



London Contemporary Orchestra Goes to Church

The London Contemporary Orchestra presented a concert in a church in London, aiming to give the audience an intimate and moving experience of new music.

Evaluation and photos by Sayaka Sakashita



Background

London Contemporary Orchestra draws together London's brightest young talent to explore and promote new music to an increasingly wide audience. LCO's aim is to stimulate and enlighten audiences through dynamic performances and a fresh approach.

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LCO's aim in programming events is to showcase a broad cross-section of musical styles and genres. As a result the orchestra is able to draw in a wide range of listeners who will encounter a diversity of new music that they might otherwise not experience. One of the LCO's strengths is the ability to draw in large crowds to hear uncompromising programmes in alternative venues including the Roundhouse, The Old Vic Tunnels, Village Underground, and festivals as diverse as Latitude and Glastonbury.

Concept

London Contemporary Orchestra (LCO) presented a concert at Holy Trinity Church in Sloane Square, Chelsea, London as part of the InTRANSIT festival, which is 'A festival of new work responding to and reflecting the unique environment and character of Kensington and Chelsea'.¹ The aim of this concert is to make the audience feel an ultimate connection with melody and witness something quite spiritual and moving in the intimate and elevating surroundings of Holy Trinity Church. The LCO performed music from British composers Jonathan Harvey and William Byrd, and new work from Edmund Finnis. This report will show the author's findings from observation of their advertisement and the reaction of the audience during the concert.

Advertisement

Four to two weeks before the concert, LCO started advertising the event on their Facebook page, Twitter and their website, corresponding to the InTRANSIT festival website which posted details of the concert. Their post on Facebook was shared several times including by one of the composers himself and LCO's Twitter account ([@LCOOrchestra](#)) posted several times about the concert and the composers' work to raise attention.

The concert venue Holy Trinity Church also contributed to efforts to attract an audience by sharing a link of the InTRANSIT festival website on their 'News and Events' page (see **Image 1**), and distributing a leaflet about the festival from their desk at the church entrance. These leaflets proved popular and were already gone when the author visited four days before the concert.

Image 1: A screenshot of the website for Holy Trinity Church² and the Church's appearance

1

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, 'InTRANSIT', 2014,
<<http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/subsites/intransit.aspx>> [accessed 28 August 2014].

2

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As for the recognisability of the festival, the author asked two places that are supposed to be knowledgeable about the area how much they knew of the upcoming concert. The author asked for information at the following places.

- Reception of Sloane Square Hotel (250 feet from the Church)
- Travel Information Centre in Victoria station (0.7 mile from the Church)

Although the festival was in its eighth year, neither of them were aware of the festival or the concert. The reason for this could be that they were not in charge of that type of information (a receptionist in the Victoria Travel Information Centre said they were in charge of information regarding direction and theatres only.) Also, the festival may not be targeting sightseers but targeting people who already know the festival, know their favourite artists performing in the festival, or happen to visit the venue by chance.

At the concert

General information

The concert started at 8pm and finished at around 9pm.

Roughly 60 people came and the gender balance was 50:50. The majority of them were people in their 20s to 40s. 5-10% of the people looked older than 60. All members of the audience had arrived

