The title seems to refer both to the exposed voice of the performer and to this invisible apparition, silent as it is.

Kurtág is one of the most beautiful characters of modern composition. Suffering most of his life from crippling depression ("I realized to the point of despair that nothing I had believed to constitute the world was true..."), he sought the help of psychoanalyst Marianne Stein, whose therapy greatly assisted him in his artistic work. Painfully modest, Kurtág’s work has nevertheless found its way to a dedicated audience.

Bagatelles for flute, double bass and piano began life as some of the pieces in Kurtág’s Játékok ("Games") - a collection of some 200 piano pieces for children, mostly notated as graphic gestures and expression markings, encouraging a playful, semi-improvisational approach. Through experimentation along with his wife and musical companion Márt, Kurtág fully notated versions of selected Játékok pieces, and arranged them for various ensemble combinations.

Here he manages to perfectly capture energies and emotions in simple miniatures. The titles of the movements, listed above, indicate the characters explored by the musicians. Like Dean, Kurtág is haunted by his predecessors - in this work the little friendly ghosts of Bach and Debussy make appearances.

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Tōru Takemitsu // Voice // 1971

Qui va là? Qui que tu sois, parle, transparence!
Who goes there? Speak, transparence, whoever you are!

- from Shuzo Takiguchi // Handmade Proverbs // 1970

The final work on this recital program was in fact the first work on my last. Takemitsu’s Voice is one of the earliest notated works for flute that feature vocalisation, and I’ve been focussing on the voice in flute music for my two-year masters degree. For Tōru Takemitsu, this technique is the result of his revolutionary fusion of Eastern and Western musical cultures. In Voice he draws upon the ancient Japanese art of Noh Theatre as well as the sounds and techniques of the shakuhachi, inventing new symbols of notation for the silver Boehm flute that nevertheless leave much room for interpretation. Shouts and whispers, multiphonics, air and percussive sounds meld the flautist into something of a one-man theatre of the absurd, performing at once as voice, flute, and drum - the traditional instrumental make-up of the Noh onstage ensemble.

The eerie tension here is between the flautist on stage and the disembodied presence they address: Qui va là? These opening words echo the first line of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, with similarly intense psychological repercussions. The flautist demands this presence (or perhaps the audience) reveal themselves and make known their identity. The “voice” of the title seems to refer both to the exposed voice of the performer and to this invisible apparition, silent as it is.

Program

| Bruno Maderna // Dialodia // 1971 | flute & oboe |
| Philippe Hurel // Loops I // 2000 | solo flute |
| Liam Flenady // Sketches I & II // 2012 | flute & piano |
| Marin Marais // Les Folies d’Espagne // 1701/2012 | solo flute |
| Brett Dean // Demons // 2004 | solo flute |
| György Kurtág // Bagatelles // 1982 | flute, double bass & piano |
| Tōru Takemitsu // Voice // 1971 | flute solo |

Many thanks to my associate performers:
Stephanie Dixon (oboe), Dr Robert Davidson (double bass) and Alex Raineri (piano)

// Unless otherwise stated, all notes by Hannah Reardon-Smith, 2012
Maderna was a spectacularly talented violinist and conductor from an early age - he toured through Europe and became widely known as “Brunetto” (Italian for “Little Bruno”). He directed the orchestra of La Scala for the first time at age seven! Later he was invited to conduct at Darmstadt, home of the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. There he met Boulez, Messiaen, Stockhausen, and others, who encouraged him to begin composing his own music. He did, and was part of a generation of Italian composers that combined dodecaphonic techniques and modernist harmonies with a thoroughly Italian lyricism. Sadly he died very young, only two years after the composition of Dialodia, at the age of 53.

Originally conceived as something of an intermezzo for the cantata Ausstrahlung, this brief but brilliant duet captures a moment of dialogue between winds. The sounds of flute and oboe blend to create a rich yet pure tone - two modern versions of ancient instruments exploring their similarities and differences. Fleeting unisons (melodic, rhythmic) slip by as the instruments follow separate paths, sometimes harmonious, sometimes tense with a jagged dissonance. Eventually they come together for one bold statement, then tear apart, leaving a question mark hanging in the air at the end.

