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CLASSICS



dance

the smith quartet

DANCE

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THE SMITH QUARTET

www.smithquartet.com www.signalrecords.com

DANCING IN THE SPIRIT ** TUNDE JEGEDE

In 1999 I was invited to collaborate with the Choreographer Wayne McGregor at the Norwich Arts Festival. The resulting piece *Dancing in the Spirit* was performed live by my ensemble together with Random Dance Company at The Norwich Playhouse as part of the festival. The ensemble went on to work with Random at the Greenwich Festival the following year, which included Wayne Mcgeggor performing a solo piece accompanied by myself playing a movement from one of Bach's Cello Suites.

This current version of Dancing in the Spirit was specifically arranged for the Smith Quartet.

Tunde Jegede

FOLK MUSIC (DAITHI'S DUMKA) * JOE CUTLER

Folk Music (Daithi's Dumka) is based upon the Dumka - a Slavic dance form originally from Ukraine, although the piece is also influenced strongly by "Goralski" folk music from the Polish Tatra Mountains. The piece begins with deconstructed material which finally emerges in its full form in the final part of the work. It

is dedicated to Daithi Morgan, son of my dear friends Darragh Morgan (of the Smith Quartet) and pianist Mary Dullea. *Folk Music (Daithi's Dumka)* was written for the Smith Quartet and won the 2008 British Composer Award in the chamber music category.

Joe Cutler

PAVANE: SHE'S SO FINE (FROM JOHN'S BOOK OF ALLEGED DANCES) JOHN ADAMS

The Alleged Dances were the next pieces written after the *Violin Concerto*, a complex work that took a full year to compose. The Concerto emboldened me to go further with string writing, and some of the techniques and gestures I'd touched on in it appeared again in the new string quartet, only in a less earnest guise. The "Book" is a collection of ten dances, six of which are accompanied by a recorded percussion track made of prepared piano sounds. The prepared piano was, of course, the invention of John Cage, who first put erasers, nuts, bolts, and other damping objects in the strings of the grand piano, thereby transforming it into a kind of pygmy gamelan. In the original version of *Alleged Dances* the prepared piano sounds were organized as loops installed in an onstage sampler, and one of the quartet players



Nic at Wilton's Music Hall, London. July 2008.

triggered them on cue with a foot pedal. This made for a lot of suspense in the live performance—perhaps too much, as the potential for crash-and-burn was so high that Kronos eventually persuaded me to create a CD of the loops, a decision that allowed for significantly less anxiety during concerts.

The dances were “alleged” because the steps for them had yet to be invented (although by now a number of choreographers, including Paul Taylor, have created pieces around them). The general tone is dry, droll and sardonic. Pavane: She’s so fine is one of the four movements played without the recorded percussion track.

John Adams

INFORMAL DANCE * GRAHAM FITKIN

This short quartet was written for the Smith Quartet in 1993. Much of the piece treats the four instruments as if they are one single instrument, working in rhythmic unison with occasional punctuating cello notes. I feel it has a latent dance feel, with overt references removed, as if there’s just a hazy memory of dance or movement or something not quite tangible.

Graham Fitkin

DEFINITELY DISCO * ANDREW POPPY

Disco in all its stylistic manifestations is something I’ve always enjoyed; from Kraftwerk though to a continuing obsession with the music of Underworld. This is a music that, like Mozart, exudes a palpable sense of physical pleasure. Disco is probably the most significant vernacular form to originate in recent times. Ironically the music is connected to the ‘feel’ of the drum machine and associated electronic instruments like the sampler. I guess vernacular dance practice has always informed the abstraction of art music. And dance itself somehow influenced by the musical instrument technology of a time. (The ‘without end’ quality of machines connects clubbing more to say, marathon running than to the polite rituals of enlightenment courtship) String instrument technology and string quartet culture is certainly from another era. But it still holds creative possibilities. The project would appear to be to understand how this old technology might be creatively involved in new forms.

In recent times ‘dance music’ musicians have explored, in the hedonistic context of the club, the ways that sound works with or on the body.

