

sometimes a player mimes music being performed elsewhere in the ensemble; sometimes a player mimes electronic music they could never, quite, have played. The most memorable moments are when the full ensemble quite literally moves together, either in rapid-fire or with an extreme, ominous protraction.

The live concert experience invites a reflection on how Takasugi's music worked before the introduction of the radically theatrical into his practice. *Die Klavierübung* (2007–09), for example, brutally refracts crackling, tinkly piano samples over 40 minutes of music not unlike that of *Sideshow*. One feels not as though inside the piano itself, but as though inside a cathedral built of the splintered, discarded wood, metal and ivory scavenged from the destroyed remains of a thousand pianos. *Diary of a Lung* (2006/07) behaves similarly, this time using samples of the composer having a particularly phlegmy coughing fit that are accompanied by a more heterogeneous (than *Die Klavierübung*) catalogue of various bathroom implement sounds. Through shifts in material and acoustic, the listener travels into and out of Takasugi's physiological and medicinal ritual with great speed. One of *Sideshow's* great feats, then, is that the listener can easily map the obvious grotesquery of the theatrical gestures onto Takasugi's dense sound world, which might otherwise be more difficult to penetrate. The music is uncanny, not in half-recognition, but in over-saturation.

Texts from the satirist Karl Kraus inspired periodic interludes in the piece, but the texts are not spoken and these interludes can be difficult to distinguish from the rest of the music. Still, Kraus's texts in the programme look like a script for a master of ceremonies, and the cumulative effect is of being in a space made this time of the splintered, discarded tropes of 100 years of morbid fascination with the sideshow. The penultimate section, 'Von Dunkel Zu Dunkel', is the closest Takasugi comes to a misstep: its expansive, breathy, reflective space treads dangerously close to feeling moralistic, but perhaps a certain nihilism is essential if the piece is to be truly felt. Thankfully, the lawlessness is reincarnated for the delirious, harrowing ending. After the concert, a performer revealed to me that the ensemble is coordinated by Takasugi's own, strangely affected voice in their earpieces, adding another uncanny dimension to the production.

Sideshow's subject matter would tempt most composers to thoroughly exploit representation. However, Takasugi's trademark relentless

granulation of electronic sounds induces a macabre feeling via the light claustrophobia of the music, and the confusion about who is producing what. Despite its length, I found myself eager to experience the piece again, to learn about it simply by being with it, as if my presence could somehow comfort the contorted musicians. As delivered by the unwavering hands of Talea, *Sideshow* is freakish without being gimmicky, making for an uncommonly rewarding concert experience.

Ian Power

Miranda Cuckson and Yarn/Wire at National Sawdust, Brooklyn, NYC

National Sawdust opened in October 2015, and behind its brick facade in Brooklyn a promising venue for new music was unveiled, overseen by composers, creators and visionaries. Splotched in haphazard polygons and neon tubes, the modest space offers an intimate environment for a new generation of artists to showcase their work. The venue's name comes from the sawdust factory that once occupied the century-old building at 80 North 6th street, and which its governing non-profit organisation raised over \$16 million to bring to life. The building was designed by Bureau V architects and the acoustic consultants from Arup, who made some critical decisions, such as placing the building on over 1,000 metal springs to absorb the shock from the subway trains running nearby. Advised by a board whose members include Philip Glass, Renée Fleming and Laurie Anderson, composer and entrepreneur Paola Prestini helms the organisation.

On 4 December 2015, in one of the first events to christen the space, curator and violinist Miranda Cuckson, whose repertoire is vast and rich in living composers, joined Yarn/Wire – a wittily named ensemble consisting of pianists Laura Barger and Ning Yu, and percussionists Ian Antonio and Russell Greenberg – for world premieres by George Lewis and Chiyoko Szlavnic. Each piece approached the idea of homogenising timbre through distinct methods: Lewis interlaced instrumental colours across the ensemble through various techniques of tone production to emphasise the similarities in sound generation, whereas Szlavnic narrowed the range of tone production to blend the ensemble in sonic uniformity.

