

A unique musical experience inspired by Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand, created by theatre maker Michael Pinchbeck, devised with artists, Ryan O'Shea and Katt Perry, and featuring world-renowned concert pianist Nicholas McCarthy.

Infamous pianist Paul Wittgenstein commissioned Ravel to write him a concerto after he lost his right arm during the First World War. At the same moment, assassin Gavrilo Princip was in prison, his withered arm tied up with piano wire. Unravelling narratives such as these surround this music's composition — and together they weave a true story that spans 100 years. Pinchbeck's Concerto is a deconstructed and re-orchestrated exploration of the legacy of war and the healing power of music to overcome tragedy.

As part of tonight's performance, concert pianist Nicholas McCarthy will play Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand in D Major written for Paul Wittgenstein in 1929/30.



CONDUCTOR / DIRECTOR REFLECTIONS ON MAKING CONCERTO

Ollie Smith

Artist, Theatre Maker & Dramaturg

Playing with both hands masks the deficiencies of each hand, until one plays with one hand. Initially, it's like being naked in cold rain. It's like playing a different instrument.

Ivan Ilic, concert pianist

Maurice Ravel was commissioned to compose *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* by Paul Wittgenstein, a concert pianist who had lost his right arm after it was badly wounded whilst fighting at the Russian front in 1914. Wittgenstein, older brother to philosopher Ludwig, subsequently commissioned several composers including Sergei Prokofiev and Benjamin Britten to compose pieces for the left hand only. Ravel wrote his piece between 1929 and 1930; and Wittgenstein premièred it in 1932.

The Concerto is a complex piece: it follows an unusual Slow-Fast-Slow tripartite structure, as opposed to the more common Fast-Slow-Fast, and it makes use of differing time signatures and rhythms, drawing on jazz as a major influence. The mood is sombre and the swift changes of direction are surprising.

It contains many jazz effects, and the writing is not as light. In a work of this nature, it is essential that the texture does not give the impression of being thinner than that of a part written for both hands. For the same reason, I resorted to a style that is much closer to that of the most solemn traditional concertos. One of the implemented features is that after the first part written in the traditional style, there is a sudden change and jazz music begins. Thereafter, only, it is evident that the jazz music is actually built on the same theme as the initial portion.

Maurice Ravel on Concerto for the Left Hand

Contemporary devised theatre, much like jazz music, has consistently resisted easy definition. Both artistic forms have multiple influences and sub-genres which have metamorphosed and tumbled over themselves over the course of more than 100 years. Both play with structure, with improvisation, with rules, with narrative – and it is in this spirit that Michael Pinchbeck's *Concerto* has been made.

In Concerto much is made of the Conductor: a figure of authority who holds all the individual musical

threads together and vitally, as Ravel would say, who keeps to the tempo. Michael drew this parallel between music and devised theatre, referring to himself as the 'Conductor' rather than the 'Director' whilst we worked together on Concerto's predecessor and partner piece Bolero (2014). During that process the ensemble company composed the material together, writing and crafting en masse, lines of varying narratives zigzagging across one another. Michael led us in navigating our way through it, drawing out complimentary countermelodies and always keeping time.

This new collaborative company has employed the same way of working throughout the creation of *Concerto*. This theatrical experience is at once a biography of a piece of music and a history of several major figures from the 20th Century, whilst also serving as a provocation, a reflection on war and the healing power of music. It plays with the dualities of complexity and simplicity; silence and shelling; despair and hope.

The piece invites audiences to make connections; to be active viewers by 'conducting' the various sources and narratives presented; to embrace the adventurousness of intertexuality, like jazz, to encourage dialogue, reinterpretation and transformation.

A key example of this intertexual approach in action was when, during the devising process, Michael became very fond of a scene from the classic American TV series M*A*S*H. An Army Major retells the story of Ravel's Concerto to a soldier who similarly has lost an arm during combat:

Don't you see? Your hand may be stilled, but your gift cannot be silenced if you refuse to let it be. The gift does not lie in your hands. The true gift is in your head and in your heart and in your soul. Now you can shut it off forever, or you can find new ways to share your gift with the world.

