
Laurence Osborn

Selected Reviews

Schiller's Piano

Zubin Kanga & Manchester Collective, RNCM (October 2024)

"But the evening's real highlight... was the world premiere of Schiller's Piano by young British composer Laurence Osborn. This is the second piece by Osborn the Collective has premiered... and her faith in Osborn is not misplaced. It's inspired, if that is the word, by the replica of a piano once owned by the great German poet Friedrich Schiller, which the largely Jewish inmates of Buchenwald concentration camp were forced to build as a monument to "great German art."

It's easy to imagine what this set-up could have led to: agonized expressive shrieks from the strings, rhythmicised sawing from the synthesizer, angry plunks from the piano. In fact the piece was remarkable for the exquisite tact with which Osborn approached its emotive theme, a quality echoed in Kanga's self-abnegating performance. True we heard Kanga both sing and play the moving "Buchenwald camp song" – but it was whispered, with no emoting." **Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph***

"The inspiration for Laurence Osborn's newest concerto for keyboards (piano and MIDI keyboard) and string orchestra, Schiller's Piano, co-commissioned by Zubin Kanga and Manchester Collective, has an intriguing origin. The title refers to a story about Buchenwald concentration camp inmates who were forced by the Nazis to create a replica of Friedrich Schiller's historic piano. The real piano was hidden, while the replica – an empty shell – was displayed. The piece featured a panoply of fine musical ideas, from field recordings of birdsong and samples of the piano's physical components – wood, brass, felt, and wire – to virtuosic keyboard passages and gentle singing."

Marat Ingeldeev, *Bachtrack******

"The best impressions (for me) came when the purely musical elements of the composition shone most clearly, through string instruments alone or single-note lines, and as the pianist becomes singer in the quiet and utterly moving contribution of the 1938-written *Das Buchenwaldlied*, which enters in the next-to-last section. The concert's title, "Fever Dreams" was an apt reflection of this."

Robert Beale, *The Arts Desk******

TOMB!

12 Ensemble & GBSR Duo, Kings Place (May 2023)

"Its centrepiece was a new work for strings, piano and percussion by Laurence Osborn, commissioned for the tour, and by quite a margin the most absorbing and worthwhile piece in what was a rather uneven concert. Osborn describes his piece TOMB! as recognising "the necrophiliac side of heritage and our morbid obsession with dead things". In this case the "dead things" are traditional musical forms like fugue, jig and passacaglia, which flit in and out of the 20-minute movement like apparitions, only occasionally assuming recognisable forms. The effect is intriguing, sometimes unnerving, but always engaging, and full of textures that are never quite as straightforward as they seem."

Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

The Biggest Thing I've Ever Squashed

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Hall Birmingham (January 2023)

"...the most successful [compositions] were those in which vivid thematic material was used with economy and perceptible logic. That material came in various forms ... [including] the deconstructed march of Laurence Osborn's *The Biggest Thing I've Ever Squashed*."

Andrew Clements, *The Guardian******

Absorber

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Zubin Kanga, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (November 2021)

"More rewarding musically was the set from pianist Zubin Kanga, in which spacey, clangorous sounds obtained by electronically distorting a piano were often laid alongside familiar musical gestures, including (in Laurence Osborn's *Absorber*) processions of guileless common chords, sullied gradually by foreign notes – a fascinating effect." **Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph***

Micrographia Riot Ensemble, CD Release (March 2020)

"This lithe, witty piece refracts (via poet Joseph Minden) Hooke's 1665 treatise describing objects viewed through a microscope." **Steph Power, *BBC Music Magazine***

"Laurence Osborn's *Micrographia*, in which Dacey is joined by soprano April Frederick, delights in the wondrous microscopic world of the 17th-century natural philosopher Robert Hooke (text by poet Joseph Minden)." **Fiona Maddocks, *The Guardian***

"The music, detailing things as seen through a microscope is very graphic in its instrumental colouring especially 'Wings of Flies' with whirling strings and the use of kazoos!" **Alan Cooper, *British Music Society***

CTRL Riot Ensemble, Kings Place (February 2020)

"Between these pieces came a vocal extravaganza, the tripartite *Ctrl* by Laurence Osborn (b1989), setting words by himself. And what words they were. "I was born without a heart. I was born face first into the pulp of processed male history" is the opening strand, initiating the theme of the futility of masculinity. The cabaret-style singer — the soprano Sarah Dacey, in male attire, with facial hair daubed on — essayed, with electronic aid, all sorts of distorted male voices. The second part, *Body*, was equally provocative, comprising 29 assertions beginning with that word — from "Body is amazing" to "Body is inescapable" — then erupting into a blatant ensemble version of the football chant "We do what we want". Part three was a sort of abstract, eviscerated lullaby, recalling the "exquisitely tired and four-in-the-morning" quality the composer Constant Lambert found in Ellington's *Mood Indigo*." **Paul Driver, *The Sunday Times***

The Mother Mahogany Opera, Polish Social And Cultural Association, London (May 2018)

"If the action evokes the inter-war avant-garde, Osborn's music also pays tribute to the 20th century. Intricate, animated and predominantly atonal, it contains snatches of parlour song as the *Mother* waxes nostalgic, and jazz rhythms flash through its lucid textures." **Yehuda Shapiro, *The Stage***

"Fantastic absurdity... Osborn's score draws on the eclectic, intoxicatingly democratic soundworlds of Ligeti, Stockhausen and Gerald Barry in its garish grotesques, creating memorable moments of surreal beauty and wit, with the help here of an outstanding young cast and the accompaniment of Chroma and conductor Jamie Man." **Alexandra Coghlan, *The Tablet***

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***CTRL* (première) Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (November 2017)**

"If these pieces interrogated the essence and origin of sounds, in Laurence Osborn's remarkable *CTRL* sound came politically charged. This song-cycle exploring masculinity is sung by a soprano (the magnificent Sarah Dacey) heard through an autotune device, chosen by Osborn for its illusion of invulnerability. Dacey, sporting five o'clock shadow, turned the dial between "male", "female" and "alien", according to the narrative, transforming her voice from shrilly synthetic gurgle to flaccid bass.

"I was born without a heart" launches in at full-tilt, words often subsumed by the noisy glitter of its music, swooping bass riffs and shrieking flute frosted with the roar of a metal sheet. In part two, "My body", Osborn conjures a sleazy, surreal cabaret: Dacey's deep, distorted intoning of "we do what we want" gathers into a queasy anthem punctuated by all-too human screams from the ensemble. At one point her voice is left naked in a limping lullaby, "rock me", the Leviathan breathing of deep bass waves recalling Britten's *Grimes* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*. That's no accusation, but a tribute to writing of powerful resonance and fluency. *CTRL* suggests a prodigious dramatic talent: indeed, Osborn is currently developing an opera, *The Mother, for Mahagonny Opera*."

Helen Wallace, *The Arts Desk*

"The most assured piece was Laurence Osborn's *Ctrl*, which showed a confident hand with larger forces and a talent for synthesising different kinds of harmony and stylistic reference points in a manner reminiscent to Thomas Adès or Maxwell Davies."

Stephen Chase, *Tempo*

"I'm sure I can't have been the only person in the hall to feel as though Osborn had personally punched me in the chest... *Ctrl* was clearly something special and possibly – time will tell – important."

Simon Cummings, *5:4*

***April in the Amazon* Lore Lixenberg and CHROMA, The Platform Theatre (July 2014)**

"An exuberantly colourful and emotionally volatile sonic tapestry"

Rupert Christiansen, *The Telegraph*