert Irvine

Robert Irvine was born in Glasgow, and at the age of 16 was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he studied with Christopher Bunting and Amaryllis Fleming. On leaving the Royal College, he went on to further studies with William Pleeth and Pierre Fournier before joining the Philharmonia as sub principal cello. He left the Philharmonia in 1988 to take up the position of principal cello with the Academy of St Martin-in-the-Fields, touring extensively.

In 1990, he returned to Scotland to take up the post of principal cellist with Scottish Opera, and with Sally Beamish and James MacMillan founded the Chamber Group of Scotland. He is artistic director of the Red Note Ensemble. He has recorded several critically acclaimed CDs including the cello works of Sally Beamish for the BIS label, Dallapiccola solo works, the cello music of Giles Swayne and the Rachmaninov and Schostakovitch sonatas for the Delphian label. He is a senior professor of Cello and Chamber Music at the RSAMD.

Robert plays on an exceptionally fine Venetian cello by Gofriller from 1720, kindly loaned to him by Renagour Rare Instruments.

John Thwaites

John Thwaites studied on the Joint Course between Manchester University and the Royal Northern College of Music, at the Guildhall, in Siena, Vienna and (as the recipient of an English Speaking Union scholarship) in the United States. His teachers included Harvey Dagul, Sulamita Aronovsky, Paul Berkowitz, Martino Tirimo and Christian Blackshaw. In addition to early recitals for the Park Lane Group and Live Music Now! John won the 1986 North West Arts Young Musicians' Platform with bassist Leon Bosch.

John has been working with Alexander Bailie for thirty years. Alongside relationships with the Schidlof, Maggini, Emperor, Martinu and Brodsky Quartets, a performance of Lyapunov's Sextet with the Dante Quartet on Dutton Digital was BBC Music Magazine's chamber music choice for November 2004. Recent concerto performances include Grieg at St. John's Smith Square, and Tchaikovsky at the Royal College of Music. A solo disc of Romantic Favourites will be released in 2010.

John conducts the Bridge of Weir and Greenock Philharmonic Choral Societies. He is currently a professor at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and Course Director of the Cadenza International Summer Music School.

The McEwen Bequest

Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) bequeathed the residue of his estate to the University of Glasgow to help promote performance of chamber music by composers of Scottish birth and descent. Other composers resident in Scotland for a substantial period have also benefited from the fund. In fulfilment of the terms of the bequest the University Court commissions annually a piece of chamber music for not more than five players and every three years a work for larger forces. From time to time the University Court has also offered a prize for a chamber work by a Scottish composer. The income from the bequest is also used to promote the Triennial Series of McEwen Memorial Concerts, the first of which took place in 1956. The programmes for these concerts are drawn from the works of Scottish composers past and present and pay particular attention to those commissioned by the University Court.

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|------|---|---------------------|
| 1955 | String Quartet No 3 | Ian Whyte |
| 1956 | <i>Directions for a Map</i> | Cedric Thorpe Davis |
| 1956 | *Sonata No 2 for viola and piano | Ronald G Duncan |
| 1956 | Octet for Strings | Iain Hamilton |
| 1957 | String Quartet No 2 | Robert Crawford |
| 1958 | String Quartet No 1 | Thea Musgrave |
| 1959 | Sonata for cello and piano | Iain Hamilton |
| 1959 | *String Quartet No 3 | Thomas Wilson |
| 1960 | String Quartet | David Gwilt |
| 1961 | Sonata for violin and piano | Thomas Wilson |
| 1962 | Chamber Concerto No 1 | Thea Musgrave |
| 1962 | *Theme and Variations for clarinet quintet | Sebastian Forbes |
| 1963 | Canzona for tenor, clarinet and string trio | Buxton Orr |
| 1964 | Piano Trio | Sebastian Forbes |
| 1966 | String Quartet No 3 | David Dorward |
| 1967 | Piano Trio | Martin Dalby |
| 1968 | String Trio op 21 | John Purser |
| 1968 | *String Trio | David Gow |
| 1968 | Sinfonia for seven instruments | Thomas Wilson |
| 1969 | String Quartet | Rita McAllister |
| 1970 | <i>Quaderno a Quattro</i> | John Maxwell Geddes |
| 1971 | <i>Journeys and Places</i> | Robin Orr |
| 1971 | Piano Quintet | Frank Spedding |
| 1972 | Fantasy String Quartet | Isobel Dunlop |
| 1973 | Clarinet Quintet | John McLeod |
| 1974 | <i>Histoire</i> | David Dorward |
| 1975 | <i>Liberation</i> | Edward McGuire |
| 1976 | <i>Three Poems of Li Ch'ing-Chao</i> | Wilma Paterson |
| 1977 | <i>Almost a Madrigal</i> | Martin Dalby |
| 1978 | <i>The Ancient Pattern</i> | Morris Pert |
| 1979 | <i>Channel Firing</i> | John Heame |
| 1980 | Wind Octet | Edward McGuire |
| 1981 | String Quartet | William Sweeney |
| 1982 | <i>Scotch Minstrelsy</i> | Judith Weir |
| 1983 | <i>Diversions</i> | John Maxwell Geddes |
| 1984 | Sonata for cello and piano | Peter Nelson |
| 1985 | <i>Strange Fruit</i> | John Lunn |
| 1986 | String Quartet | John McLeod |
| 1987 | Ricercare | Robert Crawford |
| 1988 | <i>Visions of a November Spring</i> | James MacMillan |
| 1989 | <i>El Pueblo</i> | William Sweeney |
| 1990 | <i>Dead Roses</i> | Gordon McPherson |
| 2009 | <i>Intimacy</i> for string quartet | John De Simone |