



University  
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School of Culture and  
Creative Arts presents

## **McEwen Memorial Concert of Scottish Chamber Music**

Saturday, 15 October 2011



### **The McEwen Bequest**

Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) bequeathed the residue of his estate to the University of Glasgow to help promote performance of chamber music by composers of Scottish birth and descent. Other composers resident in Scotland for a substantial period have also benefited from the fund. In fulfillment of the terms of the bequest the University Court commissions annually a piece of chamber music for not more than five players and every three years a work for larger forces. From time to time the University Court has also offered a prize for a chamber work by a Scottish composer. The income from the bequest is also used to promote the Triennial Series of McEwen Memorial Concerts, the first of which took place in 1956. The programmes for these concerts are drawn from the works of Scottish composers past and present and pay particular attention to those commissioned by the University Court.

Saturday 15 October 2011  
1pm University Concert Hall

*Funded by the McEwen Bequest*

## **McEwen Memorial Concert of Scottish Chamber Music – Red Note Ensemble**

Edgard Varèse - *Density 21.5* for solo flute

James MacMillan - *in angustiis ..I* for solo piano and *in angustiis ..II* for solo oboe (played simultaneously)

William Sweeney - *Life Studies* (I, III, IV, VI) for clarinet and piano

Helen Grime - *Luna* for flute/piccolo, oboe/cor anglais, B♭/E♭ clarinets, horn, percussion & piano [World Premiere — Commissioned by the University of Glasgow]

### **Red Note:**

Conductor – Bryan Allen

Flute – Ruth Morley

Oboe – Rosie Staniforth

Clarinet – Yann Ghiro

Horn – Patrick Broderick

Percussion – Tom Hunter

Piano – Simon Smith

## Edgard Varèse - *Density 21.5* for solo flute

First the title: 21.5 is the density of platinum, and the solo piece was written to be played by Georges Barrère on a flute he had had made in that metal. Barrère was one of the circle of Varèse's New York French acquaintances. He had been in America longer than Varèse, since 1905, when he had accepted the post of first flautist with the New York Symphony Orchestra, and he was nearly sixty when he asked his friend to write him a piece in January 1936. The composition went quickly, and *Density 21.5* was ready to be played at the platinum flute's debut recital in the Carnegie Hall, New York, on 16 February the same year.

The repertory for solo flute was not large in 1936, and it is inevitable that Varèse should have been influenced by Debussy's *Syrinx*. However, he ensured that the influence worked to his own piece's advantage by making it conscious and analytical: the crucial opening four-note pattern of the Debussy piece is crucial here too, though quite differently interpreted, and *Density 21.5* unfolds almost as an alternative to *Syrinx*, a lament instead of a pastoral. Beyond that, the material is very much Varèse's own, tracing a sketch of ideas from other works and not excluding some remnant of his vital percussion at those moments where the player is asked to tap the keys audibly.

(Paul Griffiths)

The music of Edgard Varèse (1883-1965) seems today more relevant and vital than ever. He was born in Paris of an Italian father and French mother. Between the ages of ten and twenty he lived in Turin, where he began his musical studies. In 1903, however, he quarreled with his father and left for Paris, where he completed his studies with d'Indy, Roussel and Widor. Shortly after he began composing, and moved to Berlin, where his works were appreciated by Busoni and Debussy. In the same period he heard the first performance of Schönberg's *Pierrot lunaire* and Stravinsky's *Sacre*. Then, in 1914 (as we have seen) he moved to the United States, where he decided to destroy all the works composed up to that moment, and to set off in a radically new direction as a composer, researcher and innovator.

In those years he worked as a conductor (in 1919 he founded the New Symphony Orchestra) and concert organiser with the aim of familiarising American audiences with contemporary music and introducing works and composers who had previously been ignored in the United States. In the same period he started working on the limited number of works (the first was *Amériques*, finished in 1922) which would soon establish Varèse in the whole world as one of the most advanced and daring of composers, committed to exploring the unknown territories of New Music.

1934 marked the beginning of a long period of crisis, due to dissatisfaction with his activity as a composer and marked by restless moves from one city to another in the central and western regions of the United States. Between 1934, the year in which *Ecuatorial* was composed, and 1950, he composed nothing except for the minor work *Density 21.5* for flute, the brief *Etude pour espace* for choir, two pianos and percussion (performed only once and still unpublished) and the even less well known *Dance for Burgess*.

In the last fifteen years of his life, however, he started composing again with considerable energy, producing masterpieces such as *Déserts* and *Nocturnal*. He received prestigious commissions including Le Corbusier's commission for the *Poème électronique*, composed for the Philips Pavilion at the Brussels exhibition in 1958. Varèse died on 6 November 1965 at the New York University Medical Center Hospital without being able to carry out his final project – the music for Henri Michaux's *Dans la nuit*.

