

MICHAEL FINNISSY
CHORALVORSPIELE
ANDERSEN-LIEDERKREIS
JULIET FRASER
& MARK KNOOP

My music contains many musics, but impure, misremembered, smudged and melted, torn apart yet not completely erased. The *Choralvorspiele* (*Koralforspill*), or chorale-preludes, started in a pragmatic way: making short organ pieces for my partner, Philip Adams, to play before and after church services. I had a long-standing affection for the Busoni-Bach transcriptions, evidence of which is plentiful in the *Choralvorspiele*. I wanted something a little different from the much-visited Lutheran melodies, so the Norwegian and American melodies that I had collected over the years finally found a place in my compositional Cabinet of Curiosities. *Choralvorspiele* was written for Mark Knoop in 2012 and received its premiere at the Borealis Festival, Bergen, that same year.

A few years before I started writing the *Andersen-Liederkreis* I was visiting Funen with German friends, and we went to Hans Christian Andersen's house, now a museum. Like everyone else I knew about his fairy tales; I did not know about the extraordinary, proto-surrealistic paper cut-outs and screens, nor about his travelogues and poetry. I speculatively started collecting his poems (mostly long out-of-print). Then, when Juliet and Mark asked if I would write them an extended song cycle, I decided to reclaim Andersen, nowadays a somewhat disparaged and ignored writer.

The first *lieder* I really got to know, from accompanying, were by Brahms, Berg and Webern. I eventually worked on all the Webern songs with Dorothy Dorow, and that experience led to a more sustained fascination with the genre. Writing this cycle became an opportunity to look again at this huge repertoire, and especially to rummage around in the many historical settings of Andersen's texts.

The first sketches for the opening of the cycle were made in mid-July 2014, in Saint Servin du Plain (Burgundy), during a heat wave. The first of Andersen's words are 'Det er Vintertid' (It was wintertime); these are preceded by a piano-figure derived from the third bar of 'Der Leiermann', the last song of Schubert's *Winterreise*; and indeed the twelfth of my Andersen songs directly recalls the harmony and contour of 'Rückblick' from that same source. The cycle has three large sections, containing five, three and four songs respectively. In the central section, the sixth, seventh and eighth songs, Schumann's Andersen settings Op. 40, Nos. 1-3 are re-made, and Grieg's Op. 5 (Andersen again) surfaces in the second.

Remembered songs... Song is indeed one of the principal topics here: the songbird of the opening legend, the children singing in the presbytery, the nightingale, the turning of words into song. Illusion and Disguise also feature, as does that frequent visitor to these tales, Death: inevitable, shockingly unnecessary, and morbidly indulged.



Photo by Ben Britton

I believe the singing voice can enhance and illuminate the words, especially in the original language or in a sound-sensitive translation. These songs are sung partly in Andersen's original Danish, partly in Adelbert von Chamisso's German translations, and partly in English, which I enjoyed translating myself. This is a nod to the historical treatment of Andersen's texts, but also to the vivacity of his imagery, which shivers and shifts as it passes from one language into another.

Michael Finnissy, February 2018

I first sang Michael's music when EXAUDI recorded a disc of his choral works — our debut disc, in fact — in 2005. Since then, the ensemble (guided by director James Weeks) has enthusiastically championed his work, resurrecting such lost gems as *Cipriano* (1974), *Tom Fool's Wooing* (1975-78, revised 2015 for its long-overdue premiere in 2016) and the extraordinary *Kelir* (1981), and commissioning the large-scale *Gesualdo: Libro Sesto* (2013). All the hallmarks of Finnissy's music are contained in this survey: the flawless technique, the innate vocality, the lyricism (albeit extreme), the loving attention paid to text, the serious engagement with musics of the past that somehow always bears forth a new music that is recognisably idiosyncratic, the 'fleshiness', the visceral punch it packs.

One could say, then, that I have grown up singing Finnissy! Certainly his music has shaped me as a singer, and so it was that, in a hotel bar in Glasgow in 2014, I sidled up to him to ask whether he would consider writing a song cycle for Mark Knoop and me. And the rest is history — history reframed, as it turned out, in

this critical yet passionate homage to the lieder tradition. *Andersen-Liederkreis* was premiered at Transit Festival in Leuven in October 2016 and then went on to Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival the following month and Time of Music Festival in Finland in 2017. My own relationship with the lieder tradition is ... less assured. It's not my natural habitat, but the process of working on the *Andersen-Liederkreis* has given me a fresh respect for the combined control and flexibility required for the art song repertoire. Once again, Michael's music has helped me grow, pushing me to communicate in an artless way the extreme emotional palette of these wonderful texts. And this marriage, of Andersen and Finnissy, is a joy: both demonstrate the finest craft but, whether humorous or tragic, somehow the material is never glossy. Michael's music is gnarly, gristly even — one senses keenly that it is the product of an intellectual yet instinctive wrestling with the very philosophy of music.

Juliet Fraser, February 2018

Andersen-Liederkreis was commissioned by Juliet Fraser with the generous support of Britten-Pears Foundation, RVW Trust, Arts Council England, Hinrichsen Foundation and TRANSIT Festival 20/21 Leuven, with development time supported by the PRS for Music Foundation. It was recorded in the Britten Studio at Snape Maltings as part of an Open Space residency.

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Werner X. Uehlinger

My music contains many musics, but impure, misremembered, smudged and melted, torn apart yet not completely erased. *Michael Finnissy*

Michael's music is gnarly, gristly even — one senses keenly that it is the product of an intellectual yet instinctive wrestling with the very philosophy of music. *Juliet Fraser*

Ma musique en englobe bien d'autres : des musiques impures, mal remémorées, souillées et liquéfiées, déchiquetées, et pourtant, pas entièrement effacées. *Michael Finnissy*

La musique de Michael est coriace, à s'y casser les dents — on ressent vivement qu'elle est le produit d'une lutte à la fois intellectuelle et instinctive avec l'essence même de la philosophie musicale. *Juliet Fraser*
(Translations by Benjamin Mouliets)

MICHAEL FINNISSY

1–8 **CHORALVORSPIELE** (2012) 30:58

Mark Knoop *piano*

ISRC CH 130.1800802 to CH 130.1800809

9–20 **ANDERSEN-LIEDERKREIS** (2016) 46:02

Juliet Fraser *soprano* and Mark Knoop *piano*

ISRC CH 130.1800810 to CH 130.1800821

Total Time 77:00

DDD **24**
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Recorded: 1–2 Nov 2016 (*Choralvorspiele*) and 21–22 August 2017 (*Andersen-Liederkreis*) in the Britten Studio, Snape Maltings; Recording producer and engineer: David Lefebber; Editing by Mark Knoop; CD-master by Peter Pfister; Liner notes by Michael Finnissy and Juliet Fraser; Graphic concept by fuher vienna; Produced by Juliet Fraser and Mark Knoop; Executive production by Bernhard "Benne" Vischer, Christian C. Dalucas & Werner X. Uehlinger

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