Major Charles Winchester in M*A*S*H (Season 8, episode 19: Morale Victory)

The message is clear – and some of this scene is interwoven into the fabric of our show; borrowed, revised and given new life. Wittgenstein himself could have given up after his injury but his steely determination pulled him through. He said overcoming what must have initially felt like an impossible setback was 'like climbing a mountain'. And as we all reflect on the centenary of the First World War and its echoes in the international unrest we're witnessing today, it is of the utmost importance to highlight the good that comes from tenacity, eloquence, self-belief and how the end of one thing always marks the beginning of another.



THE CLUE, AS THEY SAY, IS IN THE TITLE

Andrew Westerside Proto-type Theater

In a 1971 article for the *Italica* journal, A. C. Keys suggested that the etymology of *concerto* belongs in-part to a complex genealogy of *conserere*, the past participle of *conserto*: to join, to unite, to weave, and *consertare*: to compete, to strive, to fight. Following Keys, then, *concerto* is a word that reads uneasily, a word at war with itself. It is both unison and separation, a weaving and an unwinding, a calm and a chaos.

It strikes me, as I reflect on the piece, that this Concerto is precisely that: a playing out of conserere and conserto which weaves its tale like a complex tapestry. Indeed, like the greatest and most revered tapestries, Concerto tells not one story, but many; woven, both literally and metaphorically into a crescendo of music, war and camaraderie; an orchestra, and an assassin. Like all of Pinchbeck's work, there is a fluidity and rhythm to the writing that bears the hallmarks of great music. Not a note or beat is left unconsidered; image and text are harmonious, but the fragility of the score – it's potent liveness and the potential for discord – is ever present.

A conductor stands and raises his baton. The baton is also a gun. He is here, with us, we are his orchestra. We are in unison, *unisono*. We are here, in Sarajevo. There is a man with a gun. The gun is also a baton. We are here *Prima Volta*: we are here *for the first time*. We are in a theatre, an orchestra pit, a trench, a lorry, a train. The conductor takes aim, and fires. The sound is war like; *guierro*. An Archduke's breathing is laboured and heavy; *stentando*. The music, if there is any, is the rhythm of boots and the booms of artillery. We just loved our country.

At times, it threatens to be too much, to engulf and overwhelm. Because it's difficult. It's difficult to think about the connections; the complex, interwoven threads of the tapestry – of history, of performance – and make any sense of them. It's difficult to understand how a truck driver in the First World War who is also a composer, who writes *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand* for a pianist who loses his right arm after being shot in the elbow in the same war, might relate to the arm of a jailed assassin of a minor European Archduke which – as a result of tuberculosis – is being held on with silver piano wire which also connects to *here*, *now*; to *this* orchestra, *this* space, to the expectance of music, to a piano in the background which vibrates with its silence.

It's difficult, I think, because it's important. Or at least, the sound of that importance was the sound played loudest when I heard Pinchbeck's *Concerto*.

It's important that we try to understand, even if all the pieces don't quite fit, when there's not an easy line to trace between peace and war, life and death, music and silence. There is of course a timeliness to all this, too. As I sit here and write, it's late 2016, a year that marked the centenary of the battle of the Somme, and as is our wont with such milestones there is ample public and private opportunity for reflection and reconsideration of the events of 1914-1918. And yet it is perhaps for our own time that Concerto offers the most sobering message. In a year that has seen the UK mark its intention to sever its ties with the European Union, a growing rhetoric of hate and othering in the media and on the streets, and a dramatic swing in western politics towards demagoguery and isolationism, I can't help but wonder what tapestry we are weaving now, and the stories it will tell in another hundred years.

The subjects of *Concerto* – Ravel (the composer), Wittgenstein (the pianist) and Princip (the assassin) – all seem too small (*even* Princip) to bear the weight of the troubles of their age. Along with their politicians, their generals, their neighbours, the families and their friends, they appear bound up in a *concerto* of ill-fated ideas: of nationalism and empire; racial and social Darwinism; the naval arms race; territorial losses in the Balkans; protection treaties; Germany's pervading fear of encirclement, and the mechanisms of industrialisation.

But it can be hard to see the tapestry when you're the one being woven into it, either through choice or complicity. And yet seated as we are, in the orchestra – together, *tutti* – there's a clear indication that we are the ones making the music, and that the tapestries wound throughout history are of our own making. Moreover, that we can put the baton down. We're taking our country back, we're making our country great again, and so on, and so on...

