

highly personal work was full of distinctive characterisation from the outset. Beautifully wonky smears of jazziness play well with classical gestures, syncopation featuring prominently as the propelling element. A guitar solo, aping a fugue, jarred in a fun way with panpipe tootlings, and made a conversational convention sound unconventional. This kind of compositional originality made the most of the forces on offer in Icebreaker. I also felt an elegant three-part narrative structure guiding my ear through the often-gossamer texture, which was clear without being overbearing. The structure was also underpinned by satisfying extended lines, pulling longer and longer like taffy. The first half ends with a jubilant splash of cymbal.

After picking up a drink, the audience settled for the first piece of the second half, Kerry Andrews's *THE, WHAT IS IT, THE GOLDEN EAGLE?* my nomination for Best Title of Anything 2017. As may be guessed, the title is a quotation from the current POTUS, and Andrews's piece deftly characterises the said eagle flying, soaring, and pecking Trump's eyes out. I had not heard a non-vocal work by Andrews before, and I was struck by how very vocal her writing is, regardless of the forces. Introduced by a twisted fanfare, the cello takes central stage as the eagle, and sings a song that is by turns moving and comic, beautifully played by Audrey Riley. The classical melodic lines are undercut by the synth part, which gave me video game vibes, lending a mocking and arch quality to the narrative whilst also creating an inviting and fresh soundworld. The Trump punishment builds into a hypnotic drum rhythm, gelling with the straining and sinuous cello lines. This rhythm then remoulds itself into a freewheeling reel, a joyful folk music. The eagle escapes in this joy; I can only presume holding some eyeballs in its beak. Andrews is a highly charming composer, and this was the concert highlight for me.

*Azure* by Linda Buckley followed. I didn't feel that the unsubtle addition of blue lighting was necessary – it felt like the music wasn't trusted enough to paint the picture alone. Musically watery from the get go, and flute and clarinet conversation sounded from opposite sides of the stage, as if underwater (one time where the distance between performers worked well). A metallic midi sound then menacingly enters the instrumental pool. Gradually the midi effects threaten to drown the live instruments; I assume deliberately, although the effect does somewhat disengage the listener from the process. The ever-whiter noise continues to ebb and rather overstays its welcome – the odd arpeggio gesture

from the live ensemble would have been a welcome contrast but isn't really given permission to get started – and the piece ends in a synthetic puddle.

The final work of the evening is by Kate Moore, *The Dam*, which was written for the Canberra Festival in 2015, and won her the Matthias Vermulen Award in 2017. Opening with hurried stringy semiquaver textures, the strings reached up and up, then reverted back to their origins. This developed until the piano led the ensemble in a forthright funk (I felt the piano balance was a tad overbearing here, whether by accident or design I cannot be sure). The construction Moore used here seems boxy and sporadic, changing gesture and tempo every 40 seconds or so – an intriguing prospect but hard to cling onto. This all crumbled after a final boxed crescendo, and a sparer texture remained, with panpipes to the fore. This had a distant quality and was engaging; I would have liked this element to be further explored. The remainder of the work for me didn't gel – there were several introductions of new musical material that either vanished as soon as they were introduced or were slight to begin with, and the final whambam ending seemed an abrupt decision given the delicacy of earlier gestures. I was again struck that this piece performed in a more intimate space with more collaboration between audience and performers may have had a different effect on me.

The System Restart project is a well-conceived programme, and overall I could hear that Icebreaker has fine musicians in it. There were certainly ensemble and technical inconsistencies on this evening, and I would have liked to have heard the same works in a completely different surrounding – perhaps to have had a more immediate and exciting live music experience.

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<<how does it feel?>> rainy days 2017

Questioning whether new music is 'losing touch', Lydia Rilling, in her first edition as artistic director of Luxembourg's rainy days festival, curated a programme which sought, via an exploration of 'the emotional landscapes of contemporary music', to 'reveal' that this is not the case. The festival's scope extended beyond

concerts to sound installations, pre- and post-concert talks, an (all female-presented) conference dedicated to the festival topic, a newly affiliated composition academy, and a closing 'bal contemporain' which paired Frank Zappa and Alexander Schubert with onion soup, while composers, musicologists and curators let loose after such extensive reflection upon the question that had been posed at every turn, emblazoned on the yellow telephone book-sized festival programmes (from which all quotations in this review are taken), echoed on individual concert programmes, interrogating the listener from the tickets' fine print: how does it feel?

Chaya Czernowin's new cello concerto, *Guardian*, makes no apologies for its emotive writing. In a performance governed by emotional intensity, even in repose, soloist and dedicatee Séverine Ballon was captivating: she attacked, relented, attacked again, dropped the dynamic to a breath as she pulled a fragile vocal line from near the bridge, bursting with silence and crackling with overtones. Tension never slackening, the moments of extreme quiet pulled the audience magnetically towards the cello's whisper only to be suddenly jolted back by the grating nudity of its vocal line. The gongs rumbled their spectrum, piano and harp added their opinions, and listener's ears rang, saturated. The orchestral texture fell gently back as, over the distant crumpled aluminium rush of air through horns, the cello found a moment of peace, softly ricocheting ruled millimetres down the entire length of the fingerboard. Though Czernowin describes her orchestral writing as though resonating from inside the cello, the cello often seemed isolated on her dais, despite the instruments placed around her and the orchestra, the 'public face' of the piece as she calls it, frequently felt more like an intrusion upon the 'confessional' cello rather than an extension of it.

