

## CDs AND DVDs

CHAMBER WORKS by MARGRIET HOENDERDOS: *de lussen van Faverey*<sup>1</sup>; *maart '98*<sup>2</sup>; *juli '06*<sup>3</sup>. <sup>1</sup>Fie Schouten (bass cl.), Stefanie Liedtke (bsn), Hilde Kaiser (cl.), Joeri de Vente (hn), Anna Duinker (ob.); <sup>2</sup>Quatuor Danel: Marc Danel & Gilles Millet (vln), Tony Nys (vla), Guy Danel (vc.) with Peter Nys (vla), Godefroy Vujicic (vc.); <sup>3</sup>Margo Rens (sop.). EWR 1506

‘STOPCOCK’: works by HUGHES, GUASTALLA, FARMER, LASH, WHITTY. The Set Ensemble. consumer waste 18

Every so often in the history of recorded experimental music a record label appears that seems to be attached – often for good reason – to a particular musical style or approach, but then finds itself unable to escape the original categorisation, even after its output has moved away from that which it is commonly associated. Not only can it then become saddled with the reputation for releasing just that particular kind of music, but the name of the label becomes a kind of lazy shorthand for anything that sounds, or is presumed to sound, like it should belong on that label. The Edition Wandelweiser imprint began life in 1992 as a vehicle for the composers’ collective of the same name. It came to represent music that was austere, filled with silence or a grey hush – music that was repeatedly mentioned in the same breath as Cage’s silent work.<sup>1</sup> Over the last few years however, with a few exceptions, the music released on Edition Wandelweiser Records has shifted away from such a narrow categorisation, reflecting the now much-expanded list of associated composers but also, and more importantly, the blossoming of many of the early associates’ work into new, disparate areas. When a particular movement in experimental music fractures, and its components start to move away to other ground, what first emerges can be music of considerable significance: it would be a shame if such work sits ignored as it gets brushed into a corner, marked ‘post-Wandelweiser’.

On the whole, the music on the new EWR release showcasing the late Dutch composer Margriet Hoenderdos isn’t silent, nor very often even that quiet. There are, however, several links to the label’s heritage: EWR has a strong connection to the Netherlands (co-founder and artistic director Antoine Beuger is Dutch), and there is an attitude towards poetry and language in this release that reflects similar sympathies on past Wandelweiser records. Three pieces are presented here, two of which refer directly to poetry and, according to Samuel Vriezen’s extensive and knowledgeable sleeve notes, the third has a poetic structure at its heart. *de lussen van Faverey*, written in 1990, is Hoenderdos’s response to the work of the Dutch poet Hans Faverey who wrote some of his last works specifically for her to set to music. However, rather than create a traditional song cycle using Faverey’s words, she created this woodwind quintet. The music is framed as nine short movements, each softly played but also bursting with colour, and with a lyrical, talkative style that resembles something between the incidental music from classic films and the conversational woes of a blues guitar. The music sings like animated conversation in a foreign tongue, and is at once both refreshingly original and fittingly poetic.

*maart '98* is a string quartet performed here by Quatuor Danel. A series of glissandi lines of varying length, speed and timbre are overlaid to form a dense stream of sinewy, often abrasive muscularity that winds its way past the ear and throws out little flashes of colour and bursts of extreme dynamic. The closing track, *juli '06*, is a very different affair: for solo soprano (performed by Margo Rens), the piece is based on a poem named *Warwords* by Bas Geerts, which interleaves Latin excerpts from Cicero amongst quotations from George W. Bush’s 2003 State of the Union speech. Hoenderdos’s use of rapidly shifting dynamics to place stress on unexpected parts of the text, coupled with the soprano’s high tessitura and the mix of languages, renders the poem near-enough incomprehensible, resulting in a piece that, like the woodwind quintet, is lyrical, fanciful and clearly poetic but always slightly removed.

<sup>1</sup> Michael Pisaro’s 2009 article on the history of Wandelweiser isn’t new, but it’s still a good read: [http://www.wandelweiser.de/\\_texte/erstw-engl.html](http://www.wandelweiser.de/_texte/erstw-engl.html) (accessed 8 December 2015).

