



ARS ELECTRONICA 2019

Festival for Art, Technology & Society



Piano Music meets Digital Images

with Maki Namekawa, Dennis Russell Davis, Cori O'Lan

MON, September 9, 2019, 07:30 PM

POSTCITY Linz, Ground Floor / Train Hall



Maki Namekawa

Program

L'oiseau de feu, Igor Stravinsky

Version for Piano Four Hands arranged by Dennis Russell Davies

Interpretation: Dennis Russell Davies & Maki Namekawa

Realtime music visualization: Cori O'Lan

Piano Sonata No. 1, for Maki Namekawa, Philip Glass (2019)

Interpretation: Maki Namekawa

Realtime music visualization: Cori O'Lan



Dennis Russell Davies, Maki Namekawa, Cori O'lan

Maki Namekawa (JP),
Dennis Russell Davies (US), Cori O'lan (AT)

Pianographique – Piano Music meets Digital Images

The festival will conclude this year with another collaboration of the two pianists Maki Namekawa and Dennis Russell Davies with the digital visual artist Cori O'lan. It is part of a multi-year Ars Electronica project dedicated to the visual interpretation of musical expression and perception as well as the direct encounter between analog sound and digital visuals.

The evening's music program includes a "classic" and a premiere. *L'Oiseau de feu* (*The Firebird*) by Igor Stravinsky is a reference piece in music history and Dennis Russell Davies has arranged it for piano four-hands. The second part is the Austrian premiere of the first piano sonata by Philip Glass, which he dedicated to Maki Namekawa. Composed 110 years after *The Firebird*, the piano sonata is a joint commission of Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Philharmonie de Paris, and Ars Electronica. Its world premiere performance took place in July 2019 at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr and both the composer as well as Maki Namekawa received enthusiastic appreciation.

Arrangement for piano four hands: Dennis Russell Davies

L'Oiseau de feu (Der Feuervogel) Igor Stravinsky, 1910

In 1909, when Igor Stravinsky began to work on the music for the ballet *The Firebird*, which Sergei Diaghilev had commissioned for his *Ballets Russes*, he was still a young and little-known composer. The premiere of *The Firebird* in Paris in 1910, which was equally celebrated by audiences and critics, suddenly made the 27-year-old Igor Stravinsky internationally famous.

With his complex rhythms and extraordinary tonal effects of the great orchestra, Stravinsky created a surprising and gripping characterization of the mystical story of Ivan Zarevich, who defeats the evil sorcerer Kaschej and his demons with the help of the firebird.

Dennis Russell Davies built his arrangement for piano four-hands on Stravinsky's piano score and it is amazing how varied and sensitive he succeeds in transferring the effect of the overwhelming, colorful richness of the orchestral sounds into the fragility of the piano sound. Reduced to the elementary sound, it opens up a persuasive path to the essence of Stravinsky's great composition.

About the visuals:

As always in Cori O'lan's collaboration with Dennis Russell Davies and Maki Namekawa, the visualizations are pure real-time graphics, i.e. there are no prepared videos or image sequences that are synchronized to the music. It is only the sound of the piano directly picked up over two microphones, which is analyzed by computer and thus provides the parameters with which the graphics are generated, animated and modified – live in the moment of the performance.

The very dance-like animations of the graphic elements designed to correspond to *The Firebird* ballet and its characters are derived exclusively from the sound spectrum and dynamics of the music, without motion tracking or keyframe animation. The parameters derived from the music are directly assigned to various parameters of physics-based simulation models, particle systems as well as to the geometries, colors and lights.



Firebird, Cori O'Lan

The storyline of the ballet:

The young Prince Ivan chases the firebird and enters the magician's garden. At the wonder tree he catches the bird, which asks for its freedom. When the prince grants it this freedom, he receives a feather which has magical powers and which summons the firebird in case of danger.

Thirteen virgins, held captive by the sorcerer Kaschej, come into the garden and dance around the tree. Among them is Princess Zarevna, with whom Ivan falls in love immortally.

Threatening signals announce the appearance of Kaschej and his demons. They harass Ivan Zarevich and want to kill him. At his moment of greatest need, he calls the firebird with the feather. The firebird appears and forces Kaschej and the demons to dance with magical music and then sings them into a deep sleep.

The firebird reveals to Ivan a cave under the roots of the miracle tree, it is the hiding place of a giant egg in which Kaschej keeps his soul. The prince smashes the egg, the magician's power disappears and he dies. His captured victims are now freed and Princess Zarevna and Ivan Zarevich are united.

Piano Sonate No. 1, Philip Glass, 2019

“The Sonata is colorful, wild, excitingly jumpy...” – with these words Malte Hemmerich begins his review of the premiere of Philip Glass’s latest work at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr on July 4th 2019 in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. He further continues “... it is a prime example of Philip Glass’s piano music with its opposing rhythms, and there are also many other familiar elements from the composer’s etudes and individual works. In such a wild kaleidoscope, however, they appear here for the first time.

It is Glass’s most demanding piano work to date; the rapid succession of virtuoso octave jumps are close to the limit of playability. Namekawa breathes this music, the piece is an example of how an incomparable unity can arise from the close collaboration between composer and interpreter.”

Credits:

Piano Sonata by Philip Glass
Commissioned by Klavier-Festival Ruhr,
Festival Ars Electronica, Philharmonie de Paris,
Performance at Ars Electronica
supported by Yamaha



Piano Sonate No.1, Cori O'Lan



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