

## Press Release

For release: Monday 8 February 2016



### Birmingham Contemporary Music Group at CrossCurrents Festival

Saturday 20 February at 7.30pm

Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building, University of Birmingham

- 11 world premieres inspired by Luciano Berio's *Folk Songs*, including new songs by Judith Weir, Charlotte Bray, Richard Baker, Howard Skempton and Joe Cutler
- World premiere of Michael Zev Gordon's *Seize the Day*  
(Commissioned via BCMG Sound Investment).

In the finale to **CrossCurrents**, a new nine-day University of Birmingham festival, **Birmingham Contemporary Music Group** features no fewer than twelve World premieres in a mouth-watering array of new music at the University's Bramall Music Building.

CrossCurrents Festival opens on 12 February with a performance of Luciano Berio's *Folk Songs* by the New Music Ensemble, and this BCMG programme brings the festival full circle, with 11 specially commissioned new songs inspired by *Folk Songs* from some of the UK's most respected composers, including Master of the Queen's music, **Judith Weir**, **Richard Baker** and Birmingham Conservatoire alumnus/former SAM/BCMG Apprentice Composer-in-Residence, **Charlotte Bray**, and compositional staff at the University of Birmingham and Birmingham Conservatoire, including **Howard Skempton**, **Joe Cutler** and director of BEAST, **Scott Wilson**. **Richard Baker** conducts, and mezzo soprano **Lucy Schauer** is the soloist in a programme that also features a new work by **Michael Zev Gordon**, *Seize the Day*, commissioned via BCMG's pioneering 'crowd-funding' scheme, *Sound Investment*. The packed programme also features works by **Tansy Davies**, **Judith Weir**, **Richard Baker**, **Morton Feldman's** *The Viola in My Life II*, with soloist **Christopher Yates**, and two works by Berio, including pianist **Siwan Rhys** in *Erdenklavier*.

Berio wrote *Folk Songs* in 1964 as a tribute to the "artistry and vocal intelligence" of mezzo-soprano Cathy Berberian (to whom he was married from 1950-1964). Writing about the work, Berio commented: "It is an anthology of eleven folk songs of various origins (United States, Armenia, France, Sicily, Sardinia, etc.), chosen from old records, printed anthologies, or heard sung from folk musicians and friends. I have given the songs a new rhythmic and harmonic interpretation: in a way, I have recomposed them. The instrumental part has an important function: it is meant to underline and comment on the expressive and cultural roots of each song. Such roots signify not only the ethnic origins of the songs but also the history of the authentic uses that have been made of them".

Composers discuss their varying approaches to writing for this new 'folk songs' collection in a pre-concert talk at 6.30pm.

**Michael Zev Gordon's** relationship with BCMG goes back 15 years, with premieres of his cantata *Song* in 1999, and ensemble work, *by the edge of a forest of desires*, in 2000. Professor of Composition at Birmingham University (and a former pupil of Franco Donatoni), he says of his new work for ensemble, *Seize the Day*: "The title of my piece is the translation of the Latin maxim *Carpe*

*diem - an injunction to jump into life and make the most of it. Easier said than done, though. And in the background, there also lies the novella Seize the Day, by Saul Bellow, which details a single day of crisis in a man's life, ending in a kind of revelatory moment of realisation about his existence, and how he is squandering it. There are two briefish moments in my piece, one early on, one near the end, where the bubbling activity gives way to something stiller and questioning. However, for the most part, the interlocking lines, rhythmic layerings and bright harmonic colours push forward, dynamically and positively. "*

Tickets, priced £14, £10, £5 students, £1 under 16s, are available from: [www.shop.bham.co.uk](http://www.shop.bham.co.uk), or on the door.

**About CrossCurrents Festival 12-20 February, University of Birmingham**

CrossCurrents presents concerts interspersed with workshops, talks, foyer performances and exhibitions. For full concert and events listings, including ticket prices, please go to:  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk/crosscurrents](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/crosscurrents)      [www.facebook.com/CCmusicfestival/](http://www.facebook.com/CCmusicfestival/)

**Further press information about Birmingham Contemporary Music Group from:**

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**Further press information about CrossCurrent Festival, and press tickets from:**

Joanne Sweet, Head of University Music and Concerts on 0121 414 5791 [J.E.Sweet@bham.ac.uk](mailto:J.E.Sweet@bham.ac.uk)

## **Concert programme**

**Richard Baker** *conductor*

**Lucy Schauer\*** *mezzo soprano*

**Christopher Yates+** *viola*

**Siwan Rhys ~** *piano*

### **Berio**

Erdenklavier ~

Wasserklavier

### **Tansy Davies**

grind show (Integra commission)

### **Judith Weir**

Distance and Enchantment

On Buying a Horse\*

Blackbirds and Thrushes\*

### **Feldman**

The Viola in My Life II+

### **Richard Baker**

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### **Michael Zev Gordon**

Seize the Day (world premiere/BCMG Sound

Investment commission)

### **Various composers#**

CrossCurrents\* (world premiere)

#Judith Weir, Richard Baker, Charlotte Bray, Joe Cutler, Howard Skempton, Ed Bennett, Michael Zev Gordon, Scott Wilson, Daria Kwiatkowska, Federico Favali, Patrick Giguère