

fracturing reflected in Watanabe's German title. Francesco Filidei's *Corde Vuote* (Open Strings) differs from the other pieces on the recording in its concentration on the violin and cello (the piano enters for the first time halfway through the piece), and its more constrained approach to materials and development. The placid flow of the work, along with the ringing sustains of the open strings and harmonics, appears to animate and anthropomorphize the strings into a set of gently respirating lungs. Notwithstanding its consistency, the piece also contains several deftly handled harmonic twists, particularly two-thirds of the way through, prior to its gradual, semi-retrograde exhalation.

Where the strength of Filidei's piece rests in his effortless and restrained application of open string spectra, in *Il colore dell'ombra*, Clara Iannotta delves further into spectrality via colour theory. Iannotta's powerful work can partially be heard through the filter of French impressionist painters, who adopted Eugène Chevreul's research into separating effects of light, and chiaroscuro. From Chevreul, Renoir gleaned that 'No shadow is black. It always has a colour. Nature knows only colours'. Subsequently, shadow colour was no longer considered primary tone plus darkness, but a fine composite of pigments and their opposites. Similarly, Monet's 20 paintings of the Rouen Cathedral (1892–94) investigate the fleeting, changing light, colour and shadow on the structure at different times of day, different times of year, and in different weather conditions. Music, on the other hand, has the advantage of uninterrupted mobility through time, which is fundamental to *Il colore dell'ombra*'s achievement. In the first section, 'Passage com un velo', the loosened strings offer a dark, guttural quality to the transitory tone colourings of the cello, supported by the radiant cyclic rumbling of low piano harmonics. 'D'un fiato' (in one breath) continues the muscular deployment of extreme registers from the first movement, receding to calm, whistling harmonics in the strings. The brief final movement shimmies along like shifting colour filters, crossing, accumulating, and separating back in a mysterious continuity that quickly accelerates to its conclusion.

Overlooking the awkward, under-edited liner notes, *Passage* is an inspired debut album, on which Longleash is tethered to tight playing and bound together in lucid interpretations of the music.

Paul Steenhuisen

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DUO IMAGINAIRE: Japanese Echoes, Hommage à Claude Debussy. Chromart Classics, TYXart TXA17099

In the midst of the Japonisme-craze that overtook the Paris art scene in the years around 1900, Claude Debussy insisted on having Hokusai's iconic *Under the Wave off Kanagawa* as the cover of the first edition of *La Mer* in 1905. The composer himself possessed a print, which hung in his living room.

That being said, the influence of Japanese art is often described as being subtler in Debussy's oeuvre compared to his more exoticism-oriented contemporaries such as Saint-Saëns and Sullivan. His entry is more abstract, through relating to the way space and timbre are treated in Japanese music. 'Music is the space between notes' Debussy declared. Whether or not he knowingly echoed the Japanese culture of 'ma', or 'sensitivity for the space between', the parallel is attractive. This didn't of course prevent eastern pentatonic scales from making multiple cameo appearances.

Duo Imaginaire wanted to give six Japanese composers the opportunity to return the favour. To bring out the Japanese in Debussy, as well as Debussy in the expression of the cosmopolitan Japanese composers. Many of them have studied at key institutions of Central European modernism or with prestigious teachers of the same vein. In the global village, Debussy should self-evidently be considered part of their heritage. The 50–50 gender balance of the commissions is laudable.

Each composer chose one of the *préludes* to precede their work in a call and answer. A literary twin of this kind of programming principle is 'Waka' or Japanese respondent poetry, where a tanka-metre poem is written in response to another – perhaps as an exchange of love-letters or a political debate. These six preludes were then arranged by Duo Imaginaire's harpist Simone Seiler and clarinetist John Corbett.

The rapport is very clear in all the pieces, which is not always a virtue. In the last pair, Asako Miyaki's response *The garden of afterimage II – butterfly pattern* starts from the second chord of *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir* and attempts to gather momentum through pinning onto Debussy's contour. Unfortunately, Miyaki's work never manages to catch wind. The unambitious fragments follow each other without audible reason, and so remain introverted and insular.

