

heard as part of Dedalus, a group that also includes flautist Amélie Berson, trombonist Thierry Madiot and guitarist Didier Aschour. The former piece begins with overlapping lines that descend against an unstable backdrop of interfering pitches and quasi-vocal trombone sounds. A slowly oscillating drone emerges in the second half, around which the instruments continue to provide a darkly flickering texture.

*Steppings* consists purely of a repeated pulse, at times adorned with a background line of softly sustained pitches. The pulse, primarily characterised by battuto strings, migrates in its timbre, with different modes of attack, such as consonants into the flute, pizzicato and strong tonguing, fading in and out. These migrations give the impression of rising and falling not just because of changes in pitch but through variations in the spectral emphasis from lower to higher partials. The five-minute work in fact only explores one spectrum on E from which the sustained notes are also taken. Both *Steppings* and *Process* are effectively coloured and paced, though their structural simplicity does not quite provide the rich potential of the opening duo – despite this they still provide a detailed and engaging listening experience.

As mentioned above, *Chaoscaccia* (2014), the final piece on the disc, is unusual in the joint authorship ascribed to composer and performer. There is material with more than a little kinship with *Bothsways*, with close dissonance and buoyant glissandi. This suggests the importance of collaboration to the composer's pieces, or indeed the extent to which Walker has integrated the composer's style into her playing – two propositions that are not mutually exclusive. Composers of a previous generation would have been far more reluctant to give up their authorial rights, even with the substantial documented input of so many creative performers over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In this, the gesture made to mark the collaboration of Criton and Walker looks towards the future.

This is a relatively short disc, not 41 minutes in length, but there is more than enough fine music to make it a most worthwhile contribution. Criton's music is not noisy in its newness; it does not attempt to overwhelm or antagonise the listener. Rather, its strength lies in that rather underrated realm of subtlety. It is music that rewards close attention. The performers match this with wonderfully sensitive playing, with great care taken over the shifting timbres and character of the gestures – all of which is recorded with appropriately intimate sound. It is an important side note that both Tarozzi and

Walker also work closely with French electronic composer, Éliane Radigue. If this release is anything to go by, their efforts will do a great deal to showcase two exceptional, and rather overlooked, musical talents of contemporary French music.

Neil Thomas Smith

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Bennett: *Togetherness*. Barbara Lueneburg (vln); Decibel, Daniele Rosina (cond). Diatribe, 2018.

Born in Northern Ireland in 1975, composer Ed Bennett was, from 2013–2017, Composer in Residence at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is currently a Reader in Music at Birmingham Conservatoire. Bennett has fulfilled commissions for a number of prominent artists, such as the BBC Symphony and Philharmonic Orchestras, RTE National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, the London Sinfonietta, Crash Ensemble, Icebreaker, the Smith Quartet, Garth Knox, Reinbert de Leeuw, James MacMillan and Rolf Hind. Future commissions include those for Syzygy Saxophone Quartet and Northern Ireland Opera.

*Togetherness*, Bennett's latest portrait disc for the Diatribe imprint, features Decibel, an ensemble he founded in 2003. The group has also recorded his works elsewhere, notably on the disc *My Broken Machines*, released to wide acclaim in 2011 by NMC Recordings. Like Ireland's Crash Ensemble, Decibel melds instruments and electronics, with a particular fascination in the potential for combining amplification and the concert music milieu. This approach was taken on *Broken Machines* and created an edgy, often propulsive vibe. This is also true of *Togetherness*. However, Bennett's approach to rhythm on the most recent disc is more supple, and the pitch world is even more malleable, with sliding tones, especially glissandos of the descending variety, abounding.

The touchstones for Bennett's music are varied and palpable. His brief studies with Louis Andriessen and a longer time spent working with Michael Finnissy were formative. One also hears the energetic scores of the late Steve Martland, as well as those of English composer Oscar Bettison (now in the US, teaching at Peabody in Baltimore, Maryland) and his slightly older Irish colleague Donnacha Dennehy (currently in the States as well, at Princeton University). Bennett's early experiences in pop

bands, playing rock, punk, jazz and even gigs with the local Elvis impersonator, have also helped to inform his music and his preferred method of working: in collaboration with ensembles. That said, Bennett's music is not just a patchwork quilt of influences. His is a distinctive voice that uses the variety of his musical experiences to best advantage to provide compositions that speak with an individual point of view.

