

MUSIC IN THE UNIVERSITY: CONCERT SERIES 2017 – 2018
RE DISCOVERIES 8: VOICES AND BEASTS
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BUTCHART RECREATION HALL
Thursday 5th October, 2017.

Suk-Jun Kim introduced the first piece in Thursday's fascinating programme. In this the eighth concert in the Re Discoveries Series, Imagination, he told us was the name of the game in all five of the performances brought together under the title Voices and Beasts. We were soon to discover exactly what that meant. Actually, Kim's first piece had neither voices nor beasts in it although all the other pieces did. On The Way To Fwarrheu (2009) actually dealt with the theme of place which is a common theme in the music of the other composer in Thursday's concert, Professor Pete Stollery.

The title of Kim's piece contained a play on word sounds since the last word in the title 'Fwarrheu' is pronounced rather like 'Far Away'. Kim intends it to represent a journey towards some place in the world of pure imagination. This was a fascinating piece which contained many reflections of more traditional non-electronic music. The sounds reflected both harmonies and counterpoints although the use of electronic sound generation presented a kind of orchestral world that went far beyond anything of which a conventional orchestra is capable. There was so much to hear and to experience in this music. It had more than full orchestral breadth, there were suggestions of solo instruments within it. Overall it generated atmosphere, rhythmic excitement with percussive sounds. There was movement too. The soundscapes unfolded before us and it was not long before there was the sensation of being lifted up and carried along with them on the journey towards 'Fwarrheu'. As the music progressed a feeling of climax was generated. It made me think of a passage in the final section of Schoenberg's Gurrelieder where the speaker utters the words, 'Welch Wogen und Schwingen! Welch Ringen und Singen!'. I absolutely loved it. Is all this just my personal response to the music? Well, my excuse is that Suk-Jun Kim did say at the outset that Imagination lay at the heart of Thursday's performance.

The performance continued with three pieces by Pete Stollery. The first of these contained elements that were easily recognisable to anyone familiar with Stollery's music and modes of composition. Stolen Voices (2017) was created during the summer of 2017 as part of Silver City Projects. Pete Stollery had chosen three locations in Aberdeen where he had made possibly surreptitious sound recordings containing peoples voices in the areas. Actually Pete let Thursday's audience in on the details of his three locations, these were the Joint Station, Union Square Shopping Centre and Back Wynd. The words spoken by the voices were mostly unintelligible but they delivered much of the sound ambience of the places. In between the bare recordings which represented the world of reality there were more abstract sections that morphed the original sounds into the world of imagination and more importantly into the world of music. Stollery teaches us that music runs through the whole world of sound if you take the time to listen carefully. He seizes upon that idea, magnifies it and alters it to produce a satisfyingly artistic result.

If this last piece represented the world of Voice, Stollery's next two pieces represented the idea of Beasts. The first of these was Of The Bat (2017). I am not sure that our ears can pick up the actual sonar blips that bats make to navigate during flight especially as we get older, however Stollery's music contained definite suggestions of beeps and chirps such as bats might make. These moved within a broader soundscape that might suggest the nocturnal backgrounds in which the bats take flight. The sense of movement within the music itself and its relation to the speakers around us did suggest the flight of bats. I regularly do babysitting duties in a house in Craigton Road in the garden

of which at dusk there are quite a few bats. I enjoy watching them and Stollery's music certainly reminded me of that.

Pete's second piece was entitled *Of The Swan* (2014). During both these 'animal' pieces illustrations from 'The Aberdeen Bestiary' an early manuscript kept in the University were projected on screen. If Kim's first piece made me think of an expanded orchestra, *Of The Swan* made me think of choral music. Later on there was perhaps a suggestion of place once again as the tweets and twittering of birds were heard. I liked the way this piece was constructed. It even had a definite coda to finish with.

For the final piece in the concert we returned to the music of Suk-Jun Kim. It was entitled *The Passion* (2015). Its source material was a poem written and read by Imogene Newland – yes the same Imogene who I heard as a piano accompanist at the NESMS concert in the Lunchbreak series on the same day as the evening concert. Earlier this year I also heard her as a jazz pianist at a concert in the Blue Lamp.

Kim had cut up the spoken material and reassembled the sounds randomly. This was not a purely aleatoric work however. I sensed a considerable amount of artistry in it. There were sections early on where I sensed the idea of fugue or at least complex counterpoint from the various entries coming from different speakers. As the work progressed the textures thickened, the sounds became more percussive and repetitive suggesting the influence of minimalism. It was fascinating. Is any of this true or is it all in my imagination? Once again I claim Imagination as my excuse.