Trombone improviser and computer-music composer, George Lewis has spent a large

portion of his career understanding what real-time activity means through an investigation into improvisation, and his compositions often uncover new ways of understanding music as a form of communication. Lewis's *Into the Breach* explores the imitative possibilities between the violin's timbre and bowed metallic percussion, scraped piano strings and plucked wires, expounding the idea through a series of episodes in which the solo violin enters into unison partnerships with elements of the surrounding accompaniment, not only in terms of pitch but also quality, intensity and resonance. Cuckson emulsified her harmonics with the glockenspiel's stratospheric pings; Barger and Yu moved industriously from keys to twisted-steel guts, scraping wires with coffee mugs and plastic Rite Aid pharmacy cards; Antonio and Greenberg sanded and brushed their crotales and vibraslaps to match roughly swept violin bow strokes. In search of the perfect amalgamation, Lewis did not, however, ignore the advantages of contrast; after all, the title itself implies a rupture of some kind. In one effective instance, a rubber mallet was raked across the Mylar membrane of a tenor drum. Idiosyncratic sounds such as these momentarily added unexpected and fascinating elements to the score. By the end of the piece, the violin was exorcised from its role as a melody-maker and instead transformed into a primordial, metallic noise machine. Cuckson executed the virtuosic score like a diligently programmed cyborg, unscathed by the demands of Lewis's often swift and precise finger-work.

If the title of Szlavnic's work, *Mind is moving . . .*, is to be understood in any programmatic sense, the overall aural stasis of the composition can be interpreted as a mind stunted by apathy. In addition to producing compositions that stray into the territory of visual art, Szlavnic harnesses mathematical sinusoids in her works to achieve a sort of power-vibrato 'beating' effect. *Mind is moving . . .*, scored for two percussion, two pianos, electric keyboard and sinewaves, is divided roughly into five sections that vary little in terms of their audible material, because much of the potential for conflicting intensities or temporal variation is constricted. While much of the composition integrated the use of sine waves, the final section of the piece contained a definitive use of an oscillating device inside the vibraphones which wobbled the pitch frequency to create a steady and controlled ripple of sound. The search for homogeneous sound required precise control from the musicians in order to allow no particular accentuation in the unilateral flow of sound, and the members of Yarn/Wire

demonstrated their restrained discipline. Since the composition relies heavily on the acoustics of a room to make full use of the oscillating device in the vibraphones, it might be more effective as a sound installation piece, allowing the audience to explore the space in which Szlavnic's music resides.

Cuckson and Yarn/Wire set a high level of expectation for future performances at National Sawdust. The venue, still in the planning stages of what's to come for the remainder of this inaugural season, has the potential to make several last-minute surprises to their unfilled calendar. With a clear vision and an abundance of creative thinkers on its side, it is safe to say National Sawdust will build an attractive reputation in the next decade, defining not only its own character but that of the artists who justify its existence.

Jacob Slattery

Kammer Klang, Café Oto, London: 3 November and 1 December 2015

Kammer Klang is enjoying a purple patch. Based in East London's Café Oto, the series sits in a sweet spot between the rougher-edged music usually played at Oto and the more conventionally white cubed silence of new music. Audiences are generally relaxed in the setting, despite creaking chairs. The series' mixed programmes gel, with the distance between various featured musics growing ever smaller as cultural demographics continue to shift.

Having reviewed a Kammer Klang evening in April 2014,¹ I was keen to return to see what developments were afoot. The final two shows of the 2015 season were typically varied and integrated. The November concert paired Plus-Minus Ensemble in Matthew Shlomowitz's *Lecture About Bad Music* with three new audio-visual works performed by Speak Percussion. In the December session, artist/composer Jessie Marino appeared with We Spoke: New Music Company in the first half, and the second half featured Oliver Coates in Andrew Hamilton's *Music for Losers* and Lawrence Lek's *Unreal Estate*. To add even more flavour, a brief 'Fresh Klang' now opens each evening: November's was a delicate, attentive performance of *Vessels* from Gail Priest, a piece that explores microphone feedback using glass

¹ TEMPO, Vol. 68, No. 268 (2014), pp. 84–5.