

CDs AND DVDs

'CHAMBER WORKS 1992–2009': LAURENCE CRANE. CD 1: *Sparling; Trio; Raimondas Rumsas; See Our Lake; Sparling; Riis; Bobby J; Sparling 2000; Estonia*. CD 2: *Seven Short Pieces; Piano Piece no. 23 – Ethiopian Distance Runners; Four Miniatures; Come back to the old specimen cabinet John Vigani, John Vigani Part 1; John White in Berlin*. Apartment House: Anton Lukoszevieve (vc), Gordon MacKay (vln), Ruth Ehrlich (vln), Angharad Davies (vln), Hilary Sturt (vla), Alan Thomas (guit.), Nancy Ruffer (fls), Andrew Sparling (cl.), Philip Thomas (pno), Sarah Walker (elec. org.), Simon Limbrick (perc.), Laurence Crane (aux. insts). Another Timbre at74

Laurence Crane's solo cello piece *Raimondas Rumsas* (2002) has featured on two CDs in the past year: first on Oliver Coates' 2013 album *Towards the blessed islands* on PRAH Records (a live video version of which became a surprise hit online for the website Sinfini), and now on this important new disc from Another Timbre, played beautifully by its dedicatee Anton Lukoszevieve. Another CD featuring numerous pieces by Crane, Håkon Stene's *Lush Laments for Lazy Mammal*, has also just been released. If this coincidence of timing is evidence of an increased interest in Crane's music, it's very welcome.

This music, after all, could easily satisfy a larger audience than it usually receives. While Crane is most often seen as an experimentalist who distinguishes himself through an atypical emphasis on tonal elements and simplicity – in other words, occupying a niche within a niche – the resultant music is so delightfully approachable that it's hard to think of a reason why it need be so boxed in. In an interview with Crane on Another Timbre's website, he comments in amusement that Håkon Stene's disc was reviewed (positively) in the 'world' music section of *The Times*. That particular categorisation may not make much sense, but the idea that Crane's music should have some sort of cross-market appeal seems perfectly logical.

This particular recording of Crane's work is a double CD of chamber music, performed by members of Lukoszevieve's group, Apartment House. It not only provides a strong overview of his chamber music, but also is important for

rendering his significant relationship with Apartment House in permanent form – they have collaborated frequently over the past two decades. The shared aesthetic evinced on this release is hence no surprise: the recording is imbued with the sense that composer and performers are on precisely the same page, revelling in a clean, unfussy style, and happy swimming against stylistic tides.

The two discs have different characters, perhaps charting a slight change in Crane's music over the years – the first disc features the earlier works, written from 1992 to 2002, whilst the second features those from 2003 to 2009. The first is by and large lighter listening, as amply demonstrated by the tranquil *Sparling* (1992), a five-and-a-half-minute piece which appears three times, in different arrangements, over the course of the disc. Clarinetist Andrew Sparling – for whom, unsurprisingly, the piece was written – features each time, but he is joined first by Alan Thomas on guitar, then by Philip Thomas (no relation) on piano, and finally by a string quartet for *Sparling 2000*. Though the protagonist, Sparling has the simplest of parts: just one slow two-note phrase, which repeats over and over again while the accompanying chords shift enigmatically beneath. The harmonies are the same in each of the three versions, but the slow pace and the emphasis on timbre mean that each has a contrasting character, and indeed sounds like a completely new piece.

This radically economical approach to material is typical of Crane's music generally, in which the simple elements of each piece are presented in the precise context that maximises their effect. Another piece on the first disc, *Riis* (1996) for electric organ, clarinet and cello, also shows extreme judiciousness and frugality: the interjections for cello harmonics and clarinet are uncannily well attuned to the long, held organ chords, and the combined texture becomes not so much simple as otherworldly. It is perhaps on this recording, incidentally, that the particular talents of the performers are most apparent – the virtuosity here is in their sensitivity to tone and ruthlessly clear ensemble.

