

three or two guitars. Spahlinger's concept is that the processes set in order by the music can withstand multiple densities in their execution; the listener is merely receiving more or less of the aggregate information. Of course, the quartet version is the most fully enfolded and the one that appears here. Microtones, achieved through closely related scordatura tunings, abound, as do glissandos, smaller interval string bends, and ringing high notes at the end of the bridge. Cast in multiple short sections, the juxtaposition of these various sounds, along with a host of noise effects, evolves throughout the composition. While one can imagine Spahlinger's processes at play with one another in a smaller collection of instruments, it is riotous fun to hear them ebulliently ricochet in the thickest of possible prescribed ensemble configurations.

Rainer Nonnenmann supplies copiously informative liner notes, and while David Babcock's translation contains some infelicities of prose, for the most part the analysis of the pieces is quite clear. The sound is uniformly well detailed and the quartet's overall playing is superlatively prepared. Contrary to first impressions, Aleph seems poised to tackle even further vistas on Volume 3.

Christian Carey
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RICHARD CRAIG, *Vale*. Johnson, Järnegard, Fitch, Barrett, Croft, Pauset. Metier: msv 28540

Every so often one encounters an object whose message brazenly challenges the medium through which it is communicated. Even more seldom does this antagonism in fact work to positively recuperate both the medium and its message. And so it is with Richard Craig's recent release, *Vale*, the virtuoso compilation of recordings, pieces and performances that bring together a myriad of personas, and not just those who had a direct hand in the making and production of this CD. The figures of Johann Quantz, Jean Tardieu, Paul Celan, Evan Parker, David Smith, Johannes Ockeghem and Eurydice hover in the middle distance as dialogical counterparts to the pieces presented.

The CD recording, as an object, stands in productive tension with the pieces gathered into this collection. But it is not the pieces *as such* that challenge the practice of recording, pieces that would in some circumstances turn inside out an imported hierarchy of the Work Concept,

but the physical exigencies of the interpreting and performing bodies (which then have a heavy hand in the room of giving shape to what the piece '*as such*' is) that destabilise the recorded medium. It bespeaks the conceptual and musical vivacity of those composers presented by Richard Craig, the members of Distractfold and vocalist Cora Schmeiser, and to Craig's own microscopic gaze and caring movement through ecstatically amassed detail, that this destabilisation does not exert its forces in the opposite direction.

All of these pieces address in some way liveness, the musical poetics of distance and nearness, and the materiality of the performing bodies as instrumentally musically significant aspects of the inner rhetorics of each piece. This grinds against the grain of a medium-specific approach to recording (as in pieces that would only be possible through the mechanics of recording). An auscultative longing is set up: the dynamic of imaginative reconstruction by the listener plays the shadow role of the performative reconstruction of these pieces given by Richard Craig. Granted, a listener in this case has the privilege of hearing much farther into detail than would have been possible in live performance – a performative hearing/listening itself would perhaps stumble along the *hirsutes* of virtuosic ornamentation and the ripples of density that comprise the richly confounding soundscape of each piece.

In Evan Johnson's *émoi*, a bodily-somatic composition unfolds, one that could be read as an extension of Quantz's treatise on the bodily manipulations toward proper flute performance. What stems from a performance practice rooted in tradition reconfigures itself anew through Johnson's development of the somatics of playing as a material for composition. Articulation, head resonance, the use of the throat (voice), lips and air direction and pressure develop the actual mechanics of flute playing into this aforementioned material. Through this precise but defamiliarizing twisting of the body, Craig moves fluidly through subtle whispers and whistles, clicks, coloured breaths and multiphonics that one realises lie as a latent potential in the flute-with-body relationship. What appears to carry most rhetorical significance is the instrumentalisation of the breath, inhales and exhales that consume and insufflate the eccentrically hermetic *émoi*. If one thinks of the hermetic in terms of hermeneutics, and the magical origins of the act of interpreting a text (the idea that therein lies a dark conceit to be de-/re-coded), then Craig's recording works to exegise in fine detail

the text of *émoi*, which certainly in all its complexity will continue to yield past the expectations of any one interpreter. *émoi* as a recorded object confounds the senses – through skilled engineering and production the listener can perceive clearly what resonant spaces, whether outside or inside the body, are engaged. Listening to *émoi* takes on a kind of secretive auscultation, where hearing the body becomes hearing the *rote Faden* of hermeneutical attention. What could have possibly gone underway in the rush of live performance is captured in recording, flickering instability becoming itself textual.

