

Quite different is the gay tinkling in *Inner Cities 3* for toy piano. With its quickly repeated patterns this has a minimalist vein, yet it is interspersed with non-repetitive passages in which the music slows down considerably. In the end an innocent melody pops up that makes the toy piano sound like a music-box. *Inner Cities 5* sets off in the pointillist style that was popular among Darmstadt composers in the sixties and seventies. But gradually the sparse notes seemingly lost in mid-air clot together and evolve into frantic hammering. The fearless Bauerecker digs deep into the keys, creating fierce havoc, leaving us gasping for breath.

Her sheer pleasure in Omelchuk's at times hilarious *5 Widmungen an die verborgenen Empfänger* (*5 Dedications to the Hidden Receivers*) for accordion and tape is almost tangible. With infectious gusto she takes us on an exciting trip along bustling fairgrounds, folk-like rhythms and jittery electronics. The halting pauses in 'Widmung 2' evoke the gait of a jolly drunk, who, pint in hand, just barely manages to stop himself from keeling over. It's a compelling piece, and one can't help guessing who the hidden receivers of these five miniatures might be.

Highly contrasting with Omelchuk's jaunty piece is Simon Rummel's introverted *Melodiétude* (*Melody Study*) for accordion and sinus tones. Like Curran, Rummel takes a simple theme as his starting point. Over some 13 minutes he develops a deeply moving, wistful melody crafted from single tones. The atmosphere is hushed and searching, as if each note is expectantly waiting for what comes next. The spiky sound of the accordion is remarkably similar to the pure sinus tones, often making it hard to tell whether what we hear is produced electronically or live.

Strewn across the CD are the seven miniatures of *Viscum Album* Tsangaris composed for Bauerecker. It is inspired by the white mistletoe, a semi-parasite that lives off the trees on which it grows, damaging but not entirely killing them. In olden days it was attributed miraculous powers and in German myth it was considered to be a gift of God. The composer takes us through a plethora of atmospheres and sound colours, from melancholically drawn-out chords and virtuoso arpeggiation to ominous grunting and buoyant trills. In *Viscum Album II* Bauerecker theatrically recites the names of various kinds of mistletoe, such as 'Knisterholz' and 'Vogelmistel'. The unusual words create an incantatory and at the same time humorous effect. Yet, for all its

diversity this is the least convincing work on the CD; the musical events seem to take place in a rather haphazard way.

This debut release perfectly showcases Bauerecker's talent for pairing solid workmanship to expressive presentation. She brings across every subtle nuance and emotion, from deceptively seductive murmurings and barely audible whisperings to light-hearted irony and relentless fury. The composers could hardly wish for a more dedicated interpreter, and the natural feel of the recording makes one long to hear Bauerecker perform live. Undoubtedly this will be an exhilarating experience.

Thea Derks

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GELSEY BELL AND JOHN KING: *Ciphony*. Gold Bolus Recordings GBR029

Gelsey Bell's and John King's new album explores the divisions and intersections between the acoustic and electronic, the human and non-human, and the seen and heard. Bell, a vocalist, composer and scholar, and King, a guitarist-violist-composer, make music that is emblematic of the 'Ridgewood, NY' aesthetic: the sorts of things one might hear in any of the new industrial-warehouse-size venues popping up in the neighbourhood on the Brooklyn/Queens border, even more avant-garde and 'hipster' than its neighbours Bushwick and Williamsburg. Yet Bell and King are also exceptional voices within this aesthetic, mapping sonic cartographies that push listeners not only to listen but to think. *Ciphony* drags the listener into an oceanic abyss of layers of electronic, acoustic and vocal sounds all the way to the Hadalpelagic trenches lying 6,000 to 11,000 meters at the bottom of the ocean. The album's six tracks are named after the regions of the underwater 'pelagic zones' in the open sea, away from the shore: 'Pelagic', 'Epipelagic', 'Mesopelagic', 'Bathypelagic', 'Abyssopelagic' and 'Hadalpelagic'.

