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## RICHARD CAUSTON (born 1971)

### Ik zeg: NU ('I Say: NOW') (2017–18)

23 January 2019  
Barbican Concert Hall, London

*BBC commission: world premiere*

**BBC Symphony Orchestra**  
**Sakari Oramo** conductor

*Time strides forwards; it never stands still. My 10-year-old great nephew Joppe Naftaniel remarked philosophically: 'I say "now" now, and a moment later it is already history. So writes Salomon van Son, a Dutch relative of mine, in the foreword to his book *Ik Zeg Nu, Nu* ('I Say Now, Now'). Sal is now a remarkably youthful nonagenarian and his book traces the history of his Jewish family over a period of 430 years. Towards the end, it contains a harrowing account of his own survival in hiding in Nazi-occupied Holland during the Second World War. My piece doesn't seek to illustrate these events and it does not offer a narrative. Instead it reflects upon the title of Sal's book, with its juxtaposition of child-like directness, innocence and profundity. This also seemed to be a metaphor for how we experience not only music, but the passing of life itself: nothing remains the same and we can*

*never grasp the present, never hold onto it. It is always slipping through our fingers. *Ik zeg: NU* is made up of two contrasting ideas, which run throughout the piece. On the one hand, there is extremely fast music played by a hyperactive, zany 'menagerie' of instrumental trios: a kind of weightless music. On the other, there are extremely slow, repetitive patterns that shift almost imperceptibly over long stretches of time. While the gravity of this demands a slow pace of listening, the light, whimsical music delights playfully in the moment, darting around too rapidly and too busily to grasp properly. In their different ways, both materials play on the elusiveness of the 'now' and, in their interaction, the ear is pulled in different directions. *Ik zeg: NU* is dedicated to Sal van Son, aged 98 – and to my son, aged 4.*

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Programme note © Richard Causton

#### **Orchestration:**

3(I,II,IIIIdP).3(IIIIdCA).3.3(IIIIdC)  
4.3.3.1  
1T.5P.1H.Pft(prepared).Accordion  
16.14.12.10.8.

#### **Duration: 18'34"**

Address from where to obtain  
PDF full scores: private Dropbox link below:  
**<https://bit.ly/2J5LJRq>**

Address from where to obtain performance  
materials: **[richardcauston@hotmail.com](mailto:richardcauston@hotmail.com)**

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## RICHARD CAUSTON

Richard Causton (born 1971) studied with Param Vir, then with Roger Marsh at York University, graduating with first-class honours, and he continued with Jeremy Dale Roberts at the Royal College of Music in London and Franco Donatoni in Milan. There followed a steady broadening of his expressive horizons, revealed through a language of increasing subtlety and complexity: this despite the time he has spent on teaching – he was Fellow in the Creative Arts at Trinity College, Cambridge (2003–5), then taught at Birmingham Conservatoire, before becoming Lecturer in Composition at Cambridge University in 2012. The originality of Causton’s language stems from a brave response to the times he finds himself in. His honest contemplation of this century’s apparently irreconcilable forces can lead to frightening results, such as in his large orchestral piece *Millennium Scenes* (1999, rev. 2001), where shattering mechanistic forces appear to destroy cosmic calm. Related structural ideas can be found elsewhere in Causton’s work, where ordered calm is often challenged by alien elements. In *The Persistence of Memory* (1995), for instance, what the composer calls ‘weird temporal disturbances’ cause harmony to distort and buckle, while the powerful Chamber Symphony (2009) only just manages to allow destructive forces to be reconciled with orderly chorales to achieve an optimistic outcome, something that is hardly arrived at when brutality interrupts the breathless calm of *Notturmo* (1998, rev. 2001). In fact, Causton’s visions encompass both the optimistic and the pessimistic in a



just balance that reflects the honesty of his perception of our current world of thought and feeling, not to speak of the cosmos of which we are all a part. The language he has evolved to deal with such topics reveals the varied group of composers he has listed as influential. Boulez, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Berio and Carter number among them, but so do Tippett and Nielsen – while an early exposure to the music of the East led to his use of exotic instruments, sometimes of his own invention. All these variegated elements are successfully integrated in a highly individual manner.

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Composer Profile © Anthony Payne