



*CELLO
DREAMING*

Coral Lancaster
cello

Alan MacLean
piano

Cello Dreaming Concert

A programme that explores aspects of dreaming, and the myriad ways in which music reveals to us inner realities of life

Coral Lancaster and Alan MacLean

27 September 2015, 4pm

Holywell Music Room

Coral Lancaster pursues a varied career as a freelance chamber musician, orchestral musician, and teacher. Originally from Perth, Western Australia, Coral studied with Gregory Baron, Suzanne Wijsman, and David Pereira (dedicatee of Inner World and Threnody), before moving to the UK in 1997. Based in Oxford, Coral performs with the Lyric Piano Trio and the Jubilee Ensemble, and teaches locally. She is known for her sensitive performances, and also works regularly with the Philharmonia, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. This year Coral has toured with the Philharmonia to Madrid and Paris, and will shortly be travelling to Iceland with them as well. She can next be heard in Oxford performing in a solo lunchtime concert at St Michael at the North Gate, on 23rd November.

Alan MacLean is a graduate of The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. Alan studied with the Hungarian pianist Bela Simandi and received the award for the most outstanding student in his final year. Further study followed with internationally renowned pianists including Karl Ulrich Schnabel. Much in demand as a chamber musician, he has played with many of the country's leading instrumentalists and he premiered Malcolm Arnold's 'Trio Bourgeoises' and a recent arrangement of John Field's Rondo in A flat for Piano and Orchestra. His recording with the pianist Peter Lawson, 'English Piano Music for Piano Duet', was nominated for a Disc of the Year Award in the USA. Alan's schedule for 2015 includes festival engagements and masterclasses throughout the Midlands, the South West, London, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Sri Lanka.

Programme

Romance

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

Après un rêve

Papillon

Threnody

Peter Sculthorpe (1929-2014)

Inner World

Carl Vine (b 1954)

— **Interval** —

Louange à l'éternité de Jésus

Olivier Messiaen (1908 - 1992)

Sonata for Cello and Piano

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

I. Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto

II. Sérénade: Modérément animé

III. Finale: Animé, léger et nerveux

Romance, op.69 (1894)

Gabriel Fauré

Après un rêve, from **Trois mélodies**, op.7 (1878)

Papillon, op.77 (1884)

The composer Fauré wrote music of refined elegance that has come to epitomise the late French romantic style. He was a master of lyricism, with long flowing melodies sustained by luscious harmonic movement. Along with many other Romantic composers, Fauré's goal centred on aesthetic ideals of beauty, writing to his son in 1908 that 'for me, art, and above all music, consists of raising ourselves as high as possible above that which is real'.

As well as two quite substantial cello sonatas Fauré wrote several short pieces for cello. The **Romance** was first written as an 'Andante' for cello and organ, but in 1894 Fauré revised it for cello and piano, adding broken chords into the piano part which heightens the harmonic tension. **Après un rêve** (After a Dream) is one of Fauré's most loved compositions, and is a setting of a poem by Romain Bussine (1830–99) that describes a dream so ecstatic the dreamer yearns for its radiant return. **Papillon** (Butterfly) is a light and virtuosic showpiece.

Après un rêve

Dans un sommeil que charmait ton image
Je rêvais le bonheur, ardent mirage,
Tes yeux étaient plus doux, ta voix pure et
sonore,
Tu rayonnais comme un ciel éclairé par
l'aurore;
Tu m'appelais et je quittais la terre
Pour m'enfuir avec toi vers la lumière,
Les cieux pour nous entr'ouvraient leurs
nues,
Splendeurs inconnues, lueurs divines
entrevues,
Hélas! Hélas! triste réveil des songes
Je t'appelle, ô nuit, rends-moi tes
mensonges,
Reviens, reviens radieuse,
Reviens ô nuit mystérieuse!

After a Dream

In a slumber enchanted by your image
I dreamt of happiness, passionate mirage,
Your eyes were softer, your voice pure and
resonant,
You shone like a sky lit up by the dawn;
You called me and I left the earth
To run away with you towards the light,
The skies opened their clouds for us,
Unknown splendours, divine flashes
glimpsed,
Alas! Alas! sad awakening from dreams
I call you, O night, give me back your lies,
Return, return radiant,
Return, O mysterious night!

Peter Sculthorpe, who died last year, was one of the best-known Australian composers of recent times. In his music Sculthorpe consciously strove to create an Australian soundworld by adapting Aboriginal melodies and rhythms, imitating birdsong and didgeridoo, and also by drawing on aspects of music from other countries in the Pacific Rim.

Threnody is a lament written in memory of Stuart Challender, a conductor and personal friend of the composer who died of AIDS in 1991. The piece utilises an adapted Aboriginal lament from Elcho Island, and is also the main theme used in Sculthorpe's iconic Kakadu (1988) for orchestra. Threnody was premiered and recorded by Australia's most successful solo cellist and teacher, David Pereira. Coral Lancaster studied under David in Canberra.

Sculthorpe's deliberate use of his Kakadu melody in Threnody is partly based on an Aboriginal mythological concept of 'songlines': ancient paths across the Aboriginal landscape followed by 'creator-beings' during the Dreaming. By singing to a special melody memorized words which often described the location of landmarks, an Aboriginal person would be able to better navigate the harsh terrain. Sculthorpe himself used the term songlines to describe particular melodies having significance to him that evoked both the landscape, and aspects of an Aboriginal spirituality that has strong linguistic associations with dreaming.

