

## Contemporary Programme

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Works for Piano Guitar Duo

Anne Ku, piano  
Robert Bekkers, guitar

Museo de Arte Contemporaneo  
Union Fenosa (MACUF)  
La Coruña, Spain

Sunday 3 May 2009  
12:30 pm

#### **Little Suite (2005 – 2007)**

David Harvey (b. 1959)

*Three Parts Run Aground (homage to Purcell)*  
*It Takes Two (More)*  
*Floating*  
*Russian Dance*

*(world premiere)*

#### **Abstract and Dance (2007)**

Gijs van Dijk (b. 1954)

*(world premiere)*

#### **When Bach, Stravinsky and The Who Met (2005)**

Allan Segall (b. 1959)

#### **Fire from the Five Elements (2007)**

Heleen Verleur (b. 1964)

*(world premiere)*

#### **Sailor Talk (2007)**

Henk Alkema (b. 1944)

#### **Drizzle (2007)**

Lan-Chee Lam (b. 1982)

#### **Suite Rio de la Plata (2004)**

Erik Otte (b. 1955)

*Milonga, andante mesto*  
*Danza de la vispera, allegro giusto*  
*Danza de la pareja enamorada, lento ma non troppo*  
*Candombe del amor recuperado, allegro giusto*

## Programme Notes

All except two (Harvey and Lam) are Dutch composers who have written specifically for the piano guitar duo of Anne Ku and Robert Bekkers. Amsterdam-based composers Heleen Verleur's *Fire* (2007) and Gijs van Dijk's *Abstract and Dance* (2007) are world premieres. Harvey's *Little Suite* is performed for the first time in its entirety and hence a world premiere.

### **Little Suite (2005 – 2007)**

**David Harvey (b. 1959)**

Born in Liverpool and now based in London, David Harvey has been active as a guitarist (specialising in contemporary repertoire), composer (with works published by Boosey and Hawkes, Chanterelle and the ABRSM), researcher (completing a PhD on the music of Elliott Carter in 1986) and teacher (Oxford and Reading Universities). Since 1986 he has pursued parallel lives in music and technology, currently as software consultant after four years as head of technology for Sibelius Software.

The four movements of the *Little Suite* for Guitar and Piano are taken from a set of pieces for 2, 3 and 4 guitars commissioned 2003 by the UK's music examination body, ABRSM, for a new examination syllabus. In different forms, and with different selections, there are also versions for flute and guitar, and guitar duet (and what's more, two of the pieces have also been played by jazz groups).

Harvey writes, "I've always loved Purcell's music, and the way he combines high art and high jinx in some of his works, in particular the 'Three Parts on a Ground' from which the inspiration and the title of the first piece are derived. A little tune is subjected to several indignities against a ground which shifts amongst registers and instruments, before combining with itself in perfect and unexpected counterpoint to bring the piece to an untimely but strangely satisfying close. The remaining three pieces all nod towards dance forms for inspiration. 'It takes two (more)' is, like the first piece, a homage, this time to Astor Piazzolla, who did so much to restore the fortunes of the Tango style. 'Floating' is little Parisian cafe waltz, the title referring both to the ambiguous harmony and to the wistful not-quite-melancholy of the piece's mood. The concluding 'Russian Dance' echoes the folk melodies and rhythmic style of Stravinsky's Russian-period music (and like much of that music, it is harder to tap your foot to than at first it sounds)."

### **Abstract and Dance (2007)**

**Gijs van Dijk (b. 1954)**

Born in Delft, Gijs van Dijk studied composition and music theory with Tristan Keuris at the Hilversum and Utrecht Conservatory. He works as a composer, an improvising musician, a classical & jazz guitar player and teacher in Amsterdam. van Dijk has worked with many leading Dutch musicians, mainly as a composer for chamber music ensembles but also in various improvised music ensembles.

"Abstract and Dance" is a kind of rendered piece. The first movement develops in the direction of twelve tone music which suddenly changes into a stylized Spanish dance in the second part.

### **When Bach, Stravinsky and The Who Met (2005)**

**Allan Segall (b. 1959)**

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Dutch/American composer Allan Segall grew up in Denver, Colorado, and has most recently served as Concert Director at the Engelse Kerk in Amsterdam where he lives. He received his Doctorate of Musical Arts from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He acquired Dutch citizenship in 2007.

Segall wrote "When JS Bach, Igor Stravinsky and The Who Met" for the Baby Boomer Generation and those young at heart who love The Who. This amazing work is a synthesis of art music and rock, a work where the guitar actually surpasses the piano in volume as guitarist demonically strums to an exhilarating climax that recalls Segall's favorite Who album, *Tommy*.

### **Fire from the Five Elements (2007)**

**Heleen Verleur (b. 1964)**

Amsterdam-based pianist, composer, and Suzuki piano teacher, Heleen Verleur studied piano at the Hilversum Conservatory (The Netherlands). She has long written music for her own pupils, and also gave composing lessons to children. Among her many works are piano trio, violin and piano, baritone sax and piano, and voice and piano.

