

PALE AIR (OSCILLATING) MUSIC BY KRISTOFER SVENSSON

Duk med broderi och bordets kant (2017) for violin (WP)

I spirningstidens stillhet (2017) for alto flute (WP)

Den intimitet som finns i smultron (2016) for violin and viola

och mitt väsens alla klockor ljuda (2017) for trumpet (WP)

Förmiddagens klara, sorgset bleka ljus stilla sväva (2015) for percussion (WP)

MAYA BENNARDO, VIOLIN

ANNE DEARTH, FLUTE

HANNAH LEVINSON, VIOLA

SAM WELLS, TRUMPET

ADAM HOLMES, PERCUSSION

One Saturday at noon, Yung Hak-Chi spontaneously, as if something in the conversation had inspired him to reply with a musical composition, arose from the dinner table in his small Hong Kong apartment and walked over to his gūqín. Since it was late October and no longer as hot, we had forgotten to turn the air conditioner back on after our lesson. This was good because Yung's soft playing would easily have been drowned out by the noise; some soft plucks of the strings were ornamented with such long tails of varying vibrato that the only thing that remained audible to me was the surface noise of the left-hand fingers moving along the silken strings. This, however, was not something that seemed to bother Yung; at no point during the piece did I have the feeling that Yung was performing for anyone nor made an effort to 'project' the sound to us in the 'audience'. The gūqín was never a concert instrument and the music was composed for the solitary contemplation of the Chinese literati class. I listened to the music with a micro-audial attention

to the feeble and varied, somewhat pointillistic sounds, but I never felt strained to concentrate; the ambient sounds around the music became part of the piece and never an opposing force.

When I compose a piece of music for a single instrument I imagine this kind of informal, domestic, solitary, middle-of-the-day setting as the starting point and the music's ideal setting: can I write a piece of music that could be played without any audience at all, just for the solitary musician's contemplation or meditation? Can I write a piece of music that mingles unobtrusively with the ordinariness of everyday life?

Can I write a piece of music that Yung Hak-Chi would have been inspired to play on that Saturday in October in the middle of lunch?

Two of the pieces in tonight's concert are meant to conjure up this kind of

setting in their titles. *Förmiddagens klara, sorgset bleka ljus stilla sväva* for percussion invokes the time of day: *the clear, melancholic, pale, light of noon, quietly levitating*. The piece for solo violin invokes a completely mundane, domestic, scene: *embroidered cloth and the table's edge* (*Duk med broderi och bordets kant*). For me, the poet that best expressed the transparent, lucid melancholy of noon-time and the sadness that comes with the blue light of the zenith sun rather than the melancholia of sunsets was Vilhelm Ekelund (1880-1949), and there is no coincidence that fragments from his poetry serve as titles to three pieces in this concert. Both the aforementioned piece for percussion and the alto flute piece, *I spirningstidens stillhet*, have titles taken from the poem 'En februarimorgon' ('A February morning') from the collection of poems 'Syner' ('Visions') from 1901. *Spirningstid* is a difficult word to translate into English. It refers to germination of plants, and most specifically to the stage between the emergence of a seedling in a plant and the maturity of a crop plant. In this period of postemergence, Ekelund tells us, there is a *stillness* (*stillhet*). The close observation of plants is also invoked in the piece for violin and viola, *Den intimitet som finns i smultron* (*The intimacy of wild strawberries*). As this piece is the concert's only duo, the ontological difference between being alone and being two is presented. While the solos can be said to be about seclusion and solitude, the moment one adds another musician to the composition, the situation changes completely and the music comes to be about being together, as well as about being separated.

During the last few years, I have been working on a series of pieces that I call 'relational pieces'. These pieces are composed to be performed in non-concert spaces, usually outdoors. All my pieces, however, aspire to be relational as I want to keep them open to the sounds, smells and sights of their environment. As a composer, how do I attempt to bring this

about? There are many different solutions to this, and the five pieces in tonight's concert can be seen as five different strategies. At first, a particular kind of musical syntax is necessary. One has to make sure that the silences never become 'musical silences' tensed with anticipation but rather 'ordinary silences' where the ordinariness of everyday life is present. Secondly, one can work on a timbral level and the quality of sound. In the piece for violin, the music quietly moves between silence, resonance, white noise, noisy half harmonics, harmonics and pure stopped notes. In all, the music should not create a virtual space on its own for the listeners' immersion and escape, but the sounds from the instruments must be like the aroma produced by burning incense.

The title for the fourth piece on the program also comes from Ekelund's collection 'Visions': *och mitt väsens alla klockor ljuda*. The title could be translated as *and all the bells of my Being resounded*, but the piece is not the loud, brassy, jubilation one perhaps could expect from a trumpet piece with such a title. The title of the poem from where this fragment is taken is appropriately 'Tystnad' ('Silence'):

*Like a sunny rift,
quiet and bright in everyday gray,
silence, you come,
the sky opened above me:
in the midst of the buzz you offer holiday peace,*

*when you descend
into my soul,
cool as dew, cleansing,
as the scent of a June morning -
and all the bells of my Being resounded*

Lik en solig rämna,
stilla och ljus i en vardags grått,
tystnad, kommer du,
öppnade himlen över mig:
mitt i sorlet helgfrid kan du bjuda

när du sänker dig
i min själ,
daggsväl, rensande
som en junimorgons doft -
och mitt väsens alla klockor ljuda.