CONCERTS AT THE UNIVERSITY

Spring - Summer 2016

Friday 18 March 2016
7pm
City of Edinburgh Methodist Church

Hugh Davies Project

Programme of works by HUGH DAVIES, performed by GREY AREA and JAMES MOONEY.

THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
Edinburgh College of Art

Programme of works by Hugh Davies (1943-2005)

Not to be Loaded with Fish (1968-9)

Shozyg I & II (1969)

Mobile with Differences (1973)

INTERVAL

Quintet (1967-8)

Music for a Single Spring (1975)

Galactic Interfaces (1967-8)

Performed by Grey Area:

Owen Green
Shiori Usui
Dave Murray-Rust
Armin Sturm
Nikki Moran
Sean Williams

Diffusion of *Shozyg I & II*, and *Music for a Single Spring*: James Mooney

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***Not to be Loaded with Fish* (1968-9)**
for solo performer, record player, 2-channel pulsing unit and electronic equipment

In this piece, the performer uses a specially modified record player to play back a gramophone recording, made according to instructions given by Davies in another of his compositions, *Voice*. *Voice* requires the solo performer to make a gramophone recording in a public recording booth. Such booths were, at one time, reasonably common, for example in train stations; one would insert a coin, record sounds for three minutes or so, and a gramophone record would drop out. Such public recording booths are, however, no longer common nowadays. In *Voice*, the solo vocalist is instructed as follows:

The record is to be made vocally, with as much variety as possible (e.g. breathing, growling, murmuring, whistling, intoning, etc.) but excluding conventional singing. No intelligible words are to be used, though some passages may sound as if they are in a foreign language. In particular vary the speed of articulation and the use of pauses.

Not to be Loaded with Fish involves the playback of the recording just described. It requires a record player that has been specially modified, so that the record can be played both forwards and backwards, at the flick of a switch. In performance, the performer plays the record, ad lib, forwards and backwards, such that the performance lasts approximately twice as long as the record itself, that is, about 5 to 7 minutes.

The performer also modifies the sounds played back from the record using a two-channel pulsing unit, in this case specially designed and built for the performance by Sean Williams. The pulsing unit 'chops up' the sound, so that repetitive silences—gaps—are introduced. It is operated via two dials culled from old-style dial-operated telephones. The performer also has additional controls that influence the left/right balance of the sound, via two loudspeakers.

In Davies's instructions, the performer is directed to 'Vary the frequency of reversal of the turntable and the operation of each set of controls and their different combinations as much as possible.' 'Not to be loaded with fish' is a 'found title' that Davies saw printed on the side of a railway freight carriage. However, Davies's performance instructions inform us that 'The title has no relevance in making the recording or in a performance.'

***Shozyg I and II* (1969)**
For stereo fixed media
Shozygs: Hugh Davies and Richard Orton

In 1968, inspired by his work as assistant to the avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, Hugh Davies built an idiosyncratic musical instrument, which he called a 'Shozyg.' This instrument comprised a selection of every-day objects—three fret-saw blades, a ball bearing, and a spring—mounted inside the covers of a book with its pages removed. (The book happened to be an encyclopaedia volume covering the alphabetic range of topics from SHO to ZYG, which is where the instrument's unusual name comes from.) These objects were played in an improvised manner, with the fingers, or with the aid of implements such as small screwdrivers, toothpicks, etc. The tiny sounds, which would otherwise be too quiet to hear, were amplified via contact microphones, creating a bizarre but strangely engrossing microscopic sound-world not unlike that heard in John Cage's *Cartridge Music* (1960). (Along with Stockhausen, Cage was also acknowledged by Davies as an influence.)

Davies in fact built two Shozygs in 1968: Shozyg I, comprising the objects just described; and Shozyg II, similar in principle, but comprising a different set of amplified objects. This piece—*Shozyg I and II*—is a recording of an improvised duet involving those two instruments, one played by Davies himself, the other by his friend and colleague Richard Orton (1940–2013).