The five fundamental elements of the universe, according to the Five Element Theory, are Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. The theory views the Universe and its functioning as being cyclical and interactive. Everything in existence contains some quantity of all five elements. The doctrine of five phases describes two Cycles of Balance, a generating or creation cycle and an overcoming or destruction cycle of interactions between the phases.

The first piece “Fire” is in ABA form, with the ethereal A-part ‘creating’ the earthlike threatening B-part, a prospect to the next part Earth.

### **Sailor Talk (2007)**

**Henk Alkema (b. 1944)**

Born in Harlingen in the northern Dutch province of Friesland, Henk Alkema has served on numerous faculties in the Netherlands and the USA, the last being head of composition at Utrecht Conservatory. He has written two full length operas, both available on CD. Alkema has conducted nearly all professional symphony orchestras in the Netherlands and has earlier toured as a jazz pianist, composer, arranger, and studio pianist for Dutch Radio and TV. He is currently working on his third major opera “Lou de Palingboer” to be premiered in April 2011.

Alkema, who loves sailing, wrote “Sailor Talk” for Anne Ku and Robert Bekkers in May 2007. Introducing the premiere at the Cortona Contemporary Music Festival in Italy in July 2007, the duo said, “When sailors get drunk and try to carry on a conversation, they don't always talk about the same thing, as shown in the beginning of this piece. The guitar and the piano are on different wavelengths, so to speak. Eventually they might relate to each other and build up intensity.”

### **Drizzle (2007)**

**Lan-Chee Lam (b. 1982)**

Born in Hong Kong, Lan-Chee Lam's music often combines traditional Chinese and contemporary Western techniques, exploring new dimensions of the sound world. Her works have been performed in Hong Kong, Canada, United States and Italy. She is currently pursuing a DMA at University of Toronto.

Drizzle, as in light rain, makes use of guitar harmonics and the insides of a grand piano. There are pentatonic passages which make the piano sound like a Chinese instrument. Lam wrote, “The main challenge of writing for guitar and piano is the balance issue. In order to let people hear the guitar part more clearly, the piano can't always play too loud or busy figures. Therefore, I try to use more high register from the piano which has a thinner sound. It surprisingly works well with the guitar harmonics, as well as the inside piano plucking. This sounds like the bell. The main idea for writing Drizzle is to reflect the beauty of light rain with its transparent texture, with reference to guitar tremolos.”

### **Suite Rio de la Plata (2004)**

**Erik Otte (b. 1955)**

Born in Leiden, home to the oldest university in the Netherlands, Erik Otte played the violin as a child but made his final choice for guitar at age 16. After graduating from the Royal Conservatory (The Hague) and the Conservatory of Rotterdam, he followed an international performance career before settling into composing for chamber music in recent years.

Suite Rio de la Plata, which consists of four dance movements about the various stages of love (from heart break to new love), was written for Anne Ku and Robert Bekkers as a present. It is the first work

dedicated to the duo.

## About the Piano Guitar Duo

The PIANO and GUITAR, two of the most popular instruments, once accompanied each other in 19th century chamber music. Nowadays it is a rare but special occasion to see this unusual combination in the classical music scene.

Anne Ku and Robert Bekkers formed their **PIANO GUITAR DUO** in 2001, reviving this almost forgotten tradition of music making. This once favourite pastime of bringing together performers, composers and enthusiastic audiences has left a largely untapped legacy of published music specifically written for the piano and guitar. More at <http://www.pianoguitar.com>

A graduate of the Conservatory of Maastricht, **Robert Bekkers** also studied contemporary music with Angelo Gilardino in Italy. While accompanying flamenco dance classes, Robert formed the group "IMPETU" consisting of 9 musicians and dancers, mixing flamenco and classical music. He has toured with Serenata Mexicana, Amstel Guitar Quartet, and Berdien Stenberg Orchestra. Since 2001, he and pianist Anne Ku have taken their Piano Guitar Duo to London, North Cyprus, Cape Town, Italy, Houston and Hawaii, and throughout the Netherlands. Bekkers plays a 2005 Jeroen Hilhorst concert guitar, custom-made for the duo. Robert is actively involved in chamber music with mezzo-soprano, flute, violin, choir, and another guitar, as well as arranging music for his various chamber groups.

Born in Brunei of Chinese parents, **Anne Ku** studied piano under Betsy Hermann in Okinawa and Randall Love at Duke University. She began accompanying choirs from age 12, followed soon after by wedding engagements as pianist and organist. A graduate of London Business School and London School of Economics, she brings her passion for producing thematic house concerts from Houston and London to the Netherlands. Anne concluded her composition studies in June 2008 at Utrecht Conservatory with a premiere of her second chamber opera, Culture Shock! and a piano teaching thesis on sight-reading. She reviews operas, competitions, and music festivals for Le Bon Journal, an online publication she founded in 2001. In March 2009, she launched a new blog about her piano guitar duo, at <http://www.pianoguitar.com/blog>

This concert was made possible through the support of the Dutch sponsor



Stichting Jon Kasander, Havik 13, 3811EX Amersfoort, Netherlands