

PROGRAMME



17 April 2012
The Parry Rooms, Royal College of Music
7.00 for 7.30pm

ROBERT SPEARING

piano symphony

arranged by the composer for 3 pianos

FIRST PERFORMANCE

ANDREW ZOLINSKY piano solo
NIKOS STAVLAS orchestra 1
ANDRIANA MINOU orchestra 2

The symphony is divided into two parts of more or less equal proportions. At the start, a rudimentary theme is built out of fragmentary material. This passage recurs four times during the course of the work, including at the opening of Part 2. Each time it reappears, it takes on a different character, which to begin with is highly aggressive – setting the tone for much of Part 1.

Part 1 is a vision of a wasteland, a world in which a brutal driving rhythm attempts to blot out beauty, gentleness, consolation. Part 2 revisits some of the musical ideas of the first part, but re-imagines them in a more positive light. Fleet-footed energy displaces aggression, and a little warmth returns to dispel the sense of bewildered desolation that pervades Part 1.

Synopsis

Part 1

Heavy, rhythmic – Tense (same tempo) – Opaque (slower tempo) – Pressing forward very slightly – Quick – With increasing fury – Heavy, rhythmic, as at the start – Flowing: smooth yet clear – Subito tempo 1 – Increasingly nervy and agitated

Fast and driving music characterizes the two fugal passages which open and close the movement. Entries pile one upon another, relentlessly – at the very close leaving us without any sense of resolution. The first 'fugue' gives way in due course to slow music, in which opaque chords drift like dense clouds. Seemingly new, they in fact derive from the previous driving theme – very much slowed down and

newly harmonized. Against this background, pointillist lines are picked out across all three pianos. At first seeming lost and lacking direction, they gradually gain purpose and urgency. This music too is repeated later in the movement, just before the final fugal section. At its return, however, the textures are more fluid. Cascades of broken chords and a less static harmony hint at a mood a little less bleak than before.

In the centre of the movement, a quick and urgent passage appears – one whose importance grows significantly in Part 2. Here it leads headlong into a section marked ‘With increasing fury’. After this comes the reprise of the fragmentary opening, that in turn leads to the cascades, and finally to the closing ‘fugue’.

Part 2

Rhythmic but light (slower than at the start of Part 1) – Light and quick – Smooth and flowing (same tempo) – Very energetic – Light and quick, as before – Smooth and flowing, as before – Very energetic again – Powerfully – Calmer – Like the start, but mysterious – Dreamlike – Slower: tender, fragile and hesitant – Light and quick, as before – Broad and serene

The second part, like the first, is broadly concerned with contrasting two musical ideas – one mercurially quick, the other warmly expressive. A third idea – a transformation of the fugal theme from Part 1 – is energetic and rhythmic and is interwoven with the other two.

Certain structural similarities between Parts 1 and 2 are deliberately intended to heighten awareness of their complementary nature. This movement too contains a slow central, dreamlike interlude. This passage presented perhaps the greatest challenge in the transcription for three pianos. The original is built with constantly shifting orchestral textures, like patterns in a kaleidoscope. There is much atmospheric scoring for percussion, but there is no way of conveying this into the present version, and this for now must be completed by each listener’s imagination.

The dreamlike passage finally leads into a quietly expressive climax – marked ‘tender, fragile and hesitant’. In many respects this is the emotional core of the symphony. The return of positive energy then sweeps this aside, and at last we hear the quick and urgent theme (the one first briefly met with in Part 1) combined with the mercurial theme in counterpoint. To close, a brief coda offers final reconciliation between the conflicting tonal centres of A and B flat which have fought for dominance since the beginning.

Note on the orchestral version

The work is of course conceived for piano and orchestra, and a brief description of the particular sound world of the original may be helpful to tonight’s listeners. The solo piano provides the ‘centre’ of the sound – the sound from which all else radiates. It is in this sense that I have used the term ‘symphony’ in the title (literally ‘sounding together’) – it is not a case of contrast as in a concerto. Ranged around the piano would be found a harp, marimba, vibraphone, and an array of timpani and other percussion, grouped into drums, wood and metal – amongst the less common instruments being thunder sheets and log drums. The string section is quite normally constituted though scored with much subdivision of parts. The brass section has only four solo players: horn, trumpet, trombone and bass trombone. The woodwind by contrast is more extensive than usual and has something of a jazzy quality to its timbre, with husky alto flute and dark-toned bass clarinet, as well as three kinds of saxophone – including the rare bass sax.

Andrew Zolinsky is one of the most distinctive musical voices of his generation - a pianist of technical virtuosity and interpretative vision whose repertoire ranges from early Baroque to the present day. His recital programmes are often brought together in fascinating and exciting ways. In the contemporary field, he is closely associated with the music of Unsuk Chin, Simon Holt, David Lang, Valentin Silvestrov, and the Dutch composers Diderik Wagenaar and Martijn Padding .

