

Performers

- **Lamorna Nightingale** (*flutes*)

Lamorna studied flute with Vernon Hill and Virginia Taylor at the Canberra School of Music and with Margaret Crawford at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. Lamorna performs regularly with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, the Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. She also performs with some of Sydney's finest new-music ensembles including the Sonic Art Ensemble, Ensemble Offspring and the Kurrawong Ensemble.

- **Claire Edwardes** (*percussion*)

Claire Edwardes is a percussionist dedicated to the performance and promotion of contemporary music. For the past seven years she has been based in The Netherlands and she now divides her time between Australia and Europe. Career highlights include solo performances at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (UK), the Birtwistle Festival (QEH, London), being named Australian Young Performer of the Year (1999) and MCA/Freedman Fellow (2005).

- **Zubin Kanga** (*piano/celeste*)

Zubin recently graduated with the University Medal in music from the University of Sydney where he also studied philosophy and science.

Zubin has premiered many new works by young composers and he performs with many of Australia's leading new music ensembles including AARK, Halcyon, Sonic Art Ensemble and Ensemble Offspring. In 2006, he gave the premiere performance of Daniel Rojas' *Piano Concerto* with the Sydney Youth Philharmonic. In September, Zubin will commence his postgraduate studies at the Royal Academy of Music, London.

Programme

Morton Feldman (1926-1987)

- ***The King of Denmark*** (1964)
- ***Crippled Symmetry*** (1983)

For years Morton Feldman was regarded with fascination and enthusiasm in certain new music circles, but it was only towards the end of his life that the wider musical community recognised him as one of the most significant composers of the last century. Feldman himself was rarely troubled by crises of self-belief, which was fortunate, since his music carved its own path in relation to the trends of his time and its divergence from most identifiable currents meant it weathered a certain misunderstanding. Now, however, his work is played frequently and discussed rapturously, particularly in the United States, the country of his birth.

Feldman's principal innovations were a result of his desire to focus the listener's attention on sound: not sound in terms of trippy, colourful displays calculated to

produce wonderment à la Messiaen and psychedelia (although his timbral harmonic colours are beautiful and sensuous), but the resonant qualities of acoustic sounds drifting through a space. He cited New York School painters of the 1950s such as Rothko and Pollock as his primary inspiration in this: "the new painting made me desirous of a sound world more direct, more immediate, more physical than anything that had existed heretofore."

To achieve this, Feldman felt he'd have to divest sounds of their associations, allowing the listener to focus on each sonic element rather than their interrelationships: he'd have to challenge the habits of listening appropriate to much of the music of the past, which prioritises structural relationships. His early efforts in this direction saw him develop spatial notations in which the relative highness or lowness, the number and type of sounds and their approximate duration would be specified, but the actual pitches were the

responsibility of the performer: he creates textures and sound events, but their precise nature is open. "As controls are given up, one finds that these elements lose their initial, inherent identity," he wrote, "it is just because of this identity that these elements can be unified within a composition."

Feldman's work through the early 50s exemplified this approach and he returned to it occasionally in later pieces such as **The**

King of Denmark (1964) for percussion, which directs the performer in the timing, number and duration of sounds, and their method of production (all must be produced with hands, fingers or arms, but not sticks or mallets, producing an unusual "percussion" piece). He specifies the type of sounds to be used: bell-like, rolling, on a drum skin, or a gong or triangle. As Steve Schick wrote "Sounds simply float out, detached and weightless."

How, exactly, this music relates to the origin of the piece's title is open to interpretation: the king is Christian X, the monarch of Denmark during World War II. Feldman was attracted to a story (now discredited) of the King pinning a yellow star to his chest and walking through the city, in Feldman's words, conducting a "silent protest" against anti-Semitism.

Feldman eventually became dissatisfied with graphic notation, as he felt it resulted in something too much like improvisation, a process that held no interest for him. He now wished to achieve a "mysterious" effect in which each sound seemingly erases one's memory of what has happened earlier in the work, leaving the listener "very fresh in the moment." The means to this end was stasis, an insistence on a little-changing music with very low information density, allowing the listener to focus on tiny sonic details rather than dramatic changes and developments. "Music can achieve aspects of immobility, or the illusion of it. The degrees of stasis, found

in a Rothko or a Guston, were perhaps the most significant elements that I brought to my music from painting."

