

titters coming together or not in contradiction of that outline.

I had a similar experience with parts of the Riot concert. Aaron Holloway-Nahum provided enjoyable and penetrative insights, but I was left wondering if these could have been condensed or even avoided. Djuro Zivkovic's bluster and charged Grawemeyer winner, *On the Guarding of the Heart*, for instance, culminated in 30 loud, repeated bars that saw the chamber ensemble roiling around in a tumult of clanged chords and thwacked assaults; having this advertised beforehand meant that one couldn't avoid anticipating these repeats, every sound becoming a pre-echo of the closing gestures. Despite a little jumping of the dynamic gun once we finally reached those repeats, and some brashness in the writing that emphasised brunt over subtlety (though with some ear-catching instrumental detail), the performance was engaging for the most part – but it was haunted by expectation.

A similar thing dented the performance of composer-in-residence Nina C. Young's *Traced Upon Cinders*, albeit to a much less dramatic extent. *Cinders*, we were told, is a piece about the persistence or transformation of memory. This process could indeed be heard in the music's sure-footed and tightly unspooling progress from its initial seven-note piano motif, but with much vaguer signposts our listening was free to go where it might. Various comings-together on held notes, elusive shards of tonal shapes and transformed echoes of that initial motif were shaped dramatically by a charged-up Holloway-Nahum and ensemble, pulling the audience forward to enjoy a thunderous climax with preamble in mind or not.

Rounding out the concert were the near-silences of Evan Johnson's delicate, attention-recalibrating *L'art*, for violin, piccolo and percussion. The sounds of this piece are locked in a struggle with audibility, environmental noise, the audience's tolerance for silence and reduction of detail, and the tensions that run across and between all these elements. Though the performance here occasionally verged on silent farce, for the most part the little trills, glides and knocks of the musicians cohered disarmingly. Johnson's three movements made for winning, enigmatic interventions into an otherwise forthright and wholly enjoyable evening of music.

In the LCO Soloists + NU:NORD programme, the performances were strong even if some of the pieces proved more interesting than others. The range of the featured composers reflected the mission of nu:nord, a project-

based music and performing art network that 'engages new-music creators from Canada, Norway and the UK'. Amber Priestley's ... *And go ahead! Dare to be irrational!* was a typically exploratory graphic piece that was played by Mira Benjamin and backed up by environmental recordings Benjamin had made of everything from the opening of the 'Moonlight' Sonata to a gypsy jazz band. The performance itself was perhaps less interesting as a sonic event than it was as a theatrical realisation of a set of broad parameters (from a top-line melody to the set of images on the bottom strip of the score) but it was engaging nonetheless. The same could be said for Xenakis's rip-roaring *Tetora* that closed the show, even if in leaning heavily into the drama and spectacle of the score the performers underplayed the nuances inherent in the interplay between different sections of the music.

I found the surround-sound string quartet loops of Claire M. Singer's 4–8–1 less stimulating: once the music got going it was obvious that we were locked into a one-chord groove until the close. There were certainly some fascinating moments, particularly when the spatial layout of the speakers and players conjured an aural-visual hall of mirrors, sounds ricocheting about the hall in unpredictable, seemingly arbitrary ways, but this wasn't quite enough. On the other hand, despite its simplicity of materials, which consisted largely of glistening, sustained diatonic chords with passing chromatic feints and shadows, Isaiah Ceccarelli's *Bow* hummed away invitingly. The focused and fused playing of the LCO quartet prepared the ground especially well for the sudden taking of flight heard in the piece's closing bars, with birdlike high strings suddenly straining upwards and around each other in curlicues of sound.

Stephen Graham

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#### 'New Blood': 130701, 15th Anniversary Showcase, Brighton Festival

The Spire, St Mark's chapel, is an artist-led creation space in Brighton. Normally it's a blank space without heating or equipment but for the night of 10 May it is fantastically dressed up with lights, pictures and a projection saying 'landmark post-classical recordings'. This is a label showcase for 130701, an offshoot of FatCat Records set up by Dave Howell in 2001. Hauschka, one of the label's longstanding artists who has opened up his imaginative and playful inside-piano playing to commercial

audiences, and the label's willingness to support live experimental music are the reasons I'm here.