It's the way perception transforms through repetition. Attention to the grain of the pulse and the way it manipulates sensation. 'Repetition and difference' is something that philosophers and concert hall artists have also found consequent. There is also stillness at the centre of the dance act that is reminiscent of prayer or meditation. Dance is not about switching off. It's actually hard to dance if you're wasted. Contemplation though dancing maybe! But that's a longer piece of writing.

While string quartet music is never going to 'play' in the dance hall I hope that some of the spirit and pleasure of that context has infected this work. Definitely Disco was commissioned by the Greenwich international String Quartet Festival.

Andrew Poppy

MINUET *

(FROM SIX SEXY MINUETS THREE TRIOS)

MICHAEL FINNISSY

"If it's possible to sex up a political speech, then it's possible to sex up a Minuet."

Michael Finnissey

BLACK DANCE

(FROM EIGHT COLORS FOR STRING QUARTET)

TAN DUN

Eight Colors for String Quartet was the first piece I wrote after coming to New York in 1986. It shares the dark, ritualized singing, very dramatic form, and attention to tone color and dynamic with my pieces written in China, such as *On Taoism* (for orchestra, voice, bass clarinet and contrabassoon), but still is very different from them. This string quartet (together with *In Distance* and *Silk Road*) marks the period of my first contact with the concentrated, lyrical language of western atonality. From it, I learned how to handle repetition, but otherwise responded in my own way, out of my own culture, not following the Second Vienna School. I drew on Chinese colors, on the techniques of Peking Opera - familiar to me since childhood. The work consists of eight very short sections (of which *Black Dance* is the fourth), almost like a set of brush paintings, through which materials are shared and developed. The subjects are described by the eight interrelated titles, and form a drama, a kind of ritual performance structure. "Not only timbre, but the actual string techniques are developed from Peking Opera as I wanted to find a way to mingle old materials from my culture with the new, to contribute

something to the western idea of atonality, and to refresh it. I found a danger in later atonal writing to be that it is too easy to leave yourself out of the music. I wanted to find ways to remain open to my culture, and open to myself.

Tan Dun

FIRST DANCE

(FROM WHITE MAN SLEEPS)

KEVIN VOLANS

It was a request from Adrian Jack that prompted this piece. He asked me to rework White Man Sleeps (originally written for two harpsichords, viola da gamba and percussion) for a performance at the ICA. I resisted the idea at first, especially as the African tuning of the original piece would have to be dropped. It occurred to me however, that the western tuning (equal temperament) would mask the source material and make my intentions clearer. I began work.

My approach to the original music was anything but purist – it is played in Western tuning, filtered, slowed down by a few "time-octaves", cast into non-African metres (like the 13-beat pattern of the first dance) and redistributed between the players in several ways. I also used interlocking techniques where they were absent in the

original models and vice versa. The first movement owes something to the style of Basotho concertina music; the title 'White Man Sleeps' comes from a moment in nyanga panpipe music where the performers leave off playing their loud pipes for a few cycles and dance only to the sound of their ankle rattles, to let the white landowner sleep – for a minute or two.

Kevin Volans

TANGO **

(FROM NEVER FOREVER)

MICHAEL NYMAN

In the Summer of 2007 at the end of an intensive and exhausting few days recording Michael's opera *Love Counts*, he produced a Tango for string quartet written for the film *Never Forever* by the Korean director Gina Kim. The piece made an immediate impression on me and when the Smith Quartet was invited to tour South Korea in the Autumn of 2008 I asked Michael if we could have a copy to take along. Its associations with Korean film culture and, its raw, direct emotional expression, made it an obvious encore choice for us and not surprisingly, it was a big hit over there.

Ian Humphries



The Smith Quartet at 'Dance' recording session in St Michael's Church, Highgate, London. January 2010.

ZARABANDA SOLITARIA *

JON LORD

In an abandoned ballroom in a small town somewhere in the heart of Spain, a lone man, far advanced in years, but still proud of bearing, walks slowly onto the dusty dance floor. He stands for a while, gazing into his past, then, with only a slight hesitation, he begins to dance.

As he grows more sure, he dances in memory of long ago and far away, and of loves won and lost. The dance ends, and, with a wistful smile and a stiff bow to the ghosts, he walks out into the night.

