

LUCIANO

BERIO

EDISON

DENISSOW

WORKS FOR VOICE AND
CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

ENSEMBLE

FÜR NEUE MUSIK

ZÜRICH

'My own experiences with folk music are often of an emotional nature. When I work with folk music, I am gripped by a sense of discovery.' In 1946/47 **Luciano Berio**, who was born in the small town of Oneglia (now Imperia) in Liguria in 1925, first used the folk tradition in his own music: the *Tre canzoni popolari* were joined by a fourth song in 1952. From 1963– 1964, at the peak of the Flower Power movement,

Berio alternated with Darius Milhaud as Professor of Composition at Mills College in Oakland near San Francisco. Here he revised two of the earlier songs and added five more arrangements, two compositions by John Jacob Niles and the transcription of a shellac record to the suite **Folk Songs**, which he orchestrated nine years later. 'Time after time, I find myself returning to folk music. I want to take possession of this treasure-store, using my own resources. Even though I know it cannot come true, I have a utopian dream, namely to forge a single entity from our own music and the folk tradition.' America, the Auvergne, Sicily, Sardinia, Armenia and Azerbaijan: their diverse geographical origins reflect the multi-cultural society that Berio and his wife and preferred interpreter, Cathy Berberian, belonged to. Equally diverse are the themes of love, mourning, belief, laughter and dance. It wasn't Berio's intention to try and preserve the authenticity of the folk songs he set. 'My transcriptions are analyses of folk songs, and at the same time convey the atmosphere, the "aroma" of this music as I understand it.' Berio takes the 'raw material' of the original and weaves a shimmering net of instrumental sound around it, producing an 'up-to-date' version for our times. At the same time, he also adopts many techniques that we are familiar with from other cultures, even from the European Middle Ages. In improvisatory manner; for example, the performers play preludes, interludes and postludes, independent of the vocal part, 'like a wistful country-dance fiddler'.

There are drones, stationary chords, imitations, embellishments, paraphrases and counter melodies, Baroque-style chromatic bass passages, closely-knit heterophonous 'carpets of sound', *chitarando* arpeggio chords, muffled booming from the percussion and snatches of a tune from a shepherd's pipe: with great refinement, Berio musters every possible non-chordal

technique of instrumental accompaniment. In his treatment of the vocal part, he paints a colourful portrait, ranging from the archaic lament through the elegant virelai, swinging gospel and exuberant trills to bel canto.

After the war, Luigi Dallapiccola was the musical, moral, intellectual and cultural focus of attention in Italy; he was seen as the 'new hope', as a figure that would return Italy to a rightful place in the international avant-garde. A scholarship from the Koussevitzky Foundation gave Berio the chance to study with Dallapiccola. 'In 1952 I spent eight weeks with him at the Berkshire Music Center in Tanglewood, where he taught composition. Technically speaking, he wasn't a good teacher.' Nonetheless, Berio did become familiar with twelve-tone technique and canonic styles of writing, and with *Due pezzi* and *Cinque variazioni* he found his way to his own personal style. 'With these works I entered Dallapiccola's melodic world, but they also gave me the opportunity to flee from it again.' After his return to Milan, Berio wrote his **Chamber Music** for Cathy Berberian. This was the first time he set the work of James Joyce to music: a triptych of 36 poems dating from 1907 that abandon themselves to recollections of a bygone love. Berio listens carefully to the tonal and symbolic associations: even the instrumentation is derived from Joyce's verse, with the clarinet standing for 'winds', the cello for 'strings' and the harp for 'fingers straying upon an instrument'. He also makes frequent use of individual ciphers. Thus the word 'music' is accompanied by a triad in B flat; the reflections on the surface of the water are expressed by motif inversions and imitations; 'true love' appears in a peaceful unison, while the vocal part falls into *Sprechgesang* at the line 'Love is unhappy when love is away'; the word 'overhead' is reproduced in the form of a musical crab, and at 'noise' the harp-player runs her tuning-key over the strings. Berio responds to the second poem, 'Monotone' with its subdued vocal part, with a continuum on the note A', which is modulated solely by emphatic attacks (*sempre con la massima continuità di suono e un poco sforzato l'attacco di ogni nota*) and by the alternation of open and closed mouth. (It was at this time that Berio began to

experiment with electronic music, a pursuit that culminated in his *Tema – Omaggio a Joyce* of 1958.) Precisely on the keyword 'monotone', the accompaniment starts to move in rhythmic and tonal space, and at the end of the piece, a melismatic twelve-tone series emerges, albeit *senza espressione*. In its strict canonic technique, its rhythmic and melodic counterpoint and also in its dodecaphony, *Chamber Music* is clearly indebted to Dallapiccola. Here, however, the typical interplay of twelve-tone series and conventional tone-links is already in evidence. Sometimes, it's true, we find broadly serrated melodic lines à la Webern. But for the most part, the serial notes, arranged after the manner of Alban Berg quite lyrically, are distributed amongst the instruments and the vocal part in such a way that the vocalist is given easily singable intervals. And these cells provide sensory points of reference for the listener above and beyond the rhythmically concise and accentuated call of a third at the beginning.