The album evolved from Bell's and King's live performances with the Centre national de danse contemporaine (CNDC) of Angers, France, who were performing Merce Cunningham's 75-minute dance anthology *EVENT* at the Joyce Theater in 2015. From here, the duo took their collaboration to Roulette, where they presented it in a concert format in 2016. The scores were written 'in response to' yet separate from each other's (much in the manner of Cunningham's

collaborations with John Cage), colliding and overlapping into a 'co-compositional sound-map with parallel – though independent – scores'. Gradually winnowed down from the multimedia experience of choreography accompaniment to the live concert experience to the stabilised 'object' of a 40-minute recording, it can be hard to hear the original fluidity – or the maritime themes implied by its track titles – of 'Ciphony' in its current state. The album flows from beginning to end in an unproblematic wash of clings, clangs and gurgles, fascinating most of all not for their reactive or narrative qualities but for the acousmatic anxiety they induce.

This conundrum does not detract from the enjoyability of the range of sounds and textures to be found on the album. Throughout the lovely 'Epipelagic', named for the surface or 'sunlight' zone of the ocean, we can hear soft metallic strums, scrapes and strokes alternating with low vocal moans: straightforward enough. The following track, 'Mesopelagic', mingles a similar background of metals and percussive chimes with vocalisations ranging from a smooth humming to a wordless high-pitched singing and hissing, wispy whispers. As Bell's and King's scores and sound-making methods blend into an immersive seascape of maybe-human, maybe-electronic sounds, the distinctions between alternating textures become blurred. By the time we have sunk to 'Bathypelagic', the oceanic zone of deep sea anglerfish and vampire squid, the scrapes and groans have morphed into an indistinguishable buzzing that swarms across one's consciousness like a fleet of elusive and vaguely extraterrestrial deep sea inhabitants. A distorted, wheedling voice brings to mind the dark unknowability of oceanic depths.

The strongest track on the album, 'Abyssopelagic', strikes the ear with an introductory series of guttural croaks reminiscent of Yoko Ono's fearless vocalisations (although admittedly the painful squeaking could just as easily have been produced by a device other than Bell's vocal apparatus). As the rubbery groans soften into held tones, with the metallic scraping sounds now less-painfully squeaking in the background, the similarities between human vocalisations and the vocalisations of human-crafted technology are underlined. Without the benefit of vision, the distinctions between the 'human' and the 'artificial' are less clear. This blurring of boundaries allows for the disintegration of masculinist aesthetics of technology, in which the body is absent or erased; histories of electronic music have tended towards the erasure

of female bodies. These histories boast of 'grand-fathers' of subgenres and of 'seminal' works, insisting on a sonic reproduction that is not only woman-less but body-less. These histories also tend to equate sound with a feminized entity one can 'get inside of like a womb; sound is objectified even while its author's subjectivity is insisted upon.

As feminist theorist and sound artist Tara Rodgers points out in 'Towards a Feminist Epistemology of Sound',

the analogy between sound and water waves in acoustics texts articulates sound to the connotations of formlessness and unknowability that historically have been associated with female sexuality and corporeality, and to the horrors of submersion and dissolution that threaten the coherence and dominance of the male subject.

Drawing from Luce Irigaray's theoretical work on liquids and 'the feminine', Rodgers argues for a more ethical epistemology of sound: one that would dismantle existing tropes of sound-as-wave and allow for a more immersive experience, in which listeners would 'recognize ourselves amid the currents'. Rather than focusing on the disembodiment and nullification of the body that technologies allow for, it seems that Bell and King take a feminist approach as they drag their listeners into a dark oceanic abyss in which sounds cannot be distinguished and separated as 'objects'. Rodgers writes that the dissolution of the binary of masculine subjectivity and feminine objecthood is crucial to establishing a feminist epistemology of sound.

It is possible to hear Bell and King's collaborations through this lens. Setting aside the maddening unknowability of the sounds' sources, one can simply float in the various pelagic zones. The sounds of *Ciphony* are not objects to be conceptualised as separate from one another, but rather waves of sensation and textures and tones washing the listener in their currents. The album propels its listeners deeper and deeper into an environment in which they can recognise themselves, rather than merely presenting a series of notes standing apart from their authors and audience: a welcome radicalisation within the 'Ridgewood aesthetic', whose authors and audiences are both typically constituted of white males. By breaking down boundaries within sonic production and experience, Bell and King allow for the possibility of further boundary dissolution within the new music scene.

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