Concerto
by Michael Pinchbeck
Tour Pack

‘Concerto was genuinely one of the best things I’ve been able to be a part of since I took on the event programming at Attenborough Arts Centre’

John Kirby, Programmer
Concerto
by Michael Pinchbeck

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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 Terezín, 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

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.
Supported by Arts Council England, we are now able to offer a full orchestra version of Concerto. This was premiered on 28 October 2017 at Attenborough Arts Centre (Leicester) featuring the University of Leicester Orchestra and the Knighton Chamber Orchestra.

We are happy to work with you and a local amateur or professional orchestra to create a bespoke version of the piece for your venue or an alternative space in your city that can accommodate both an orchestra and an audience. This is a unique theatrical experience and becomes event theatre with over 60 people onstage. We would recommend that the event features in your music and theatre listings in all venue publicity.

The orchestra plays Concerto for the Left Hand with the concert pianist, Nicholas McCarthy, and also other pieces by Ravel e.g. Pavane pour une enfant defunte. There are moments of interaction when the percussionist strikes a gong to represent shell shock and the orchestra eat apples, rip scores and tap pencils on music stands etc. We can rehearse this on the day of the show so the cost of working with the orchestra should not exceed a daily rate.

The show tells the story of a 1928 Ravel piano concerto, the characters involved in it and the power of music to overcome tragedy. It marks the centenary of the end of World War One and we invite the audience to become the orchestra. The idea is that it becomes an immersive concert and collides the genres of classical music and contemporary theatre.

‘Ravel’s biography in all its lyrical poetry of the lost’

Leicester Mercury
There are two touring versions of the show, both featuring world-renowned, one-handed pianist, Nicholas McCarthy. The piece explores music, war and disability and is currently touring with and without an orchestra. There are trailers for both versions online here:

**Concerto 1.0 (Solo pianist)**
michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/c1

**Concerto 2.0 (Full orchestra)**
michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/c2

Full length show videos here:

**Concerto 1.0 (Full length version)**
michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/c1full

**Concerto 2.0 (Full length version)**
michaelpinchbeck.co.uk/c2full

‘Intelligent and intellectual, neat and messy, highly authored and highly collaborative’

Alexander Kelly, Third Angel

‘The pianist is extraordinary. What a talent! I had tears in my eyes. The live performance at the end blew me away’

Natalie Raven, Artist
Michael Pinchbeck is a writer, live artist and theatre-maker based in Nottingham. His work weaves together different threads into a dynamic narrative, creating 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 pursue 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.

Supported by Arts Council England, Michael is currently touring Concerto as a sequel to Bolero. Working with Ollie Smith, he has made a third piece in 'The Ravel Triptych', Solo, commissioned by Frequency 2017.

Other notable projects include The Trilogy (2014) and an immersive slideshow, The man who flew into space from his apartment (2015). His work has been selected four times for the British Council’s Edinburgh Showcase. He has a Masters in Performance and Live Art from Nottingham Trent University and a PhD from Loughborough University exploring the role of the dramaturg. He is a Principal Lecturer (Professional Practice) and MA Theatre Programme Leader at the University of Lincoln and his work features in the forthcoming Routledge publication, Twenty First Century Performance Reader.

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
- Disabled People’s Organisations
- Charities e.g. Help For Heroes, Amnesty etc.
- Deaf audiences - Concerto BSL interpreted

Michael Pinchbeck’s work attracts 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 and Third Angel. The full orchestra version might appeal to audiences who enjoyed Amadeus at the National Theatre, 1927’s work with orchestras and sleepdog’s The Bullet and the Bass Trombone.

‘... beautifully structured post-modernist piece... hugely entertaining’

The Guardian
on The End, 2010

Show programme available at bit.ly/concertoprogramme
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, the University of Salford, University of Lincoln and University of Chester.

Michael's performance work has been developed as part 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.
“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
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
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
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.

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
PROGRAMME NOTES

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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