



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS
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JANUARY - JUNE 2015

Grey Area performs:

**Hugh Davies, Stockhausen, Christian Wolff,
Owen Green**

A concert of music composed by, or related to the work of,
Hugh Davies.

Saturday 23 May 2015

7:30pm



Programme £1



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PROGRAMME

Stockhausen

Verbindung (Connection) from *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968)

Hugh Davies

Music for a Single Spring (1975)

Christian Wolff

Edges (1968)

INTERVAL

Hugh Davies

Quintet (1967-8)

Owen Green

Neither the Time nor the Energy (2015)

Stockhausen

Intensität (Intensity) from *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968)

INTRODUCTION

This is a concert of music composed by, or otherwise related to the work of the English musician and instrument inventor Hugh Davies (1943-2005). After graduating with a degree in Music from Oxford University, Hugh Davies became personal assistant to the avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, living and working in Cologne from 1964 to 1966. Stockhausen's music went on to feature frequently in Davies's career as a performer of experimental and electronic musics, and also influenced his practice as an instrument-builder. Throughout his career, Davies constructed many idiosyncratic self-built musical instruments from every-day objects such as springs and hacksaw blades, and from recycled rubbish such as empty bottles and jam-jar lids. Many of Davies's instruments were amplified, so that sounds that would otherwise be inaudible could be heard, and their musical possibilities explored.

Tonight's programme features two pieces by Stockhausen and one by Christian Wolff that were regularly performed by Davies's ensemble Gentle Fire, which was active from 1968 to 1975. It also includes two of Davies's own compositions, as well as a more recent piece by Owen Green for amplified bowed cardboard box, which carries on the tradition of exploring the musical possibilities of amplified detritus.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Stockhausen – *Verbindung (Connection)* from *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968)

For ensemble

Stockhausen's *Verbindung (Connection)* is one of fifteen text scores from a set entitled *Aus den sieben Tagen* (From the Seven Days). Written in 1968, the texts provide instructions to the ensemble that describe how the musical events should unfold, or that describe the interactions between players. Many of the texts—including the two in tonight's programme—are written simply 'for ensemble', and do not specify a particular instrumentation.

The text for *Verbindung*, translated from the original German into English by Hugh Davies, reads as follows:

Play a vibration in the rhythm of your body
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your heart
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your breathing
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your thinking
Play a vibration in the rhythm of your intuition

Play a vibration in the rhythm of enlightenment
Play a vibration in the rhythm of the universe
Mix these vibrations freely
Leave enough silence between them

Aus den sieben Tagen was designated by Stockhausen as a work of 'intuitive music', because the sounds produced by each player are arrived at intuitively rather than being specified in detail as would be the case in a conventional musical score. Because of this, the pieces in *Aus den sieben Tagen* unfold differently with each performance, and can of course vary considerably depending on the ensemble, and the instruments within it.

The pieces in *Aus den sieben Tagen* were performed regularly by Hugh Davies's ensemble Gentle Fire between 1968 and 1975, and Hugh Davies translated the texts from the original German into English for the score published by Universal Edition.

Hugh Davies – *Music for a Single Spring* (version 1) (1975)

For stereo fixed media

Music for a Single Spring, as the title suggests, comprises only sounds produced by a single metal spring, in this case 85 centimetres in length. The sounds of the spring, which would otherwise be too quiet to hear, are heavily amplified. This is achieved by placing the spring across four magnetic pickups, similar in principle to the pickups that are used to amplify the strings of an electric guitar. Basically, the sounds are produced by dragging the spring across the pickups in various different ways; each pickup also had a separate volume control, allowing the final sound to be further manipulated. The apparatus just described is one of over 120 self-built instruments that Davies built in his lifetime, usually incorporating every-day objects and other recycled materials.

Music for a Single Spring—as is the case with much of Davies's work—is semi-improvised; two different performances exist as recordings, the first of which will be heard this evening. In the liner notes that accompany the CD, Davies notes that version 1 was begun by playing sitting down and then standing up half-way through, whereas version 2 was played entirely standing up. No further details are available as to how, precisely, the piece was structured, but based on Davies's notes from other similar works it is likely that different sound-worlds or methods of playing the spring were loosely mapped out for different parts of the piece, leaving room for improvisation within that overall framework. The recording itself is stereo—it has two channels, left and right—but will be 'diffused' live in this

evening's performance, so that the sound envelops the audience from front to back as well as from left to right.

Christian Wolff – *Edges* (1968)

For any number of players

"You have to listen to the notes she's not playing"

"I can do that at home"

The Simpsons, "Lisa the Simpson", (Series 9, Ep. 17)

Wolff has suggested that the score for *Edges* is at least partly concerned with instructions about what *not* to play. This is because the symbols given denote archetypes that the players are to trace their way between, rather than land upon. The score itself simply presents these symbols, loosely clustered in space and some instructions that are playfully vague.

In this sense *Edges* has things in common with other pieces of Wolff's from this period that also explored how scores and notation could intersect with improvised play. Some of the notational elements, for instance, also appear in *For One, Two or Three People* (1964), which presents a notational scheme orientated around players' responses to each other and to sounds in the wider environment. However, where the transactional basis of this piece might impose some common character between otherwise indeterminate performances, *Edges* seems (even) less concerned with this, insofar as it leaves so very much up to the players.

At the same time, though, they share a sort of soft and empowering didacticism that seems to be characteristic of Wolff. Superficially it may seem as both pieces are concerned with making claims about what might constitute *good* improvising but, in each case, gaps in the information given mean that it is left to players and audience to work this out for themselves...

Edges was performed regularly by Hugh Davies's ensemble Gentle Fire between 1968 and 1975.

