

sine tones are another facet of *Togetherness's* fabric. Subtly incorporated, they join the guitar and bass guitar as another amplified component in the work. Just before its midpoint, the piece reaches a section of overlaid amplified ostinatos. It is worth mentioning the facility with which Bennett writes for electric guitar: his rock background helps him to maximize the available playing techniques and exploit the timbral characteristics found on its various strings.

As *Togetherness* passes its midpoint, all of its various constituent parts, including ones that will be familiar to the listener by now – saxophone dyads, descending trombone glissandos and chiming repeated guitar notes – converge with cymbal crashes and hammered beats from the drums. A long build-up, a powerful crescendo, is abetted by the disjointed feel of multiple tempo strands at play against ostinato quavers, which gradually move from groups of two to triplets. Polyrythms abound in the climax, with semiquavers against triplets providing thrilling and thunderous passages that are alternated with a reorchestrated version of the sustained music from the opening. The piece finally reverts to a denouement accompanied by a gradual slow down, the *sostenuto* passage fading amid glimmers of repetition. One of Bennett's most substantial works to date for chamber ensemble, *Togetherness* incorporates many of the preferred elements of his compositional language. This makes it an excellent summary of the potent, varied and consistently vibrant character that pervades Bennett's oeuvre.

The recording is available as a CD and as a download from Diatribe's Bandcamp page (<http://shop.diatribe.ie/music>), as well as the other usual online vendors. Composer Laurence Crane, who has also composed for Decibel, writes thoughtful programme notes for the release. Bennett is a composer whose career's ascent is gratifying to witness. *Togetherness* is heartily recommended listening.

Christian Carey
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Ryoko Akama, *places and pages*. Another Timbre. at 110 × 2

While the 'post-Cagean' moniker associated with Another Timbre can range from somewhat misleading (in the cases of Marek Poliks, Yun Ingrid Lee and Martin Iddon) to flatly inappropriate (Bryn Harrison), there are nevertheless many items in their catalogue that unquestionably,

vigorously, and joyfully pick up their musical practice where Cage left off in the late 1960s. This two-disc set from Ryoko Akama, a sound artist/composer/performer (in that order, according to her website), is an example of the latter case. Akama describes the *pages and places* project arising from a desire 'to develop a score that would concern location, situation, time and environment in terms of performance, and that somehow would erase a boundary between "performance" and "installation"'. Similarly, the boundary between these two categories and that of 'documentation' is blurred (if not erased) in the present release: both the set itself (with Another Timbre's usual hyperminimalistic packaging) and Akama's writings on the project leave unclear (deliberately, one assumes) exactly when and where these recordings were made – some are clearly outdoors, others apparently done in the studio – as well as the actual content or even the general nature of the scores being performed.

At any rate, with each disc clocking in at over 79 minutes, this is certainly a sumptuous offering. The scores are performed by a rotating ensemble of performers – only four separate tracks contain all six performers and, somewhat counterintuitively, these are among the sparsest of the entire set. The performers are Cristián Alvear (a Chilean guitarist who has been associated with the project since its inception), Christian Müller, Stefan Thut, d'incise, Cyril Bondi and Akama herself. While Müller, Thut and Alvear are professional instrumentalists (clarinet, cello and guitar, respectively), and their instruments can occasionally be discerned playing on the tracks where they are featured, the actual duties performed by each individual performer are, like many aspects of the recording, left ambiguous. This organisational structure points towards a more Fluxus-y interpretation of post-Cagean aesthetics, and, indeed, Akama specifically mentions Yoko Ono, George Brecht and Alison Knowles as inspirations for the project (furthermore on a graphic level, Akama's use of her 'favourite typewriter' to write the texts itself seems like an homage to the gleefully DIY text scores of the Fluxus era).

But, much like the Wandelweiser Group, whatever Akama and her collaborators have taken from Fluxus, they have left behind the sort of arch ironic humour and virulence that characterised many of the group's activities. For her part, Akama is explicit about her sincerity: 'I don't find conceptuality, theatricality or artificiality in our actualisations at all'. This has always struck me as a somewhat odd reading

of Fluxus, although many musicians and historians have made it: the deliberate and even violent provocations (see Ben Vautier, whose *Audience Piece #1* reads simply 'Audience is locked into the theater. The piece ends when they find a way out.') are passed over in favour of the more evocative and transparently poetic text scores. In concrete terms, this signifies that sound events and their collaborative production are now front and centre, and the meditative intensity of Cage replaces the deliberate artifice and hostile-absurd humour of Fluxus. As Akama puts it, throughout the realisation of her scores, 'we focused on musical reactions ... Rather than engaging in verbal discussions, we performed in an insistent and continuous flow, as if actualising the fifty instructions were the only way for us to communicate and exchange ideas.'

And, to be sure, there is very much to recommend here on a purely sonic level. '#3 CA-d' is one of the most immediately enjoyable, comprising a slowly modulating chord on what sounds like a very old, wooden harmonium with an almost impossibly warm sound. Indeed, several other tracks in this vein, like '#28 RA-CA-d' and '#48 CM', seem like unconcealed drone

music. Other tracks, like the 1.5 seconds-long '#13 RA' (the track itself is four seconds long, but the last two and a half seconds are silence), elevate the ambiguity of their conception to a deeply compelling, almost koan-like mystery; their sounds appearing directly compelling in their simplicity, yet infinitely complex, nebulous, ephemeral events from unknown and unreplicable sources. Some, like '#17 d' and '#49 RA', even create a sort of vague anxiety at the impression of an unknown activity being enacted methodically, repeatedly, and with distinct sonic repercussions. The tutti sections, on the other hand, are less distinctive, and occasionally (#11) seem like they could have been lifted from any number of alternate 'post-Cagean' group improvisations. Despite the huge variety (and even seeming generic difference) of the sonic results, this collection nevertheless offers a coherent aesthetic experience, defined by the consistent ambiguity and immediacy of material: a sort of gently curated – yet occasionally quite intense – odyssey through a landscape of fleeting beauty.

Max Erwin

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