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### **James MacMillan - *in angustiis ..I* for solo piano and *in angustiis ..II* for solo oboe**

*in angustiis* was the original title of Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* (*Missa in Angustiis*), which literally means 'Mass in Time of Anguish'. I wrote two short pieces with this title after September 11, one for piano and one for an assortment of instruments (oboe, cello and voice). The piano piece is based on clusters and an old melody, *L'homme armée* - a song sung in the time of war. The music for the other soloists is like a melancholy reflection.

*In angustiis ..I* was composed for Simon Smith who is performing in today's concert.

James MacMillan read music at Edinburgh University and took Doctoral studies in composition at Durham University with John Casken. After working as a lecturer at Manchester University, he returned to Scotland and settled in Glasgow.

In addition to *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, which launched MacMillan's international career at the BBC Proms in 1990, his orchestral output includes the percussion concerto *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*, premiered by Evelyn Glennie in 1992 and which has since received over 400 performances and has been programmed by leading international orchestras and conductors.

Current commissions include include festive settings of the *Gloria* (to mark the 50th anniversary in 2012 of the consecration of Coventry Cathedral) and *Credo*, a full-evening chamber oratorio and a large-scale orchestral work.

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### **William Sweeney - *Life Studies (selection)* for clarinet and piano**

This series of pieces for clarinet and piano was begun in 1984 and completed in 1996.

They can be performed individually, in groups, or as a complete set. (Performance in the order of composition, as printed, is probably not the most effective arrangement).

While all share a common motivic phrase, each piece focuses on particular technical problems of clarinet playing and combines these with various ethnic musical styles or extra-musical allusions.

All of the studies are notated for Clarinet in Bb.

Life Studies I-III were written for Alan Hacker; IV was commissioned by Lawrence Gill in memory of Sir Alexander Gibson and the set as a whole is dedicated to all my fellow students of Berlioz' "most heroic of instruments".

I The problems are: 1) micro-tones and glissandos, produced by a combination of embouchure modifications and non-standard fingerings (the player should find those most appropriate to their own system and set-up) and: 2) sudden changes of dynamic and tone-colour. The style is a representation of the traditional Turkish style of clarinet-playing: therefore a pronounced and varied vibrato is appropriate.

III Here the piano imitates the sound of the West African kora (harp-lute), while the clarinet is the griot (bard, praise-singer). The player has to produce a variety of articulations while negotiating tricky finger-patterns and grace-notes.

IV It seemed to me that dynamic shading over long time-spans was one of the features of an “Alex” performance, so here the clarinetist has to take individual notes from, and to, the edge of audibility, while sustaining a musical line through the whole piece. The piano part is a kind of abstract distillation of a Sibelius accompaniment.

VI Here the exercise is staccato playing, in all registers and dynamic levels with coordination problems set by cross-fingered sequences. The music begins with a reminiscence of the sound of the Andean harp and continues with a flavour of the dark Argentinian tangos of Astor Piazzolla.

Born in Glasgow, 1950. Educated at Knightswood Secondary School, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama: W.T.Clucas (Clarinet), Frank Spedding (Harmony and Counterpoint), Royal Academy of Music: Alan Hacker (Clarinet), Harrison Birtwistle (Composition). Currently Professor of Music at the University of Glasgow.

Many works have been written for the clarinet, but his output covers a wide range of instrumental, orchestral, electronic and vocal forces. Commissions have been from such diverse organisations as the BBC, Paragon Ensemble, St Magnus Festival, Musica Nova, Capella Nova, Mayfest, the STUC, Glasgow University, RSAMD, Moving Music Theatre, McNaughten Concerts, Theatre Cryptic and the Jim Henson Organisation.

In 2006, a Creative Scotland Award led to the creation in 2007 of *Schemes, Blues and Dreams*, a composition combining live performance and electro-acoustics, exploring the sensibility of Scottish musicians of the 1960s who defined their identity through the music of Black America. The project featured internationally recognised blues harmonica player Fraser Spiers, placed in an electro-acoustic setting based on live processing of sampled and performance material.

During April and May 2010, he was in residence at the Kone Foundation’s Saari Manor in South West Finland.

More recent works in 2010 include a Sonata for Cello and piano, and future plans include a setting of Brian Merriman’s “The Midnight Court”, and a new work for Chorus and Orchestra.

(William Sweeney)

**Helen Grime – *Luna* for flute/piccolo, oboe/cor anglais, B♭/E♭ clarinets, horn, percussion & piano**

I took my starting point for *Luna* from a poem by Ted Hughes called *Harvest Moon*. The piece is cast in one continuous movement but falls into a number of well-defined sections. As I was working on the piece, I started combining the instruments in small groups. Although there is much interaction between all members of the ensemble, the instrumental groups became a defining characteristic of the piece. The piano and percussion often form a duo, breaking into virtuosic solo passages scattered throughout. The flute, oboe and clarinet form a sort of unified trio, sometimes playing a unison line or combining lyrical lines in the slower final section of the work. The horn takes on a distinctly soloist role, with solo passages building to a mini cadenza, which eventually leads the piece into its final section.

