

DON'T BE FRIGHTENED, MR GOULD IS HERE

Adam Henry, Hongyan, Sofia Hultén, Jonna Kina, Claudio Parmiggiani,
Benoît Platéus, Evariste Richer, Thu Van Tran

6 March - 11 April 2020

Don't be frightened, Mr Gould is here is a phrase spoken by Leonard Bernstein during a brief talk given as an introduction to Brahms's first piano concerto which he conducted on 6 April 1962 at Carnegie Hall in New York. Bernstein was speaking to announce to the audience that there was a serious **difference of opinion** between the soloist, Glenn Gould - the famous Canadian virtuoso and him. Their conception of the tempo at which the concerto should be played was radically different: Gould lengthened the concerto in a way that was most unusual in Bernstein's view. Those remarks continue to fuel commentaries today.

Referring to these remarks to the audience raises a number of questions about the basic concept of **artistic interpretation**. How to play a work written by someone else in a personal way? How far should one go? How can one convey the emotion of another person? What is involved in comprehending and redistribution of intensity, an ambiance, a colour?

In the **left-hand room**, the work *Arirang Partition* by **Thu Van Tran** symbolises the divergence of opinions about a folk song dating back to when Korea was united. The artist has modified a piano in two radically different ways: the left side is sanded down and left bare, whereas the right side is finely crafted and reveals stylized motifs drawn from traditional Korean iconography. Nowadays, North Korea and South Korea both lay claim to this music, and each country has made it a symbol of its national identity. In the North, historical frescoes in the form of moving paintings in stadia, used as Party propaganda tools, are called Arirang. In the South, Arirang has continued to indicate the folk song, as well as being the name of a national television channel and of a traditional cake. The painting by **Adam Henry** *And Per Se And* is a painting that reproduces dozens of times the ampersand (&), the typographical character that represents the conjunction 'and'. To create a work, a creator and a receiver are required. The 'and' is essential for communication and interpretation. The reading of this painting implies a metaphor of infinite possibilities with multiple optical effects: by looking at it attentively, one can no longer see which symbol is in front of its shadow. Is the shadow coloured? Is it black? *L'Horizon des événements* (The Horizon of Events) by **Evariste Richer** (term borrowed from the vocabulary of astrophysics which refers to black holes) is a work which seems to have been drawn from a Magritte painting, as the clash of the two elements is so powerful. The pétanque balls obstruct the tuba in a total paradox. The weight of the work is also in contrast with the lightweight and ethereal appearance of the composition by **Claudio Parmiggiani** representing an absent violin. This *delocazione*, in its gradations of grey, seems to make the ineffable visible. This is a Parmiggiani drawing dating back to 1977 and which represents a multicoloured violin placed on an easel, inextricably linking painting and music. Linking colours to sound is a wonderful synaesthesia. The relationship to time, which pervades all of Parmiggiani's work, is also perceptible in the almost naïve painting by Chinese artist Hongyan which depicts a clock in the sky.

In the **right-hand room**, the film *Arr. for a scene* by Finnish artist **Jonna Kina** evokes a very special interpretation of one of the best-known film scenes (shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*). The two people filmed are post-production sound effects technicians ('Foley artists') and are recreating the sound effects of this iconic scene while watching images from the film which the viewer never sees. The audience sees the intense concentration of the two technicians but never gets to see an image from the film that they are screening. So it is a film about a film, inverse cinema or *mis en abîme*, with a generous dash of humour. On the wall, three

scripts explore the structures and form of the film sound, converted into visual language.

The **rear room** houses recent work by **Benoît Platéus**, counterbalanced by two works by **Claudio Parmiggiani** which deal with time and beauty, melancholy and a deathly silence. As for the new paintings by Platéus, we can see a perfect example of interpretation. Taking as his starting point an engraving by Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947), Platéus enlarges, moves, breaks down, and tilts the original image into a different register. In a paradoxical movement, he unravels and re-assembles at the same time. While respecting Bonnard's cutting here and there, Platéus dematerialises, makes aesthetic alterations, plays with flat surfaces and puts colour where there was none. In an alchemy of his very own, he combines the familiar and the singular. The image becomes a painting. The use of colours, very intricate backgrounds and rapid brushstrokes turn a banal vision into something hypnotic. He reproduces an almost trivial view of a park as an intriguing or even worrying scene.

In the video *Fuck it up and Start again* being shown in the **Wunderkammer**, Berlin-based Swedish artist **Sofia Hultén** smashes a guitar in a spotless space in seven sequences. After each destruction, this guitar is patiently repaired, out of shot, and glued back together by the artist, evoking the myth of Sisyphus. The sequences follow on from each other, and show the artist going to town on the instrument and unrelentingly smashing it to pieces. The violence of this action is counter-balanced by the calm required to meticulously re-assemble the instrument. Sofia Hultén develops a rehabilitation process of the object in her work, and bases it on repeated steps to make and unmake, re-make and re-unmake.

“Don't be frightened. Mr. Gould is here. He will appear in a moment. I'm not, um, as you know, in the habit of speaking on any concert except the Thursday night previews, but a curious situation has arisen, which merits, I think, a word or two. You are about to hear a rather, shall we say, unorthodox performance of the Brahms D Minor Concerto, a performance distinctly different from any I've ever heard, or even dreamt of for that matter, in its remarkably broad tempi and its frequent departures from Brahms' dynamic indications. I cannot say I am in total agreement with Mr. Gould's conception and this raises the interesting question: «What am I doing conducting it?» I'm conducting it because Mr. Gould is so valid and serious an artist that I must take seriously anything he conceives in good faith and his conception is interesting enough so that I feel you should hear it, too.

But the age old question still remains: «In a concerto, who is the boss; the soloist or the conductor?» The answer is, of course, sometimes one, sometimes the other, depending on the people involved. But almost always, the two manage to get together by persuasion or charm or even threats to achieve a unified performance. I have only once before in my life had to submit to a soloist's wholly new and incompatible concept and that was the last time I accompanied Mr. Gould. (The audience roared with laughter at this.) But, but this time the discrepancies between our views are so great that I feel I must make this small disclaimer. Then why, to repeat the question, am I conducting it? Why do I not make a minor scandal — get a substitute soloist, or let an assistant conduct? Because I am fascinated, glad to have the chance for a new look at this much-played work; Because, what's more, there are moments in Mr. Gould's performance that emerge with astonishing freshness and conviction. Thirdly, because we can all learn something from this extraordinary artist, who is a thinking performer, and finally because there is in music what Dimitri Mitropoulos used to call «the sportive element», that factor of curiosity, adventure, experiment, and I can assure you that it has been an adventure this week collaborating with Mr. Gould on this Brahms concerto and it's in this spirit of adventure that we now present it to you.”

Leonard Bernstein, 6 April 1962, Carnegie Hall, New York