STEVE REICH

AUSTRALASIAN PREMIERE
MALLET QUARTET

Thursday 6 May 2010, 8pm

CITY RECITAL HALL ANGEL PLACE

Associated Event of the ISCM World New Music Days

Presented by

SYNERGY
PERCUSSION

Programme

Drumming Part 1 (1971) – Steve Reich

Electric Counterpoint (1987) – Steve Reich
CARL DEWHURST – GUITAR

Mallet Quartet (2009) – Steve Reich

INTERVAL

Kalabash (2004) – Nigel Westlake

Sextet (1984) – Steve Reich

This performance will be recorded by ABC Classic FM.
Other recording and photography is strictly prohibited.

Drumming Part 1 (1971) – Steve Reich

The significance of Drumming in Reich's career is clear – in 1971, his biggest work to date by far (at well over an hour duration), it staked a very serious claim to his ability to generate long and involving music by using simple ideas repeated over and over and over. It really put him on the map as a composer. The importance for percussion groups like Synergy goes even further. In 1933 Verese had composed the first piece for percussion alone –Ionisation – and there followed a spate of works by composers like Harrison, Cowell and Cage. But before Drumming exploded in 1971, there hadn't been an important work for almost 30 years. It really was the starting gun, together with the subsequent works by Xenakis, for the percussion group as we know it now. Interestingly, the score we've been referring to in rehearsals was given to Synergy in 1974, and it's still hard to read. This was the final work in which Reich employed the techniques of phasing, where two or more musicians playing the same material incrementally move out of time with each other, generating complex cannonic effects.

Electric Counterpoint (1987) – Steve Reich

Written for jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, who gave the premiere in 1987, Electric Counterpoint reached the greatest number of people when sampled by British electronica outfit The Orb in the 1991 dance-floor classic Little Fluffy Clouds. So many times I read electronica producers claim Reich as a major influence, and this piece makes the links very clear, sharing so much with sample-based processes. Often performed with Metheny's recording minus the solo part, Carl has created a new version here, and I can attest that he played every one of those thousands of notes because I recorded him at our Newington Studio. It was mastered by Bob Scott.

Mallet Quartet (2009) – Steve Reich

During the last 3 years, Reich has written a trio of chamber works for various combinations - Double Sextet, 2x5 and now Mallet Quartet, each with a three-movement form and an harmonic structure outlining a diminished arpeggio. It is special to have been involved in the commissioning process, and the work's tender moments in particular have touched us a great deal during rehearsals. The tight cannons of vibes parts in the outer sections are typically relentless, and quite ecstatic at times. This is the composer's first work exploiting the full compass of the modern marimba, and here again there are precious few moments of repose for the performers. Despite the abundance of percussion ensemble music now, we're tipping this one for instant classic status.

Kalabash (2004) – Nigel Westlake

Like Reich, Westlake's beautiful marimba writing draws inspiration from West Africa balafon music, with melodies woven into the texture of complex ostinati. Omphalo Centric Lecture was written for Synergy in 1984, and the group has performed it, in one context or another, hundreds of times. It is the most performed percussion ensemble piece in the world. Kalabash, the long awaited sequel, sets out to chart a different domain. Darker, possibly even funkier than its predecessor, it struts along with this catchy shuffle groove (which we're giving a hip hop tendency tonight in line with some of Nigel's more recent projects). This is the first time we've performed the piece, although we recorded it a few years ago. We hope it's the first of many.

Sextet (1984) – Steve Reich

In the early 80s Reich was poised for change. The seminal hard-core minimalist works of the previous decade, crowned by 18 Musicians and Drumming, were now behind him, and in works like Sextet, Desert Music and Tehellim he expanded his palette considerably. Jazz harmonies (in particular melodic minor modes) give Sextet its particular lustre and grit, and the fast-medium-slow-medium-fast architecture gives it a marvellous inertia. It's a personal favourite of ours, and it's fabulous to have Colin and Jo with us on it.

Notes by Timothy Constable

Personnel

Members

Timothy Constable

Alison Pratt

together with special guests

Joshua Hill – Percussion

Eugene Ughetti – Percussion (courtesy of Speak Percussion)

Colin Piper – Percussion & Piano (Synergy Member 1974 – 2006)

Tim Brigden – Percussion

Carl Dewhurst – Guitar

Jo Allan – Piano

Bob Scott – Sound

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SYNERGY PERCUSSION

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