On the second CD, a darker tinge intermittently emerges. Layers of ominous percussion

cut through several of the scores (notably *John White in Berlin* and *Four Miniatures*, both 2003), and the first of the *Four Miniatures* is extreme in its flirtation with near-silence. Here, violinist Gordon MacKay bows a mute, Simon Limbrick plays his bass drum as softly as possible, Philip Thomas muffles his occasional low notes with a hand on the piano strings, and flautist Nancy Ruffer is instructed to play with 'more breath than pitch; avoid pitch as much as possible'. *John White in Berlin* has a sinister edge, the metallic percussion creating a sheen that cuts through the ensemble's delicate held notes. *Piano Piece no. 23 – 'Ethiopian Distance Runners'*, an epic by Crane's standards, is softer in mood, and beautifully presented by Thomas. Its greater length and many repetitions create a piece a little more akin to what conventionally gets called minimalism, though this is not a particularly useful label to apply to a composer so clearly treading his own path.

The overall impression from the later disc is of an opening out: the constituents are similar to those on the earlier disc, but they are taken in unexpected, new directions. It is proof that the lack of theoretical encumbrances in Crane's style does not curtail his artistic or affective range.

Paul Kilbey

BERNHARD LANG: *The Anatomy of Disaster* (Monadologie IX). Arditti String Quartet. Winter&Winter 910 217-2

'BEZIEHUNGSWEISE': works by MAIERHOF, SCHWEITZER, NEWMAN, LANG. Elole Piano Trio: Uta-Maria Lempert (vln), Matthias Lorenz (vc), Stefan Eder (pno). Querstand VKJK1405

Walking together, hand clasping hand, history and writing bound down in metronome; and it's only when you turn and look that you see they share a face and form, are identical twins. The phrase 'written history' is a pleonasm: the first word is already contained in the second. History means written history; history begins with writing and record, whether daubs of red paint on a cold cave wall, lines chipped out of a heavy stone slab, or the black blobs and squiggles inscribed in ink above a text in Latin. In the modern era, with the invention of the phonograph and the advent of Information Technology, our means of acoustic recording and inscription have exploded. Correspondingly, the grounds of Western Art Music – of the 'literate tradition' – have shuddered and shifted, have rippled, broken and realigned,

and the features of music's landscape have been reshaped.

It's hard not to see Bernhard Lang as a signal figure in this context. At no other time in history would it have been possible for his music to be written. Lang's music is usually based on the repetition of small cells or 'grains' of sound taken from previously written music, which he samples and analyses on computer, splicing, blending, deranging the sound, and then orchestrating or otherwise scoring the result. Often that result can sound like a skipping vinyl record or like the musical equivalent of the experimental films of Martin Arnold. Running a scalpel against the surface of a musical record means, naturally, making an incision into the body of music history; in the two ongoing cycles of pieces that Lang is composing alongside each other – *Differenz/Wiederholung* and *Monadologie* – the Austrian composer has been making his way through the compositional Pantheon, cutting into the past so that the future can leak out (to misquote William Burroughs, one of Lang's points of reference).

Despite the chin-stroking implications of his music, in person Lang is refreshingly down to earth and cordial. When he came to City University London to give a guest seminar earlier this year, he stood at the front of the room, confident and comfortable in black jacket, black t-shirt, jeans, trainers and dark-circled eyes, meeting theoretical questions with practical answers, open about his influences, his discussion ranging from destructivism to the mixed reception his music received last year at Donaueschingen to his specifically devised computer program with which he composes. (And the following evening he cooked everyone a big dinner.)

The string quartet *The Anatomy of Disaster* is a recomposition of Joseph Haydn's *The Seven Last Words of our Saviour on the Cross*, also for quartet. Aurally it comes across as a nightmare of that work, for the most part harmonically discordant. Where Haydn sings, Lang gives a croak; where Haydn glides gracefully, Lang tumbles around in a Saint Vitus' Dance. In Lang's immediate style there is something of Ligeti's machines-breaking-down; a touch, too, of Christian Marclay's experimental turntablism. In Lang's process of writing you could make connections (as has been done) with Cage's generation of musical material by mechanical chance operations, or even Scelsi's process of improvising-recording-transcribing-tweaking. These references notwithstanding, Lang's style is distinct and his outlook quite new. Although the results