Edison Denissov was born as the son of an engineer and a doctor in the Siberian town of Tomsk in 1929. He gained his first experience of music on the mandolin and the balalaika, and started to study mathematics before he received official sponsorship as a composer at the instigation of Shostakovich.

Denissov was accepted by the Moscow Conservatoire, where he studied under Shebalin, and was appointed to a lecturer's post in 1961 – his subject was not composition, however, but instrumentation. He studied the officially frowned-on twelve-tone technique in private lessons with the Webern pupil Philip Hershkowitz, who had emigrated from Vienna, and he became the first Russian musician to write about dodecaphony and serial technique. He analysed scores by Bartók and Stravinsky for the purpose: 'I wanted to understand everything, evaluating and choosing what could help me learn. I was keen to learn composing techniques that I didn't know, and which I probably couldn't have learnt in my time at the conservatory'. Denissov's command of the French language was likewise self-taught, and he became a keen reader of French poetry. It wasn't long before his experimental compositions discredited him with the Party, where attitudes to art

were inevitably conservative. He had to suffer public insults, his work was vehemently attacked, and the authorities generally did their utmost to impede his career, placing a ban on performances of his music. The 'beauty of the idea' that Denissov found in the works of Bach and Webern and his desire to concentrate in essentials motivated him to strip music of all bombast and insincerity. He believed that music should bring light into people's lives – and in a time of intellectual and cultural paralysis, this was destined to be a sad light, overshadowed by melancholy.

In 1990, Denissov became the initiator and president of the newly-founded Association for Contemporary Music, which adopted as its high-minded ideals the lengthy motto: 'For unconventional compositional ideas, the creative search and experimentation – and against musical conservatism and academicism'. With the creation of the Association, Denissov was deliberately holding aloft the banner of an association of the same name that flourished from 1924–1931, and was then banned by Stalin.

The text to **La vie en rouge** comes from Boris Vian, who led a brief but intense life as a poet, jazz trumpeter and critic from 1920–1959, and who was a close associate of both the existentialist Sartre and the surrealist Ionesco. Thus the grotesque, scepticism, dreams and reality coexist and clash with each other in his writings. Denissov's setting of the Vian poem was written in Riga and Moscow in 1973, and takes up the musicality of Vian's own language. Thus we find seemingly irreconcilable elements placed next to or on top one another; the composer combines strict technique, echoes of Debussy and Webern, a casual chanson style, bebop, the Marseillaise (*maestoso*), the speaking and singing voice, colourful instrumentation, chromatic paraphrases that are squashed down as far as crotchets, and entirely new sounds to form an idiosyncratic, close-knit musical language that is every bit the equal of Vian's in its fundamental blackness and malignance.

Thomas Gartmann (English translation: Clive Williams)

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Werner X. Uehlinger

LUCIANO BERIO & EDISON DENISSOW
WORKS FOR VOICE AND CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
ENSEMBLE FÜR NEUE MUSIK ZÜRICH

Hedwig Fassbender *mezzo-soprano*, Hans-Peter Frehner *flute*, Hansruedi Bissegger *clarinet*, Matthias Eser & Lorenz Haas *percussion*, Viktor Müller *piano*, Urs Bumbacher *violin*, David Riniker *cello*
guests: Xenia Schindler *harp*, Cornel Anderes *viola*

Conducted by JÜRIG HENNEBERGER

LUCIANO BERIO (1925–2003)

Folk Songs (1946–47)

for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, viola, cello,
harp & percussion

- 1 **Black Is the Colour** (USA) 3:12
 - 2 **I Wonder As I Wander** (USA) 1:56
 - 3 **Loosin yelav** (Armenia) 2:51
 - 4 **Rossignolet du bois** (France) 1:51
 - 5 **A la femminisca** (Sicily) 1:14
 - 6 **La donna ideale** (Italy) 1:17
 - 7 **Ballo** (Italy) 1:29
 - 8 **Motettu de tristura** (Sardinia) 3:18
 - 9 **Malurous qu'o une fenno** (Auvergne, France) 0:54
 - 10 **Lo fioilaire** (Auvergne, France) 2:54
 - 11 **Azerbaijan Love Song** (Azerbaijan) 2:23
- ISRC CH1300700530–540

Chamber Music (1952)

after James Joyce

- for mezzo-soprano, clarinet, cello & harp
- 12 **Strings in the Earth** 4:08
 - 13 **All Day** 2:38
 - 14 **Winds of May** 1:31
- ISRC CH 1300700541–543

EDISON DENISSOW (1929–1996)

La Vie en rouge (1973)

after Boris Vian

- for mezzo-soprano, flute, clarinet, violin,
cello & piano
- 15 **J'aimerais** 0:55
 - 16 **La vraie rigolade** 2:02
 - 17 **La java des bombes atomiques** 5:05
 - 18 **La valse jaune** 4:23
 - 19 **Le prisonnier** 3:02
 - 20 **Pourquoi que je vis** 3:14
 - 21 **La dernière valse** 4:35
- ISRC CH 1300700544–550

Total Time 55:15

DDD ²⁴Bit

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