Jon Lord

BOGLE MOVE *

GABRIEL PROKOFIEV

Jamaican Dance-hall, or Ragga (as I used to know it), or Raggamuffin, or Bashment as it is also called, is a dance-form that emerged in Jamaica in the '80s, and can always be guaranteed to get any party or club crowd dancing.

The driving syncopation and charismatic minimal grooves of dance-hall have a warmth and energy which is rarely found in modern dance music, and

I've been a fan since my teens. One of the first tracks that really got me hooked on Dance-hall was *Bam Bam* as performed by Chaka Demus and Pliers, and it's sister tune *Murder She Wrote* which were both set to the classic *Bam Bam* riddim (backing track) back in 1993. When I was a student I started listening to Reggae pirate radio stations which played continuous dance-hall DJ mixes, and then began collecting Dancehall compilation LPs, even DJed dancehall a bit at parties, and incorporated some of the ragga rhythms into music of the bands I was playing with at the time.

So when the Smith Quartet asked me to compose a dance piece for them, there was no doubt in my mind that I'd use the opportunity to have some fun with a style that I already knew and loved.

Continuing an approach I've developed in my previous String Quartet writing; the Quartet is frequently required to play in a very percussive style, often recreating the type of sounds that are normally produced by electronic instruments, so that terms such as *spiccato molto sec*, *glissando* and *col legno* appear very regularly in the score. The score also uses DJ and studio type effects that can be found in much modern dance music, such as looping, echoing, re-triggering,

stretching and bending; but these are taken beyond their normal limits so that the piece doesn't become too predictably stuck in a groove; as I was keen to compose something that fuses dance-hall rhythmic feel with a more classical approach to form and development. Towards the end of the dance, the piece even slips into a more 'classical' style with trills in the violins and legato 'sighs' from cello and viola before descending back into a final caught-in-a-loop reprise of the groove.

The title comes from one of the oldest dancehall dance moves which is called the 'Bogle', a winding gyration from the shoulders down to the hips to the ground; riding to the beat, it was invented by the late great Jamaican dancing king: Mr Bogle. I would love to have seen him dance to the Smith Quartet.

Gabriel Prokofiev

NAÏVE WALTZ

ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

Naïve Waltz was written in the early 90's as part of the score for a dance project with Reinhold Hoffmann's Dance Theatre in Bochum. Reinhold Hoffmann asked me to write about 10 waltzes of which she would choose a couple. With each

of the waltzes I set myself a particular framework within which I would create a piece. For the *Naïve Waltz* I decided to work with laconic material, reminiscent of Satie. As it was a dance piece, for a particular purpose, there is perhaps a flair of "incompleteness" about it, because the structure of the choreography dictated its form. It existed only as an archival recording for at least 10 years until one day someone asked to perform it live, so I then transcribed it and the piece has had a few performances since.

Elena Kats-Chernin

STAMP (TO AVOID EROTIC THOUGHTS) *

DONNACHA DENNEHY

STAMP (to avoid erotic thoughts) takes as its point of departure some bars from an Italian Salterello dating from the 14th century, a manuscript of which is housed in the British Library. It is a particularly wonderful dance, which in this instance switches instantly between a 7/8 and 6/8 grouping. I take this subversive wrong footing as a license to develop various metrical intrigues through STAMP, and the piece is infused throughout with bars that can simultaneously be perceived as 6/8 or 3/4.

Deirdre at St Michael's Church trying to keep warm.



Darragh at St Michael's Church — deep snow outside...





Having recently fallen in love with the French Estampie I had wanted to use this as a source. It has wonderful, occasionally wrong-footing, form bound together by recurring rhyming ending refrains. Johannes de Groecheio, writing in the 14th century, claimed that the Estampie was so complex, so that it obliged the young people dancing it to concentrate and avoid erotic thoughts! I thought “wonderful - did it ever catch on here (Ireland)?” However the extant notations did not trigger a way forward for me, so I was delighted when I found this particularly strange Salterello, as that Italian form is quite clearly derived from the French Estampie. I like to think of the spirit of this piece as a strange cross between the ringing visceral open-stringed resonances and ebergry of an Irish session and the wonderful twists and turns of these related medieval dance forms.

STAMP was commissioned by Music Network (with funding from The Arts Council of Ireland) for the Smith Quartet.