The festival theme's questioning of losing touch (or not) was also revealed through relationships: Czernowin emphasised in her pre-concert talk how she wrote the cello part specifically for Ballon, a performer she knows 'inside out'. Similarly, Georges Aperghis' *Situations pour 23 solistes* is a collage-portrait of the individual members (and their languages) of his long-time collaborators, Klangforum Wien. The violist's voice emerged above her playing as an intimate solo in the midst of the ensemble. The cello's baritone French text overlaid his playing. Double pianos stereophonically framed the ensemble and one of the pianists turned to the audience, narrating his text in German. The accordion's

penetrating high note was joined by clusters intermingled with passionately declaimed Russian – a love poem by Pushkin. The audience pounded out their feelings, interspersed with whoops and shouts, as conductor Emilio Pomàrico called upon the soloists, including the young trombonist performing with the ensemble for the first time, to take their much-merited applause. Applauding them too and extracting single flowers his ample bouquet for each woman in the ensemble, Pomàrico also demonstrated how he felt.

If, as Catherine Lamb suggests in her programme-booklet response to the question of emotion in contemporary composition, it is not the structure or musical form which contains emotion but rather the beings engaged in realising and perceiving it, then EXAUDI certainly succeeded in creating emotion in their concert of Italian madrigals (old and new), sung to a sold out Salle de Musique de Chambre in the Philharmonie. They time-travelled with ease from the richly word-painted nature tropes which typify the madrigal to the works of the four contemporary composers programmed by director James Weeks, including Catherine Kontz's festival commission. Amidst his signature plaintive glissandi, the members of EXAUDI murmured thematic waves and wind in Sciarrino's madrigals; a solo lark skyrocketed before thundering back to unison octaves. The pleasure with which they leaned into the harmonies of Monteverdi's closing madrigal was evident to the very last interval. (If we're questioning whether new music is losing touch with emotion, what about its relationship to consonance?) The spiralling canon of the last verse, 'Oh, my dear heart, who can take you from me?' finally rested on a chord that provoked a collective sigh of expansive contentment. The singers hurled Finnis's walls of dissonance at the audience, perfectly intoned, in a time-warped echo of Gesualdo's passionate despair. Indisputable lynchpin to the 'new' half of the programme, the Venosan prince's dissonances stretched between the singers in sweet torment, a prime example of dissonance used as a highly affective emotional tool (leaving one feeling that perhaps the 'new' madrigal may have been conclusively written in 1611).

In an extension of Jennifer Walshe's observation that we curate our own 'listening on a minute to minute basis, allowing us to sonically manage our emotional states in the same way we might medicate', the transformation of the Philharmonie into a Wunderkammer of concerts allowed the listener to do just that, curate their own emotional experience by selecting from

historical 8-channel electroacoustic experiences, the immersive resonances of one half of Yarn/Wire, an accordion holding its bellows-breath as the audience squirmed in tangible apnea. In a rollercoaster improvised vocal duet which left some listeners agape and others chuckling, Walshe invited another feeling: that of amused complicity. By highlighting the humorous side of the more extreme range of contemporary music, when the highly animated Tomomi Adachi, the other half of the duo, started screaming, she soothed: 'It's ok, there's no need for that, have a cup of tea', she created a recognisably self-aware context in which the audience felt included. Typically characterised by the exotic or bizarre, the 'Wunderkammer' mood was set during the previous night's performance by the Brötzman & Leigh duo. An odd pair: the wailing nascar of Heather Leigh's pedal steel guitar provided the shifting foundation for Peter Brötzman's saxophone explosions, at an overwhelming volume that erased any intellectual pretensions of the listener. Abruptly exchanging the saxophone for the rougher tones of the tárogató, Brötzman's white whiskers drooped around the mouthpiece as multiphonics rushed out in an illusion of polyphony. The Blade Runner atmosphere in the anonymously black Espace Découverte was accentuated by Leigh's appearance in gold, crimson, and patent leather. Neither of them looked up. Neither looked at each other. An entire cabinet-worth of curiosities.

The festival, reflecting optimistically upon emotion in new music also confronted the

possibility of a paradigm shift. The apocalyptic spirit with which 2017 comes to a close is exquisitely rendered in Grisey's last work, *Quatre Chants pour Franchir le Seuil*, with which Klangforum Wein concluded the final concert. Soprano Katrien Baerts moved effortlessly through a wide range of expression: she fell into a half-voiced almost tearful *parlato* as the violin took the melody in the first movement; she rose in strident calls amidst brightly arching dissonances of the apocalyptic fourth movement. Both syphoning the force of their instruments into a single bright wire, the trumpet took the upper note with utmost control while Baerts sang in duet as though from the depths of her mouth.

The dry tapping bass drum that had dusted the silence became an unnerving shifting of infra-sound tension, shattered by sudden strikes but never released until cut for the first time to silence, held by Pomàrico with immobile outstretched arms. After a silence which weighed tangibly upon the audience's ears, a vacuum at the end of everything, the festival programming, by closing with the haunting *Berceuse*, seemed to offer hope for a new dawn which (re)turns its attention to emotional expression in new compositions: 'Et pleurai . . . je regardai l'horizon de la mer, le monde'.

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