Feldman's music does not, however, eschew repetition, in fact, the effect of stasis is often dependent on it. As Alex Ross has written "His habit of presenting the same figure many times in succession invites you to hear music as a gallery visitor sees paintings; you can study the sounds from various angles, stand back or move up close, go away and come back for a second look." Or as Kyle Gann says, "you end up living with Feldman's music as you would with a painting on your wall."

In the late 1970s Feldman began writing extremely long works, such as the six hour Second String Quartet, composed in 1983, the same year as **Crippled Symmetry**. These works, he felt, required from the composer a heightened sense of concentration, something he'd always prioritised in his own, largely intuitive compositional process. Many are built from repeated but shifting patterns, patterns which don't develop so much as adjust themselves slightly (this is not a narrative, directional music), and in the composing of which Feldman's primary concern was scale: "The compositional concentration is solely on which pattern should be reiterated and for how long, and on the character of its inevitable change into something else." He said it was the contemplation of Near and Middle Eastern rugs which stimulated his thinking on patterning, rugs which appear symmetrical at first glance

but in which, on closer examination, repeated patterns are divergent (18 candelabras versus 19, for instance, in matching sections). Colours, too, make inexact repetitions in the rugs, resulting from the use of handmade dyes and the dyeing of the yarn in small quantities. It's easy to see how this kind of patterning resonated with Feldman's concerns, and **Crippled Symmetry** is permeated with exact repetitions housed between unequal silences, mirror images slightly out of skew, and musical gestures expressed in ever divergent durations. "In this regularity, there is a suggestion that what we hear is functional and directional, but we soon realize that this is an illusion: a bit like walking the streets of Berlin - where all the buildings look alike, even if they're not."

(Programme notes by Rachel Campbell)

ENSEMBLE OFFSPRING & EASTSIDE ARTS PRESENT

Crippled Symmetry

the music of Morton Feldman

Programme

1. *The King of Denmark* (1964)

Claire Edwardes - solo percussion

[Approximately 7 minutes]

2. *Crippled Symmetry* (1983)

Lamorna Nightingale - flutes

Claire Edwardes - percussion

Zubin Kanga - piano/celeste

[Approximately 90 minutes]

Ensemble Offspring and Eastside Arts gratefully acknowledge the support of Arts NSW & the City of Sydney. Ensemble Offspring would also like to thank Alex Sheather (lighting design) and the New Music Network.



A Ensemble Offspring

Ensemble Offspring is dedicated to the performance of challenging new music. With over sixty projects to its name, the Sydney-based ensemble has established itself as one of Australia's leading voices for innovative forms of classical music. Ensemble Offspring is committed to a living classical-music tradition combining the music of today with iconic works of the 20th and 21st centuries. The ensemble embraces a wide variety of progressive repertoire from wild improvisation to

meticulous complexity and has a particular focus on experimental and interdisciplinary presentations.

Ensemble Offspring is emerging as one of the most successful contemporary music groups in Australia. The ensemble has developed a reputation for its original programming, quality of performance and successful audience engagement.

Highlight projects have included; a European tour as guests of the prestigious Warsaw Autumn International Festival of Contemporary Music; 'Partch's Bastards', a microtonal instrument-building project; two concerts 'Spectral Guises' and 'Whirlwind of Time' that focused on the growing spectral movement in classical composition; and numerous programs, 'Flexible Eclectic' and 'Plastic Noise', that feature open-form music. Ensemble Offspring is also noted for its development of interdisciplinary projects. The ensemble has been featured twice as part of the Sydney Film Festival where they have presented new music to accompany classic experimental films, while in programs such as 'The Imaginary Opera Project' and 'Light is Calling' the ensemble produced new works in collaboration with digital artists. Recent projects have included; 'Eggs & Baskets' a concert of conceptual music; the 'Sibelius Student Composer Awards', a nation-wide composition competition; and, 'Tehillim' a collaboration with Synergy Percussion and Halcyon featuring the seminal work of Steve Reich.

On the 15th September, Ensemble Offspring will join forces with The Song Company for 'Cage Uncaged', a mini-festival celebrating the words, ideas and music of John Cage.