

classical Korean singer Song Hee Kwon. Different temperaments were exposed, with each musician allowed to develop their own line within the ensemble sound, but there was nothing here that one could not experience every week in a city like Berlin, albeit in more intimate places. The festival also included a few sound installations in more or less public spaces. Thomas Köhner's installation was set in a hermetically dark room, with red light, smoke and low frequency vibrations. It was well executed, but I've been in similar environments before. Hannes Seidl's radio project *Good Morning Deutschland* was located outside the main festival locations and near the newly created refugee housing as a radio show run by and for refugees. According to Seidl this provided 'the potential to allow the newly-developing community to network, exchange, make music together and design a future for our society'. I would argue that the main way to become part of a society is to have access to its cultural institutions – like the Donaueschinger Musiktage – but maybe the refugees were invited to the concerts as well.

Bernhard Gander's *Cold Cadaver with Thirteen Scary Scars* was characterised by hard driving pulses in a typical rock-fusion manner, with abrupt changes and the attractive groove-addition of the musicians of Steamboat Switzerland on Hammond organ, electric bass, drum-set and piano, but it lacked the sense of direction you would find in a rock context. Franck Bedrossian's *Twist* managed better in combining the disruptive and direct volume and original noises from metal plates and electronics. The sound surface had some obvious 'metal' or 'noise' qualities, but, unlike Gander's piece, did not rely directly on these genres.

As the attentive reader will have noticed, there certainly were some pop references in the works mentioned so far and, if one extends 'popular' to embrace everyday material, there was also Joanna Bailie's captivating soundscape-based *Music from Public Spaces* for choir, string quartet and recorded material. But the popular connections were mostly at a distance, analytically conceived and executed through dissection. This is nothing unusual; indeed it is what art music is about. Instead, in this aesthetically unchallenging programme, it was interesting to see what happens when a work takes another, different approach to the general discourse. If the festival really did have a theme it was to question appropriateness and inappropriateness at a new music festival, something further demonstrated by the rather negative reaction to

G.F. Haas's new concerto for trombone and orchestra: a thoroughly conventional work, but without the potential critical sting of Morthenson. In the end, what matters may not be context, but what's actually there; that way we are exposed to our listening, to hear what we hear.

Andreas Engström

---

**Georg Friedrich Haas and Rebecca Saunders  
premieres, Huddersfield Contemporary Music  
Festival 2016**

The first weekend of the 2016 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival saw an eclectic and vibrant mix of musical events. Artistic director Graham McKenzie promised a festival that was going to be 'undoubtedly characterised by the bringing together of often quite disparate forces, to create new sounds, new experiences, and new approaches to music making', and the opening days also manifested a strong sense of artistic difference and distance as well. The presence of Georg Friedrich Haas, this year's Composer in Residence, and Rebecca Saunders seemed to fire up such underlying dynamic energies. Throughout the weekend both composers took part in public interviews and both had UK and world premieres, yet they only presented in parallel: the programming kept them apart. In turn, the weekend amplified various levels of similarity and divergence between the two composers, exposing some fascinating creative tensions.

In interview, Haas and Saunders provided glimpses into the different models they had adopted to connect and engage with this year's Huddersfield audience. Robert Worby, in conversation with Haas, proposed

it might be said that there are only two ways to put sound together, and that is one after the other ... and one sound with another, in what we might call the vertical structure. Could you say something about how you do this?

Haas's response was one of immediate deliberation, the silence broken when the composer said,

for whom should I tell this, this is the question. If you are all composers then I can speak technically ... but if you are just audience, is it really necessary when you buy a cheeseburger that you know the chemistry of the cheese?

Saunders, on the other hand, when asked by Sara Mohr-Pietsch whether it is important to her for

the audience to be aware of principal structures within her music, responded decisively: 'I should not be expecting someone in the audience to do that work. I think the piece, the sounds themselves, will make that evident as necessary'. The composers' words rang true throughout the Huddersfield performances of their works. The composer–audience relationship in Haas's music seemed somewhat loose and, at times, (perhaps purposefully?) confused or misplaced, whereas Saunders's music always seemed grounded.

