

white, taken by Power himself. A human is bowing, forehead to the earth in prayer.

Alex Huddleston
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Mem1, *Diapason*. Estuary Ltd, est10009.

For 21 years, Laura and Mark Cetilia have devoted their duo project to a rigorous excavation of all manner of striated artifacts. More than their instruments (usually cello and a flexible combination of electronics and synthesisers), Mem1 are recognisable by their tender attention towards *what slips in and out*. A standard track dilates around the uninvited objects asleep in electroacoustic phenomena. That their music is so often slow and quiet is a measure of their commitment to the fragile states of accidental feedback, distortion, acoustic imperfection and ambient interruption that emerge when instruments are subdued below a threshold. Mem1 are forever seeking the wispy crackles and soft air bubbles that lay trapped between tectonic drones, gently shifting focus away from the (minimal) material itself and towards hazy, less predictable peripheries. Theirs has always been a generous permission for such rich effusions, with the result consistently a notch above this century's deluge of stock electroacoustic drone music.

But *Diapason* – a 30-minute diptych, released this March on their in-house label Estuary in a handsome, limited-edition dyed vinyl – is their most burnished, patient and rewarding venture yet. The album is first a study of one room and its rare treasures. Abandoning their usual cello-plus arrangement, *Diapason* reconfigures around three time-bound instruments separated by two hundred years: a reconstruction of the seventeenth-century Charlottenburg Palace organ since lost to the ruins of war; a 1970 Minimoog Model D, preferred by Hancock and Sun Ra; and the '80s pop goliath Roland Juno 60 analogue. All three live at Cornell University's Center for Historical Keyboards, and it is that campus's Anabel Taylor Chapel – a porous wooden chamber perched high on Ithaca's main hill – that provides the invisible third player on the record, an enveloping acoustic replete with trailing residues of its own. On both sides of the vinyl (labelled simply 'Diapason I' and 'Diapason II'), L. Cetilia remains behind the Charlottenburg, while M. Cetilia alternates between synthesisers, differentiating the tracks by subtle degrees of light.

But the album is no mere zany instrumentarium, like a curio closet of forgotten sounds. The instruments in *Diapason* remain forever in service to an unfolding logic of the leak. While swell (as in its title) lends the album general material, it is the limitation of leakage – and the varying thresholds at which such leaks retain significance – that hem it in. Swell is only an impetus, a utility for testing limits: shifting spectra gradually reveal the precise threshold at which the hiss of air venting from an organ pipe can still be heard, the lowest valley at which haze of electronic interference can still be said to mingle with pitch before aerating it completely or the level of activity necessary to capture the birds chattering outside an open chapel window. This is what is meant by a *logic of leaks*: these many leaking objects – organs, synthesisers, buildings and recording equipment – teach, through patient attention to the varying acoustic returns of all manner of diapasons, where their intended result and fallible intrusion dehisce with highest drama.

It is a fool's errand to speak of drone music in the singular or momentary, and, indeed, what is most rewarding about *Diapason* is the epic scale on which one becomes aware of perceptual drift: knowledge of the many leaky punctures is accrued gradually, and no two listeners take note of the ulterior layer at quite the same time. But there are, however subtle, something like instants, nexuses in which the varying leaks pierce the fore, turning the soft bed of harmony into a kind of uneven topography of small ruptures and fissures. We might, for instance, attend to the rare moments when the organ enters without its dal niente swell, a hooty articulation that puffs a cushion of air into the otherwise seamless plane – or, elsewhere, when a crescendo crests its limit, petering off with an exhalation as if a pressure gauge had been tripped. There's the sound of wooden slats gently clattering as the organ, in silence, prepares for entry, evidence of an instrumental hapticity alongside pure tone. And then there is the ending, a dramatic evacuation of sound, a sudden shutting of louvres, a switch turned off that instantly reveals what has felt rather like loud room noise as having been a controllable phenomenon from the start, divulging at the last possible second yet another threshold of absence below what had previously been understood as the limit.

