

NEW MUS DUB

ÉTUDES

28th April 2022, 5pm | Diatribe Stage - Room 103, National Concert Hall, Dublin

Kevin Volans Étude 1 ('92, rev. '03) *

Kevin Volans Étude 2 ('98, rev. '03) *

Kevin Volans Étude 3 ('97, rev. '03) *

Kevin Volans Étude 10 (*Glosa a lo Divino*) ('06, reworked 2022, World Premiere) *

Kevin Volans Étude 8 ('87, rev. '08) **

Kevin Volans *Vanishing Point* ('22, World Premiere) ***

* **Jill Richards** piano

** **Kevin Volans** piano

*** **Richards + Volans** piano four hands



PROGRAMME NOTES

Kevin Volans Études

At the turn of this century I realised that in the 40 years or so of my composing life I had written only two solo piano pieces to date. This despite having started out as a pianist, a devoted fan of Liszt and Chopin, as well as having written my final year university dissertation on the Stockhausen piano pieces. Perhaps this was the problem – as a pianist, a large repertoire of piano music is practised into one's fingers; it resides in the muscle memory as well as intellectual memory. This makes writing original piano music exceptionally difficult. In my case, as with many other composers, the hands as well as the brain are involved in the compositional process.

There was a further problem. The piano evolved, especially in the 19th century, as an instrument with maximum resonance, with an extended pitch range, enhanced dynamic range, and a pedal. It's not simply an advanced percussion instrument. The resonance of the instrument is created largely by repeating figures and notes at multiple octaves, often with the assistance of the pedal. And the pedal, in the words of Arthur Rubinstein, is 'the soul of the piano'. This put it at odds with mainstream late 20th century contemporary music practice, which since the 1950s has largely eschewed the doubling of pitches.

So, taking a cue from an artwork I love, Marcel Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise*, which consists mainly of miniatures of Duchamp's own work, I decided to start out with transcriptions of my own pieces for other media. The Études, then, are autobiographical in nature. My aim was to write a set of études that were technically on a similar level of difficulty as the Liszt *Études d'exécution transcendante*, which I've struggled with as a pianist for many years. My Études present very different technical problems, however. There are 13 written to date. Not all have been recorded.

Étude 1 is based on material from my opera *The Man Who Strides the Wind* (1992), part of which also appears in the 3rd String Quartet. Different rhythms are overlaid, calling on a number of occasions for three hands – or rather two hands working at high speed to give the illusion of three hands.

Étude 2 is taken from music I wrote for a dance piece for the Jonathan Burrows dance company, called *Things I Don't Know* (1998). At the last minute, Jonathan decided to cut a large chunk of the music towards the end of the piece, because the dancers (including himself) found it too 'heavy' for the dance. They danced to silence. While I understood the reasoning, I wasn't exactly pleased – as I felt this was the best music in the piece, which I had saved for last. So this rejected music is what I used as a basis for this étude. I was interested in large blocks of static resonance, with the illusion of near and far away sounds.

Étude 3 begins with original material which however relates to a piece I wrote in 1983 called *Journal: Walking Song*. (I withdrew the piece and plundered it for several other works, including my second quartet *Hunting:Gathering* (1987)). The original material was played on two pianos, not one.

The second half of the piece is an extremely complex and difficult arrangement of a section of my *Cello Concerto* (1997). There are moments where 4 hands would be useful.

Étude 10 includes transformed material from a choral piece called *Glosa a lo Divino* (2006) on a text by San Juan de la Cruz. The poem contains the lines: *Mi alma está desassida de toda cosa criada y sobre sí levantada* - roughly: 'my soul is disentangled from every created thing and lifted above itself'.

My admiration for Jill Richard's skill and musicality in tackling and conquering these pianistic monsters, is unbounded.

Étude 8 is a transcription of what was my second string quartet, written in 1987 in a style deliberately very distanced from that of my first quartet *White Man Sleeps*. I was fascinated by a painting of Philip Guston entitled *Artist's Forms*, which shows objects he depicted in many paintings - a boot, the sole of a shoe, a cork (maybe) a bottle etc. - falling from the mouth of a face in the upper left side of the painting. I liked the image of pieces of fragmented material from (what might have been) a piece of music, plummeting in sequences, like falling garbage, and I used that as a starting point.

