

ANNIE YIM'S THE POET SPEAKS: FROM DEBUSSY TO PÄRT

TUES MARCH 10, 2020 | 7:30PM

FOX CABARET

PROGRAMME NOTES BY ANNIE YIM

MusicArt's conceptual concert "The Poet Speaks" combines the recorded voices of composers and writers with live piano, juxtaposing poems from two centuries with musical responses to them by Debussy, Ravel, Cheryl Frances-Hoad, and Philip Glass. *Für Alina* by Arvo Pärt will be performed alongside a specially commissioned poem by Zaffar Kunial. Other writing featured ranges from French poetry by Aloysius Bertrand and Charles Baudelaire to a personal love poem by Cage; from Else Lasker-Schüler's expressionist poem *Versöhnung* (Reconciliation), which inspired Franz Marc's woodcut print, to Allen Ginsberg's anti-war poem *Wichita Vortex Sutra*. Each pairing of musical composition and poem reveals tributes, friendships, and artistic affinities. Each work is no more than a few minutes long, and yet contains a microcosm of the composer's unique stamp, carrying far more than meets the eyes and ears. The poets' voices shine through these piano compositions as an inspiring light. The hope is to create meaningful dialogues within the pairing of poetry and music.

Claude Debussy *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*
(from *Preludes Book 1*)

Poem by **Charles Baudelaire** - *Harmonie du Soir*

The title of Debussy's prelude (1910) comes from line 3 "Sounds and perfumes turn in the evening air" of Baudelaire's poem. Images, sounds, and scents evoked in this poem are mirrored in the music, such as "Every flower exhales perfume like a censer", "Melancholy waltz and languid vertigo" and "The violin quivers like a tormented heart". The correspondence between the different senses was an idea espoused by Baudelaire which influenced Debussy's aesthetic.

Maurice Ravel *Scarbo* (from *Gaspard de la Nuit*)

Poem by **Aloysius Bertrand** - *Ondine* (from *Gaspard de la Nuit*)

Aloysius Bertrand's book of poems *Gaspard de la Nuit*, written between 1832 and 1836 and published in 1842, appealed to Ravel's love of fairytales and the supernatural. Ravel set to music *Ondine*, *Le Gibet*, and *Scarbo* in 1908, and had each poem printed in full next to the score. *Scarbo*, the malevolent gremlin, sets a nightmarish scene throughout the piece. "How many times have I heard his laughter buzz in the shadows of my alcove, and his fingernails scratching on the silk curtains round my bed!"

John Cage *Dream*

Poem by **John Cage** - *Poem. Cause: I love you*

The love poem by Cage was written in 1943 for the choreographer Merce Cunningham, his lifelong partner and collaborator. *Dream* was premiered in 1948 with choreography by Cunningham. According to Laura Kuhn, Director of the John Cage Trust, this piece is unusually expressive and has a narrative quality. The performance instruction is as follows: "Rubato: Always with resonance; no silence; tones may be freely sustained, manually or with pedal, beyond notated durations." Together, the love poem and *Dream* inhabit the same mood and encapsulate the early relationship and collaboration between the two artists.

John Cage *4'33"*

Poem by **Ed Baker** - *A Kind of Silence*

4'33" (1952) was conceived with the idea that any sound may constitute music. It was inspired by Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (1951). Cage himself made the connection clear: "To Whom It May Concern: The white paintings came first; my silent piece came later". It is a three-movement composition in which the performer does not play the instrument during the entire duration of the piece. The piece reframes the sounds of the environment that the listeners hear while it is performed. Our new version with poetry was conceived in 2016 for a performance at an art gallery, where the performer read the poem silently at the piano. The idea was arrived in this order: silence is musical – silence is poetic – silence is music is poetry.

Arvo Pärt *Für Alina*

Poem by **Zaffar Kunial** - *Sunlight*

The poem by Zaffar Kunial in response to *Für Alina* was specially commissioned for Annie Yim's performance. In Kunial's own words: "I decided to write a response both to the music and also to another poem, from another language - so that the poem almost contains two voices beneath the one. So my poem *Sunlight* is a version of a poem by the same name by the South Korean poet Ko Un. His poem is much longer and mine is very compressed and crystalline as seemed to be fitting for the Arvo Pärt piece which fits so much into a small space."

Cheryl Frances-Hoad - *Star Falling*

Poem by **Else Lasker-Schüler** - *Versöhnung (Reconciliation)*

Star Falling, a contemplative miniature for piano, was written in 2004 by Cheryl Frances-Hoad. The composer described the circumstances behind the writing of this work, "Penned and sent as a gift in an attempt to stop a partner from leaving me, this piece did not have its desired effect (which in retrospect was tremendous luck!). It is a simple, calm reflection on some of the lines in Else Lasker-Schüler's poem *Reconciliation*, and was written purely intuitively in a matter of hours." Lasker-Schüler's poem was printed in 1912 in the influential art and literary magazine, *Der Sturm*, together with a woodcut print by fellow expressionist Franz Marc that it inspired.

Philip Glass *Wichita Vortex Sutra*

Poem by **Allen Ginsberg** - *Wichita Vortex Sutra*

Recordings by Ed Baker

In Philip Glass's own words, "In 1988...I happened to run into Allen Ginsberg at St. Mark's Bookshop in New York and asked him if he would perform with me. We were in the poetry section, and he grabbed a book from the shelf and pointed out *Wichita Vortex Sutra*. The poem, written in 1966 and reflecting the anti-war mood of the times, seemed highly appropriate for the occasion. I composed a piano piece to accompany Allen's reading, which took place at the Schubert Theater on Broadway." Ginsberg spent three weeks in Wichita, Kansas writing this poem in 1966 in the midst of the Vietnam War. His original performance with Glass included the second half of this epic anti-war poem. In our version, Ed Baker has formed a new collage of the words of Ginsberg, choosing new sections from the poem to highlight his own response as an American to Ginsberg's poem and Glass's music, which rings true today.