The pairing of Järnegard's *Psalm* and John Croft's *deux Méditations d'une Furie*, both featuring the versatile and acute vocalist Cora Schmeiser, provide a juxtaposition to Johnson's work. Järnegard's dealing with the texts of Paul Celan and Lars Norén, necessarily fragmentary and extending both Schmeiser and Craig past the point of instrumental/vocal legibility (though a region of technique and phraseology in which they maintain utter control in the handling of blend, tone colour and dynamic fragility) to a state of alienation or ecstasy (the use of the vocal fry in this piece is perhaps the nexus of these two seeming extremes), which confirms a musical conformity to the post-war tendency towards fragmentation of language in the literary arts. The flutist and vocalist work together to enunciate a singular line, each shadowing the other in colour and gestural contour that could in some contexts easily fall into the territory of trope, but in this case inevitably allude to the act that made up part of the poetic practice of Paul Celan – of bringing language through itself. The placement of *Psalm* after *émoi* also allows the listener to hear Järnegard's instrumental splitting and shadowing as a vocalic extension of certain compositional situations that Johnson sets up in the polyphonic treatment of the flute and performer.

Deux Méditations d'une furie deals with the fragmentation of language differently than does Järnegard's work, in a way that posits a hopeful reconfiguration of language through its fragmentary sparseness. The listeners have the impression that what they hear are the remnants of continuous and through-running phrases, palimpsested by silence.

The remaining verses or words of the surviving Greek epic poems are conjured, of the likes that Stesichoros or Alcaeus of Mytilene would have left behind. In this set of two pieces (that are in turn part of a larger monodrama for soprano and mixed ensemble) Cora Schmeiser reveals her expressive and musical-poetic

potential in the most confined of musical spaces. In the interaction between Craig and Schmeiser, the depths of intimate sorrow of impermanence and imaginal emotional extension are evoked in the intentionality of their through-hearing of silence.

There is an interesting conversation to be had about how the recorded medium effects the ontological state of these pieces, but that topic is perhaps outside the confines of this review. Perhaps a more generative approach to reconciling the recordings' conceptual entanglement with liveness, would be to theorise them along the lines of an improviser's relationship to recording, practical marking-stones to document one's progress through winding terrain. An improviser's approach to recording wouldn't be too far off the mark either, taking in to account the involvement of both Richard Craig and Richard Barrett in differing capacities with the British improvisation scene. Barrett's *Vale* itself can be understood in this way. Hearing Richard Barrett's notated music can become an act of listening to self-referential commentary through the deployment of highly dense notational situations. As it is, with *Vale* one longs to listen to the performer, or Barrett himself, improvise. In such a case, the performer, unencumbered by the organisational and physical exigencies of the notation, would be actively fulfilling the reckless freedom of movement to which his notated music coyly alludes. One can even, at the 4'30" mark, hear the slowed registral leaps as evocative transcriptions of Evan Parker's soprano saxophone solos. Yet this allusion to a free improvisation would merely be illusory, and this 'freedom' can only exist as an allusion because of Barrett's notational constrictions of the performing subject. Because of this, Craig renders what could be considered an ideal performance of this piece, one that makes the hearer emphatically desire something purposefully, and cheekily, denied.

Part of a larger cycle of pieces, Fitch's *Agricola IX* takes its inspiration from the music of Alexander Agricola, a cycle of sculptures of David Smith with eponymous title, and phrases of a rondeau by Johannes Ockeghem. With so many names and gravitational forces heavy in the background, this piece for flute and string trio, featuring the refined musicianship of the members of Distractfold, is triangulated amidst the polyvalent points of musical and artistic reference. The result is a dilated, hovering melody (a retooling of the aforementioned rondeau *Je n'ay deuil que je ne suis morte*), whose temporal distension loosens any seeming imminence of

becoming or directionality. Most noteworthy is the wash of resonance, a type of acoustic *tromp-l'oeil* 'reverb' sustained by the string trio that lingers in the air and microtonally modulates itself after the flute has left each subsequent pitch. Caught in this web of musical multi-referentiality, *Agricola IX* seemingly shows no penchant towards any particular reference. Instead an eerily atemporal *sostenuto* blooms into sounding, and subsequently subsides. Contrasted with Craig's quivering and trepidatious flute lines, the members of Distractfold maintain perfect stasis, matching precisely the kind of grainy tone quality of the flute sound laid bare – in contrast to the complex self-masking of Johnson and Järnegard.