These moments are fleeting and easy to write off as mere ambient intrusions. But in the scope of *Diapason* as a whole, they are crucial knots that tether the soft blanket of sonic leakage

into something like a layer of autonomous activity capable of being unconcealed as a formal priority. Leaks are fugitive phenomena, approachable only indirectly. But as the listener attunes to their intrusion, each subsequent striation recasts with greater force the more 'musical' material – pitch, chord, harmony, consistently gorgeous throughout – into a secondary role, present solely to discover and engage this hidden parameter of airy slippage and mechanistic encroachment. Harmony itself at last thins out, glassy and translucent, having revealed an even more vaporous and diaphanous substance slipping out and in beneath it.

Ty Bouque

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Modney, *Ascending Primes*. bandcamp.

According to this reviewer's impressions, Modney's album *Ascending Primes* strives to emulate the prime numbers in their manner of operation: specifically, in their irreducibility, their unpredictability and their inevitability. So what is a reviewer to do, given that the two-disc album succeeds so brilliantly in embodying these attributes? Reduce it anyway? Say something predictable? Evade it by talking nonsense? I am sure I will do all of these things. You were warned, but I do urge you to read on. If I can convince even a half-dozen readers to acquire this album, it will be one of the most useful things I've done with my power as a reviewer. *Ascending Primes* deserves to be heard and re-heard by as many enthusiasts and sceptics as possible.

Like so much music that I admire, Modney's album juxtaposes complex and simple sound-bits in a way that makes the former seem simple and the latter complex. It's almost a cliché to say so by now. What impresses me most, however, is that these sound-bits are used in an almost traditional manner, like recurring characters in a drama, a classical musical form. Each time an idea returns, it is treated in a new way or re-introduced in light of other recurring sound-bits. We observe these characters either introducing themselves fully formed or inventing themselves before our ears; groping around in the dark and in the light; projecting confidence or diffidence; reacting to the presence of other characters with antipathy, sympathy or equanimity. It's particularly magical when a sound-bit seeks to expand but cannot do so until it's in the presence of another sound-bit, or seeks to contract but loses that desire when other sound-bits are

added. When the bits converge, Modney's multifaceted ensemble devises exquisite moments of, simultaneously, transcendence and grounding.

Ascending Primes is in five sections, the last two of which are broken up into four and three numbered and subtitled movements respectively. Each successive section is inspired by an interval, ever higher in the overtone spectrum: unison (fundamental), octave (2:1), fifth (3:1), major third (5:1), harmonic minor seventh (7:1) and augmented fourth (11:1). Their numeric value (and their primality) directly corresponds to the sizes of the ensembles (solo, duo, trio, up to undectet) but is otherwise less important here than the moods, the metaphorical characters that they suggest to the composer. The fifth, for example, suggests 'honesty and focus'; the third is poignant; the eleventh is 'a serrated scream'. But this tour of the intervals is not for sightseers. There is a continuous unfolding of successively broader and deeper insights.

The opening movement, 'Ascender', features Modney on solo violin, as he presents (aptly) ascending figures with exquisitely tuned double-stops. Dyads are presented here not as harmony but as pairs of tones that provide context for one another. I guess that is harmony, isn't it? But that modality of 'mutual context-providing' becomes particularly important in light of the composer's preoccupation with two realms of thought: just intonation and electronic sound.

Just intonation is a sonic world which Modney has clearly thought about and experienced for a long time, viscerally, with a buzzing wooden box jammed against his neck. When two tones form a 'pure' interval, they instantly imply a wide spectrum of related tones, unambiguously. Modney hears this spectrum more deeply than we do and demonstrates that tiny changes in one or the other tone just as instantly alter the whole implicit spectrum. The electronic component in turn accentuates the fragility of this purportedly unambiguous soundworld. Throughout *Ascending Primes*, the electronics are used to make explicit and amplify these spectra, and they intentionally demonstrate that a pair of sustained tones is in no way stable. Difference tones are both indelibly attached to the dyads and imbue them with fluctuations that no notion of stability could possibly countenance.

'Everything Around It Moves' forms the centrepiece of the album (being preceded by two shorter and followed by two much longer movements or sections) and is most clearly expository in nature. It begins by presenting snapshots of contrasting sounds, successively cutting from one to the next like an old-fashioned