

members are credited with 'Performance', as in 'Brigitte Wilfing: Choreography, Voice, Performance') that kaleidoscopically evokes in turn glam rock (keytar solos!), classical-ish dance and nature documentaries, with some of the most arresting percussion set-ups I've ever seen. Even more embracingly bombastic was Ricardo Eizirik's *adolescência*, with Håkon Stene and Jennifer Torrence on amplified drum kits doing a snare roll with a death-grip for upwards of 20 minutes while Roberto Maqueda played different chords on an arpeggiator. This is music that makes you feel *good*, in the same way as a massage or a hot shower.

Mivos!

Finally, there was the ensemble-in-residence, the Mivos Quartet. This review is already very long, but Mivos is just so good that I need to write something at the end. They were perfect, and they gave a perfect performance of one of the most perfect pieces of music I have ever had the absolute joy of hearing, Alvin Singleton's String Quartet No. 2 'Secret Desire To Be Black', one of those very special pieces where you know exactly what the music is going to do and you *cannot wait* for it to do it.

Max Erwin  
10.1017/S0040298223000827

### Sarah Angliss, *Giant*. Aldeburgh Festival, 2023.

The Aldeburgh Festival 2023 opened in commendably adventurous style with the world premiere of Sarah Angliss' first opera, *Giant*. She has been working for many years as a composer and sound designer, known for her blend of acoustic instruments and electronics, of short folk-like songs and distinctive weird sounds. Angliss herself is a multi-instrumentalist who performs on recorders and the theremin, and she also designs and builds her own instruments.

Ross Sutherland's libretto for *Giant* is based on the life of the Irishman Charles Byrne (1761–1783), who was around 2.30 metres tall; until recently, his skeleton was exhibited at the Hunterian Museum, in London, where Angliss viewed it and became curious about his story. Exhibited as a freak in his lifetime, Byrne was adamant that he did not want to be an object of curiosity after his death, and the opera tells the imagined story of the conflict between the museum's founder Dr John Hunter, who wanted to study him, and Byrne. More broadly, reason (science) is opposed to magic and religion.

Hunter, performed by baritone Jonathan Gunthorpe, is portrayed as a successful if vulgar man, though someone who is also in pain. *Giant* opens with a tiny coffin being brought on stage; Hunter sings 'the opportunity of death brings knowledge to this house', as he had studied the body of his six-week-old child. The Giant himself is first hidden behind a curtain, as if on a stage within a stage. Gweneth Ann Rand portrays Rooker, a master of ceremonies/music-hall character whose livelihood depends on exhibiting Byrne to the public. In one of many very British touches in the work, Rooker serves tea to the 'audience' who have come to view the Giant. Of course, we the opera audience are also complicit, as we too have come to gawp at this extraordinarily tall man.

Karim Sulayman (Byrne), standing on a raised platform, is already tall, and his height was further enhanced by huge platform boots. His lyrical tenor voice rendered the Giant as a profoundly human character. Byrne is portrayed as a deeply religious man who is horrified at the idea of being dissected post-death; other characters ascribe mystic qualities to him, wanting to believe that someone so tall can more easily communicate with heaven.

The most dramatic scenes are those between Hunter and the increasingly ailing Byrne: the doctor is a complex character who says he just wants to help Byrne and provide medicine, but he also gets him drunk and provokes anger when he speaks of wanting to study Byrne's body. As the Giant is measured in every direction, an English folk-style recorder melody is looped against itself, building up tension. Drawings of his body join drawings of other creatures on stage, adding to the museum of images and stressing Byrne's position as an object of curiosity.

Vultures circle as the Giant dies: Byrne asks Rooker to promise to bury him at sea in a lead-lined coffin, though Rooker raises the question of cost, and a graverobber (Steven Beard, in a spoken role) addresses the audience directly about the realities of his livelihood: again, we are complicit. A tick-tock sound in the background highlights the inexorable march of time. After Byrne's death, a huge coffin was wheeled on, poignantly mirroring the opening scene with the tiny coffin, but it is made clear that Byrne's body was sold to the graverobber. As the body was treated offstage, we smelled the stink of burning chemicals. This farewell to the Giant is followed by a concluding scene in which the other characters set up Hunter's museum; the versatile singers Héloïse Werner

and Melanie Pappenheim, who previously appeared as mourners and audience members, are now in the roles of curators.

