

Mon 29 Apr 2019
Hall Two, 7pm

Michael Chant and Howard Skempton String Quartets

A concert promoted by
The Cornelius Cardew Concerts Trust

Eusebius Quartet

Beatrice Philips violin
Venetia Jollands violin
Hannah Shaw viola
Hannah Sloane cello

with Daniel Bates oboe

Programme

Pre-concert discussion between Howard Skempton and Michael Chant,
with Carole Finer as moderator

Howard Skempton *Catch* (2001)
Moving On (2016)

Michael Chant *String Quartet No.1 The String
Quartet* (1987/8-2010)
(premiere)

Interval 20 minutes

Michael Chant *String Quartet No. 2 Renewal*
(1992-3)

Howard Skempton *Tendrils* (2004)

Michael Chant *String Quartet No. 3 Even Our
Shadows* (2009)

Michael Chant and Howard Skempton celebrate the 50th anniversary of
their first joint concert with their complete string quartets, performed by the
Eusebius Quartet.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Howard Skempton: *Catch* for string quartet

Written for the Smith Quartet, the title refers to some of the many different meanings of the word 'catch' – fishing, tricks, rounds. The result is a twelve-minute piece played continuously and full of canonic writing and musical games. [HS]

Howard Skempton: *Moving On*

Moving On proceeds without a break for a little over eight minutes. The title seems valedictory, yet is also expressive of momentum. Both metre and tempo are fixed at the outset; yet it could be argued that this very regularity allows for flexibility. The main play, though, is between modal melody and chromatic harmony, each striving to make sense of the other. All we can do in music is find our bearings between the familiar and the unfamiliar. [HS]

Michael Chant: *String Quartet No. 1 The String Quartet*

The title implies an archetype, standing outside of us, from which all others derive. It embodies music as expression. In three movements, the third follows the second without a pause. [MC]

Michael Chant: *String Quartet No. 2 Renewal*

The work is in three Fragments: Under the Table, On the Table, Space. Renewal can mean revitalising or starting afresh. [MC]

Howard Skempton: *Tendrils* for string quartet

Tendrils has been described as a 'masterly display of Skempton's utterly natural art'. It is built out of continuous undulating lines that sustain their effect throughout, the impulse being lyrical and experimental. [HS]

Michael Chant: *String Quartet No. 3 Even Our Shadows*

Written for the Darwin Bicentennial, the quartet is based on the material of the final earth's song from the composer's piano piece *Songs of the Earth*, which looks to the future. It embodies that humankind is an evolutionary product of Mother Earth, but is defined primarily by its society and its culture, and today has a responsibility for humanising both the natural and social environments. The title comes from some lines of the poem *We Will Have to Give Our All* by Cuban poet Fayad Jamis:

For this freedom that is the right of the youth
For this freedom
As beautiful as life itself
We will have to give our all
If necessary
Even our shadows
And it will never be enough.

[MC]

Skempton on Chant

In November 1970, Howard Skempton wrote an essay *Michael Chant*. The essay begins: 'It seems scarcely credible that Michael Chant should have reached the age of twenty-six without attracting wide critical attention; I use the word 'scarcely' because it seems to me that outstanding talent is far more difficult to recognise than stylistic purity; if an artist cannot be classified, he becomes invisible, whilst remaining indigestible, and refusing to stay down. A fine musician, poet, entertainer, philosopher, mathematician, expert on income tax and related disciplines [now one could add welder, typesetter, machine-minder], the image of Michael Chant is difficult to grasp.' One might say that 'composer and organist' are taken for granted.

Towards the end of the essay, Howard Skempton has this to say of Michael Chant's *Pastoral Symphony*: '...an intrepid band of six musicians, girding their loins with faith and determination, gave a warmly-appreciated first performance at Ealing Town Hall on the 29th of April, 1969. Most affected of all was Michael Chant, not necessarily pleased, but visibly transformed.'

Only a short age of time has passed since then, but it is the world which is visibly transformed.

On April 13, 2019, Howard Skempton wrote, *On Symmetry*: 'At the root of the work of Cornelius Cardew, Michael Chant and Howard Skempton – and in the case of the first two, at least, the 'work' may be musical or political, or both – is a passion for symmetry. There is symmetry in dialectics; also, be they strengths or weaknesses, in vacillation and ambivalence.

A passion for symmetry is a passion for resolution. In a practical way, we may use this in the pursuit of justice. More theoretically, we may find it in music and mathematics. At this theoretical level, we may engage with the infinite, but, in practice, we can work only with what we can grasp, and that is symmetrical.'

Chant to Skempton

In an email to Howard Skempton in May 2012, Michael Chant wrote: 'I think it is a strength of the moral force of the Scratch Orchestra that it could encompass all who had integrity yet give rise to so many different rivers, of which only we can understand the common source and continuing connecting threads.'