Dmitry Evgrafov's set begins with several solo piano tracks featuring simple I–IV–V chords, falling 6ths, then a heavily romantic quasi-waltz with double octaves (almost operatic) and some slightly meandering jazz. When his wife, Victoria Bogorodskaya, joins Dmitry on stage, there's an immediate added richness, blurring, distorting, delaying the sound: the predictability remains, but is now seen through the prism of something much lovelier, more fragmented, aged somehow. Despite the authenticity of expression, though, I find Dmitry's pianism somewhat limited and the array of musical styles strange and structurally confusing.

Emilie Levienaise-Farrouch performed her piano-led set with the Delphi string quartet, adeptly using the quartet to colour the simple pieces. As a composer for ensemble, Emilie finds beautiful textures and connections, and the intricacy and intimacy in her tracks pull the audience in. Again, though, I found the piano playing lacked variety, as it was generally limited to the middle of the keyboard, often with *moto perpetuo*, minimalist textures; and at times I felt her compositional ambition went beyond her performance abilities (though nerves also played their part – the 'New Blood' here constituted less experienced performers). The Delphi Quartet was great: their contribution was rich, lush, not overplayed but very expressive with a beautiful sound.

The third performer, Resina (the alias of Polish cellist Karolina Rec), is in a different category. An accomplished performer, she explored her instrument fluently and experimentally. Her opening track used short glissandi to construct a layered texture using a loop pedal to add several versions and then something contrasting. Each subsequent track went on to explore a different technique (e.g. *spiccato*, *col legno*) in the same way, yet always found what each piece needed to feel complete. There is genuine flexibility, as she responds to and plays with balance and sound, each note articulating its own space. There is a delicious simplicity of intent married to a richness of result: it is a fulfilling set, varied but coherent, all matched to a minimal but effective film. Resina is a highly focused artist who lets us delight in the cello as a sound source.

So, it is a mixed evening. Dave Howell explained to me that 130701 was 'set up in 2001 with the notion of pushing a music rooted in classical instrumentation (piano, strings, brass, etc.) yet exploring territory outside of the academic context – engaging with electronic and digital technologies; meshing with non-classical

instrumentation, sounds and approaches'. I think this was a timely vision that foresaw much of what is now happening in the contemporary classical scene, and I'm sure that the big hitters of the 130701 label (such as Max Richter and Hauschka) have helped this trend feel possible.

As a by-product, this strand of music might also help prolong and encourage the playing of traditional, acoustic musical instruments. If instruments are placed centrally to the music-making, however, I would prefer them to be played really proficiently. In an interview,<sup>1</sup> Howell explains that the desire was to promote 'classical instrumentation being used in expansive, adventurous, non-traditional ways', and I suppose this is another reason I feel a little disappointed by the first two performers tonight (though I understand that performing studio music live is a particular challenge, and that some musicians are composer-pianists rather than dedicated piano players). I might also be constrained by expecting 'post-classical piano-playing': well controlled and developed, if not subversive.

Throughout the evening, I find myself wrestling with the term 'post-classical'. Maybe it is always difficult to label music, and maybe it doesn't really matter ('contemporary classical' has always felt limited), but 'post-classical' led me to hope for something informed by and developed 'after' classical music. For me, the difference between classical and pop is most often in compositional deliberation; I would say the music I heard this evening errs towards simplicity, builds on minimalism, and uses live instruments, but doesn't travel far enough to be called 'post-classical'. However, putting terminology aside, I hope broadly that the cross-fertilisation in this area continues. I certainly value artists who thoughtfully span artistic niche and commercial audiences: in the eco-system of classical music we badly need innovators, 'new blood', and, as importantly, new or rejuvenating audiences.

Sarah Nicolls

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**Christian Wolff *Wade in the Water*, Kammer Klang, Café Oto, London**

Is there any London concert venue more suited to the music of Christian Wolff than Café Oto? It's not so much its status as the nexus of hipster lounge and ascetic experimentalism as its noisiness. No sooner had violinist Aisha Orazbayeva

<sup>1</sup> <http://inverted-audio.com/feature/130701-pioneers-of-post-classical/> (accessed 2 June 2016).