

CLAUDIA CHAN: MUSICA RICERCATA

FRIDAY 5 APRIL 2024 7PM

ROSINA AUDITORIUM, ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

CONCERT PROGRAM

	Duration
Girolamo FRESCOBALDI <i>Fiori Musicali</i> (1635) Reuben Johnson (QLD) harpsichord*	4'
Helmut LACHENMANN <i>Wiegenmusik</i> (1963) & <i>Guero</i> (1969) Timothy O'Malley (VIC) piano	9'
György LIGETI <i>Arc-en-ciel</i> (1985) & <i>Der Zauberlehrling</i> (1988-94) Po Goh (VIC) piano	6'
Vassos NICOLAOU <i>Études</i> (2008) <i>i. Anodos</i> <i>ii. Monologos</i> Matthew Garvie (NSW) piano	6'
UnsuK CHIN From 6 Piano <i>Études</i> (1995-2003) <i>v. Toccata</i> <i>vi. Grains</i> Claudia Chan & Ronan Apcar (NSW) piano	7'
— interval 20' —	
Francesco FILIDEI <i>Garibaldi's Little Rock</i> (2000) & <i>For Claudia</i> (2023) Claudia Chan piano	5'
FILIDEI <i>Toccata</i> (1996) Ronan Apcar (NSW) piano	4'
György KURTÁG Selections from <i>Játékok</i> books I & III (1973-9) <i>Perpetuum Mobile</i> <i>Hommage à Petrovics</i> <i>Five Little Piano Pieces</i> <i>Three-finger Play</i> <i>i. Prelude and Waltz in C</i> <i>Gallop</i> <i>ii. Allegro Pesante</i> <i>Melancholic Overtones</i> <i>iii.</i> <i>Little Chorale</i> <i>iv. Comodo</i> <i>Hommage à Paganini</i> <i>v. Presto</i> Reuben Johnson (QLD) piano	8'
LIGETI <i>Musica Ricercata</i> for piano (1951-53) (see overleaf for movement titles) Reuben Johnson (QLD), Francis Atkins (NSW) & Timothy O'Malley (VIC) piano	25'

Approximate concert duration: 2 hours

*ANAM's harpsichord, generously funded by John and Rosemary Macleod

ANAM respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands spread across Australia on which we work and live. We uphold and honour their continued relationship to these sites, we pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

PROGRAM NOTES

Playing with Possibility: The Joy of the Unconventional in Contemporary Piano Performance

Let us tackle bravely even the most difficult task without being afraid of making mistakes: we should try and create valid proportions, unity and continuity out of the long and short values – just for our own pleasure!

– István Máriássy, forward to György Kurtág's *Játékok*, vol. 1

The verb we use for creating music with an instrument is 'play', in any other context an act that is devoid of the studious seriousness that the art of Western classical tradition often brings with it. Through a course of study, a pianist no longer plays *with* the piano, they *play* the piano. In composing his *Játékok* ('Games'), **György Kurtág** took inspiration from children playing spontaneously, often imitating the joy of discovering the tactile and responsive nature of the keyboard in quick alternations of dynamics, glissandi up and down, and clusters played with the whole fist – encouraging the musician to *play*. This program tends towards the virtuosic in unexpected ways through this playful spirit imbued across studies that transcend mere technical skill and question the boundaries of what one does when *playing* the piano.

This program starts with a work centuries removed from what follows: **Girolamo Frescobaldi's** chromatic ricercare from his collection of organ works for the church, *Fiori musicali*. Frescobaldi is considered among the greatest of composers in the first half of the seventeenth century, creating works that melded counterpoint, polyphony and chromaticism with an experimental flair. The ricercare exemplifies the then-ground-breaking writing of Frescobaldi with a chromatic subject in fugue treatment creating ahead-of-its-time harmonic intrigue. The technical skills in performing Frescobaldi's ricercare are less overtly virtuosic than other works on the program, but require precise voicing to maintain each line in the fugue, letting the harmony blossom out of the interlocking melodies.

The history of technical instrumental practice is to see the student surpass the teacher, and for the contemporary to become ever more marvellous. As the program leaps to the twentieth century, the virtuosity of the player becomes increasingly important. We move from the ricercare ('to search') to the toccata ('to touch') and étude ('to study') – intrinsically more tactile and present, and closer related to the action of engaging with the piano and its machinery. Études by **György Ligeti**, **Unsuk Chin** and **Vassos Nicolaou** test the pianistic abilities of players, each successively iterating on technical demands already stretched in a tradition of virtuosity tracing back through Liszt, Chopin and Czerny.

A gesture to the equally landmark Debussy études comes in the first of the Ligeti selections, *Arc-en-ciel* ('Rainbow'), where the connection of flowing lines and changing colours of chromaticism evoke the étude's namesake. *Der Zauberlehrling* ('The Sorcerer's Apprentice') suggests magic being woven, perhaps unsteadily by this apprentice, with melodies emerging out of a breathless tempo and mechanistic staccato.

Chin, who studied with Ligeti between 1985-1988, sees the étude as a way for the pianist to "push themselves to – or past – their limits", and again evolves the form from her teacher's works. This 'pushing' is not necessarily for technique's sake, rather for exploring new concepts in unique, often non-idiomatic ways. Nicolaou similarly approaches his études in seeing virtuosity not as "the primary purpose, but rather the means", becoming more Romantic in the gesture of creation through technical means. *Anodos* ('Upwards') captures how we seek patterns in everything, evoking a pointillistic "starry sky" and asking the audience to hear figures within. *Monologos* ('Monologue') turns dramatic, picturing an actor in an empty theatre, their monologue interrupted by bouts of imaginary applause as they lose touch with reality.

