



Concert: Linda Chatterton and Matt McCright
at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation

Reviewed by Denis Joe August 2012

The prospect of two musicians of the calibre of Chatterton (Flute) and McCright (Piano) presenting a programme of rarely heard pieces, as well as a world premiere of a work by Ailís Ní Ríain, would excite any music lover.

Linda Chatterton has been awarded prizes and grants from such institutions as The McKnight Artist Fellowship, The Jerome Foundation and The American Composers Forum. She has performed with the Minnesota Orchestra and is a member of the contemporary music group, Ensemble 61. Five of her recordings are available on CD; the latest, the critically acclaimed *Div*

erse Voices – American Music for Flute,
includes the first recording of Edie Hill's
This Floating World

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Matthew McCright has devoted his life to the music of living composers. He has performed throughout the world as a soloist and as part of a chamber music group. His two CD releases include a disc of the piano music of the Minnesota composer Gene Gutchë. He has received myriad grants, awards and prizes, and has performed at top festivals, including *Bang On the Can* and *MassM* OCA.



Velocity by Kenji Bunch opens deceptively with a simple rhythmic harmony on the piano, almost as if the flute and the piano were being introduced to each other. There is a minimalist feel to the first minute but both instruments grow increasingly agitated. The weaving in and out by each instrument, in attempts to dominate, is skilfully handled by the musicians, and suggests

an in-depth understanding of the music. Chatterton restrains the music back from the threat of sounding hysterical and out of control as we enter the second movement which the flute picks up from the dying chord of the piano. There is something calming about the second movement, yet the pace picks up and relies, increasingly on a rhythmic piano accompaniment, which sounds rather like rock music in places. Towards the end the flute plays as if it were a jazz session.

Velocity was written as a 21st century version of the *Mannheim Rocket* (a swiftly ascending passage typically with a rising arpeggio, melodic, line); one of the many innovations by the 18th composers of the Mannheim school of which the opening of the fourth movement of Mozart's 40th Symphony is one of the better known examples. Bunch's approach is certainly novel, but its moments of 'popular music' never seem to cheapen the piece. Both instrumentalists are kept on their toes with rapid changes in melody and rhythm - an excellent opener to this unique recital.

It has been many years since I read Anthony Burgess, and to my shame, I was ignorant of his musical compositions. Matthew McCright played the humorously titled **3 Preludes from The Badly Tempered Electronic Keyboard**; an allusion to Bach's *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier*.

The preludes, transcribed for piano, are enjoyable pieces. In no way can they be said to be innovative - in fact I felt that they had a rather conservative feel to them, and Burgess, by his original choice of instrument, may well have been having a laugh at the expense of certain contemporary composers, particularly John Cage, who was noted for composing for strange instruments, such as the toy piano.

The first prelude has a rather lush feel to it, as if it were written for a lounge pianist, whilst the second appears to be poking fun at the more rhythmic composers such as Stravinsky. The third

movement seems to hark back to those melodic piano pieces by Rachmaninov. Though I feel that Burgess was having a bit of fun with these pieces, he never stooped to the crudity of exaggeration and there is a feeling of deep respect running through these preludes.



'chainstitchedembroidered' was the world premiere of a piece by Ailís Ní Ríain. I first came across her work earlier this year when Ensemble 10/10 performed her

In Sleep...

in Liverpool. I was greatly impressed and so I was looking forward to this new work. Before Linda Chatterton and Matthew McCright performed the piece, Ailís read an excerpt from Burgess'

Earthly Powers,

and gave an explanation of the title of her work where the chain is Bach, the stitch is Burgess, and Ailís is the embroidery.

There is a beautiful melody that immediately draws you into the piece. The feeling seems at once other-worldly yet intimate with the melody of the flute creating something like a dreamscape whilst the piano weaves in and out. The solo writing for the flute has a very unique sound to it. Whereas familiar composition for the flute either concerns itself with melody

(Debussy) or drawing out the extremes (Varèse), Ni Ríain creates emotion and the music is given a poetic feel to it, where we place our own images. Throughout **‘chainstitchedembroidered’** it seemed as if we are at a poetry recital with two voices performing at once.

‘chainstitchedembroidered’ reminded me of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*. Though it lacks that work’s hysteria it does feel as if we are being taken on a journey through the different emotions. The piece is not ‘easy’ and places demands on both instrumentalists, yet Ni Ríain has a knack of forcing us to listen, take in what is happening, and make sense of it all.

