

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY CONCERT SERIES 2018 – 2019

In association with THE SOUND FESTIVAL 2018

COLOURS: ENSEMBLE 2e2m:
JEAN-PHILIPPE GROMETTO: Flute.
VÉRONIQUE FÈVRE: Clarinet
CAROLINE DELUME: Guitar
DAVID SIMPSON: Cello

KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL
Thursday 1st November, 2018

Thursday's concert by Ensemble 2e2m, one of the oldest and most distinguished French ensembles dedicated to contemporary music performance gave this year's **sound** Festival four quite startling pieces in one of its most challenging and unforgettable performances ever. The sounds were thrilling and for some unnerving – nothing like some of us had ever experienced before. They used combinations of just three instruments but adventurous and expanded playing techniques produced what sounded like many more instruments.

The first piece to be performed actually used more than just the three instruments because flute and tenor flute were doubled as were clarinet and bass clarinet. All four of the works performed were electrifying and perhaps alarming to those not used to the kinds of sound colours used throughout three of the works. The first was the World Première of a work commissioned jointly by **sound** and Musiques Démesurées of Clermont-Ferrand which is twinned with Aberdeen. **'Traces'** for flute, clarinet and cello was by Raphaële Biston who comes from Lyons.

Traces opened with an explosive outburst in which a 'woof' on the flute was the overwhelming sound. Quiet low pitched musical blends followed, but the startling explosions were also repeated. Low notes on bass clarinet were also forceful and the cello had fierce pizzicatos and percussive slaps on different parts of its body. Deliberately discordant harmonies brought several of the instruments together. In a post concert talk with Fiona Robertson, Raphaële Biston explained her intentions in bringing her instruments together or driving them apart. Like three other of the works, it boasted a vast range of instrumental colour, some of it quite astonishing.

'Territoires Imperceptibles' by Pascale Criton from Paris was scored for flute, acoustic guitar and cello. The guitar produced mainly rattling sounds with slides on cello and trills on flute. Advanced colour techniques included rattle and strum on guitar and chattering flute keys. As the music progressed, it cleared and became just a little more tuneful.

'Vermillion' by Rebecca Saunders for clarinet, electric guitar and cello progressed in surges with important moments of silence which were not absence of music but an integral part of it. Slides on cello were almost like yelps but it was the electric guitar that had a real plethora of surprising sounds. There was a suddenness to much of the musical entries and mechanical sounds played an important part. Rebecca Saunders is a London born composer who now lives and works in Berlin. One major source of fascination in the concert was the thread of similarity that ran through these three works set against the considerable differences between them.

There was one piece in the concert that stood apart from the other three. This was **'Esercizio di Pazzia II'** (Exercise in Madness) by a young Italian composer and pupil of Salvatore Sciarrino, Francesco Filidei. All four members of Ensemble 2e2m took the stage but they did not have their instruments with them. The instruments for this piece were the scores themselves and they were used as a kind of percussion ensemble as the members of the Ensemble turned the pages noisily and later used them to make high squeaking noises as children sometimes do with blades of grass. Even

tearing up sheets of paper produced sounds that contributed to the piece. It began with silence. Where have we heard that before? Was this piece meant to be funny? Some of the audience laughed but others thought it should be taken more seriously. This music may not have been for everybody. It was right at the outer limits of modernity but I feel that it was important to hear what other countries and their ensembles are doing these days. The BBC obviously agreed because they were recording this performance for later broadcast.