The unusual instrumental ensemble of *Giant* is, in fact, familiar to anyone who knows Angliss' distinctive blend of folk-like songs, electronica and skewed ancient sonorities. The instrumentalists were divided into three groups, with music director Ben Smith (who also played the clavicymbalum, a decrepit proto-harpsichord) in the centre between a viola da gamba (Luciana Elizondo) and recorder (Fatima Lahham). To Smith's right was the percussionist Stephen Hiscock, a regular Angliss collaborator, surrounded by multiple hanging bells and gongs and the 'Ealing Feeder', one of Angliss' own instruments: a bell machine that can play at speeds beyond even Hiscock's virtuoso capability. Two violinists (Jack Greed and Tiago Soares Silva) and a violist (Miguel Sobrinho) sat on the opposite side of the stage. Smith expertly handled the diverse and spread-out forces, balancing the instrumental ensemble with the singers and recorded sound design.

Angliss' musical language seemed perfectly adapted to the story. An essentially modal language (especially on the recorder and viol) is combined with the microtonality of the electronic sound design, multiple bell resonances and the imperfect tuning of the clavicymbalum. The electronic sounds, including a theremin and an old transistor radio as well as the sound design, suggested a horror movie score, and Hiscock's unnerving jangling of tiny bells, sometimes played with brushing circular motion, added to this creepy effect. There were particularly striking moments when electronic sounds underpinned music and speech, and at one point Werner and Pappenheim merged with Sulayman's voice to give the character of Byrne a truly gigantic vocal range. Only the violins and viola seemed rather derivative; they often crescendo under recitative or arioso sections, immediately bringing to mind Britten's similar use of the instruments in his *War Requiem*.

This 80-minute work combined a strong, moving story with a musical treatment that was highly apt. If anything, *Giant* seemed not quite giant enough: the conclusion was rather abrupt, and the music might have fleshed out the dialogue-heavy final scenes more. *Giant* was performed only twice at Aldeburgh, and I hope that the work will ultimately reach a wider audience.

Caroline Potter

10.1017/S0040298223000840

**Folks' Music, Dundalk, Louth, Ireland, 16–17 June 2023.**

Eamonn Quinn's Louth Contemporary Music Society, which he founded in 2006, is a curiously wonderful success story. The annual festival takes place in an incongruously quiet, unassuming working town halfway between Dublin and Belfast, just south of the border. The programming is, quite simply, what Quinn likes or what tweaks his uncannily discriminating ear. The music is experimental rather than mainstream modern, mostly minimal and post-minimal, but there have been performances of Dillon, and Sciarrino has visited. Louth's activities have expanded to include a record label (recordings from this year's festival will appear soon), but the feeling is still of a one-man-band cottage industry, which I find very heartening – no programme committees or pandering to fashions. In a recent interview<sup>1</sup> there was much self-deprecating humour, but he is also quite candid about how stressful running the whole thing can be.

Quinn commissioned four pieces this year, from Cassandra Miller, Sam Perkin, Laurence Crane and Linda Catlin Smith: the latter's *Folio* opened the first concert, given by the excellent Chamber Choir Ireland, conducted by Paul Hillier. The recording of Smith's *Meadow*, for string trio, written for the 2019 festival, has had excellent reviews, not least in these pages.<sup>2</sup> *Folio* uses texts taken from Emily Dickinson's *The Gorgeous Nothings*, which are fragments of poetry written on envelopes and only collected in facsimile in 2013, and *Open Folios*, an earlier publication (1995) of fragments also in facsimile. In the festival programme note, Smith says these are like 'thoughts on the way to poems, thoughts to herself: they are mysterious and unusual'. Smith has brought the different texts together in her own order, 'that moves more and more towards something like hopefulness... [lines] not meant to be together, but gathered here like a bouquet of disparate flowers'. The harmony is rich, slow-moving and consistent with, it seems, dominants that don't resolve. There are repeated fragments and texts set on top of each other, sopranos and then altos, and tenors

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Arlo Brown, 'The Head Dishwasher. An Interview with Eamonn Quinn', *Van Magazine*, 16 March 2023, <https://van-magazine.com/mag/eamonn-quinn/> (accessed 19 July 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Power, 'Linda Catlin Smith, *Meadow*. Cooper, Roewer, Butt. Louth Contemporary Music Society, LCMS2021', *TEMPO*, 75, no. 297 (July 2021), pp. 82–83.