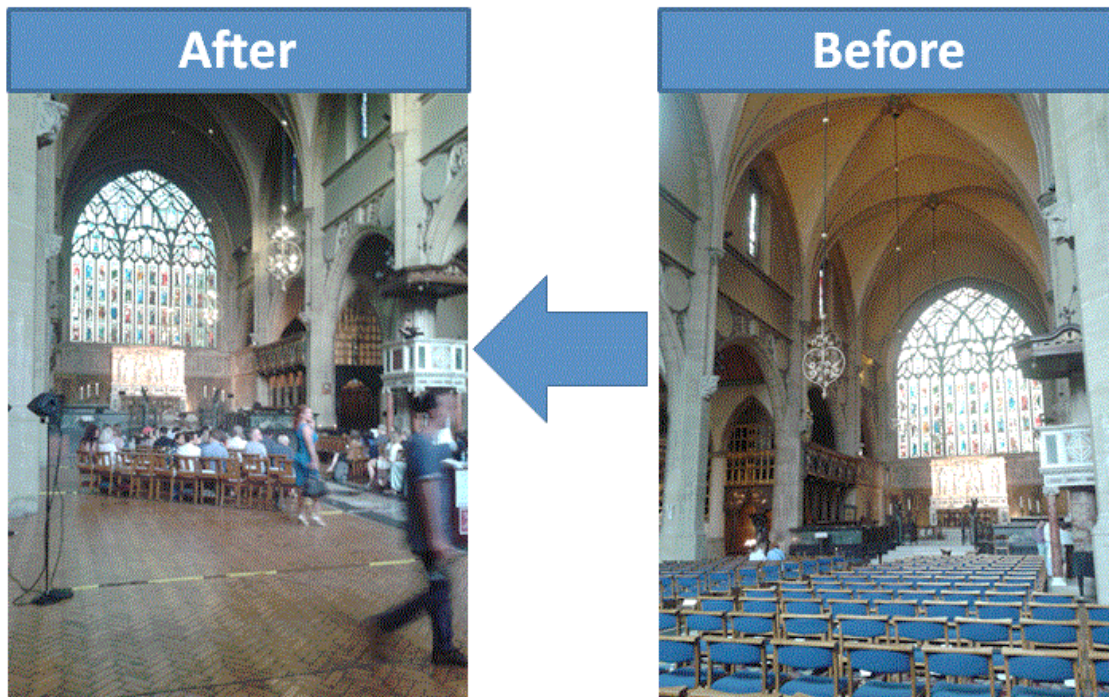
Holy Trinity Church, 'News and Events', 2014,
<<http://www.holytrinitysloanesquare.co.uk/news.php>> [accessed 19 July 2014].

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before the start time except four people who arrived during the concert. Although many people came in groups of two to three people, more than five people came on their own.

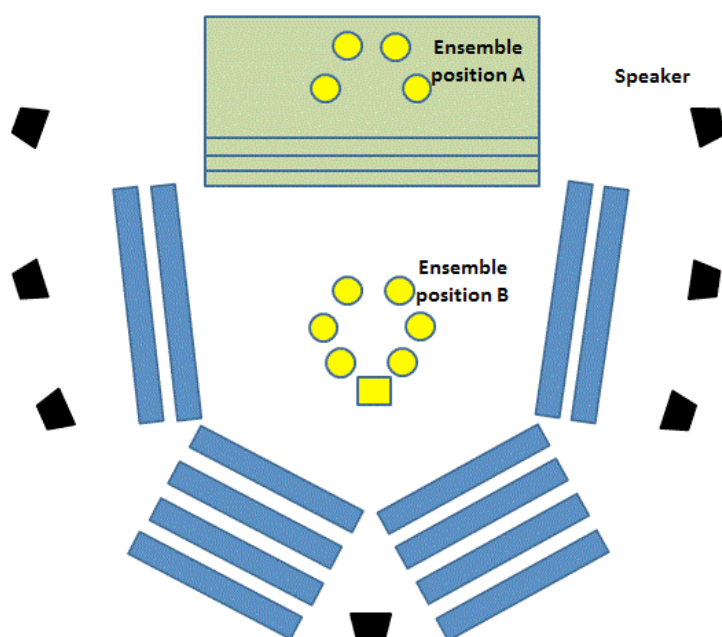
As for the seating arrangements, usually the Church arranges chairs in parallel lines (see **Image 2**). LCO changed the seating arrangements in order to make them more appropriate for an intimate chamber orchestra concert.

Image 2: Before and after the seating arrangement



As can be seen in **Image 3**, LCO used the stage as two areas. They changed the place of performance depending on the songs. The green stage in **Image 3** is a few steps higher than the audience seating. It is particularly worth noting that they installed many speakers around the audience seating. As far as the author could see, there were seven speakers and apparently there were more on the upper side of the Church, which will be described later.

Image 3: Stage plan (*it could be not fully precise)



Audience observation

The concert consisted of eight songs. The description of each song is referred to in the concert's programme, which was distributed at the venue.

1. Byrd (arr. Hugh Brunt) Mass for Four Voices: Kyrie

The first song started in position A in **Image 3**. As soon as the song began, the audience seemed to concentrate all of their attention on each sound made by the performers. Some people's brows came down, some dropped their gaze to the ground, and some even closed their eyes.

2. Jonathan Harvey Ricercare una Melodia (UK premiere)

When Robert Ames (viola) came down to position B and started a song that was in correspondence with the other, the eyes of some in the audience wandered between them as if they were following the sound.

As the song gradually became Ames' solo, the atmosphere was very intense. Some people gazed at the decoration of the church carefully while listening to the music, some people crossed their arms and were hunching over as if they were trying to look deep inside of themselves.

