

Pfzinger's original text, remains doubtful. While his introduction gives every indication that Pfzinger intends this as something of a positivist project – something that may eventually, conceivably, contain the records of all composers who have ever taught and been taught by other composers – an increase in facts does not necessarily result in a decrease of bias. For example, one probable result of this initiative is that the students of current English-language composition teachers will be even better represented, while musics outside the Anglosphere – especially non-Western – will not. Such additions would therefore not result in greater perfection but more compounded flaws, not to mention the Wikipedia-esque problem of composers writing in to have their own genealogy included. It is as a flawed but exhilarating compendium that this work best exists, rather than a perpetual information mine. Not so much a stopgap in the scholarly literature but a reference work – and starting point for research – in its own right, Pfzinger's book, for all its flaws, is an invaluable resource for anyone curious of the rawest data of Western art music history.

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Trevor Barre, *Convergences, Divergences and Affinities: The Second Wave of Free Improvisation in England, 1973–79*. London: Compass Publishing, 2017. £14.99

The cover photo of Trevor Barre's second book on the history of free improvisation in England, following *Beyond Jazz* of 2015, prominently features David Toop (performing in 1978 with Evan Parker and Paul Burwell), whose own promised sequel to *Into the Maelstrom: Music, Improvisation and the Dream of Freedom, before 1970* will no doubt cover some of the same ground. While Barre's volume makes clear the central contribution of Toop to the music of his chosen place and time, my hopes were raised that it would provide a historical focus and discipline lacking both in Toop's free-association approach to his subject (wandering in *Into the Maelstrom* as often outside the title's time period as within it) and Ben Watson's disastrously biased *Derek Bailey and the Story of Free Improvisation* of 2004. Were these hopes fulfilled? Yes and no. Barre begins with a 'timeline' before the preface, situating the music within a whistle-stop history of British society and politics between 1973 and 1979, beginning around the accession of the UK to the European

Economic Community (incorrectly called here the European Union, which at that time did not yet exist) and ending around the election of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in May of 1979. This would seem to indicate a certain rigour in dealing with the material at hand, although the next 40 or so pages of the book are dedicated to a rather rambling disquisition on exactly why these dates were chosen, which seems to me a little unnecessary, especially given how often Barre necessarily ranges outside them. Indeed, *Convergences* reads more like a series of magazine articles than a unified overview, devoting long chapters to an issue-by-issue (often page-by-page) review of the *Musics* journal, the platform of choice for aesthetic statements and squabbles on the British improvisation scene of the time, and to the first moves towards the still incomplete decentralisation of the scene from London to various points around England. (Wales, Scotland and Ireland are nowhere mentioned.)

In general I found its emphatically informal tone, with its constant personal asides (often several within a quoted text, breaking up and obscuring the point being made by the quotation), jokey but unfunny parentheses, and lack of an index, frequently obscuring its usefulness as a document of the music and its time. Inline citations make the book look 'academic' from a distance, but inconsistencies in their format make it look sloppy and undisciplined when viewed more closely, and the density of typos, unnecessary repetitions, and odd phrasing and punctuation indicate that proofreading must have been minimal, which is a shame. To quote his chapter on Keith Rowe: 'Looking at the CD pictures [from the AMM album *It was an Ordinary Day in Pueblo, Colorado*], [Rowe] has turned into A.N. Other Hairy Bloke, so it is rather apposite that he partially sounds like another Hendrix disciple here. But all this emerges, inevitably, from the inevitable AMMusic matrix, which bypasses analysis, ultimately'. (p. 90) Potential readers will be able to judge from the style of this sentence whether the book is for them! But it also highlights another major problem with the book, at least as far as this reader is concerned: not only does AMM's music 'bypass analysis', but so, seemingly, does all the other music mentioned in the book, since there is enormous emphasis on who played with whom where and when, but hardly any on what they played or what Barre thinks about it, besides which some of the few musical descriptions are misleading – the 'layers of sound' of Evan Parker's soprano saxophone music, for example, aren't the product (only) of circular breathing (p. 66). I found interesting and

enlightening the way that Barre draws connections and parallels between (the people involved in) free improvisation in the 1970s and the pop/rock scene of the time, given that the boundaries between those musical areas were more porous then than they are now, with Toop and Steve Beresford playing on the TV programme *Top of the Pops* with the Flying Lizards, Jamie Muir's time with King Crimson and Terry Day working with Ian Dury in Kilburn and the High Roads. The connections with the world of notated composition at that time are, on the other hand, only sketchily outlined, which is perhaps understandable given that so many composers of the time, from Boulez to Cage, were vocally disdainful of the music, but there too is a story that's still waiting to be told objectively. One of the important developments in the field covered by *Convergences* was the slow and belated arrival of women on the British improvising scene, as evidenced for example by the formation of the Feminist Improvising Group in 1977, which is duly acknowledged by Barre, although he doesn't appear to have interviewed any women for this book, which is an opportunity missed, and doesn't help to dispel a distastefully laddish undercurrent that lets in such casual misogynisms as '[the journalist Julie] Burchill went on to become ... ironically, a rather overweight lesbian, it must be added' (p. 276), and frequent references to the memories and opinions of the author's wife who nevertheless remains anonymous. Once more, a little proofreading and editing might have significantly improved the quality of this product.

In the final analysis, it's the aforementioned emphasis on people and dates which gives Barre's new book its primary value. Having followed the music closely as a committed admirer throughout the period under discussion, he has amassed a knowledge of the minutiae of 'what really happened' which must be second to none, and it's usefully augmented here by first-hand accounts from a number of the participating musicians. Highly valuable also is Barre's survey of what he regards as the most important recorded documents of this period, with an emphasis on those still available in CD form, which might stand as an attractive starting point for anyone wishing to explore the music further for themselves.

A principal focus here is the distinction between the first generation of British

improvisers (discussed by Barre in *Beyond Jazz*) and the second, many of whose members were little if at all younger than their predecessors but came to prominence a little later, especially as concerns released recordings. Central to this distinction is how free improvisation is to be defined: by the earlier players in terms of Derek Bailey's demand for a 'non-idiomatic' approach, and by their successors in terms of what might be called a 'pan-idiomatic' approach, where references to pre-existent musics, sometimes simultaneously or in rapid succession, could once again find a place, as evidenced particularly in the work of Alterations (Beresford, Toop, Day and Peter Cusack). This was one of the few longer-term collaborations in the second generation, which, as another generational difference underlined by Barre, was characterised more by fluid *ad hoc* formations than by identifiable groups like AMM (which indeed exists to this day), Spontaneous Music Ensemble, Music Improvisation Company and so on. The discussion as to whether 'non-idiomatic' actually means anything is still current in improvised music, of course, even though the stylistically ascetic Bailey went on to collaborate with numerous highly idiomatic performers from DJ Ninj to Will Gaines, as well as recording two CDs of standards (however obliquely interpreted) in 2002, and such discussion can be better informed with the advent of this book, and especially its quotations from those involved in the discussion at the time.

The history of this music, then, let alone its sounds and structures, still awaits a book-length treatment which goes beyond the anecdotal. When this finally does take place, though, Trevor Barre's book will need to be extensively referenced. It doesn't pretend to be anything but a personal account, and as such the window it opens onto its subject-matter is a fascinating thing to look through. Whether it might serve to spread more widely the idea that this music was and is valuable and important, as opposed to finding its way only to readers (like myself) for whom this is already clear, is another question. I'm inclined to doubt it, given the frequency of its insider references and assumptions.

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