Kevin Volans *Vanishing Point*

This piece is dedicated to my teacher, Karlheinz Stockhausen. He always told us, 'If you're going to spit, spit! You can apologise later.' In other words, he encouraged boldness and conviction, which reflected also in the scale of his and his students' work. Nothing in half measures.

Technically, this piano duet turned out, quite unintentionally, to be a series of tests of mental and physical agility for the performers, placing it on a par with the more difficult of Stockhausen's and my piano pieces.

—Kevin Volans

BIOGRAPHIES

Jill Richards

Jill Richards is a South African pianist specialising in new music. Versatile and dynamic, her interests range from Bach to free improvisation.



Her career includes collaborations with numerous composers from around the world. She has a longstanding working relationship with Kevin Volans, who has written many solo works as well as piano duos for her. These she has performed with the composer as partner. Richards has also worked with Francisco Lopez, Jörg Schäffer, François Sarhan, Rudiger Meyer, Clare Loveday, and many others. She has also toured with live music performances to William Kentridge's films.

Richards has performed and been broadcast in the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia. Some of these performances were used for BBC broadcasts of premieres of solo and duo works by Kevin Volans. She has released five CDs, including *Cicada*, featuring work by Volans. Together with violinist Waldo Alexander, Richards has also recorded works by Kevin Volans for piano, violin and viola for the Ergodos label.

She also collaborates with sound artist João Orecchia, visual artist Marcus Neustetter, composer-drummer Christophe Fellay, and has created sound tracks with video artist Jurgen Meekel and artist Dorothee Kreuzfeldt, amongst others.

Kevin Volans

Kevin Volans' work is regularly performed worldwide. Principal performances in the last years include the Berliner Musikfest, Vienna State Opera, the Salzburger



Festspiele, Lincoln Center NY, Dokumenta Kassel, Pompidou Centre Paris, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Kunstmuseum Bonn, Chicago Institute of Fine Arts, Edinburgh Festival, Caixa Forum Madrid, Barbican, South Bank, Wigmore Hall, London and several times in the BBC Proms.

In the last 35 years Volans has worked with quartets: Kronos, Smith Quartet, Arditti Quartet, Signum; pianists: Barry Douglas, Marc-André Hamelin, Melvyn Tan; conductors: Michael Tilson Thomas, Marek Janowski, Yan Pascal Tortelier, orchestras: San Francisco Symphony, BBC Symphony, Bayerische Rundfunk, Royal Flemish Philharmonic; percussionists: Schulkowsky, Axelsson, SISU and many others; dance companies - Siobhan Davies, Shobana Jeyasingh, White Oak, Jonathan Burrows; artists: William Kentridge, Juergen Partenheimer, Jose-Manuel Ballester.

He was born in South Africa, and studied in Johannesburg, and later with Stockhausen and Kagel in Cologne. He moved to Ireland in 1986 and has been an Irish citizen since 1994. After a productive collaboration with the Kronos quartet in the 1980s his work has been regularly performed worldwide. The Kronos discs, *White Man Sleeps* and *Pieces of Africa* broke all records for string quartet disc sales, the latter being number 1 on the Billboard Classical and World Music Charts for 26 weeks.

In 1999, the South Bank in London hosted a 50th birthday celebration of his work and for his 60th the Wigmore Hall in London organised a 'Kevin Volans Day' of concerts. In 2019 the Wigmore Hall sponsored his 70th birthday concert, the South African Society for Research in Music invited him to give a series of 4 days of lectures at the Goethe-Institut, Johannesburg, and the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome sponsored a 'Ritratto di Kevin Volans'.

There are some 50 CDs and videos featuring his music currently available.

The Diatribe Stage features a specially commissioned installation by artist Rory Tangney. Diatribe Records gratefully acknowledges the support of the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon.



NEW MUSIC DUBLIN 2022

Welcome one and welcome all to New Music Dublin 2022. It's so good to see you!

I very well remember just after the end of the last live, in-person festival in March 2020, standing at the bus stop on what was the day of the first confirmed Covid case in Ireland, wondering how long it would be before we were all together again: a few months at most, I reckoned. Certainly not later than the 2021 Festival?