Album opener *Suspect Device* employs a number of gestures that characterize Bennett's material. The overarching one is the use of ostinatos of different lengths, with frequent shifts in feel from the beat to various divisions thereof, each performed by a different fractal of the ensemble. Repeated saxophone notes alternating with oscillating dyads, stentorian punctuation from a variety of percussion instruments, from drums to metallophones, a strident recorder solo, undulating piano chords, and descending strings glissandos all vie for the foreground. A distinctive feature of Bennett's compositions: the conglomeration of activities is neither just juxtaposed or amalgamated. Instead, there is a subtle shift back and forth between the two practices that makes the growth of each piece, and the development of its materials, seem quite organic.

On the slower paced yet no less potent *Sometimes Everything Falls Apart*, the beginning is strikingly scored. Repeated notes, similar to those in *Suspect Device*, are repopulated to electric guitar and piano in rhythmic unison, seated alongside syncopated interjections in the drums. All of these accompany a mournful sustained violin line. Hearing it close upon *Suspect Device*, one realizes the substantial expressive range that Bennett musters from amplified instruments. He appears keen to explore the power of them both to create muscular fortes and, as he does on *Sometimes Everything* . . . to illuminate the resonances of prevailingly soft passages, in delicately balanced and deftly scored fashion. Gradually, descending slides, this time in brass instruments, and more forceful percussion bring on a build-up that serves as the piece's central arc: a long crescendo. As the brass descends, there is a bit of counterpoint in the winds, in the form of ascending dyads and glissandos, that provides toothsome contrast. At the end of the piece, a wailing climax is joined by the ostinato eighths from the beginning, this time delivered quadruple forte and with considerable bravado.

The finest work on the disc is *Heavy Western*, a violin concerto in which the cadenza, not dissimilar to the frenetic fiddling of virtuosos country players, comes first, occasionally interrupted by short sustained notes from a small fragment

of the ensemble. Barbara Lueneburg is an excellent soloist, capable of making the diverse array of violin music in the piece shimmer and scintillate. During later passages, we hear glissandos, this time sliding upward, start to infiltrate the proceedings. The cadenza is followed by brash ostinatos pitting repeated low winds and strings against percussion, both pitched and a resonantly thrumming bass drum. This is succeeded by a back and forth colloquy between the violin, adopting the motoric ostinato of the ensemble, a long upward slide pierced by digressions from high unpitched percussion, and a resurgence of the aforementioned powerful reiterations. The violin soars into high fiddling gestures and then, in the blink of an eye, joins brass and winds in descending slides. The back and forth between these various blocks of material is thrilling. With each large phrase, another small change in orchestration ratchets up the excitement: more drums here, blatting trombone on the off-beats there, and so forth. All of the juxtaposed materials finally converge on a unison figure which, fast upon, is interrupted by high register repeated quavers. The tutti then reconvenes for a rollicking, extended, contrapuntal coda that abounds with downward slides. The violin is supplied a more subdued cadenza that concludes the piece.

A truly lovely interlude is *Slow Motion Music*, the recording's penultimate track. Here, the overlaying of different tempo strands, glissandos and gradual accumulation of both textures and pitch material – all Bennett signatures heard in the previous works – are present, but they are more gradually deployed. One of the most fetching sections is the piece's centre, where a duet in single notes between bass clarinet and piano is haloed by soft string slides and supported by pitched percussion. Gradually, different members of the ensemble join the party, each adding an occasional single-note attack. Steadily until its close, the piano's registration expands and small clusters, softly articulated, effectively enhance the harmony.

The last, and longest, piece (at over 27 minutes) is the title work. As the composer describes it in a succinct but highly accurate note: '*Togetherness* is an immersive work which explores contradictory notions of independence, pluralism and unity in music.' The composition begins quietly with an extended introduction. In uneasy calm, with a suspended cymbal as a textural constant, keening violin is accompanied by melodic and clarinet in sustained dyads. Gradually, more sustained notes, from piano and strings, are added, as well as descending glissandos from the latter instruments. Electronic

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