Ailís Ní Ríain’s work has featured widely on British and Irish radio. She received her Purcell Room, Southbank debut in 2007 and her Carnegie Hall debut in 2008. *Treasured*, a major work, written and composed by Ailís will be performed at the Anglican Cathedral in Liverpool in the first week of October (details

[here](#)

). A commercial recording of her work is long overdue.

Roberto Sierra’s ***Sonata for Flute and Piano (“With Gusto”)*** opens with a rhumba melody played on the piano, which is joined by the flute. We are quickly drawn into more hectic and energetic music and Chatterton seems to let herself go in the playfulness of the piece. Although only four minutes in length, the piece demands much from the performers who were more than capable. It was a breath-taking end to the first half of this fascinating recital.

Alma, by Tania León opened the second half of the recital. The piece is a lovely dialogue between the piano and flute, opening as if awakening. Then there is a playfulness between the two instruments before the piece slowly fades away. The work is pleasant; it never stretches either the instrumentalists or the listener. I think it was the least satisfactory of the pieces on the programme as it seemed to have no *raison d'être* other than to be played. It reminded me a lot of Erik Satie, whose music is pleasing yet empty of any substance beyond that.

This Floating World by Edie Hill is a work for solo flute based on five Haiku by the great Japanese poet Bashō. For this performance Linda Chatterton played four of the pieces.

“skylark
“sings all day,
“and day not long enough”.

Skylark is evocative of that bird's song: a short, panicky piece, it beautifully captures the feeling of being trapped that one can read into the poem, yet there is an element of striving to be free in the piece, whereas the poem has a feeling of acceptance of the way things are.

“harvest moon—
“swelling up to my gate,
“the cresting tide”.

In *Harvest Moon and Tide*, Hill captures a sense of danger, and also a feeling of wonderment towards the end.

“A petal shower
“of mountain roses
“and the sound of the rapids”

Petal Shower starts hesitatingly as each petal falls one by one, accumulating into a larger downpour before dying away.

“a wild sea-
“in the distance over Sado
“the milky way”

A Wild Sea. Whereas the preceding three pieces tended to demonstrate a delicate and hesitant approach to the playing, this piece seems much more forceful, perhaps because it is intended to convey something that is hard to reach.

In the Middle Ages in Japan, *Haiga* were paintings with accompanying haiku. It seems to me that Hill has created something similar with ***This Floating World***. As in *Haiga*,

where painting and poetry complimented each other, Hill has achieved the same effect with music and poetry. The experience of these pieces is quite distinctive, and differs vastly from music composed to relate the essence a poem in the musical language (for example: Debussy's *P*

rélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

, based on Stéphane Mallarmé's poem). What Hill has achieved in these pieces can almost be understood as a reinterpretation of the poet's vision. Bashō, on the other hand, suggests a limitation: the restrictions of nature. Hill seems to counter that with a striving to be free and I think the choice of solo instrument, particularly with its emphasis on high pitching reflects that freedom. It is certainly something that deserves to be performed; watching Linda Chatterton play, one could almost believe that there was a choreographed input.

The final piece of the evening was a rather more conservative piece from the first successful Afro-American composer, William Grant Still. ***Mother and Child; Gamin*** is a transposition of the final two movements from his

Suite for Violin and Piano

. By any account the piece would be classed as light. Considering that Still was composing from early to the late twentieth century, a time when the USA was at the forefront of turning the world of art music on its head, he seemed oblivious to the changes that were going on around him.

Generally his music could be described as lush and sentimental, but he was an early voice for representing the aspirations of many Black Americans. If his music could not be described as 'challenging' then his inspirational subjects certainly were, with titles such as *And They Lynched him on a Tree,*

and
In

Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy

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I think Still is worthy of remembering. He was a successful composer for his time, by any standard, and his music captured a sentiment of the age. It was something that those who couldn't attend the concert hall, either because of their economic status or their colour, could tune into the radio to hear the music broadcast. And whilst Still may not have been an innovator of new music, his compositions are very much a product of the twentieth Century.

This recital was one of the best I have attended in a long while. Not only were the performers of the highest calibre of musicianship, but also they brought with them a programme that was new and exciting. Linda Chatterton and Matthew McCright should be touring Britain next year, and I would urge anyone with a love for music to catch them.