



and Melanie Pappenheim, who previously appeared as mourners and audience members, are now in the roles of curators.

The unusual instrumental ensemble of *Giant* is, in fact, familiar to anyone who knows Angliss' distinctive blend of folk-like songs, electronica and skewed ancient sonorities. The instrumentalists were divided into three groups, with music director Ben Smith (who also played the clavicymbalum, a decrepit proto-harpsichord) in the centre between a viola da gamba (Luciana Elizondo) and recorder (Fatima Lahham). To Smith's right was the percussionist Stephen Hiscock, a regular Angliss collaborator, surrounded by multiple hanging bells and gongs and the 'Ealing Feeder', one of Angliss' own instruments: a bell machine that can play at speeds beyond even Hiscock's virtuoso capability. Two violinists (Jack Greed and Tiago Soares Silva) and a violist (Miguel Sobrinho) sat on the opposite side of the stage. Smith expertly handled the diverse and spread-out forces, balancing the instrumental ensemble with the singers and recorded sound design.

Angliss' musical language seemed perfectly adapted to the story. An essentially modal language (especially on the recorder and viol) is combined with the microtonality of the electronic sound design, multiple bell resonances and the imperfect tuning of the clavicymbalum. The electronic sounds, including a theremin and an old transistor radio as well as the sound design, suggested a horror movie score, and Hiscock's unnerving jangling of tiny bells, sometimes played with brushing circular motion, added to this creepy effect. There were particularly striking moments when electronic sounds underpinned music and speech, and at one point Werner and Pappenheim merged with Sulayman's voice to give the character of Byrne a truly gigantic vocal range. Only the violins and viola seemed rather derivative; they often crescendo under recitative or arioso sections, immediately bringing to mind Britten's similar use of the instruments in his *War Requiem*.

This 80-minute work combined a strong, moving story with a musical treatment that was highly apt. If anything, *Giant* seemed not quite giant enough: the conclusion was rather abrupt, and the music might have fleshed out the dialogue-heavy final scenes more. *Giant* was performed only twice at Aldeburgh, and I hope that the work will ultimately reach a wider audience.

Caroline Potter

10.1017/S0040298223000840

## Folks' Music, Dundalk, Louth, Ireland, 16–17 June 2023.

Eamonn Quinn's Louth Contemporary Music Society, which he founded in 2006, is a curiously wonderful success story. The annual festival takes place in an incongruously quiet, unassuming working town halfway between Dublin and Belfast, just south of the border. The programming is, quite simply, what Quinn likes or what tweaks his uncannily discriminating ear. The music is experimental rather than mainstream modern, mostly minimal and post-minimal, but there have been performances of Dillon, and Sciarrino has visited. Louth's activities have expanded to include a record label (recordings from this year's festival will appear soon), but the feeling is still of a one-man-band cottage industry, which I find very heartening – no programme committees or pandering to fashions. In a recent interview<sup>1</sup> there was much self-deprecating humour, but he is also quite candid about how stressful running the whole thing can be.

Quinn commissioned four pieces this year, from Cassandra Miller, Sam Perkin, Laurence Crane and Linda Catlin Smith: the latter's *Folio* opened the first concert, given by the excellent Chamber Choir Ireland, conducted by Paul Hillier. The recording of Smith's *Meadow*, for string trio, written for the 2019 festival, has had excellent reviews, not least in these pages.<sup>2</sup> *Folio* uses texts taken from Emily Dickinson's *The Gorgeous Nothings*, which are fragments of poetry written on envelopes and only collected in facsimile in 2013, and *Open Folios*, an earlier publication (1995) of fragments also in facsimile. In the festival programme note, Smith says these are like 'thoughts on the way to poems, thoughts to herself: they are mysterious and unusual'. Smith has brought the different texts together in her own order, 'that moves more and more towards something like hopefulness... [lines] not meant to be together, but gathered here like a bouquet of disparate flowers'. The harmony is rich, slow-moving and consistent with, it seems, dominants that don't resolve. There are repeated fragments and texts set on top of each other, sopranos and then altos, and tenors

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Arlo Brown, 'The Head Dishwasher. An Interview with Eamonn Quinn', *Van Magazine*, 16 March 2023, <https://van-magazine.com/mag/eamonn-quinn/> (accessed 19 July 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Power, 'Linda Catlin Smith, *Meadow*. Cooper, Roewer, Butt. Louth Contemporary Music Society, LCMS2021', *TEMPO*, 75, no. 297 (July 2021), pp. 82–83.

and basses as blocks, and some new starts or sections while still feeling like a continuous whole. 'In this short life look back on time with kindly eyes' has repeated harmonies, a very beautiful moment that seems like an ending but continues with just the men's voices. The piece ends with a single unison line, 'This has been a beautiful day'. It is a wonderful work that other choirs should perform. Smith has a real ear for choral sound and blend, and the structure progresses for musical rather than textual reasons, though she emphasises, in her understated way, words that have a particular meaning for her: 'Nor any death', 'look back', 'words flowed softly like a shining'.