Pauset's *Eurydice* closes this album, but despite Richard Craig's rich and attentive performance of this text, this piece possibly has the most to lose from listening to it as a recording. One of the most salient compositional conceits of this piece, and one to which Craig has obviously afforded careful curation, is the evocation of nearness and distance through extreme dynamic and tone colour manipulations. Unlike almost all of the pieces preceding this one, *Eurydice* does not employ the self-cloaking of the instrumental material through its more unstable sounds arrived at by mechanical decoupling or somatic recomposition. Instead, a defamiliarisation of the 'uncloaked' flute sound is arrived at precisely because of the aural familiarisation of its inherent complexities as presented in the preceding pieces. Like the lone snare drum at the end of *A Soldier's Tale*, the presence of sound at its most bare is most unsettling. If anything, the poetics of *Eurydice* could make use of the masking – this is at least alluded to through its portrayal of the extreme distance between the living and the dead through the composition of tone colour as a rhetorically significant parameter. Perhaps one can imagine a situation where this piece would be performed at one end of the concert space, with the audience sitting at the other end facing the opposite direction, listening in a way similar to how Orpheus would divine the distance of *Eurydice*, as he would try and fail to lead her out of the underworld. But perhaps, this speculative listening environment encompasses the situation of listening to these recordings – metaphorically blindfolded to the live bodies of the performers, we lead these bodies through our auscultation into the imaginal daylight of hearing.

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DORRIT BAUERECCKER, *Inner Cities*. Curran, Tsangaris, Omelchuk, Rummel. Kaleidos KAL 6336-2

The German Dorrit Bauerecker is a dedicated new music performer, dividing her attention evenly between accordion, piano and toy piano. On this album she regularly breaks genre boundaries, combining art music and popular music as a matter of course. Over the years she also developed an interest in music theatre, often working together with Manos Tsangaris, the present co-director of the renowned Munich Biennale.

Bauerecker's concept album *Inner Cities* features contemporary music from three different generations and countries. The CD takes its name from a cycle of 14 piano pieces the American composer Alvin Curran wrote between 1991 and 2013. Three of them form the heart of the disc, taking up half of its playing time. Curran's pieces are surrounded by compositions for accordion which respond to them in one way or another. These were written by Manos Tsangaris (1956) and Simon Rummel (1978) from Germany, and the Belarusian Oxana Omelchuk (1975).

Inner Cities is a sort of musical autobiography, drawing on real or imagined memories. In Curran's own words: 'Inner Cities are where you go to get debriefed, to hear Brubeck fill a Newport stadium unamplified; to watch Cage and Braxton play chess in Washington Square Park; to give an impromptu ram's-horn concert for Palestinian shopkeepers', or 'to ride with a New York cabbie nuts about Gubaidulina'. The composer warns us there is no 'drive-by', yet acknowledges that each piece 'starts with a single idea, chord, or cellular pattern, which serves as its own source of narrative and history'.

Lasting some 25 minutes, *Inner Cities 9* is the longest and most captivating work on this CD. It was composed in 2001 for the Dutch pianist Reinier van Houdt, and references Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. The typical three-note-motif of its opening E-major chord is delicately played 'upside down' in a high register, using a lot of pedal. After several variations, the dreamy atmosphere is abruptly shattered by loud banging in the bass register. Dark, aggressively repeated chords creep in, but once they seem to take over entirely, the music suddenly shifts back to the sweet lyricism of before. Curran repeats this procedure several times, only once presenting the original Beethoven motif. The piece ends with a walking-bass theme that slowly fades into silence.