Bang.
We just loved our country...
A pianist plays.

BIOGRAPHIES





NICHOLAS MCCARTHY CONCERT PIANIST

Nicholas was born in 1989 without his right hand and only began to play the piano at the late age of 14 after being inspired by a friend play Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata. Nicholas went on to study at the prestigious Royal College of Music in London. His graduation in July 2012 drew press headlines around the world, being the only one-handed pianist to graduate from the Royal College of Music in its 130 year history. Nicholas is a champion of the dynamic and brave world of left hand alone repertoire, that first came into being in the early 19th Century and developed rapidly following the First World War as a result of the many injuries suffered on the Battle field. Paul Wittgenstein was responsible for its 20th Century developments with his commissions with Ravel. Prokofiev and Britten amongst others. Nicholas has toured internationally and his work features throughout national and international press. He regularly gives live performances on television and radio including BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, BBC television, Channel 4 and ITV.

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RYAN O'SHEA DEVISER & PERFORMER

Ryan is an emerging theatre maker and performer based in Bristol. He is in the process of developing a solo project, Sync, performed at Word of Warning's Emergency 2016 in Manchester. He is currently touring with Reckless Sleepers on their projects The Last Supper and Negative Space. A recent graduate of Contemporary Theatre and Performance at Manchester Metropolitan University, Ryan has worked with a wide range of artists including Spanish company El Conde de Toriffiel. In 2015, Ryan was assistant production manager of Flare Festival 2015, helping deliver a diverse range of theatre. Ryan facilities workshops and is interested in creating work that challenges play, deconstruction and authenticity. His theatre work questions how we sit, negotiate and find our way through this evertwisting, omnipresent maze known as popular culture.

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KATT PERRY DEVISER & PERFORMER

Katt is a performer and theatre maker currently based in Northamptonshire. She is a graduate from Manchester Metropolitan University after receiving a BA Hons in **Contemporary Theatre and** Performance. While studying, Katt had experience at the Axis Arts Centre, Flare Festival 2015 and working with Reckless Sleepers. Since graduating in 2016 she has started off her career as an artist collaborating on Concerto. Katt started performing when she was 8 years old through dance shows and competitions but this has transformed into theatre within the past five years. She is particularly interested in creating theatre work which deconstructs real life stories into sensorial experience for audiences.

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MICHAEL PINCHBECK ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Michael is a Nottingham-based writer and theatre maker. He co-founded Metro-Boulot-Dodo in 1997 after studying Theatre and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. He was commissioned by Nottingham Playhouse to write The White Album (2006) and The Ashes (2011). He premiered Bolero at Nottingham Playhouse as part of neat2014 before touring it to Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo supported by the British Council. He is currently making Concerto as a sequel to Bolero for UK and international touring. He recently showed The Trilogy for the last time at neat2016.

His work has been selected three times for the British Council's Edinburgh Showcase and features in the forthcoming Routledge publication, 21st Century Performance Reader. He has a Masters in Performance and Live Art from Nottingham Trent University, lectures in drama at the University of Lincoln and has recently completed a PhD at Loughborough University exploring the role of the dramaturg.

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ANNEKE VAN DE STEGE STAGE MANAGER

Anneke is a graduate of Loughborough University and is currently finishing an M.A. from Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. She started working with Michael as a technical intern on The Beginning in Edinburgh in 2013 and she has since worked on multiple other projects as his stage manager, including the international tour of Bolero. Other work includes: Cinderella (Little Wolf Ltd.), Crazy for You (Watermill Theatre), Hamlet (Creation Theatre), Untold Stories (Watermill Theatre), King Lear (Creation Theatre), Beauty and The Beast (Jordan Productions), The Ladvkillers (Watermill Theatre). Oresteia (Almeida Theatre), as well as a range of productions while studying. She moves to Amsterdam in January to train as a Production Assistant with Bos Theaterproducties.

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Artistic Director Michael Pinchbeck

Devisers & Performers Ryan O'Shea & Katt Perry

DramaturgsOllie Smith & Rachael Walton

Stage Manager Anneke van de Stege

Conductor Paul Jenkins

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