



**Premiere of the Fortnight- Joanna Lee, *The Chronicles of Archy*
22 May 2010 by Samara Ginsberg**

Cockroaches are not generally regarded as the best loved of all creatures, but it's a very special cockroach that is the subject of Joanna Lee's piece, *The Chronicles of Archy*, written for the Orchestra of the Swan and Sarah Leonard as part of the Spring Sounds 2010 Festival.

The piece is a song cycle set to a selection of Don Marquis adopted the persona of Archy for his columns, a poet who has been reincarnated as a cockroach. Whether this was a punishment for the dubious quality of his poetry is never made clear, but the premiere behind the column is that every night Archy jumps on the typewriter and writes a cockroach's view on life.

'It's very quirky piece,' Says Joanna Lee, 'presenting a selection of the different characters. The text is very light hearted and comical – for instance, there's a bit where it alludes to Archy's punctuation being terrible because he can't reach the shift key. This piece draws on comic strips quite a lot as well. George Herriman, who drew the Krazy Kat cartoons, illustrated the texts for Don Marquis' Archy columns, and I was inspired by the colourfulness, vibrancy and intensity of all of that. There are rapid shifts of colour and juxtapositions of rapidly shifting backdrops, creating a parallel with the visual medium of comic strips.'

The piece is scored for a fairly conventional chamber ensemble but also has some interesting instrumentation. The conductor doubles in the percussion section, which includes a typewriter, a reception desk bell and a newspaper. It is around 25 minutes long, comprising four songs and five instrumental sections.

Speaking about her working relationship with Sarah Leonard, Lee said: 'I specialise in vocal composition and opera, and the voice is what draws me. I've known Sarah since I was 19. She's a very versatile Soprano- she also premieres a lot of works by Helmut Lachenmann, who uses a lot of extended vocal techniques, which is something I'm into as well. The piece has some lyrical and expressive items, but the last song is a rap, and it's a real tongue-twizzler of a piece.'

'Theatre is a fundamental part of my style. I love conveying characters and stories. My music has a fun element to it both for the players and for the audience, but I like to think that it's also challenging and sophisticated and has depth.'

Samara Ginsberg

31 May

Joanna Lee *The Chronicles of Archy* (Orchestra of the Swan, Keneth Woods, conductor, Compton Verney, Warwickshire, 3pm)

Ivor McGregor *Symphony no2* (Orchestra of the Swan, David Curtis, conductor, Stratford upon Avon, Civic Hall, 8pm)