Mobile with Differences **(1973, rev. 1982)**
for 5 musicians with portable instruments, 2 sine-wave generators and 2 loudspeakers

Mobile with Differences is a music theatre piece in which the five performers play a card game that determines how the piece progresses. At the start of the piece, each player is dealt a set of cards. The cards contain instructions, which tell the players to play solo, in a duet with another player, or in a duet with one of two on-stage loudspeakers, which are connected to a pair of electronic sine-wave generators. (A sine-wave generator is a piece of electronic equipment, which produces a basic, pitched, electronic tone.) When a player is instructed to play solo, they move to one of three 'solo' chairs to do so, following the instructions on their card which describe what they should play. When a player is instructed to play in a duet with another player, they move to join another player at one of three pairs of chairs and, again, follow their instructions, which in this case tell them how to interact with the other player. Thus, there are nine chairs on stage. When a player is instructed to duet with a loudspeaker, they move to a loudspeaker and pick up another card (which they find in a pile next to the loudspeaker), which contains instructions about how to adjust the pitch of the oscillator; then, they follow the instructions on their original card, which describes how to 'duet' with the loudspeaker.

Many (though not all) of the cards contain instructions that have to do with producing 'difference tones.' A difference tone is something that happens when two notes which are close in pitch—close, but not quite identical—are played simultaneously. Sometimes the results will simply sound 'out of tune', but with careful adjustments to one or both of the pitches it is possible to produce a difference tone—a phantom 'third pitch' that neither player (or loudspeaker) is actually playing, but which is the result of the interaction (sum and difference) between the two pitches that truly are being played. Difference tones are not always easy for the untrained ear to hear, but with a little practice can be quite easily perceived.

Many of the other cards have to do with the musical relationships between the players, and often include a theatrical, sometimes humorous, element; for example, 'If another player joins you [in a duet], respond (musically) gruffly, briefly, as if in annoyance at being disturbed.'

Because the players are following instructions on cards in a random sequence—the cards are shuffled before the piece starts—the piece will evolve differently with each performance. Sometimes, the instructions on a player's card are impossible to carry out—for example, if there is no-one available to play a duet with, or if all the solo chairs or loudspeakers are currently 'taken.' If this happens, the player swaps the card with their next card and the game continues. There are also a few 'wild' cards that tell the player, e.g. to repeat their last card, or move to a different position.

Hugh Davies was fond of puns and word-play. In this case, 'mobile' can be thought of as referring both to the structure of the work, which is different with each playing, and to the performers themselves, who are 'mobile' throughout the performance. Likewise, 'differences' can be thought of as referring to the 'differences' between successive performances, but also to the use of difference tones in the piece.

Special thanks to Caitlin Mockridge for preparing a new set of the playing cards from Davies's originals.

INTERVAL

***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 concerts director during the late 1960s, which is where the piece received its première performance.

***Music for a Single Spring* (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 everyday 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.

***Galactic Interfaces* (1967-8)**
for 6 performers, 4 self-built amplified instruments, 2 stereo tapes and electronic equipment

In this semi-improvised piece, four of the performers play small, self-built instruments made from wood, plastic, metal, and glass, and amplified using contact microphones – this was one of Davies's particular specialisms. These different materials were chosen because of the contrasting sounds they produce. The other two performers operate electronic equipment to transform the sounds and distribute them among four loudspeakers, positioned in the four corners of the room. There are also two stereo tapes (transferred to a digital format from Davies's originals for this performance) that contain a range of recorded material, including electronic sounds, recordings of short-wave radio, and instrumental music, as well as recordings of some of Davies's own self-built amplified sound-producing devices. According to Davies's original programme note:

> The title refers to the combination and contrast of the sounds on four tape tracks with each other and with live sounds produced by the four performers, as well as to the varied use of modulating, mixing and switching devices (including a 4-channel photocell divider); it also applies to the interpretations of the four performers, who have been chosen for their very different musical backgrounds.