Donnacha Dennehy

PECULIAR TERMS OF PHYSICAL INTIMACY ** DJANGO BATES

This jig which I arranged for the Smith Quartet is from 'Music for The Third Policeman'; my 1989 album inspired by Flann O'Brien's book of that name. It's best to read the story to see how these peculiar terms of physical intimacy come about. Of course with such a title it makes sense that the musicians are trapped in unison throughout the piece.

Django Bates

* Written for the Smith Quartet

** Arranged for the Smith Quartet



The Smith Quartet at Wilton's Music Hall

BIOGRAPHY

THE SMITH QUARTET

Violins: Ian Humphries, Darragh Morgan.

Viola: Nic Pendlebury. **Cello:** Deirdre Cooper.

Now into its third decade the Smith Quartet remains at the forefront of the new music world. It has championed the works of the world's most celebrated composers commissioning over 150 new pieces during its career. A list that includes recent works by Donnacha Dennehy and Joe Cutler and works by Nyman, Volans, Bryars, Fitkin, and Skempton.

Continually striving to go beyond the string quartet's traditional role in the concert hall the group has shared the stage with artists as different as rock group Pulp and Malian singer Rokia Traore. Working with longtime partners, Sound Intermedia, the concept of the stage itself can be challenged, commuters in Cologne for example witnessing the Smiths forty feet above the platform performing Steve Reich's *Different Trains*. The quartet's long association with this seminal work led to a performance of the 2nd Movement, *Europe - During The War*, in the

most unusual and poignant location of all when, along with artists such as Maxim Vengerov and Emmanuel Ax, it was asked to be a part of the BBC's award winning documentary *Holocaust – A Music Memorial Concert* from Auschwitz filmed on location at Birkenau-Auschwitz at the end of 2004. The film went on to win a BAFTA and the 2006 Emmy for Best Arts Documentary Film.

The quartet has enjoyed a number of prestigious residencies recently including a five concert series in 2006/7 at Queens University Belfast at the Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC), and a series of European concerts featuring the work of celebrated Portugese composers as part of Miso Music's Circuits tour. As Artists in Residence at the 2006 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, they performed the complete works of Morton Feldman for piano and strings with the celebrated pianist John Tilbury.

In 2008 the Smiths toured South Korea for the first time where they performed to over 10,000 people. They were also invited for a residency

at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. 2009 saw them make their US debut at the Phillips Collection, Washington DC followed by an appearance at the Bang On A Can Marathon at the Winter Gardens, New York of which the New York Times commented, "The Smith Quartet, ..., drew one of the strongest responses of the day with its lush account of the early Gavin Bryars proto-Minimalist work *The Sinking of the Titanic*". In October 2009 the Smith's celebrated Kevin Volan's 60th Birthday with two concerts at London's Wigmore Hall where the Daily Telegraph noted that "they... played with exquisite care". Highlights of its 2010 season included an appearance at the Sligo New Music Festival and, in October, at 'Minimal' in Glasgow and SOUND Festival in Aberdeen.

In 2005 the quartet released their debut album 'Different Trains' for Signum Classics. The album met with much critical acclaim, the Sunday Independent remarking that "... the Smith Quartet's intense sound re-emphasises the rhapsodic ending of the work" and that Duet and the Triple Quartet "are played to perfection". This was swiftly followed by their second album 'Ghost Stories' described by the press as "...a compelling blend of live ensemble and electronics", Andrew Clements of the Guardian

commented that the release was "...superbly played..." Their most recent album for Signum, 'Philip Glass Complete Quartets', received considerable critical acclaim and coverage in the media leading Classic FM magazine to ask "How long before the Kronos is labeled the 'American Smith Quartet'? ...they are ahead of the curve at generating new repertoire and taking the experimental back-catalogue seriously".

2010 has seen the quartet back in the studio recording for its new album of Dance pieces. Also, the first of three Audio DVDs of Feldman's complete works for Piano and Strings, recorded with John Tilbury at the 2006 Huddersfield Festival, has been released on Matchless Recordings to instant critical acclaim.

2011 concert highlights include a return invitation to the Greenwich International String Quartet Festival to premiere a new string quartet by Michael Nyman plus, Bach and Glass in Germany, and concerts in Poland and London with Steve Reich.

www.smithquartet.com

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