

Concerto by Michael Pinchbeck Tour Pack



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SHOW PROFILE



A conductor will become an assassin, an audience will become an orchestra and a pianist will play.

A unique musical experience inspired by Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand featuring world-renowned 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. The assassin that triggered that conflict, Gavrilo Princip, was kept in shackles in prison in Terezin, his withered arm tied up with piano wire, fading into the snow. Unravelling narratives surround this piece of music and together they weave a true story that spans 100 years. Michael Pinchbeck's Concerto is a deconstructed re-orchestrated exploration of the legacy of war and the healing power of music that marks the centenary of World War One. Musical manuscript will fall from the sky like snow on a battlefield. A conductor will become an assassin. An audience will become an orchestra. And a pianist will play.

Show Trailer

<http://bit.ly/concertotrailer>

Technical

Concerto is performed on a small raised stage (2m x 2m) and requires a grand piano next to the stage. A projector is required to show video on the floor in front of the stage. There are three mics and sound is played from a laptop to the venue PA. The audience are seated as if in an orchestra with music stands in front of their chairs.

Length

65 mins. (no interval)

Performers / Performers on tour

4

Min. performance area

8m (w) x 6m (d)

Get in

One day

Stage set-up

End on with onstage loose seating for 40 people approx.

Equipment

Projector, three microphones and stands, one 2m x 2m rostrum, three piano stools, grand piano. 20 music stands if available. Full details supplied on request.

ABOUT MICHAEL PINCHBECK



Michael Pinchbeck is a writer, live artist and theatre-maker based in Nottingham. His work weaves together different threads into a dynamic narrative that operates across time and space. He makes innovative structures for storytelling. He co-founded Metro-Boulot-Dodo in 1997 after studying Theatre and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. He left MBD to make a five-year live art project - The Long and Winding Road (2004-09) - that toured to ICA (London), Ikon (Birmingham) and The Bluecoat (Liverpool). He was commissioned by Nottingham Playhouse to write The White Album (2006) and The Ashes (2011). He premiered Bolero (2014) at Nottingham Playhouse as part of neat2014 before touring it to Bosnia & Herzegovina and Kosovo supported by the British Council.

Michael is currently touring Concerto as a sequel to Bolero for national and international touring. It is a piece that tells a positive narrative about disability, and features the only one handed pianist to have graduated from the Royal College of Music. Michael has recently finished touring

an immersive slideshow, The man who flew into space from his apartment (2015). His work has been selected four times for the biennial British Council's Edinburgh Showcase. He has a Masters in Performance and Live Art from Nottingham Trent University and lectures in drama at the University of Lincoln. Michael recently completed a PhD at Loughborough University exploring the role of the dramaturg.

michaelpinchbeck.co.uk

“Michael Pinchbeck is a terrific theatre-maker”

The Guardian



Unique Selling Points

- Music and theatre
- Maurice Ravel
- Nicholas McCarthy - unique performer
- Interesting and unknown narrative
- First World War connection
- Classical music
- Somewhere between concert and performance

Audience

- Metroculturals / Urban Adventurers
- Appealing to theatre and music audiences
- Older audience for classical music
- Locals interested in classical music
- World War One enthusiasts/interest
- Ravel fans
- Local Disabled associations/amputees
- Charities e.g. Help For Heroes help promote

Michael Pinchbeck's work is suitable for audiences who attend work by Action Hero, Chris Thorpe, Tim Crouch, Andy Smith, Emma Bennett, Chris Goode, Deborah Pearson, Chris Brett-Bailey, Lone Twin, Reckless Sleepers, Forced Entertainment, Uninvited Guests, Goat Island and Third Angel etc.

'... beautifully structured post-modernist piece... hugely entertaining'

The Guardian
on *The End*, 2010

Show programme available at bit.ly/concertprogramme

WRAPAROUND ACTIVITY

The cast and crew of *Concerto* are available to deliver workshops around the themes of the show. Michael Pinchbeck has led theatre workshops in Cologne, Pristina, Riga, San Jose and Sarajevo. He is also an educator who has taught at MMU Cheshire, University of Lincoln and University of Chester.

Michael's performance work has been developed as art of his PhD exploring dramaturgy. It is the starting point for educational workshops that weave together research and practice, absence and presence, the writing of performance and the performance of writing, to ask how we perform writing and how writing performs. Stemming from interest in theatrical re-enactment and reliving real life events, Michael invites participants to explore their memories of performance. Workshops explore the notion of a theatrical 'signature' and 'handwriting' in devised work to ask whether autobiography might meet the autograph or personality might meet the page. Participants are introduced to a methodology that short-circuits notions of how

narrative normally operates and locates a place somewhere between offstage and onstage, past and present, fact and fiction.