Philippe Hurel // Loops I // 2000

A modern study in virtuosity, Loops makes mechanical demands of the human performer. As the title implies, a short phrase is repeated, each time with a few changes, until it has morphed into something unrecognisable. French composer Philippe Hurel's interest is in the detail of this alteration. He writes: "What fascinates me is that between two loops, there is the way you arrive and the way you leave. ... The loops fascinate me because they involve repetition, and repetition fascinates me because it is the basis of all transformation in time. In this work, the principle is pushed to the extreme."

Liam Flenady // Sketches I & II // 2012 (premiere)

The composer writes: "When I wrote the first of these sketches at the start of this year, it came as the beginnings of a new approach to composing for me. Sure, the preparation work had been done in previous pieces, which were heading in this direction, and sure, the new sketch was only touching on this new direction, but nonetheless it was a conscious decision of mine to begin to write differently from the ground up (the reasons for this decision are as much musical as they are aesthetic or ideological). Whereas before, I was building musically syntactic structures (or phrases) out of non-syntactic processes, in this piece did away with process as a starting point, and instead built phrases over a multilayered formal plot (however vague it was in this case), which covered character, harmony, and integration of lines. I also decided to write something a little lighter and more fun.

During my JUMP mentorship with French composer-theorist François Nicolas earlier this year, he and I looked over this work, and he gave me the task of writing some new sketches based sections of it. He had criticized my harmony in the first piece for being essentially modal and lacking an inner dynamic. We found a moment in the piece that has a glimmer of such a dynamic, and I decided to write a sketch dealing almost exclusively with developing that. This dynamic is essentially the contradiction meandering-developing, and I hope you hear some of that in the performance."

Sketches I & II were composed as part of a JUMP mentorship program, run by Youth Arts Queensland and the Australia Council for the Arts.

Marin Marais // Les Folies d'Espagne // 1701/2012

* new variations by Hannah Reardon-Smith, Liam Flenady & Michael Mathieson-Sandars

Marin Marais was a royal court musician in Versailles. There he was celebrated for his mastery of the viol, an early relation to the violin family - his teacher on the instrument wrote of his playing that "there were pupils who could surpass their master, but that young Marais would never find any to surpass him". He studied composition with Jean-Baptiste Lully and wrote prolifically, especially for his own instrument.

Les Folies d'Espagne is a beautiful and very well known collection of 32 couplets from Book II of his Pieces for 1 and 2 Viols, based on a folk dance from the Iberian Peninsula. These have been arranged for many instruments, including flute. I'll play a selection of these couplets with a contemporary twist - some new variations by myself and my composer friends!

Brett Dean // Demons // 2004

Written for Sharon Bezaly's “From A to Z” recording project, Demons accordingly takes as its humble starting point the note 'D'. Often violent and obnoxious, Dean’s work could in fact be characterised as a bitter internal struggle. Opening mid-battle, the demon gradually gains control over the subject (the flautist herself?) and sings in a dreamy Erkönig-esque voice before breaking into devilish dances. The subject fights back and there are several more battle scenes (coincidentally taking shape in rondo form) before the bitter end. Dean's relationship with past composers seeps into everything he does, and along with the Schubert one can hear flashes of Stravinsky’s Petrouchka and Mahler scherzos in this wild work.

Originally studying in Brisbane, Brett Dean is one of Australia’s leading composers, and certainly one of the most internationally recognised of his generation. Primarily engaged as a violist in the Berlin Philharmonic from the mid-80s, Dean began to experiment with composing for radio and film projects soon after and by the mid-90s was beginning to establish himself as a strong musical voice blending the Australian and German traditions. His opera Bliss was produced by Opera Australia in 2010 and his violin concerto The Lost Art of Letter Writing won him the prestigious Grawemeyer award.