There were two other pieces in the opening choral concert, Cassandra Miller's *The City, Full of People* and Caroline Shaw's *How to Fold the Wind* (2020, commissioned by an international consortium of choirs). Miller's piece split the 16 voices into duos and trios distributed around the church: with no conductor they repeated material over and over. Miller tells us that 'members are singing to each other, as if telling a secret (the audience is merely eavesdropping)'. The text is the final refrain from Tallis' *Lamentations of Jeremiah I*, 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, convertere ad Dominum Deum tuum', and there are hints of Tallis in the music: slow expressive fragments. There seemed to be three sections with moments where voices came together, the sopranos holding notes moving to some sort of resolution at the end, but the repetition technique continued throughout. Independent, random repetition is an 'experimental' stock-in-trade giving performers freedom, but it does mean leaving the music's interest to serendipity. Despite the beauty of the voices in St Nicholas Church's acoustic, the piece, while diverting, was ultimately unfulfilling. Shaw's *How to Fold the Wind* sounded like a very tricky piece. The idea comes from origami and is about folding words as well as folding air – in fact, the singers' air or breath. Words become hums or breath, and there are glissandi and number counting (an *Einstein on the Beach* moment). The piece is very well written for voices with novel sounds and striking moments, although fewer of the pyrotechnics of her Pulitzer Prize-winning piece *Partita for 8 Voices*, for the group *A Room Full of Teeth*.

We heard Miller's earlier string quartet *Leaving* (2011) in Explore Ensemble's concert in the Oriel Centre at the wonderful Dundalk Gaol. This is a very beautiful and affecting short lament, written for the Bozzini Quartet, based on the transcription of a folk fiddle melody played in the second violin with the others adding uncoordinated (I think) drone-like material.

Bozzini's performance is quite blended and subdued, while Explore here foregrounded the folk fiddling as more of a solo with accompaniment.

The Sam Perkin commission was also in Explore's concert. A piece for quartet and film, the video was of the first half of his earlier work for string orchestra, *Visualisation* (2021), a very striking and original piece for players who move in the space with their bow strokes almost throwing the sounds into the air.<sup>3</sup> The string orchestra piece is fascinating but was difficult to appreciate on the small screen projection here, while the live quartet, 18 or so long-held crescendo/decrescendo/tremolo chords, didn't seem to add anything.

Explore also played two works by Clara Iannotta: *A Failed Entertainment* (2013) and *Dead Wasps in the Jam-Jar (III)* (2017–18). These are pieces that have become quite well known through the Arditti and Jack Quartets, among others. They are both good examples of what Iannotta does: an emphasis on timbre, extended techniques with additional mutes and other toys, gestural rather than through-composed, often harsh and violent but also wispy and cloud-like. With little need for pitch as such, hers is a very particular and recognisable style. *A Failed Entertainment* began interestingly with the addition of auxiliary instruments: a shop bell, a whistle, a squeaker and something that sounded like Tibetan prayer bowls. A second section had much rhythmic play between the players, with vocalisations and more of the increasingly amusing circus sounds: Explore certainly seemed to enjoy playing it. *Dead Wasps* is a more serious affair. While very much more of the same soundworld, it is more focused and less tricky.

You might be forgiven for thinking that Caroline Shaw, Pulitzer Prize and Grammy winner, now also writing for film/TV (the recent miniseries *Fleishman Is in Trouble*), would bring some American showbiz glitz to Dundalk, but this proved not to be the case. At the excellent Esposito Quartet's tea-time concert at The Spirit Store, a kind of old-fashioned working-men's club room over a pub, her spoken introductions and engagement with the audience were unassuming, warm and winning, as was her singing in the group of songs with quartet that are now quite popular – the Attacca Quartet's recording<sup>4</sup> of the songs together with the earlier quartet *Evergreen* also won a Grammy this year.

<sup>3</sup> The film is available at <https://samperkincomposer.com/artistic-work> (accessed 19 July 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Attacca Quartet, *Evergreen*. 2022, Nonesuch, 7559791350.

*Evergreen* is a lovely piece. Four short movements ('Moss', 'Stem', 'Water', 'Root') describe their titles quite closely – 'Water' is completely pizzicato, for example, and 'Root', appropriately enough, has a ground bass throughout. There is use of other Baroque techniques, particularly some 'signature' chord sequences that occur in many of her pieces. She sings beautifully, and while the songs may have sentimental moments, they are captivating and often moving.

Esposito also played Laurence Crane's String Quartet no. 2. Relatively short, in three movements, it wasn't quite what I expected – a slow Handelesque movement with functional harmony, a movement sounding like Mendelssohn (or similar), a strong cadential section that doesn't resolve and a busy third movement. I wasn't quite sure what to make of it.

The Saturday afternoon concert was, in a sense, an outlier – the highly accomplished Spanish saxophone quartet The Sigma Project, founded in 2008 and dedicated to playing and researching new work, particularly by Spanish composers. Jesús Torres' *Tenebrae* began with quiet multiphonics and tremolos, played with impeccable control, from which emerged fragments of music by the Spanish Renaissance composer Victoria, with the piece becoming livelier as it progressed. Helga Arias' *Milk Spilt on a Stone* also had multiphonics at the opening, a

section with teeth on the reed, subtones moving into air sounds and finally just mouthpieces without instruments. Graciela Paraskevaïdis' (1940–2017) *Alibi* had no extended techniques apart from a curious rhythmic slap-tongue section. This was a more conventional atonal piece with descending scales and pulsing. Sigma ended with three movements from José María Sánchez-Verdú's *Khôra Cycle*, for two soprano and two bass saxophones. Using many extended techniques, mouthpieces on and off the instruments, teeth on the reed, lots of busy squealing and split noises, it was brilliantly played but quite relentless.

Quinn rounded off his festival with a performance of Terry Riley's *In C*, but with a twist. It was performed by seven traditional Irish players: fiddles, uilleann pipes, flute, accordion, bouzouki and harp. The harp gave the pulse and they moved relatively quickly through the opening material, staying close to what was notated. It was only towards the end (50 minutes in all) that the fiddle took off and the others followed with more of their own embellishments, making for a very lively ending followed by a standing ovation from the packed church. They then played a traditional encore which really brought the house down.

Roger Heaton

10.1017/S0040298223000839