György Kurtág (b.1926) 6 Moments Musicaux Op 44 (2005)

I. Invocatio (un fragment). Con moto, passionato

II. Footfalls (...mintha valaki jönne...- as if someone were coming). Molto sostenuto

III. Capriccio. Ben ritmato

IV. In memoriam György Sebők. Mesto, pesante

V. Rappel des oiseaux (etude pour les harmoniques). Léger, tendre, volatile à Tabea Zimmerman

VI. Les Adieux (in Janáček's Manier [sic]). Parlando. rubato

Born into a Hungarian Jewish family in northern Romania, Kurtág moved to Budapest in 1946 when he was twenty. The year after the 1956 uprising he spent in Paris ostensibly to study with Messiaen and Milhaud, but in fact undergoing treatment for severe depression and a creative block from art psychologist Marianne Stein. She was hugely important in releasing and guiding his creativity. Kurtág 'self-purified' himself by eating only rice and performing angular gymnastics. He also copied out Webern scores, read Samuel Beckett and Kafka's Metamorphosis, made stick figures out of matches, dust-balls and cigarette butts and felt as a 'cockroach striving to change into a human being, seeking light and purity'. He returned to Budapest, discarded his previous compositions and produced his 'Opus 1' a string quartet dedicated to Stein.

Writing for quartet suits Kurtág's style: transparent, condensed and diverse in its sound world. Although his style is distinctively his own, many of his compositions allude eclectically to others, for example: Hommage à Nancy Sinatra, Homage to Tchaikovsky, In Memory of a Just Person, Omaggio a Luigi Nono. Today's 6 pieces, each about 2 minutes long, are his fourth work for string quartet and refer to: (II.) a poem by Endre Ady and Beckett's play Footfalls whose central character paces metronomically across the stage; (III.) Kurtág's friend and pianist György Sebők; (V.) viola player Tabea Zimmerman; and (VI.) the composer Janáček. The pieces use material from Kurtág's Játékok, or Games - an open-ended series of pedagogical piano pieces similar to Bartók's Mikrokosmos.

The following poem by Endre Ady accompanies the second piece which mirrors its bereft desolation:

No One Comes
Kipp-kopp, as if a woman were coming
On a dark stairway, trembling, running
My heart stops, I await something wonderful
In the autumn dusk, confident.

Kipp-kopp, my heart starts up once again
I hear it once again, to my deep and great pleasure

In a soft tempo, in a secret rhythm
As if someone were coming, were coming
Kipp-kopp, now a funeral twilight
A misty, hollow melody sounds
The autumn evening. Today no one comes to me
Today no one will come to me, no one.