

## Contemporary Programme

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

Anne Ku, piano  
Robert Bekkers, guitar  
<http://www.pianoguitar.com>

Funen Concert Productions, Amsterdam  
Sunday 12 July 2009 @ 15:00 (no break)

#### **Little Suite (2005 – 2007)**

David Harvey (b. 1959)

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

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

Gijs van Dijk (b. 1954)

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

Allan Segall (b. 1959)

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

Heleen Verleur (b. 1964)

#### **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. This programme was first presented in the Contemporary Music Concert Series on 1 May 2009 in the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo Union Fenosa (MACUF) in La Coruña, Spain by invitation of the Galicia Musica, with support from Stichting Kasander.

### **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.

## **ANNE KU**

Born in Brunei of Chinese parents, Anne Ku spent most of her childhood on an American air base in Okinawa, Japan. Two years after taking piano lessons, her sight reading ability landed her first stint as contract pianist at age 10, accompanist for school choir at 14, accompanist for adult choral society and church youth choirs at 16. By then, she was completely immersed in music, with a bustling private piano teaching practice, weekly church services as chief organist, and regular engagements as wedding pianist.

Anne won a full scholarship including the prestigious A.B. Duke Scholarship to Duke University where she studied piano under Randall Love while double majoring in electrical engineering and mathematics. The A.J. Fletcher Music Performance Scholarship supported her senior year piano recital of French impressionist works.

In March 2001, the late composer/pianist Robert Avalon invited Anne to participate in an improvisation ensemble for classical musicians organised by Dutch guitarist Robert Bekkers. Not long after their meeting in Amsterdam, they formed their piano guitar duo, probably the only purely acoustic duo performing on contemporary instruments.

After a varied career in the financial and energy sectors, Anne returned to her passion for making music. She now combines her business skills with music, such as giving practical career workshops for musicians (in Italy), a pro bono arts consultancy, and producing thematic concerts and events at the Monument House Concert Series she co-founded with Robert Bekkers in 2006.

Anne obtained a Bachelor of Music with Honours degree in composition with a teaching diploma in piano in 2008 from Utrecht Conservatory. Her second chamber opera "Culture Shock!" was premiered at her final exam concert in Utrecht in June 2008. Her ensemble work "All Tuned Out" was selected by Dutch Radio Four for broadcast in Spring 2007. Her compositions have been performed in the Netherlands, London, Slovakia, Cortona, and Honolulu. Anne's website at <http://www.anneku.com> lists her published articles and premiered compositions as well as her events calendar, which spans the music scene in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

In March 2009, Anne began a blog of the piano guitar duo, sharing behind-the-scenes stories of their concerts, rehearsals, recordings, composers, audiences, and travel. See <http://www.pianoguitar.com/blog>

## **ROBERT BEKKERS**

Born near Eindhoven, Robert Bekkers is active as a soloist and ensemble musician, performing regularly throughout the Netherlands. Robert acquired musical training on various instruments before choosing the guitar at age 12. After obtaining his diploma in electronics, he spent the next seven years at the Conservatory of Maastricht where he earned his teaching and performance degrees in classical guitar. During this time, he also studied contemporary music with Angelo Gilardino in Italy on a full scholarship.

Robert's musical curriculum has spanned a wide range of genres, with classical guitar as the centrepiece. Parallel to his performing career, he has been a songwriter, arranger, composer, producer, and sound engineer. To satisfy his curiosity in flamenco music, he accompanied flamenco dance classes and then formed the group "IMPETU" consisting of 9 musicians who played his arrangements mixing classical music with flamenco rhythm and styles. He has performed throughout Europe with the mariachi band Serenata Mexicana and Amstel Guitar Quartet. For more than years, Robert was the guitarist and bass player of the Berdien Stenberg Orchestra which toured the Netherlands, Belgium, Indonesia, Curacao, and Oman.

As Robert has always looked for the unusual in musical combinations, he formed a piano guitar duo with Anne Ku in 2001. The acoustic challenge of such a combination was not overcome by using amplification but by the construction of a special guitar, custom-built by the Amsterdam-based luthier Jeroen Hilhorst in 2005. Their duo has given concerts, lecture-recitals, and master classes in London, North Cyprus, Cape Town, Cortona, Spain, and throughout the Netherlands. The Hilhorst concert guitar enables the two instruments to be equal partners in sound and volume.

In Spring 2007 Robert launched a new solo programme featuring some of the most challenging guitar pieces such as Bach's Chaconne and Tedesco's Capriccio Diabolico. Around the same time, the Dutch ensemble Aria Balsamica invited him as artist-in-residence. In Autumn 2007, Vera Laporeva, the principal violinist of the Metropole Orchestra asked him to form a new violin guitar duo. They mainly perform Robert's original arrangements of famous classical works.

In 2008 Robert formed duos with mezzo soprano, guitar, flute, and oboe to expand the guitar's portability and versatility to new venues and audiences. He also transcribed the Eine Kleine Nachtmusik and Vivaldi's Four Seasons for piano guitar duo. Visit Robert's website at <http://www.dutchguitar.com>.