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Review: Ian Pace, York Late Music, Unitarian Chapel, York, last Saturday

By Martin Dreyer

IT takes a special brand of tenacity to devote one's performing career to music by living composers. But Ian Pace, an admirable pianist who could be equally at home in Brahms as in Boulez, has taken that route – and premiered more than 100 works.

He added three more to his tally last Saturday in an appearance for the York Late Music series. Two of them were by the distinguished American Frederic Rzewski, celebrating his 75th birthday this year, who was in the audience to hear them.

New commissions are a lottery: you never know how long or apt they will turn out to be. That is part of the thrill of the new. But it can wreak havoc with programming, so we had a second half twice the length of the first, and a 'new' piece that was in fact only one quarter new and lasted 40 minutes. Rzewski is nothing if not uncompromising.

His Steptangle, a parody tango, made a jolly opener. Fantasy on Give Peace A Chance was pure music theatre, as his page-turner "unscrunches" music that Pace had thrown into the piano. There the merriment ended. The new postscript, Illusions Perdus, added nothing to the extended Dreams, which had seemed to wind up quite successfully without it.

Finally, Rzewski joined Pace skilfully in his attractive duet Four Hands, staccato textures without pedal, liberally sprinkled with trills. By then, promising pieces by Steve Crowther (Political Prayer) and Sadie Harrison (Return Of The Nightingales) had faded into the maelstrom