Thus, the piece is about interactions (interfaces) and contrasts: contrasts between sound materials (wood, plastic, metal, glass, plus the recorded sounds); contrasts in electronic processing; and contrasts in the interpretations and 'musical personalities' of the performers.

This piece was the first work of electronic music to be produced at the Electronic Music Workshop at Goldsmiths College, which Davies set up in late 1967. (The Workshop was the first ever electronic music studio at a UK higher education institution.) *Galactic Interfaces* was premièred in a concert at the London Planetarium on 22 March 1968, but the performance did not go well. We hope—touch wood (and metal, glass, and plastic)—that this evening's performance is more successful.

Programme notes by James Mooney

Owen Green is a composer-improviser who focuses on electronic music. He is active in a number of groups, including Sileni (improvised doom-crunk hip-hop), Tri/fon (live laptops) and the large improvising ensemble EdImpro. Recent projects have included 'Perch' with Stephen Deazley and Conflux; 'Limits to Growth', a mutating sound installation with Martin Parker, and a new Sileni recording released on Black Lantern music. Owen also teaches sound design and electronic music at the University of Edinburgh.

Armin Sturm is a double bass player and improviser based in Glasgow. A member of Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, Armin has played with the likes of George Lewis, Evan Parker, and most recently Marshall Allen and Henry Grimes (Sun Ra Arkestra).

Originally from Japan, **Shiori Usui** is described as a composer with "individual ears" (The Times). In 2012, her orchestral piece *Warai* (Laughter) received the Toru Takemitsu Composition Award in Tokyo, Japan (judge: Toshio Hosokawa) and in the same year, the Civitella Ranieri Music Fellowship in conjunction with the UNESCO-Aschberg Bursaries. July 2015 saw the première of Shiori's new work *Ophiocordyceps unilateralis s.l.* at the BBC Proms, performed by BCMG with conductor Franck Ollu at Cadogan Hall in London. Shiori has produced works in radical instrumental music, and has worked with motion capturing sensors and biophysical technology. Many of her compositions are inspired by the sounds of the human body, the deep sea, and many other weirdly wonderful living organisms in the world. Shiori enjoys playing improvisation in the UK and abroad as a vocalist and pianist, and has performed with musicians such as Arve Henriksen, Ilan Volkov, Rie Nakajima, and Lee Patterson.

Dave Murray-Rust sits in between people and computers and tries to make them both do interesting things. He is a researcher in Informatics at the University of Edinburgh, looking at approaches to online interaction. As well as Grey Area, he plays with Edimpro (a large improvising ensemble) and Tr-I/O-Fon (a laptop trio) as well as playing solo as mo-seph. He is interested in how technology can support human interaction, through digital responsiveness and animacy.

Nikki Moran's research interests and projects are based on the relationship between musical performance and everyday social interaction. She specialises in the study of musicians' communicative behaviour, using methods drawn from both music psychology (video observation and analysis) and ethnomusicology (participant-observation and ethnography). Before joining the staff at Reid School of Music in 2007, Nikki studied classical viola and North Indian sitar performance. She plays with local ensembles and friends, including Edimpro, GIO (Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra), Grey Area ensemble and Orchestra of the Canongait.

James Mooney is a lecturer in Music at the University of Leeds and has been running an AHRC funded research project on Hugh Davies' work alongside Dr Tim Boon from the Science Museum, London. He encouraged Grey Area to work on these pieces and brought the group to Leeds to perform three concerts and workshops in 2015. It is thanks to James' work that many of these pieces have been rediscovered, and his tireless efforts to assemble meaningful scores, comments, instructions, diagrams and digitized tape recordings have given new life to the work of one of the most inventive musikers of these islands.

Sean Williams is a practice-led researcher based at the University of Edinburgh, focusing on the performance practice of electronic music. He balances research into historic practices at the WDR Studio for Electronic Music in Cologne in the 1950s with building new hybrid analogue/digital instruments for live electronics and sound projection. Co-founder of LLEAPP, the Monosynth Orchestra, and the ensemble Grey Area, he performs his own compositions and electronic and structured improvisation repertoire internationally.