

By kind permission of
the Master and fellows



Composers' Concert

Thursday 15th June, 2023 | 8pm

Trinity College Chapel

PROGRAMME

GREGORY MAY	Launching Music
MARISSE CATO	Asteria
ALEX WRATHALL	Glacial (d/r)econstruction
VICTOR WANG	I heard the mountains breathing
MONTAGU JAMES	String Quartet No. 2, Nocturne
RHYS LEWIS	The Devil's Waltz
TIM TIAN	Piano Trio
ADAM HOWELL	Pizzicato
SARAH HENDERSON	Epilogue

PROGRAMME NOTES

Gregory May – Launching Music

I called this piece 'Launching Music' for two reasons: Firstly, it (more-or-less) speeds up continuously from the beginning to the end, like a rocket taking off. Secondly, the piece might work well as a concert opener, functioning as the music that 'launches' a concert.

Marisse Cato – Asteria

This piece was inspired by a journey through outer space and the sense of existentialism and altered perception of time experienced during this journey. It explores the range of timbres and subtleties that can be

created on the violin in order to produce an extraterrestrial soundworld. The composition of comets, made up of ice and dust, inspired the simultaneous use of stopped notes, natural harmonics and artificial harmonics in order to convey the clear light we see from a comet, the cold sharp aspect of ice in the timbre of natural harmonics, as well as the more textural, dusty sound from artificial harmonics. The players' agency to determine the lengths of bars allows for more control in the slow changing aspects and nuances of the music in order to create both an atmosphere with elements of stillness as well as intensity. The spatialisation and echo effects between the two violins heighten the vast and seemingly eternal body of area that is outer space, communicating the existential element, in addition to the range of perspectives from which the journey can be. The increasing and decreasing note frequency as well as pitch range analogise the progression of such an awe-inspiring journey both physically and emotionally.

Alex Wrathall – Glacial (d/r)econstruction

This piece is inspired by *The Hearing Trumpet* by Leonora Carrington. The novel, which follows the story of a 92-year-old woman, sent away by her family to an old people's home, who discovers a secret occult plot to resurrect a bee goddess using the stolen Holy Grail. About 3/4 of the way through the novel, the world goes through an apocalyptic event, with cataclysmic changes in weather and widespread social collapse. This event, however, is treated by the characters of the novel as only a mild disturbance, and by the end the protagonists are welcoming an ark on sleds, full of Canadian wolves, to join them in the remains of the convent, blissfully unconcerned with the devastation of humanity as a whole.

This led me to conceptualise a scale of history that would be so vast, would move so slowly, that such an event would be almost imperceptible. The 'end of the world' occurs at a similar point in this piece, but passes almost without note as it fades into the glacial movement of the music.

The piece begins with all three recorders playing homophonically, coming together to form a solid unmoving object. This object is then deconstructed, all three parts disappearing into their own streams, be-

fore they converge again on the final page to finish the melody they began so many aeons ago.

Victor Wang – I heard the mountains breathing

I sketched out this composition on some long train rides, while traveling around Japan. Whenever I visit East Asia I love seeing the deep, green mountains that fill the countryside. Something mysterious seems to live inside them – a kind of otherness, altogether indifferent to human existence.

I wonder how these same landscapes must have appeared to people millennia ago. What drove the ancients to build temples on the mountains, to pray to them in their dreams and poems?

Montagu James – String Quartet no. 2, Nocturne

The piece's quiet opening and closing sections invoke four-part chorales with a repeated rhythmic motif. The middle part is a slow, dance-like section that shifts harmonies several times before returning to the original theme. I also draw inspiration from the impressionistic, atmospheric style of Claude Debussy's Nocturnes and the elegiac quality in Ralph Vaughan-Williams's chamber music. I intend for this 'nocturne' to be part of a larger string quartet with contrasting movements that explore different textures and harmonic languages.

Rhys Lewis – The Devil's Waltz

This piece initially began as a string quartet but the drama of it required more texture, hence the switch out of a violin and viola for a piano. The idea of some supernatural being toying with your emotions can be heard throughout this piece, from the simple but slightly eerie opening melody appearing throughout, to the different styles of lyricism and jauntiness that are abruptly stopped and replaced with loud and ferocious sections. As the old saying goes, you can't dance with the devil.

Tim Tian – Piano Trio

This piano trio consists of three movements. The first movement is an agitated, fragmentary dialogue between the three instruments, seemingly to decide on what material to play. The second movement is a

playful game, as if the three instruments have familiarised with each other. The third movement is a calmed down reflection, summoning up previous materials religiously.

Adam Howell – Pizzicato

This piece is written for a small string orchestra of 9 players. The players are to play exclusively by plucking the strings. The piece is meant to be a fun exploration of the pizzicato technique, influenced by the third movement of Tchaikovsky's fourth symphony and the second movement of Britten's Simple Symphony. In both of these pieces the pizzicato technique is used exclusively for extended periods, and it is this element that I have sought to employ but in a more modern context.

Sarah Henderson – Epilogue

Cryptically titled 'Epilogue' without any reference story, this piece aims to demonstrate the sense of an ending without imposing any prior context on the audience. The listener is invited to construct their own narrative from the music of what this could be an epilogue to, drawing on their own experiences and the stories they've encountered. The piece utilises the space of the chapel to surround the audience with the soundscape, while moments of heavy contrast make room for a variety of emotional responses to the music.

PERSONNEL

Emma Dinnage flute
Vanessa Ortiz clarinet
Anna Grayson, Ellen Jameson recorder
Mika Curson recorder/'cello
Jonathan Davies horn
Jess Clayton percussion
Kristin Barone-Samadi, Daniel Liu piano
Jacqueline Seki, Calvin Leung, Montagu James violin

Leon Sturdeeviolin/viola
Sam Travis viola
Rhys Lewis 'cello
Annabel Beniston double bass
Sarah Henderson 'cello/conductor
Adam Howell conductor

Concerts from Trinity College Chapel are video webcast live and available to watch again. You may be identifiable as in attendance at the concert. Please ensure that all electronic devices, including cameras, are switched off. Any children should not be left unsupervised at any time.