University of Birmingham

Professor Michael Zev Gordon

Professor of Composition

Department of Music (/schools/lcahm/departments/music/index.aspx)

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About

I am a composer, principally of instrumental and vocal music. I have written for a wide variety of forces and genres, from orchestral work and chamber opera to solo work and song.

Biography

Before coming to Birmingham, I taught composition at the University of Southampton and at the Royal College of Music. My works have been performed by many leading artists, including Britten Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and EXAUDI. Awards for composition include a 2004 Prix Italia for *A Pebble in the Pond*, a large-scale radiophonic work on the subject of memory; and twice winner of the choral category of the British Composer Awards in 2008 and 2011, the last for *Allele* for 40 voices – on the subject of music and genes.

In recent years, I have been featured composer at the Park Lane Group series and on the CoMA summer school. My work for piano, *On Memory*, played by Andrew Zolinsky, was one of The Times' top 10 contemporary albums of 2010; while Tête-à-Tête and CHROMA premiered Act 1 of *Icarus* at the Riverside Studios in summer 2011. An extract of *Icarus* was also presented in the Royal Opera House's Exposure programme at the Linbury Theatre in London in 2012. Further performances in 2012 also include *Glass Mountain*, a new work for CHROMA's 15th birthday celebrations at King's Place; and *Bohortha*, a commission for the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Neeme Järvi. 2013 sees a new work for tenor, horn and strings at the Cheltenham Music Festival.

Teaching

I teach undergraduate and postgraduate courses in acoustic composition. I have also taught history/analysis of 20th and 21st century music, including a module on the music of Stravinsky.

Postgraduate supervision

I am happy to supervise postgraduate students interested in instrumental/vocal composition.

Research

My research area is composition. I have had a particular interest in exploring the relationship between the present and the past through composition, with special attention to the workings of memory. I am also interested in dialogues between Western and non-Western materials in composition, and in the subjects of the musical fragment and time in music. Technically, I continue to work on developing a musical syntax that can accommodate a wide range of disparate materials – from tonal to atonal. Poetically, my music pulls between the passionate and contemplative.

Recently I have taken a new departure in working on a major piece in conjunction with a scientific study of genetics. I hope to continue such interdisciplinary collaboration in the future.

Other activities

I have examined externally at a number of other institutions including the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Cardiff University and King's College, London.

I also enjoy broadcasting on radio, and playing the oboe.

Publications

Scores

- *And I will betroth you* for a cappella choir (Faber Music)
- *Grace* for violin and piano (Faber Music)
- *Far Away, High Ground*, *Crystal Clear* (ABRSM in 'Spectrum' for piano)
- *Joshi's Dance* (ABRSM in 'Spectrum' for violin, and in Grade 3 syllabus, 2012-15).

Other works published previously by Bmic/Sound and Music, presently self-published.

Recordings

- *On Memory*: Piano Works (NMC, Autumn 2009)
- *Crystal Clear* for piano solo, in *Spectrum 4* (Usk 1227)
- *False Relations* for violin and piano (Usk 1226)
- *Far Away* and *High Ground* for piano solo, in *Spectrum 1* and *2* (NMC DO57)

- *And I will betroth you* for a cappella chorus (Faber Music FM19)
- *Dolce* for recorder and piano (Forsyth FS004)
- *Bells, Lachrimae and Stillness* for guitar (Riverrun Records RVRCD71)

Articles

- 'Symphony of life', *The Guardian* (June 2010) [on *Allele*]
- 'Michael Zev Gordon and Michael Finnissy in Conversation', *Contemporary Music Review* (April 2010) [on the relationship between words and music]
- 'Allusions and Fragments', *PLG programme booklet* (Jan 2006)
- 'Red Sea blues', *The Guardian* (June 2002) [on *Red Sea*]
- 'Why we love Louis', contribution *The Guardian* (Sept 2002) [on Louis Andriessen]
- 'The Phoenix at Play', *The Guardian* (May 2001) [on Franco Donatoni]
- *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2001), entries on:'Simon Bainbridge', 'Andrew Toovey', ' Philip Cashian', 'Andries van Rossem'
- 'Franco Donatoni: Who's pulling the strings?', *The Musical Times* (May 1993)
- 'Luigi Nono: a History of Belief', *The Musical Times* (January 1992)

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