The Set Ensemble has been linked to the Wandelweiser set thanks to their past performances of work by members of the collective, but 'stopcock' (a tongue-in-cheek title from Sarah Hughes, the ensemble's only female member) sees the ensemble turn their energies towards promoting their own work. Founded in 2010, The Set Ensemble is an evolving group of musicians who originally came together in Oxford, all of whom are composers, most of whom have a background in improvisation and five of whom have works presented on this disc. The collection of pieces, then, while contemplative and considered in general tone, has little to do with the origins of Wandelweiser and owes as much to Brechtian dadaism as it does Cagean minimalism. Sarah Hughes's text score, *Fires & Conifers*, opens the disc. A summary could be that it asks some of the group to play traditionally, and others to disrupt proceedings: a gentle electronic warbling and a stately, repeated note from the piano are intercepted by loud bangs, heavy, ugly scraping and sudden chimes. A piece that continually contradicts itself, *Fires & Conifers* is perhaps better witnessed as a live, often theatrical performance but the recording offers a certain mystery of its own.

Bruno Guastalla's *Memoire de Cézanne* is constructed of three, extremely dense, visceral chords held by the entire ensemble who utilise everything from the percussive qualities of opened, spinning CD players to guitar, double bass, cello, electronics and zither. A ten-minute study of timbre, density and the comparison of three similar but different masses, Guastalla's piece reveals a whole world of interplay between the wildly disparate and yet carefully matched sounds.

The score for Patrick Farmer's *This has already had a history (2b)* instructs performers to 'initiate the decay/transformation/disintegration of one or more chosen objects'. His suggestion to the group was that they should each choose items of food, and so we listen to a mango, bananas, an apple, carrots, crisps and 'Bear for kids' yos being dispatched, close to the microphones, for more or less ten minutes. Beyond the obvious absurdism and inevitable abundant humour, there is actually much fascination to be had in listening to this: crunching teeth, slavering saliva and rumbling stomachs come and go in a manner usually politely hidden from the ear, and at a push it's possible to hear something really quite musical in such a hilariously guttural performance.

Dominic Lash's *360 Sounds* asks six musicians to make one sound per second for 60 seconds,

but 'without exactly synchronising the beginning'. The work, whose inexactitude means it lasts one minute and nine seconds, is an oddly manic but curiously listenable passage of clockwork rhythm and erratic bleeping that achieves the feat of placing musicians only just out of time with one another. At the halfway point, the score seems to ask all performers to aim for one sound: a strangely loose coalescence emerges before slipping quickly apart again, resulting in a piece of oddly decentring, highly unusual and fascinating music.

*you have not been paying attention (again)*, by Paul Whitty, asks six musicians to make four to ten sounds that are at once both extremely quiet and exceptionally abrasive, the intrigue here arising through that inherent contradiction. Whilst perhaps the least enticing of the pieces, what emerges is a curious layer of sonic detritus that denies any sense of authorship and feels decidedly inhuman.

Closing the album is Dominic Lash's *for six*. This sets up a framework in which three pairs of musicians (here, bass and cello, zither and guitar, and a pair on electronics) simultaneously perform discrete works that are similar to but slightly different from one another; each pair is supposedly unaware of how their particular piece may differ to the others', and some musicians are occasionally asked to be silent. Other patterns exist in the music that are hard to ascertain precisely just through listening, but a sense of symmetry appears as elements seem to mirror one another, even if not always coming from the same source. Again, the music has an odd appeal to it, as if driven by some agency independent from the musicians themselves.

These are two albums, then, that we might expect to be labelled Wandelweiserian, but that in actual fact have little to do with the near-silent minimalism associated with the narrowest sense of the term. They have nothing to do with each other, but each has much to offer.

Richard Pinnell

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'THE PANUFNIK LEGACIES': works by GLYNN, MAISTOROVICI, MASON, MAYO, McCORMACK, NESBIT, PIPER, SUCKLING, WINTER, YARDE. London Symphony Orchestra c. François-Xavier Roth. LSO5061

Since the inception of the Panufnik Young Composers Scheme in 2005, over 50 composers have benefitted from collaborating with