Michael presents exercises used to develop his trilogy of performances (*The Beginning, The Middle, The End*) to introduce a deeper understanding of the possibilities of experimentation in performance, combining choreography of text and movement with repetition, collision and echo. He also introduces the way in which working with music can inform the dramaturgy of devised performance as explored in 'The Ravel Triptych' (*Bolero, Concerto, Solo* etc.). Workshops for *Concerto* take apart the key motifs from the show: The conductor, the pianist and the assassin and explore how they can be woven together using music, movement and text.



TESTIMONIES

“Thank you very much for offering this workshop, it is something which our membership was very excited about. Thanks again for the opportunity to see your work last week. All the feedback I heard was very positive and I think the skills will be very useful.”

*Workshop
Niamh Caines, New Theatre Nottingham*

“I enjoyed it very much... I really like its tone, its very beautiful weave, and its embracing of the performativity of an orchestral concert. Being an orchestra is very much about collective creation, about highly skilled individuals working together to create a harmony, and there is something fascinating about seeing a theatre audience (and concert audience) as that.”

*Performance
Neil Mackenzie, Axis Arts Centre/Flare Festival*

“Engaging and stylistically very interesting. Fascinating and provocative. Innovative, moving and thought-provoking. A sharp, neatly composed piece, intertwining music, war and performance. Emotional, gorgeous, organised, chaotic. A complete theatrical experience. The live piece at the end was unexpected and stunning.”

*Performance
Audience Member*

PROGRAMME NOTES



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 – its 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

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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.

'A beautiful love letter to theatre...'

*Exeunt Magazine
on The Beginning, 2012*



PROGRAMME NOTES

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

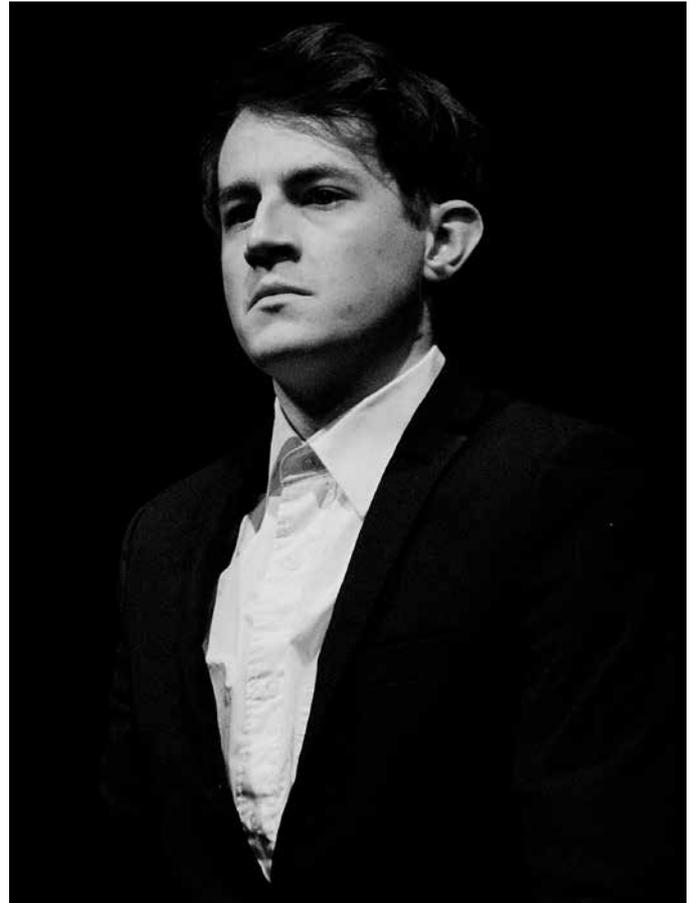
Maurice Ravel was commissioned to compose Piano Concerto for the Left Hand by Paul Wittgenstein, a concert pianist who had lost his right arm after it was badly wounded whilst fighting at the Russian front in 1914. Wittgenstein, older brother to philosopher Ludwig, subsequently commissioned several composers 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

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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 intertextuality, like jazz, to encourage dialogue, reinterpretation and transformation.

A key example of this intertextual 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.



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Commissioned by Lincoln Performing Arts Centre, Attenborough Arts Centre and Nottingham Lakeside Arts. Supported using public funding by Arts Council England.



Supported using public funding by
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