Satoshi Minami's *Soundprint No.4* manages better to keep the characteristic drive and flow of *La danse de Puck*, mirroring its abundant use

of dotted rhythms and mapping the clarinet line often directly onto Debussy's line. Minami structures the harmony of the work on a tangible three-note motive, which arches right through to the end. The album's orchestration is at its most inventive here: the harp is prepared with paper sheets in the lowest register, and the clarinet plays with its bell hovering over a snare-drum. This conjures an imaginary third performer, a ghost pipe-and-drum player, enhancing the dance-character of the work.

The wintery imagery of *Des pas sur la neige* is seamlessly continued by Yasuko Yamaguchi's *Die Entdeckung der Freude im Schnee*. The works share an initial motive, from which Yamaguchi quickly fans out. A fast forward through twentieth-century instrumentation ensues, ending in glissandi and timbral trills. The narrative of the work is very evocative of the title, ending with the clarinet shivering in the cold. The exhilarant, repetitive gestures in the distinctive middle part are suggestive of a syllabic metre and unquestionably her own.

After *Canope* comes a welcomingly long clarinet solo. Most of the pieces have both instruments playing all the time. Here, in Takashi Fuji's *Annotation on a Japanese Lullaby* there is space. Fuji first lets the single line fork into polyphony before introducing quarter-tones, poetically reinstating a – to our ears microtonal – pentatonic sound that Debussy would have heard at the Paris World Fairs of 1889 and 1900. The scordatura of the harp and the carefully placed melodic microtones in the clarinet grown beautifully from one another. Here Fuji audaciously presents a fragile foreign object. A short traditional Japanese lullaby appears, continent and tasteful, just moments before the work culminates in a microtonal fanfare in impressive unison. Moments of complex clarity such as this one are otherwise mostly found in Debussy's contribution to the album.

Kumiko Omura's counterpart *À travers le brouillard* starts where *Brouillards* ends, setting the same diatonic standard and quickly going away from the quiet and settled. Metallic multiphonics and a low half-pedal rattle herald

a few minutes of strange dialogue between twentieth- and twenty-first-century aesthetics. Omura writes a pastiche of Debussy until little over halfway into the piece, where her own voice beautifully comes to the fore. Here, unshaded, is a transparent and spacious harp solo intertwined with clarinet multiphonics and timbral trills beautifully enunciated by Corbett. Overall, Omura succeeds in an orchestral sound, as if the work were scored for more than two instruments.

Again, it is the opening gesture of Debussy that sparks its sister. Meditating on the F# that begins *Feuilles mortes*, the melodic permutation that ensues in Takayuki Rai's *Misty Stillness* brings to mind a potentiometer: Rai rolls the knob subtly from Debussy to rigorous post-serial harmony at crucial points. The approach is that of a sentimental scientist. Research into the many subtle spectres of harp and clarinet unison is ornamented with quaint flashbacks.

The Debussy arrangements are streamlined and devout to the style and period of the *préludes*. They are orchestrated according to the period. Debussy writes music for horns, flutes, wind machines and harps, all this arsenal having to be realised with only the white and black keys at hand. Duo Imaginaire slightly enhances this colour palette, albeit leaving the contemporary expansion of the misty sound colours and orchestration techniques to the composers.

The roles of the clarinet and the harp remain unswapped throughout, the clarinet carrying the solistic line and the harp the accompanying figures. This is the obvious starting point for such an ensemble, so therefore there's an incentive to be inventive and look for ways to break this setup. *Des pas sur la neige* and *Brouillards* indeed do so, transforming the preludes into glorious dwellings into Simone Seiler's sound. Magnetic together, Duo Imaginaire seek and find a great variety of ways to express their musicality – even within austere concision.

Lauri Supponen

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