

# Late Music Concert Series 2015

7th March at 7.30pm

Unitarian Chapel, St Saviourgate, York

Ian Pace (piano)

James Dillon:	<i>The Book of Elements (Volume One)</i>
Judith Weir:	<i>The King of France</i>
Schoenberg:	<i>Six Little Pieces</i>
Schumann:	<i>Papillon</i>
Steve Crowther:	<i>New Work</i>
Edward Caine:	<i>New Work</i>
Kurtág:	<i>Eight Piano Pieces</i>
Ligeti:	<i>Etudes (Book One)</i>

Preconcert talk at 6.45pm plus a complimentary glass of wine

## PROGRAMME NOTES

**James Dillon:**     *The Book of Elements (Volume One)*

James Dillon burst on to the new music scene some 25 years ago as a composer of blisteringly aggressive energy and complexity. These days the aggression has receded, but the music still has an engagingly improvised air, and a tendency to pass back and forth between meditative stillness and sudden decorative skirls and sweeps. This new 'book' is a set of 27 piano pieces spread over five volumes which traces a line from small and many to large and few. The first is a set of 11 miniatures, the last a single big structure of 16 minutes. Each volume is correlated with one of the elements of earth, air, fire and water, plus the 'void' that lies beneath all of them, according to some oriental cosmologies. But this is no straight-line progression. The book teems with subtle cross-references, like the sudden reappearance in the last volume of the amazingly Debussian gesture that launched the whole cycle. There are other echoes, too, from Schumann, Bartók, even folk music and rock. It adds up to something rich, strange and utterly riveting. The recording is beautifully fine-grained and warm, and the performances from Noriko Kawai have just the right combination of cat-like energy and delicate inwardness. Ivan Hewett

**Judith Weir:**     *The King of France*

I once made some transcriptions of Spanish/Arabic folk music for a theatre piece about the Crusades. One of these tunes has haunted me ever since - EL REY DE FRANCIA, sung by Sephardic Jews at the time of their exile.

The King of France is a set of variations on this tune. Although the musical processes are abstract ones, there is perhaps a hint of the tune's Spanish background in the dry, brittle textures of some of the later variations. The piece lasts about eight minutes.

The King of France was written for Susan Tomes in 1993.

© Judith Weir

**Schoenberg: *Six Little Pieces***

The first five pieces of Op. 19 were composed in a single day, February 19, 1911; the sixth followed on June 17. These very brief and compact pieces are a sort of musical equivalent of aphorisms: the longest of the set, No. 1, encompasses no more than 18 measures. Schoenberg here experiments with the construction of ideas that are complete from the outset and require no development. This method of composition would have a great influence on Schoenberg's pupil, Anton Webern.

**Schumann: *Papillon***

Papillons, Op. 2, is a suite of piano pieces written in 1831 by Robert Schumann. The title means 'butterflies' in French. The work is meant to represent a masked ball and was inspired by the Jean Paul's novel Flegeljahre.

The suite begins with a six-measure introduction before launching into a variety of dance-like movements. Each movement is unrelated to the preceding ones, except that the second, A major, theme of the sixth movement recurs in G major in the tenth movement and the theme of the first movement returns in the finale. This movement starts out by quoting the theme of the traditional Grossvater Tanz (Grandfather's Dance), which was always played at the end of a wedding or similar celebration. Repeated notes near the end of the piece suggest a clock striking, signifying the end of the ball.

**Steve Crowther: *New Work***

**Edward Caine: *New Work***

***Etude: Resonance***

***Resonance*** is one of a set of Etudes for piano that I am gradually writing. The set aims to cover various aspects of piano technique, with a focus on techniques expected from pianists performing modern and contemporary repertoire. As the name suggests, resonance focusses on the sound resonating across the piano itself. If you hold down a key on the piano silently it releases the damper that prevents the string from

vibrating. If you then play other keys on the piano that have a sympathetic resonance with that string then it will vibrate producing sound. The effect is as if the sustain pedal is down but on particular strings, bringing out harmonics from the performed notes. The language of the etude owes a debt to György Ligeti and to Conlon Nancarrow. Listen carefully for a rising figure played silently initially in the right hand. The other main piece of material is an arhythmic stride-esque piano motif in the left hand played loudly to bring out the sympathetic resonance of the notes held down in the right hand. There are also a three quotes hidden in the piece, two of which are from pieces in tonight's concert. See if you can work out which!

**Kurtág: *Eight Piano Pieces***

The *Eight Piano Pieces* of 1960 are an excellent example of the unique style that marked Kurtág's maturity: very brief spans (all are less than a minute, some only 30 seconds long) but charged with expression.