(Helen Grime)

Helen Grime studied oboe with John Anderson and composition with Julian Anderson and Edwin Roxburgh at the Royal College of Music. She graduated from the BMus course with First Class Honours and completed her Masters with Distinction in 2004. From 2005-07, Helen was a Legal & General Junior Fellow at the Royal College of Music. In 2003 she won a British Composer Award for her Oboe Concerto, and was awarded the intercollegiate Theodore Holland Composition Prize in 2003 as well as all the major composition prizes in the RCM. In 2008 she was awarded a Leonard Bernstein Fellowship to study at the Tanglewood Music Center where she studied with John Harbison, Michael Gandolfi, Shulamit Ran and Augusta Read Thomas. Helen has had works commissioned by some of the most established performers and organisations including ENO, London Symphony Orchestra, BCMG, Britten Sinfonia, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Tanglewood Music Center. Conductors who have performed her work include Daniel Harding, Oliver Knussen, Pierre Boulez and Yan Pascal Tortelier. Helen is the 2010 recipient of the Lili Boulanger Memorial Fund and Associate Composer of The Hallé for the 2011/12 season.

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Red Note is a new Scottish-based professional music ensemble, dedicated to developing and performing contemporary music to the highest standards, and taking the music out to audiences around and beyond Scotland.

It was founded in 2008 by Scottish cellist Robert Irvine, is directed by John Harris (Chief Executive and Artistic Co-Director) and Robert Irvine (Artistic Co-Director).

Red Note performs the established classics of contemporary music; commissions new music and develops the work of new and emerging composers from around the world. It is also committed to finding new audiences in new spaces. The performing ensemble is drawn from a deep talent pool of Scottish new music expertise, and Red Note counts amongst its players some of the very finest performers working in the UK today.

Red Note made its debut in May 2008 with a recording of Eddie McGuire's *Carrochan* suite for Delphian records, and since then ensemble has rapidly gained profile and support.

As well as touring Scotland twice each year, in the Spring and Autumn, Red Note run a regular new music series showcasing the work of new composers (*Noisy Nights* and *What Happened*) bi-monthly in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It also develops the work of new composers, particularly at Glasgow University and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

Red Note are delighted to have been appointed Contemporary Ensemble-in-Residence at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music Drama in Glasgow in 2009 for a three-year period, and Associate Company of the Traverse Theatre from January 2010.



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## The McEwen Bequest

1955	String Quartet No 3	Ian Whyte
1956	<i>Directions for a Map</i>	Cedric Thorpe Davis
1956	*Sonata No 2 for viola and piano	Ronald G Duncan
1956	Octet for Strings	Iain Hamilton
1957	String Quartet No 2	Robert Crawford
1958	String Quartet No 1	Thea Musgrave
1959	Sonata for cello and piano	Iain Hamilton
1959	*String Quartet No 3	Thomas Wilson
1960	String Quartet	David Gwilt
1961	Sonata for violin and piano	Thomas Wilson
1962	Chamber Concerto No 1	Thea Musgrave
1962	*Theme and Variations for clarinet quintet	Sebastian Forbes
1963	Canzona for tenor, clarinet and string trio	Buxton Orr
1964	Piano Trio	Sebastian Forbes
1966	String Quartet No 3	David Dorwarad
1967	Piano Trio	Martin Dalby
1968	String Trio op 21	John Purser
1968	*String Trio	David Gow
1968	Sinfonia for seven instruments	Thomas Wilson
1969	String Quartet	Rita McAllister
1970	<i>Quaderno a Quattro</i>	John Maxwell Geddes
1971	<i>Journeys and Places</i>	Robin Orr
1971	Piano Quintet	Frank Spedding
1972	Fantasy String Quartet	Isobel Dunlop
1973	Clarinet Quintet	John McLeod
1974	<i>Histoire</i>	David Dorward
1975	<i>Liberation</i>	Edward McGuire
1976	<i>Three Poems of Li Ch'ing-Chao</i>	Wilma Paterson
1977	<i>Almost a Madrigal</i>	Martin Dalby
1978	<i>The Ancient Pattern</i>	Morris Pert
1979	<i>Channel Firing</i>	John Hearne
1980	Wind Octet	Edward McGuire
1981	String Quartet	William Sweeney
1982	<i>Scotch Minstrelsy</i>	Judith Weir
1983	<i>Diversions</i>	John Maxwell Geddes
1984	Sonata for cello and piano	Peter Nelson
1985	<i>Strange Fruit</i>	John Lunn
1986	String Quartet	John McLeod
1987	Ricercare	Robert Crawford
1988	<i>Visions of a November Spring</i>	James MacMillan
1989	<i>El Pueblo</i>	William Sweeney
1990	<i>Dead Roses</i>	Gordon McPherson
2009	<i>Intimacy</i> for string quartet	John De Simone
2010	Piano Trio ( <i>Music for the pauses in a conversation between John Cage and Morton Feldman</i> )	David Fennessy
2011	<i>Luna</i>	Helen Grime