Andrew has given premieres of many of David Lang's works, including the world premiere in New York of the complete set of *Memory Pieces*, and the piano concerto *Fur* commissioned by the BBC, and premiered at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival. He performed Unsuk Chin's complete *Etudes* for solo piano at the Royal Northern College of Music in February 2007 as part of a festival celebrating her work, and gave their French premiere at the Festival Musica in Strasbourg. He also gave the London premiere of her *Piano Concerto* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Miguel Harth-Bedoya. More recently, as part of the BBC's 'Total Immersion' series in April 2011, Andrew played her *Double Concerto* with percussionist Owen Gunnell and the London Sinfonietta conducted by Stefan Asbury at the Barbican Centre. At the request of the composer, he was recently invited to perform the *Piano Concerto* and *Etudes* at the prestigious French festival, Acanthes.

In addition to his appearances with the BBCSO, Andrew has also performed with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Sinfonietta, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Concert Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lorraine, and has worked under the baton of such distinguished conductors as Stefan Asbury, David Robertson, Miguel Harth-Bedoya, Diego Masson, Owain Arwel Hughes, Martyn Brabbins, Nicholas Cleobury, Charles Hazlewood and Grant Llewellyn. As well as playing at all the major venues in the UK, he has given concerts in the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal and the United States – both in New York and San Francisco.

Andrew has recorded for Cantaloupe, Guild and NMC. NMC recently released Andrew's recording of solo piano music by Michael Zev Gordon. This disc was chosen as one of the TOP TEN CONTEMPORARY CD'S OF 2009 by Paul Driver in the Sunday Times. His disc of David Lang's piano music on the Cantaloupe label, was released in September 2011. Future engagements include concerts with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and In May 2012, with members of the Philharmonia Orchestra in the Royal Festival Hall. Also during that month, Andrew will be giving concerts in New York and Texas. Andrew is Professor of piano at the Royal College of Music and at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Nikos Stavlas was born in Greece in 1983. He studied at the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki (BMus with distinction, 2005) and at the Royal College of Music with Yonty Solomon and Kathron Sturrock (MMus with distinction, 2007, financially supported by the Greek State Scholarship Foundation and by the RCM). He has given several concerts as a soloist and as a chamber music performer - in Greece, Albania, Spain, Belgium and the United Kingdom. Finally, as a member of the Zalas trio, he has given concerts at the Purcell Room and the Wigmore Hall, as part of the Park Lane Group New Year Series. Nikos is currently working towards a PhD in Piano Performance Practice at Goldsmiths, University of London under the supervision of Keith Potter and Andrew Zolinsky. His area of research is *Ludwig van*, a film and a musical composition on Beethoven by the Argentinian composer Mauricio Kagel.

Andriana Minou was born in 1982 in Athens, and started her piano studies in Kalamata with Lilian Zafeiratou and Nelli Semitekolo. In 2003 she completed her BA Piano Performance in the Department of Music Science and Art of the University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki with Domna Evnouhidou with a

distinction. She is a member of the music/performance company 'Black Hook' (based in Greece with members around Europe) and of the 'Vladimir & Estragon Piano Duo'. In 2005 she attained an MA Performing Arts from Middlesex University, London, with an Onassis Public Benefit Foundation scholarship, and in 2010 she completed a PhD in Piano Performance Practice at Goldsmiths College, London with the same scholarship. She frequently appears in a wide variety of events in Greece and London as pianist, performer, (script)writer, composer and director, and she has won literary and musical awards in competitions.

Robert Spearing trained at the Royal College of Music, studying composition under Herbert Howells and conducting with Vernon Handley. He later gained a first class honours degree at the Open University, and went on to study with Vic Hoyland at the University of Birmingham. His compositions include, choral works, two symphonies and an oboe concerto, as well as chamber music and music theatre pieces. A number of works have been broadcast on Radio 3, including the Second Symphony, a cantata - *The Seagull* – which was a BBC commission, and the sonata for oboe and piano – *A Welsh Bestiary*. He has held a number of teaching posts – at the Purcell School, the Birmingham Conservatoire, and at the University of Birmingham where he completed his doctorate in musical composition.

Since 1996 he has taught at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff, and amongst other educational projects has been the collaboration with violinist Mary Cohen on four volumes for Faber Music for young string players 'Superstart'. His most recent work, in addition to tonight's, includes the solo cantata for tenor and piano *She Solus*, first heard in 2010 in Cardiff. This has just been adapted for distinguished Welsh baritone, Jeremy Huw Williams, for performance in the near future. Amongst current projects is a work for solo violin and mixed ensemble – *Electric*, and a *Diamond Jubilee Fanfare* for the RWCMD Symphonic Brass, who premiered his *Commedia dell'Arte* for Brass in March 2012.