

The Guardian



Lukas Ligeti - even further out than his father

He's the son of György Ligeti, the greatest composer of the postwar era, and like his dad he's a musical innovator

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Lukas Ligeti has a tough compositional gig. Yes, the name does mean exactly what you might think: György Ligeti is his dad, arguably the greatest composer of the postwar era. Talk about having to live up to a legend. But Lukas has managed a pretty astonishing personal and musical feat in his creative life: he's able to acknowledge his father's influence and at the same time, sidestep it and even transcend it. He's been on tour with his solo music, much of it improvised with his electronic "marimba lumina" (a much, much more interesting contraption than that sounds) playing the London Jazz Festival last night, with gigs in Edinburgh tonight and tomorrow. He's also made a couple of appearances on Radio 3 - talking to me for Music Matters tomorrow, and explaining the wizardry of the genre for Jazz on 3.

At the Purcell Room last night, Lukas was a charmingly modest virtuoso of a musical middle ground between improvisation and composition, weaving teeming, teasing rhythmic textures from sounds he has gathered from all over the world - sirens in Johannesburg, musicians in Burkina Faso, and weird electronic soundscapes. He told the audience how he used to get bored watching people improvise with laptops, where there's so little relationship between the knob-twiddling you see and the sounds they produce, so he uses the marimba lumina (invented by electronic pioneer Don Buchla) as part percussion, part MIDI-controller, and part instrumental theatre.

Lukas has developed kinds of music-making his Dad never did: using free improvisation, live electronics and trans-cultural pop bands, like his group Burkina Electric, a kind of post-world music. But if you listen to his albums of solo music and his pieces for contemporary classical performers (released on gorgeously packaged CDs on John Zorn's Tzadik label), you'll hear how Ligeti puts together a smorgasbord of influences from Norway, Senegal, Miles Davis, and the Beatles (all of those can be found in a single track, *Moving Houses*, which you can hear on his MySpace page).

There's something original here, I think. New York-based Ligeti isn't trying to create some globally homogenised soundworld in which the whole universe of music can come together and, you know, make the world a better place. Sure, he wants to bring audiences from contemporary classical, free jazz, and the experimental end of world music together, to show them the connections between their separate worlds. But his music is defiantly individual. Try a track like *Balafon Dance System*, also on MySpace, which manages to sound like Battles crossed with György's *Piano Etudes* - but somehow edgier and stranger than both of them.

Yet there is a connection with his father's music in the way Lukas takes small, apparently simple patterns and melodies, and creates textures of exponential, fractal complexity out of them. You can hear this especially in *Delta Space* on the *Mystery System* album. Lukas told me how he and his dad used to criticise one another's music; he called György's *Violin Concerto* self-referential and old-fashioned - and his father agreed with him. Whatever his father said to him in response seems to have worked: Lukas is another musical one-off, just like György.

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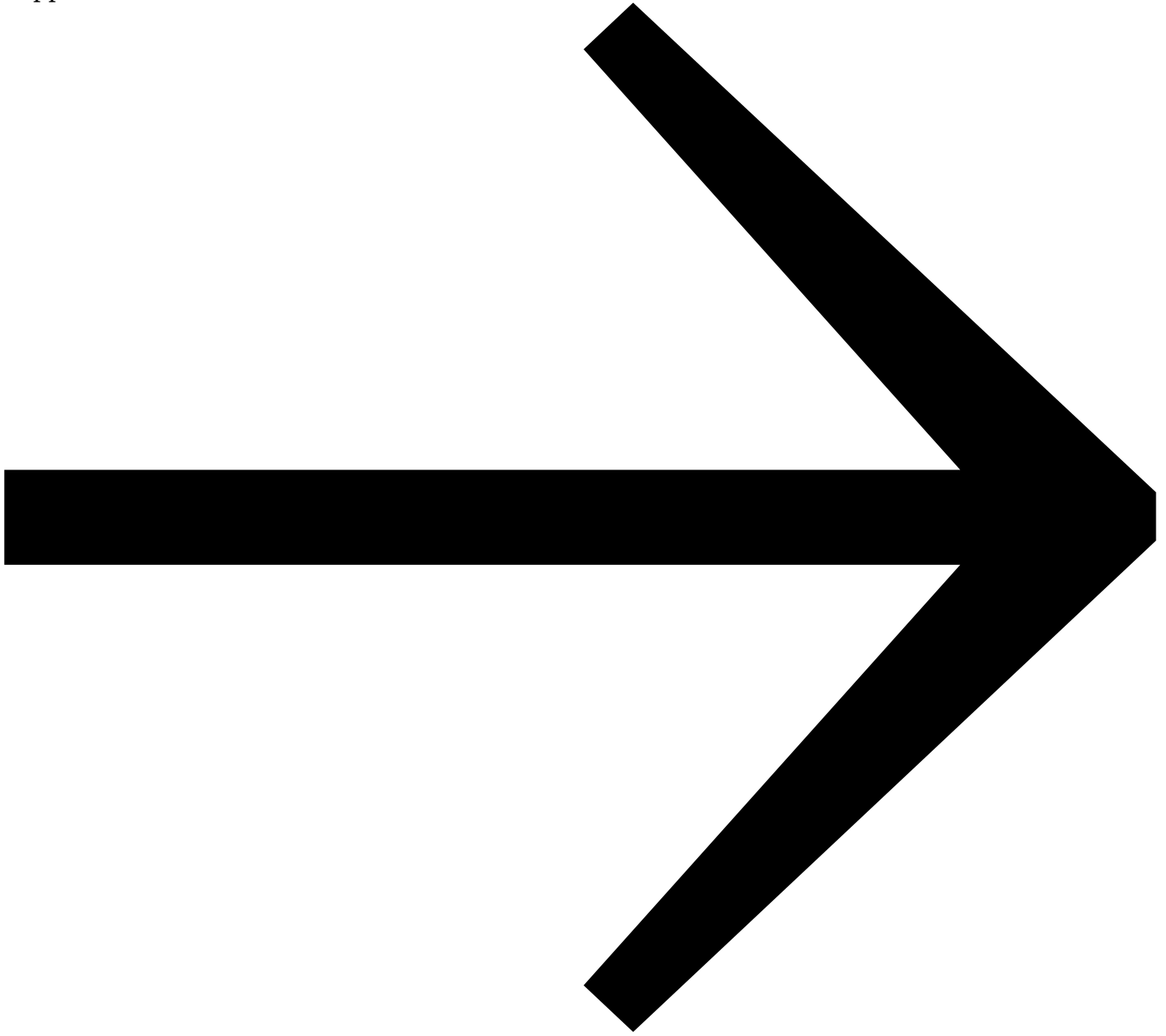
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