The Huddersfield performances of Haas's music in the first weekend included the UK premiere of *I can't breathe* (2015) for solo trumpet performed by Marco Blaauw, the world premiere of String Quartet No. 10 (2016) performed by the Arditti Quartet, *aus freier lust ... verbunden ...* (1994–96) for solo trombone performed by Angelos Kritikos, and the UK premiere of *Octet* (2015) for eight trombones performed by Trombone Unit Hannover. Described by Blaauw as a piece that 'screams for attention with the most vulnerable of soft sounds, has meaning where words have lost theirs and wants to make audible the suffocation that we witness again and again in the time of frequent outbreaks of racial violence', *I can't breathe* was particularly poignant alongside String Quartet No. 10, in which the audience was once again cast by Haas into the proximity of 'beautiful' darkness, to experience the 'feeling of being reduced to yourself ... just listening'. The UK premiere of *Hyena* (2016) for ensemble and narrator, performed by Klangforum Wien and Mollena Lee Williams-Haas, on the other hand, seemed to provoke a more unsettled reception. It was difficult at times to hear the music over the narration, the subject material being Williams-Haas's battle with alcoholism. But it was perhaps even more difficult to understand why such a 'monstrous' experience was being expressed through a constant, literal, narration accompanied by music. Was a contemporary music festival the most suitable public platform for *Hyena*? Words, music and audience seemed disconnected, the piece teetering on the edge of being overtly commercial.

In contrast, the performances of Saunders's music during the weekend included the world Premiere of *Bite* (2016) for solo bass flute performed by Helen Bledsoe, and the UK Premiere of *Skin* (2015–16) for solo soprano and 13 instruments performed by Juliet Fraser and Klangforum Wien, compositions which prised the notion of 'narrative' wide open. In *Bite*, the structural outline was almost subliminally

visible: exactly what Saunders had described when stating that sound will reveal structure when necessary. Intricately crafted, the trajectories posed by Bledsoe would become more and more desperate to 'speak', yet never lose their articulation. Similarly, *Skin*, incorporating text by Saunders as well as a passage from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, demonstrated the composer's fascination with 'speaking on a finishing out-breath, or finished in-breath' and exploring 'what that actually does to the drama of the text, what kind of narrative comes across'. Fraser's performance was captivating; as Saunders said, 'you really feel with her this kind of almost existential moment that she is desperate to breathe but must finish the text. ... There is something in there that everybody responds to but can't quite distinguish'. And yet, in prising open the notion of 'narrative' – so that the soloist's mouth itself seemed to represent the strenuous unfolding of each word – performative disconnection was never an issue. Saunders was able to 'imply without saying ...', and, in turn, present the audience with a situation that was precise and persuasive, yet also open to interpretation.

Stephanie Jones

---

#### Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival 2016, Huddersfield

The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival leaves an indelible impression on any brave soul who ventures into the chill, dark November nights across its ten days, a rite of passage challenging conceptions of the stuff music is made of. Now in its thirty-ninth year, this is one of the more established contemporary music festivals, yet it never fails to provoke and stimulate, a snapshot of current musical preoccupations. The first weekend traditionally showcases a selection of significant works, setting the tone for the subsequent week, and 2016 was no exception. Jennifer Walshe and the Arditti String Quartet opened the festival in a 'declaration of love to life on earth'. *EVERYTHING IS IMPORTANT* (2016) is an eco-treatise on the bombardment the world is suffering – a torrent of visual and vocal disturbance with the arch-complexist Arditti gamely along for the ride, a playful synergy of theatre, voice and string quartet, preparing us for what was to come over the next few days.

Claudia Molitor's *Walking with Partch* (2016) was a festival commission receiving its world