Threnody moves through clearly delineated sections, each with its own mood. The music is raw and foreboding and, as in much of Sculthorpe's music, melodic development is consciously avoided (he regarded this as too European). The Elcho Island melody at the beginning suggests deep mourning, crying, and even wailing at times. After a chordal middle section the music returns to the lamentation with a repeated drone accompaniment, perhaps inspired by the didgeridoo.

Sculthorpe prefaced the published edition of the music with the most well-known passage from John Donne's 1624 Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, itself a meditation written by Donne when he recovering from a life-threatening illness. The text is best known today as a poem set in modernised English:

No man is an island, entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main; If a clod be washed
Away by the sea, Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know
For whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee.

Inner World (1994)

Carl Vine

Carl Vine is a prominent composer in Australia and has written in a wide range of genres, including orchestral and chamber music, concertos, and music for film, television, dance and theatre. He is currently senior lecturer in composition at Sydney Conservatorium of Music and director of several music festivals and Musica Viva Australia.

Carl Vine's **Inner World** was dedicated to and premiered by David Pereira in 1994. It is performed with a backing track consisting entirely of pre-recorded cello playing, often digitally altered to produce a kaleidoscope of sound and effects. This electronic accompaniment was recorded by Pereira using the same 18th-century instrument that Coral performs on today.

Vine's notes for the piece state that

'The performer is not only live, but also surrounded by his own creation: dissected, crystallized, modified and re-arranged. The cello is not only the physical instrument in the player's hands, but also an enveloping shroud of sound — a hall of mirrors in which artifice and reality collide and in which the sounds we hear may be no more than a product of the performer's own imagination.'

The piece begins with the solo cello playing a series of extrovert tonal gestures that dissolve into shimmering effects. Soon the backing track joins the performer, and a series of episodic duets takes the listener through an exploration of the psyche of both performer and, perhaps, the listener. The backing tracks acts as an invisible protagonist against which the performer reacts, cajoles, and sings with, before finally joining forces in an exuberant finale.

— Interval —

Louange à l'éternité de Jésus,
from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (1941)

Olivier Messiaen

Louange à l'éternité de Jésus (Praise to the Eternity of Jesus) is the fifth movement from *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* ('Quartet for the End of Time') for cello, piano, clarinet and violin. Written for cello and piano alone, it is considered one of the most powerful cello lines in the chamber music repertoire of the 20th century. Messiaen's tempo marking translates as 'infinitely slow, ecstatic', and for the cellist the extreme slowness (a semiquaver = 44) presents an enormous technical challenge; for the listener it provides an opportunity to participate in an extraordinary tonal experience.

The words 'for the end of time' convey no single meaning, and refer not just to the end of the world in an apocalyptic sense, but also to ideas concerning the end of musical time. To Messiaen, this 'end' was not a meaningless destruction but rather a fulfilment of purpose, and in this movement Messiaen perhaps anticipates a time when music and meaning might find perfect expression.

To Messiaen the movement was also a theological hymn of praise to Jesus; to others the music provides a more mystical, meditative quality. The movement is in the key of E major and for Messiaen, whose chromesthesia meant sounds conveyed specific patterns of colour, it presented a harmonic soundscape that denoted both grandeur and magnificence. Alongside the rhythmic serialism and polyrhythmic structures that shape some of the other movements, the cello solo provides a particularly slow line, so prolonged that time almost appears to stand still.

Messiaen penned short aphoristic texts before each movement, and for the preface to *Louange* he chose — uniquely — to include a bible verse, ending his short piece with the opening verse of John's gospel in the New Testament.

'Jesus is considered here as the Word. A broad phrase, "infinitely slow", on the cello, magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of the Word, powerful and gentle, "whose time never runs out". The melody stretches majestically into a gentle, regal distance. "In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Sonata for Cello and Piano

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

I. Prologue: Lent, sostenuto e molto risoluto

II. Sérénade: Modérément animé

III. Finale: Animé, léger et nerveux

This year is the 100th anniversary of Debussy's cello sonata. Composed in the latter years of Debussy's life, and following a period of ill health and artistic stagnation, the sonata is regarded by many to be one of the most sublime works ever written for cello and piano. During the pre-war years Debussy had composed many theatrical and large-scale works, often using literary structures to help create programmatic works that were successful and lucrative. But with the onset of World War I many theatres closed and for almost a year Debussy composed nothing at all, before finally embarking on a number of small instrumental sonatas.

Following the completion of the cello sonata Debussy wrote in a letter to an Italian conductor:

‘When I tell you that I spent nearly a year unable to write music... after that I've almost had to relearn it. It was like a rediscovery and it's seemed to me more beautiful than ever! ... What beauties there are in music by itself.’

The cello sonata displays throughout strongly discernible Spanish influences, especially in the second movement, with inventive pizzicato effects (Debussy almost uses the cello as a guitar), folk-like motifs, harmonics, *sul tasto*, cadenzas, and coloristic sounds. Some of the keyboard writing is also reminiscent of the French Baroque style, with many rich flourishes and ornamentation.

Debussy was proud of the work's form and proportions, and there is a fascinating cyclic unity, with themes and motifs recurring, albeit often in subverted forms. According to one story, Debussy was perhaps inspired by the pantomime character Pierrot, and was considering naming the cello sonata ‘Pierrot, Angry with the Moon’. It is possible to hear something of the creative energy of this sad clown — a sense of yearning, moments of laughter, tears, and frustration — but more important to Debussy was the sonata's capacity to function as a brilliant and highly emotive work of pure, abstract music that could provide its own aural narrative.