And yet ... here we all are, 2 years and one fully-digital 2021 lockdown New Music Dublin later - finally together, Back in the Room. I'm not feeling the need to add to the screeds and reams that have been written and will be written about the pandemic; suffice to say, I suspect very few of us right now are able to say exactly how we feel about what just happened to us for the past 2 years.

Which is probably the perfect state to be in for coming to this smorgasbord of a festival! Here you will find musical expression for a vast array of emotional states: joy, elation, confusion, melancholy, nostalgia, awe, contentment, despair, exasperation, bliss, relief, rapture, dismay, tenderness - and many others we don't really have words for, often all at the same time, and often all piled one on top of the other.

You'll also find an increasing variety and diversity of people writing and performing the music that you hear. This festival we are delighted to include world premieres by young composers for young performers in the Cór na nÓg and Cór Linn programme, thrilling new work from emerging under-represented voices in the NCH Creative Lab project, new work by and for young musicians in BrassFest, new work with sign language in George Higgs' ground-breaking new performance, and the up-and-coming compositional voices represented by the Irish Composers' Collective. Add to this work by a whole raft of Ireland's most garlanded, radical and highly-regarded professional composers and music creators, and - well - there's something by everyone, not just for everyone!

Our hope is that somewhere in amongst the 39 world premieres, 10 Irish premieres, multiple repeat listens and everything else that is going on in the 25 concerts this weekend, there are likely to be expressions for many things you have been feeling recently. Whether it's something massive and orchestral, or something choral, or something played by a solo musician, or something heard via a hidden loudspeaker somewhere, it may catch you unawares, just like that - and remind you, that although we have all been desperately separated from each other these past two years, someone somewhere, maybe quite a lot like you, also felt what you were going through back there. Although we went through it all by ourselves, we also, in no small measure, went through it all together.

And here we all are! Welcome back!!

John Harris

Festival Director, New Music Dublin

NEW MUSIC DUBLIN

Thursday 28 April 2022

MUSIC ALLIANCE IRELAND LAUNCH

TOTEMIC: Nathan Sherman and Alex Petcu
presented by Ergodos

CHORAL SKETCHES: Chamber Choir Ireland

ÉTUDES: Kevin Volans and Jill Richards

PERSONHOOD: Oslo Sinfonietta and Andreas
Borregaard

TONNTA presented by Ergodos

Friday 29 April 2022

AMPLIFY LIVE with Contemporary Music Centre

CORCORAN AT NMD: Hard Rain
SoloistEnsemble

YOU HEARD IT FIRST: Crash Ensemble

ICC ALBUM LAUNCH

IN MEMORIAM / IN CELEBRATION:
National Symphony Orchestra and Ensemble
Interforma

AVENUE AZURE presented by Ergodos

SONGS FROM THE BRAIN BOOK: Diatribe
album launch with Diamanda La Berge Dramm

Saturday 30 April 2022

BRASSFEST in partnership with RIAM

LANDSCAPE SERIES presented by Diatribe

MUSIC FOR 5 SILENT POEMS: George Higgs

PUTTING IT INTO MUSIC: Crash Ensemble

A BRIEF DESCENT INTO DEEP TIME:
Chamber Choir Ireland

DIATRIBE – JAZZ TRIPLE BILL

Sunday 1 May 2022

NARLI RECORD FAIR

THINGS THAT NEVER DIE: Cór na nÓg and
Cór Linn

NCH CREATIVE LAB FINALE

NARLI AGM 2022

ISABELLE O'CONNELL PIANO

DELIVERANCE: RTÉ Concert Orchestra

**THE POSSIBILITIES FROM HERE ARE
ENDLESS:** Crash X Diamanda Dramm

COLM O'HARA 10TET presented by Diatribe

Throughout the festival:

ULYSSES JOURNEY 2022: newly
commissioned music and film works

WINGFORM: an installation of music and
light

REACTIONS film screenings

HAUNTOLOGY

NMDX (hosted by The Contemporary Music
Centre, Ireland and New Music Dublin)

New Music Dublin is a partnership between:

RTÉ

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NAISIÚNTA



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