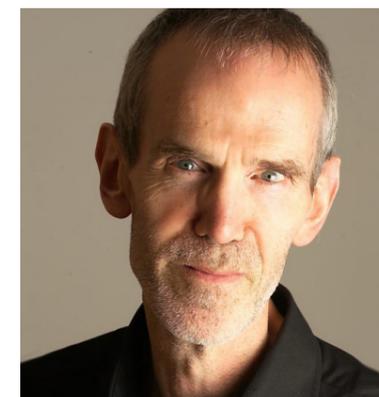
Celebration of integrity; this is certainly to be applied to Howard Skempton, as these 50 years have shown.

A letter of 5 February, 1993: 'The necessities of the times are renewal, going forward, remoulding society anew. Of course, composers of the day have to measure up to this. For a while, what I am writing is almost experimental again, certainly challenging the establishment. I think of it as music of commitment, and it is renewal also in the sense of drinking once again at the spring of lonely university musical discoveries, and starting afresh.'

BIOGRAPHIES

Howard Skempton (b. 1947)

Howard Skempton has always been a composer. In conjunction, he has worked as accordionist, and music publisher. Renowned for the distinctive clarity of his musical language, in recent years he has concentrated increasingly on writing choral and vocal music. His choral commissions include works for the BBC Singers and the Belfast Philharmonic Society.



Michael Chant (b. 1945)

Michael Chant has always been a composer. He holds a BA in mathematics, and is a pianist and organist well-known for his political and philosophical concerns. He is Secretary of the Cornelius Cardew Concerts Trust, organising and writing for concerts and symposia that bring together varied composers and performers around progressive themes. This work owes a great debt to the leadership of Hardial Bains.



Eusebius Quartet

Finalists of the 2018 Royal Overseas League Competition, the Eusebius Quartet are fast gaining a reputation for imaginative and communicative performances. Formed in autumn 2015, they were resident String Quartet at the Lewes Chamber Music Festival 2016 and 2017, Wye Valley Chamber Music Festival 2017 and at FitzFest 2018, Fitzrovia's newest music festival. They have recorded works by Schubert, Haydn, Bartok and Korngold. Since forming they have appeared at numerous London venues including Conway Hall, St James' Piccadilly, the Foundling Museum, Blackheath Halls, as well as other venues across the country including Snape Maltings and Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh and abroad in Santa Fe, USA. They have played live several times on BBC Radio 3's *In Tune*.

The quartet enjoys exploring unusual repertoire and in 2017 collaborated with pianist Alasdair Beatson in performances of Gabriel Pierné's Piano Quintet, and again at Lewes Chamber Music Festival 2018 in a performance of Korngold's Piano Quintet. They have also performed with clarinetists Matt Hunt, Michael Collins and bassoonist Amy Harman, oboist Daniel Bates, and with the Elias Quartet's cellist Marie Bitloch in a performance of Taneyev's String Quintet.

The Quartet enjoy working with children and have organised and undertaken a number of 'school tours' visiting multiple primary schools in one day, prior to an evening recital. These have taken place twice in the Camden area culminating in recitals at the Foundling Museum in Bloomsbury. The most recent school tour was in Sussex, ahead of the Lewes Chamber Music Festival when the quartet visited 5 schools in the local area, presenting to the children the opportunity to hear and interact with a professional live string quartet. All four members of the Eusebius Quartet also coach regularly at Junior MusicWorks chamber music courses, which, as three of them MusicWorks alumni themselves, is a course close to their hearts.

The Eusebius Quartet were recently Quartet-in-Residence at Snape Maltings in Aldeburgh where they spent two weeks rehearsing and performing quartets by Bartok and Schumann, receiving coaching from Hungarian pedagogue, Rita Wagner.

The members of the quartet have played together in different formations for many years, having met as teenagers studying together and then again later at IMS Prussia Cove. After completing studies in London, New York, Helsinki, Paris and the Netherlands they have been very excited to reunite as a quartet, sharing their passion for the extraordinary music written for this formation.

The quartet takes its name from one of the two fictional characters invented by Robert Schumann for his musical journal writings. These characters became symbolic of Schumann's opposing moods: the fiery and impassioned Florestan contrasted the more introverted and dreamy Eusebius.

eusebiusquartet.com



Daniel Bates

Daniel Bates is principal oboe with the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the City of London Sinfonia and co-principal oboe of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. He read Music and the History of Art at Pembroke College, Cambridge. As an actor, he studied classical acting at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. Daniel is the founder and Artistic Director of FitzFest, a community chamber music festival, based in Fitzrovia, central London.

dsbates.com

Cornelius Cardew Concerts Trust (CCCT)

The objects of the CCCT are to finance concerts of the music of Cornelius Cardew, as well as to encourage the writing and performance of new music which champions the enlightenment and progress of which Cardew was a pathfinder. The trust works for the advancement of education in new music for the public benefit. It is well known that Cornelius Cardew, as well as being an outstanding musician and composer, became a leading political figure and modern communist. His greatest legacy, it has been said, is of keeping in step with the requirements of the times in a manner that accepts no dogmatic rendering of reality or limitations on the human spirit.

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A Cornelius Cardew Concerts Trust Concert featuring the Eusebius Quartet



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The Cornelius Cardew Concerts Trust

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