Durham University

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Durham University's professional concert series

Wednesday 21st January 2026 | 7.30pm
Department of Music, Durham

lettura del labirinto

Richard Rijnvos
lettura del labirinto

for harpsichord & video (2024)

[1] Castello
[2] Cannaregio
[3] Santa Croce
[4] San Polo
[5] San Marco
[6] Dorsoduro

Jane Chapman *harpsichord*

Italo Calvino's fantastical novel *Invisible Cities* (1972) is a frame story in which the common thread is a tireless conversation between Kublai Khan and Marco Polo. The second, more emphasized narrative is a set of prose poems, in which the young merchant describes his travels, regaling the Tartar emperor with an ornate series of bite-sized fables. Many evenings have passed when eventually the Khan confronts the Venetian with the question why he does not include his home city. Marco Polo responds by saying: 'every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice.' By dividing the chapters into eleven thematic groups of five each, the book portrays a total of fifty-five fictitious cities, ingeniously fabricating a vast labyrinth for the mind.

By way of homage to Calvino, *lettura del labirinto* ('reading the labyrinth') aspires to create a parallel universe by fathoming the map of Venice, itself a staggering warren of alleys, bridges and little squares. The work depicts a walk through all six neighbourhoods ('sestieri'), starting at the eastern corner of Castello and ending near the western edge of Dorsoduro. During this so-called Eulerian trail any feature on the map is visited only once, while crossing the same path twice is avoided. Along the way we pause at fifty-five locations: 39 'campi', Piazza San Marco, another 14 'campi' and 1 'ultima fermata'. Whereas some squares look deceivingly similar, as if triggering a game of spot the differences, others have distinct, sometimes even unique characteristics: the leaning bell tower of San Pietro, the spiral staircase of the Palazzo Contarini del Bovolo, the striking symmetry of the Procuratie Vecchie and the Procuratie Nuove, the Ponte dei Pugni just off Campo San Barnaba, to name just a few. And although these features are not fictional, their musical interpretation is imaginary: a collection of miniatures, evoking a feeling of getting lost and forever being incarcerated in an urban maze.

Jane Chapman is at the forefront of creating and inspiring new music for harpsichord. She has premiered over 200 solo, chamber and electroacoustic works for the instrument. Equally passionate about baroque and contemporary music, she has collaborated with ground-breaking composers, artists and dancers, working with musicians from the worlds of Indian music, jazz, and the avant-garde. Through her innovative performances, she aims to bring the harpsichord to a wider public, and to combine repertoire in ways that engage and challenge her audiences. "Her progressive spirit and comprehensive technique have inspired composers to forge new parameters and sound worlds for the harpsichord with works of unprecedented musical and technological scope" (*Harpsichord & Fortepiano*).

Described as "stylish and eloquent" by *The Times*, Jane's recordings and recitals reveal both a scholarly and inventive approach to the baroque repertoire. Her CDs of 18th-century English music, *The Lady's Banquet,* and of the 17th-century French *Bauyn Manuscript,* offered the first extensive overviews of important sources previously unexplored on disc and were both highly acclaimed.

Her recording of *The Oriental Miscellany,* the first published transcription of Indian music in Western notation for harpsichord, was awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik for keyboard. Her performance of Berio's *Rounds*, part of a compilation of his works, was New York Times pick of the year and awarded the Preis der Deutschen Schallplatten Kritik. Recent and forthcoming discs include *Tears no More* by Roxanna Panufnik, *lettura del labirinto* by Richard Rijnvos, and *Divertissements* by Tom Armstrong in collaboration with Simon Zagorski-Thomas.

Jane received a British Council scholarship to study harpsichord with Ton Koopman at the Amsterdam Conservatory. She is harpsichord professor at the Royal College of Music, and was Turner Sims Fellow at the University of Southampton and artist in residence and King's College London, supported by the Leverhulme Trust. She is an Honorary Fellow of Dartington College of Arts, and an Honorary Member of the Royal College of Music.

Richard Rijnvos (1964, Netherlands) is known for a variety of extramusical influences, both by writers (Samuel Beckett and Italo Calvino) as well as visual artists (Joseph Beuys and Richard Serra). Among contemporary composers he admires Morton Feldman, John Cage, Aldo Clementi, and Luc Ferrari. In 2010-11 he was composer-in-residence with the Netherlands Broadcasting Music Center, followed by a 6-year residency with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam. In the year 2000 he was awarded the Matthijs Vermeulen Prize (the most prestigious award for composers from the Netherlands), and once again in 2011. His music has been performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Residentie Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Ensemble Intercontemporain, Brussels Philharmonic, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Gyeonggi Philharmonic Orchestra, and many others.

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