3. Byrd Mass for Four Voices: Gloria

A Russian lady in her 20s later told the author that she especially liked the way LCO mixed traditional music and new music. Indeed LCO presented traditionally based music and contemporary

music alternately in this concert. After this third song based on traditional music, there was a short, awkward moment of wondering at the timing of the applause (the author's impression).

4. **Edmund Finnis** Relative Colour (UK professional premiere)

Hugh Brunt (conductor) came down and initiated music with new, rather comical sounds of string instruments: sounds like jumping, sneezing and falling. The audience atmosphere changed a little. Their expressions softened and some even smiled. As the melody became hypnotizing, some in the audience were nodding their heads along with the rhythm. Some were leaning forward. A woman in her 20s was looking around curiously as if she was enjoying the magical atmosphere generated by the new sounds and the historical church. Gradually frowning faces appeared again and the atmosphere became quiet and heavy.

5. **Jonathan Harvey** Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco

This song was formed by several instruments' sound including bells and voice of choir. Various sounds came from different speakers surrounding the audience (see **Image 3**). At first, many members of the audience looked this way and that way to identify the source of the sounds. The voices like angels came over their shoulder one moment and the next moment from above. The sound was stereoscopic due to the location of speakers and the acoustics of the church. Soon the members of the audience stopped looking around and steadily focused on the music. A Russian lady later described the experience as 'a little bit creepy' because the voice sounded real and it gave her the illusion of the sculptures of angels and saints making the sounds.

6. **Byrd** Mass for Four Voices: Sanctus & Benedictus

The time was past 7:30pm and it was getting dark. The audience was still concentrating steadily on the music.

7. **Edmund Finnis** Across White Air(world premiere, LCO commission)

A Japanese lady in her 40s later told the author that she never thought cello could make such a sound. She also mentioned that because she could not anticipate what kind of sound was to come next, contemporary music is very unpredictable and it makes her curious about how conductors and players memorise songs and play, understanding precisely the composer's intent. It was notable that Oliver Coates (cello), who played this song as a solo, was dressed in relatively casual clothes, despite other musicians being in formal dress.

8. **Byrd** Mass for Four Voices: Agnus Dei

As the last number finished, the church filled with great applause.

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After the concert, as can be seen from **Image 4**, more than 40% of people remained and shared their impressions and opinions with their companions.

Image 4: After the concert



Conclusion

As a conclusion, although there were some empty seats, the concert was well-attended (it looked like more than 80%). LCO's intention of making this concert an 'intimate chamber concert' was well served by re-arranging the audience seats. During the concert, the performing musicians moved their position depending on the music they played, and that could convey to the audience an impression of movement and the shift of distance. This impression had been even better established by the stereoscopic sound generated by a number of speakers installed in various positions around the stage. The unusual venue and the mixture of musicians' casual clothes and formal clothes indicate the various ways of understanding and participating in the world of contemporary music, which can be presented through methods ranging from the mundane to the unusual.

From observing the audience, though the posture was different between individuals, the most common reaction was listening very carefully to the music as if they were trying to understand the hidden meaning in each sound. As for the marketing, it worked effectively as far as seeing the result, but it could be more effective in attracting various customers if the festival cooperated with places such as hotels and tourist centres close to the venue in order to increase recognition. As mentioned earlier, more than a small number of people remained and shared their thoughts about the concert with company. Therefore, it is highly likely that the audience would volunteer spare time to answer a questionnaire or participate in a focus group to share their views on LCO's further work in the future.

Facts

Ensemble: London Contemporary Orchestra presents:

Concert: ACROSS WHITE AIR at the InTRANSIT Festival

Venue: Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square, Chelsea, London, England

Date and time: Wednesday July 23rd 2014, 8pm

Attendees: 60

Programme:

Byrd (arr. Hugh Brunt): *Mass for Four Voices: Kyrie*

Jonathan Harvey: *Ricercare una Melodia* (UK premiere)

Byrd: *Mass for Four Voices: Gloria*

Edmund Finnis: *Relative Colour* (UK professional premiere)

Jonathan Harvey: *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco*

Byrd: *Mass for Four Voices: Sanctus & Benedictus*

Edmund Finnis: *Across White Air* (world premiere, LCO commission)

Byrd: *Mass for Four Voices: Agnus Dei*

Further information: <http://www.lcorchestra.co.uk/>