Hugh Davies – *Quintet (Alstrabal.....)* (1967-8)

For 5 performers, 5 microphones, sine/square-wave generator, 4-channel switching unit, potentiometers, amplifiers, and 6 loudspeakers

Hugh Davies's *Quintet* is a piece in which all of the sounds are produced by microphone feedback. Microphone feedback occurs when sounds picked up by a microphone, amplified, and played through a loudspeaker, are picked up again by the microphone, creating an infinite loop of amplification. This is usually heard as a

howling or squealing sound, which sound engineers typically try to avoid during performances. In *Quintet*, the five performers produce feedback deliberately, but (we hope!) in a reasonably controlled way, by holding hand-held microphones close to loudspeakers while following instructions in a score. At different points in the piece, for example, performers are instructed to ‘Move the microphone slowly in different directions, producing increasingly wider pitch intervals’, or to ‘Fade sounds in and out by hand movements between the microphone and the loudspeaker’. Four players are situated in the four corners of the performance venue, while the fifth player, at the centre of the venue, controls the levels of the four loudspeakers as well as producing further feedback sounds via an additional pair of loudspeakers at the centre of the room. The fifth performer also operates other electronic equipment so as to alter the characteristics of the feedback sounds, in a ‘solo’ that happens around four-and-a-half minutes into the piece.

Davies’s own programme note for *Quintet*, written around 1970, reads as follows:

Four musicians stand each at one of the four corners of the room, in front of a loudspeaker, holding a microphone which is connected directly to it. The fifth performer has an oscillator in addition to a microphone, as well as potentiometers to control the level of each of the five microphones. All the sounds are produced by acoustic feedback, with the exception of a solo section in the middle of the work, where the oscillator is used to modulate (without actually employing a ring-modulator) the microphone feedback. A switching unit is used in the penultimate section to rearrange the microphone-loudspeaker connections, so that a performer sometimes finds that his [or her] microphone is connected to a different loudspeaker.

The slightly cryptic subtitle ‘Alstrabal.....’—read the word backwards—refers to the Arts Lab, an arts collective in London in which Davies acted as artistic director during the late 1960s, which is where the piece received its première performance.

Owen Green – *Neither the Time nor the Energy* (2015)

For bowed cardboard box and electronics

This new piece has wormed its way in to this programme by claiming a sense of continuity with the other works being presented. Like Hugh Davies – and many others since – I like to search out the music in ostensibly non-musical objects (yymm), hence the box.

When I first started playing with cardboard boxes and bows a few years ago the intention was for something much more flippant and disposable. I’d expected to exhaust a fairly limited repertoire of sounds and movement quite quickly and move

on. However, to my surprise it seems to keep giving and rewards something with at least some of the properties of technique.

In this piece the box is both the sound source and a means of control for the electronics, where features of what and how I play drive and configure the conduct of the software. I'm trying here to find roles for the computer that hover between a composition, a co-player and an instrument. There are structural elements that are pre-specified but whose articulation is driven by my playing, so the music emerges through the interplay of the spontaneous and the determined (as with the Wolff and Stockhausen pieces).

The digest version: I have only marginally more of an idea than you of what might happen. But there will probably be five audibly distinct movements, and it could be about twelve minutes long.

Stockhausen – *Intensität (Intensity)* from *Aus den sieben Tagen* (1968)

For ensemble

Intensität (Intensity) is one of 15 texts scores written by Stockhausen under the name *Aus den sieben Tagen* (From the Seven Days) in 1968, and is the second of these pieces to be featured in tonight's programme. For a brief explanation, see the programme note for *Verbindung (Connection)*, above. The text for *Intensität*, translated from German into English by Hugh Davies, reads as follows:

Play single sounds
with such dedication
until you feel the warmth
that radiates from you
Play on and sustain it
as long as you can

Stockhausen was adamant that the process of interpreting and performing these text scores—a process that he referred to as 'intuitive music'—was not the same as improvisation. As Hugh Davies explained in an interview preceding a radio broadcast of a performance of *Intensität* by his own group Gentle Fire in 1973:

The fact that all the players are following the same instructions, independently of each other but always in parallel, gives a musical result that is far removed from the structures and relationships that arise in unpremeditated improvisation.

The pieces in *Aus den sieben Tagen* were performed regularly by Hugh Davies's ensemble Gentle Fire between 1968 and 1975, and Hugh Davies translated the texts from the original German into English for the score published by Universal Edition.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Grey Area (on this occasion comprising Owen Green, Emma Lloyd, Dave Murray-Rust, Armin Sturm, and Sean Williams) was formed in 2011, with an initial focus on Stockhausen's 'Intuitive Music' works *Aus den sieben Tagen* and *Für Kommende Zeiten*. The group has gone on to work with a range of structured improvisations by composers such as Christian Wolff, Cornelius Cardew, Hugh Davies, and Tim Souster, as well as free improvisation and original and collaborative pieces and processes by members of the ensemble. One of the group's principal interests is in distributed creativity, and the ideas of authorship, agency, and emergence are never far away from Grey Area's music practice. Regular players are Shiori Usui, Nikki Moran, Armin Sturm, Owen Green, Emma Lloyd, and Sean Williams, with guest players including Sue MacKenzie and Dave Murray-Rust.

CREDITS

Performers:

Owen Green, Emma Lloyd, Dave Murray-Rust, Armin Sturm, Sean Williams.

Sound Diffusion (*Music for a Single Spring*): James Mooney.

Sound Engineer and Technical Manager: Colin Bradburne.

Programme notes: James Mooney, Owen Green.

This concert was funded by a grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council in partnership with The Science Museum, London, as part of a project exploring the work of Hugh Davies that is being led by Dr James Mooney at University of Leeds. For further information about the project, which is entitled 'Hugh Davies: Electronic Music Innovator', see <http://hughdaviesproject.wordpress.com/>.

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