**Ligeti: *Etudes (Book One)***

Numerous influences are at work on these Etudes. The etude cycles of Chopin and Debussy, each vital to the evolution of the piano and its literature, are an inevitable presence, as are the keyboard techniques of Scarlatti and Schumann. Yet the role of sub-Saharan African culture is crucial in the often complex rhythmic polyphony that motivates Ligeti's Etudes; indeed, polyrhythms and shifting pulses are essential to the sound and feel of the music at all times. Geometric patterns, especially the self-repetition of 'fractals', were a vital stimulus, as were the rhythmic and metric innovations of the maverick American composer [Conlon Nancarrow](#) (1912-1997) and the pianism of such jazz 'greats' as [Thelonious Monk](#) and [Bill Evans](#). Yet there is no sense of eclecticism in the music itself: to quote the composer again, "... it is neither 'avant-garde' nor 'traditional', neither tonal nor atonal. ... These are ... etudes in the pianistic and compositional sense. They proceed from a very simple core idea, and lead from simplicity to great complexity: they behave like growing organisms".

# BIOGRAPHIES

## **James Dillon**

James Dillon (born October 29, 1950) is a Scottish composer who is often regarded as belonging to the New Complexity school. Dillon studied art and design, linguistics, piano, acoustics, Indian rhythm, mathematics and computer music, but is self-taught in composition.

Dillon was born in Glasgow, Scotland. Honours include first prize in the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 1978, the Kranichsteiner music prize at Darmstadt in 1982, and four Royal Philharmonic Society composition awards; most recently for his nine-composition cycle *Nine Rivers*. Dillon taught at Darmstadt from 1982–92, and has been a guest lecturer and composer at various institutions around the world. He taught at the University of Minnesota School of Music in Minneapolis, Minnesota from 2007 to 2014.

His major works include choral and vocal music, including the cycle *L'évolution du vol* (1993) and the opera *Philomela* (2004), the orchestral works *helle Nacht* (1987), *ignis noster* (1992), *Via Sacra* (2000), and *La navette* (2001), as well as a violin concerto for Thomas Zehetmair (2000) and the piano concerto *Andromeda* (2006) for his partner, Noriko Kawai, all showing an ease of writing for large forces. From 1982–2000, Dillon worked on the *Nine Rivers* cycle, a 3-hour work for voices, strings, percussion, live electronics and computer-generated tape. The epic work was first performed in full in Glasgow, November 2010.

His considerable body of chamber music, often written expressly for a performer's individual abilities, includes solos for clarinet, drumkit, cello, flute, piccolo, guitar, violin, viola, and accordion, alongside seven string quartets (1983, 1991, 1998, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2013), the five-part *Book of Elements* for piano (1997–2002) and the *soadie waste* for piano and string quartet (2002/3).

## **Judith Weir**

Judith Weir's interests in narrative, folklore and theatre have found expression in a broad range of musical invention. She is the composer and librettist of several widely performed operas whose diverse sources include Icelandic sagas, Chinese Yuan Dynasty drama and German Romanticism. Folk music from the British Isles and beyond has

influenced her music for solo instruments, and she has had strong links with performers from non-classical traditions. She was resident composer with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and has also written music for the Boston Symphony, BBC Symphony and Minnesota Orchestras. In recent years she has worked intensively on commissions from choirs of many kinds.

In July 2014 she was appointed to the 388-year old royal post of Master of the Queen's Music, in succession to Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Recent and forthcoming premieres include *Ave Regina Caelorum* (Merton College Choir/Cheltenham Festival 2014) *Day Break Shadows Flee* (Benjamin Grosvenor/BBC Proms 2014) and *Good Morning, Midnight* (Alice Coote, Aurora Orchestra/Wigmore Hall 2015). Weir will take up the position of Associate Composer with the BBC Singers in 2015.

### **Steve Crowther**

Steve Crowther was born and brought up in Bradford. The gritty character of the city and its communities is still a major influence in his music. He studied music at Sussex University with both Jonathan Harvey and Michael Finnissy. In 1991 Steve and composer David Power formed the acclaimed Late Music Festival, which has now simply become Late Music.

