

by Arthur Russell and Frederic Rzewski. Russell and Eastman were collaborators and kindred spirits of sorts, both outsiders to 'serious' (i.e. unengaged) music. Russell's almost inaccessible *Tower of Meaning* received an all-too-rare airing, in a special chamber arrangement from Apartment House. Its lack of direction, to the point of stasis, and its otherworldly blankness invites comparisons to medieval music, to Satie's *Socrate* and Cage's *Cheap Imitation* of it, as well as anticipating much 'naïve' music of the late twentieth Century.

The entire programme opened with Rzewski's *Coming Together*, a key work in understanding Eastman's musical approach – minimal rhythms, harmonies and repetitions as a framework for looser improvisation – and his engagement with politics, revolution and their conflicts with his sexuality. These themes were pursued further on the second night when Rzewski himself performed his own *De Profundis*, a setting of Oscar Wilde's text for reciting pianist. Besides the Eastman, this was the highlight of the Festival. Rzewski, now 78, may have faltered on occasion but his voice, playing and percussive gestures (including rapping on the piano lid, scratching himself, beating his skull with his fist) all spoke with an unmatched directness and clarity. It was a gripping performance, letting the words drive the music and the music serve the words.

Ben Harper

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Impuls Festival, Graz. Collaboratory with Stefan Prins

Impuls, the International Ensemble and Composition Academy for Contemporary Music, has in the past offered a workshop that deviates from the main activities of instrumental classes and ensemble work, composition classes, lectures, and call-for-score reading sessions, taking the form of an intensive course which plays with the grey areas between composer and performer, performance and installation, cochlear and non-cochlear music. In 2017, with the Academy now in its tenth edition, the focus of this workshop moved from 'Composition Beyond Music', led in recent years by Peter Ablinger (2013) and by Georg Nussbaumer (2015), to 'Collaboratory', a new workshop led by Belgian composer/performer Stefan Prins, imagined in collaboration with Ute Pinter, the festival's secretary general.

Offered as a 'Special Course' within the Academy, applications were solicited from 'adventurous composer-performer-sound artists' who wished to develop their own projects while committing to an intensive course with collaboration as its central feature. Rather than signifying the collective creation of a single work, the collaborative element was instead intended as the way in which the members of the group would be encouraged to interact. To share not just physical space and equipment but also 'thoughts, energy, inspiration' was central to the three foci of Prins' 'laboratory': the development of each participant's own work-in-progress through feedback and discussions with the other participants; the preparation of a performance/presentation/installation of each work-in-progress for a final public event; the collaborative development and curation/dramaturgy of this final event.

Group collaboration on individual projects, one of the principle aims of the workshop, came to life during the first two days through intensive roundtable discussions during which each participant presented their proposed performance or installation. The 13 selected composers-performers-sound artists (categories overlapping or not) gathered in the ESC Gallery in the centre of Graz, an open-plan, glassed-in aquarium with seven squared columns in the middle and swathes of grey curtains. The group feedback quickly evolved into an enthralling hydra of debates: three hours were spent on one of the projects alone as we delved into aesthetics, touched upon creative vulnerability, the historical weight of a sonic object, audience roles, performer responsibilities, cultural appropriation, transgression of performance spaces, and the multiplicity of realities. Prins sat back, attentively watching chaos spin itself out, occasionally stepping in to bring the discussions to a head. It proved to be a rapid way of getting to know each other, cutting out the *hors d'oeuvres* of small talk and getting straight to the meat of each project, respectfully disagreeing, at times interrupting, but mostly seeking to clarify the central idea embedded within often very divergent approaches and aesthetics. Our backgrounds were at least as diverse as the ten (11 including Prins) nationalities represented: performance, improvisation, circus, composition, programming, installations, 3D modelling, song-writing. The situation seemed like it must result either in a complete train wreck or push everyone towards excellence.

It was an intense confrontation with the creative process. The only prerequisite 'preparation'

for the workshop was exactly the opposite of that, to arrive, counterintuitively, with compositions/installations/performances that were incomplete. A week is a very short time in which to bring something (either entirely or mostly) new to a point where it can be presented to an audience, even if it is shown as a 'work-in-progress'. By first exposing one's inchoate dream to the small Collaboratory world, population 14, planet ESC Gallery, one also had to commit to it, dare to run with it, break it, reinvent it, throw in the towel, and then reinvent the towel. The collaboration itself fell into two distinct parts: the sounding board that was the group which facilitated the refining and decision-making aspect of the creative process, and then the involvement of participants as a resource for experimentation so that ideas could quickly be tried out, scrapped, changed and retried so that a piece could develop, passing through multiple iterations in a very short space of time. One piece required three violinists in addition to its author/performer, and over the course of several run-throughs/rehearsals, each performer contributed essential elements to the resulting final piece. The roles of 'composer', 'director', and 'performer' bled together, raising questions of authorship (and the relativity of its importance). Another piece began with a simple concept that, through a series of improvisations with different members of the group, moved from being a piece for multiple muted instruments to an improvisation for a mixed ensemble, to a piece for three violins combining movement in space, to a piece for three (and eventually four) performers using only their voices and bodies in a semi-structured improvisation. Each of these versions went through a phase of trial, error, and experimentation, being discarded or revised until reaching a conclusive version.

The final presentation was the first time that these works, after their intensive week-long incubation, would receive feedback from anyone outside of the 'bubble' of the glass walls of the ESC. I felt there to be an acute awareness of our insularity from the rest of the festival, and a certain degree of uncertainty about how these works would be perceived from an external perspective. We certainly no longer had any. Thirteen participants ricocheted around inside the gallery an incessant exchange, generating their own reality. The group, which Prins had managed to guide without leading, had become a living and breathing sounding board, a hyperactive hive mind, with the capacity to optimise the creative process (if the quantity of feedback didn't overwhelm the work before it even started)

and, finally, a support system in which the participants, having contributed to each other's projects, could take pride in their final form.

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Mimitabu at Atalante, Gothenburg

Why Swedish contemporary music over the past few decades has been such a provincial affair is a mystery. Most of the pieces receiving critical attention from the media are using neo-Romantic aesthetics – bombastic orchestral sounds more connected to the world of Richard Strauss than Helmut Lachenmann. Hearing this type of music, often characterised by its excesses of art nouveau ornamentations, one may wonder what century one is living in. Where is the contemporary world?

Of course there are exceptions. There are quite a few very talented experimental musicians coming from Sweden, many of them moving back and forth between free improvisation and composed music. For example, the pianist Lisa Ullén, the saxophone player Anna Högberg, the violinist Anna Lindal and the clarinet and saxophone player Magnus Granberg. The two last names have collaborated in a series of wonderful pieces released on CD by the Another Timbre label. This is quiet music in the post-Feldman tradition, but with an open door to a new and unknown landscape, full of musical wonders.

Another exception is the Stockholm-based Curious Chamber Players, run by the composer Malin Bång and the conductor/composer Rei Munakata. Since its inception in 2003 the group has premiered and introduced an immense number of new pieces, engaging in a most needed dialogue with an international experimental music scene.

Rei Munakata is also the musical director of Mimitabu, a smaller group based in Gothenburg, consisting of eight musicians. One of the intentions of the group is to work as a fruitful ground for younger composers, and several of the members are active as composers as well. In the beginning of December, 2016, the group presented an alternative Christmas concert in Atalante, a space for contemporary dance, music and performance art in Gothenburg. Four pieces by four Swedish composers were played: *Kylan, plötstlig* (The Cold, Sudden) by Lina Järnegård, *Vox Terminus* by