In the progression of this program, the spaces between notes increasingly capture the focus of the composers. Resonance, or the German 'nachklang' (lit., 'after the sound'), is a focus of **Helmut Lachenmann**, and keenly informs **Francesco Filidei's** creative expansion of the piano's sound palette. With 236 strings each able to resonate along their own harmonic series, works through this program manipulate resonances by raising dampers (or, unmuting) certain strings to allow new resonances after a new note is played.

The spaces between notes grow in Lachenmann's *Wiegenmusik* ('Cradle Song') as he invites the audience to explore the resonances after each note, allowing certain strings to resonate in this ethereal lullaby. *Guero* then seeks resonances beyond the string, using a range of percussive sounds as gestures to imagine the piano as a guero – listen for the slide of the nails on the surface of the keys, imitating the guero's ridges.

Filidei's works embrace this percussive performance, eschewing the pitched strings entirely, save for the distant melody in this first Australian performance of *Giribaldi's Little Rock*. Filidei utilises a novel graphic notation system where the surfaces of the piano are represented on an abstraction of a grand staff, and a range of symbols represent exact methods of creating sound percussively. The pedals are used to modulate the resonance of the

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

percussion, inviting distant memories of pitch to ring sympathetically with this new instrumental idiom playing with the very concept of the pianist.

Kurtág too challenges what pianism is in asking for the musician to truly *play* with the material provided, using a novel dictionary of notation which, with large scribbled note-heads, is evocative of the childish energy captured through these musical games. The *Játékok* feature homages to existing works and composers, using these playful techniques to completely reinterpret musical landmarks. *Hommage à Paganini* is subtitled "La nuova campanella" (or, the *new* Campanella), imitating the ascending and descending motion of the final movement of Paganini's second violin concerto in a delightfully childish way.

Homage is also embraced by Ligeti as the program concludes with his *Musica ricercata*, a sequence of works that increases the pitch set used by one in each movement. We begin with only A in the first movement, a D announced only in the last measures – again playing with resonance, with this fifth emerging out of the A's harmonic series. The procession of movements contain their own musical development, seeking a language that becomes diatonic and then moves beyond it as a growing chromatic palette emerges. With the entire 12 notes of the Western scale available in the last movement, *Omaggio a Girolamo Frescobaldi*, Ligeti calls back three centuries to Frescobaldi's chromatic *ricercare*, quoting the opening of the work before sliding into chromaticism more daring than Frescobaldi could have conceived. The subject is imitated in perfect fugue around the circle of fifths, creating this slippery, perpetually moving homage embracing the past and future of this instrument's capabilities.

Alex Owens

Music Librarian, ANAM Robert Salzer Library

LIGETI *Musica Ricercata* for piano

- i. *Sostenuto – Misurato - Prestissimo*
- ii. *Mesto, rigido e cerimoniale*
- iii. *Allegro con spirito*
- iv. *Tempo di valse (poco vivace – "à l'orgue de Barbarie")*
- v. *Rubato. Lamentoso*
- vi. *Allegro molto capriccioso*
- vii. *Cantabile, molto legato*
- viii. *Vivace. Energico*
- ix. *(Béla Bartók in Memoriam) Adagio. Mesto – Allegro maestoso*
- x. *Vivace. Capriccioso*
- xi. *(Omaggio a Girolamo Frescobaldi) Andante misurato e tranquillo*

ABOUT CLAUDIA CHAN

Hailed as the new "Ambassador for New Music" (The Ottawa Citizen) and proclaimed "dazzling" (Classicagenda) and "brilliant" (Piano News), pianist and conductor **Claudia Chan** is known as one of the foremost interpreters of contemporary music and has been praised for a "piano playing that moves seemingly effortlessly between often hair-raising (but never self-indulgent) virtuosity and sublime sound development" (Fono Forum). Her thoughtful interpretations of music from Brahms to Boulez and beyond have been heard in major concert halls in Canada, the US, Italy, France, Germany, Austria, and South Korea, as well as on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

From 2017-2020, Claudia was Artist-in-Residence of the contemporary music department at the famed Fondation Royaumont in France, where she organised and presented concerts, interdisciplinary projects, and gave a series of lecture-recitals on contemporary piano music. Based in Cologne, Germany, she has been heard as a soloist and chamber musician at the Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik; Acht Brücken Festival (Cologne); Heidelberger Frühling Festival; Tongyeong International Music Festival (South Korea); the MATA Festival (New York City); the Klangspuren Schwarz Festival; the Festival Musica Strasbourg; the 21C Festival (Toronto), the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival; the New Creations Festival (Toronto); the Sommerliche Musiktage Hitzacker; and PianoCity Milan; and founded the award-winning new music quartet BRuCH, who have been invited to play at major festivals and profiled by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk and Deutschlandfunk. Also active as a conductor, Claudia was appointed Musical Director of the premiere opera *Liebesgesang* by Georg Friedrich Haas at the Stadttheater Bern in 2022, and will be reprising this role in 2024. Other activities in 2024 include the release of her second solo CD *toccare* of contemporary Italian music with B Records, as well as the release of chamber music recordings on avj/Deutsche Grammophon and bastille musique, and conduct and play concerts in Australia, Canada, France, Switzerland and Germany. Claudia has been on the piano faculty at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln since 2018. www.claudiachan.ca

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