Samples of Steve Crowther's music can be heard at [www.soundcloud.com](http://www.soundcloud.com)

### **Edward Caine**

Dr. Edward Caine PhD is a composer, pianist and conductor currently based in the West Midlands. He spent most of his formative years in York where he studied for a PhD in composition with Roger Marsh. Edd's music has been performed across the UK and in Europe, and he has been the recipient of a number of high profile awards and commissions. As a pianist he has performed in many UK and World premieres, both as a soloist and ensemble player for groups such as Manchester-based award-winning group Distractfold. He is currently employed as Musician in Residence for Old Swinford Hospital School in Stourbridge. For more information please visit <http://www.edwardcaine.com/>

## **György Kurtág**

György Kurtág was born in Lugoj in the Banat region, Romania. In 1946, he began his studies at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, where he met his wife, Márta, and also György Ligeti, who became a close friend. His piano teacher at the academy was Pál Kadosa; he studied composition with Sándor Veress and Ferenc Farkas, chamber music with Leó Weiner, and theory with Lajos Bárdos. He graduated in piano and chamber music in 1951 and received his degree in composition in 1955.

Following the Hungarian uprising in 1956, Kurtág's time in Paris between 1957 and 1958 was of critical importance for him. Here, he studied with Olivier Messiaen and Darius Milhaud. During this time however, Kurtág was suffering from a severe depression: 'I realized to the point of despair that nothing I had believed to constitute the world was true...'. Kurtág received psychological therapy from Marianne Stein – an encounter that revived the composer and strongly stimulated his artistic development. During this time he also discovered the works of Anton Webern and the plays of Samuel Beckett. The String Quartet he composed in 1959 after his return to Budapest marks this crucial turning point; he refers to this piece as his Opus 1. He dedicated it to his therapist, Stein.

Kurtág's international reputation began to take hold with Messages of the Late Miss R.V. Trousova for soprano and chamber ensemble, which had its premiere in Paris in 1981. Since the early 1990s, he has worked abroad with increasing frequency: he was composer in residence at the Berlin Philharmonic (1993–95) and the Vienna Konzerthaus Society (1995). He then lived in the Netherlands (1996–98), again in Berlin (1998–99) and upon invitation by Ensemble InterContemporain, Cité de la Musique and Festival d'Automne, in Paris (1999–2001). György Kurtág and his wife have lived near Bordeaux since 2002.

## **Ian Pace**

Ian Pace is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society and the avant-garde. He was born in Hartlepool, England in 1968, and studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's

College, Oxford and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York. His main teacher, and a major influence upon his work, was the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a student of Bartók.

Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international career, performing in 24 countries and at most major European venues and festivals. His absolutely vast repertoire of all periods focuses particularly upon music of the 20th and 21st Century. He has given world premieres of over 200 pieces for solo piano, including works by Julian Anderson, Richard Barrett, James Clarke, James Dillon, Pascal Dusapin, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy (whose complete piano works he performed in a landmark 6-concert series in 1996), Christopher Fox, Volker Heyn, Hilda Paredes, Horatiu Radulescu, Frederic Rzewski, Howard Skempton, Gerhard Stäbler and Walter Zimmermann. He has presented cycles of works including Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke I-X*, and the piano works of Ferneyhough, Fox, Kagel, Ligeti, Lachenmann, Messiaen, Radulescu, Rihm, Rzewski and Skempton. He has played with orchestras including the Orchestre de Paris under Christoph Eschenbach (with whom he premiered and recorded Dusapin's piano concerto *À Quia*), the SWF Orchestra in Stuttgart under Rupert Huber, and the Dortmund Philharmonic under Bernhard Kontarsky (with whom he gave four highly critically acclaimed performances of the Ravel Left Hand Concerto in 2008). He has recorded over 25 CDs; his most recent recording of Michael Finnissy's five-and-a-half hour *The History of Photography in Sound* (of which he gave the world premiere in London in 2001) was released by Divine Art in October 2013 to rave reviews from critics.

He is Lecturer in Music and Head of Performance at City University, London, having previously held positions at the University of Southampton and Dartington College of Arts. His areas of academic expertise include 19<sup>th</sup> century performance practice (especially the work of Liszt and Brahms), issues of music and society (with particular reference to the work of Theodor Adorno, the Frankfurt School, and their followers), contemporary performance practice and issues, music and culture under fascism, and the post-1945 avant-garde, in particular in West Germany, upon which he is currently completing a large-scale research project.



**Late Music** would like to thank: Charles Hutchinson (York Press), Craig Monk (ACE), Celia Frisby and the University of York Music Department, David Lancaster and the York St John University Music Department, Claire, Simon et al (Unitarian Chapel), Antonia, Emma, and Fiona Crowther, Richard McDougall (YorkMix), Chris Mercer (York Publishing Services), Charles Hunt, Michael & Eileen Scott, Jon Hughes, Me & Mrs Fisher, The Beehive, Dave Taylor (City Screen) and Music Room.