

extreme degree as the track continues, in a way that viscerally evokes an uncanny dream world – perhaps one in which being tired or afraid makes one literally melt. It's astonishingly well executed, evoking the idea of a space which is 'both more dreamlike and more sensible than dreams' (*Sensible Activities*, p. 5).

At this point on a third or fourth listen to the album, it also occurred to me that all of the tracks are longer than I expect. This lets these strange, disparate tracks insist on themselves and take strange turns; almost all of the tracks lose momentum as they go, ending in a spookier, meltier place than they began. Like our dreams, they outstay their welcome or contain segments we don't remember when we wake. Always playful and deeply imaginative, this epitomises how Neil's work is also very often darker than I expect.

As if laughing at me, my final assertion about *Eden Box* is undermined by *Organic Techno* – a coda to the album which is in the same world as *Pith*. After a mere 2:38 of something essentially quite static, it's suddenly over – an invitation to play or a snippet of information in the increasingly fragmented form in which we receive the world today?

I loved getting to know *Eden Box* through the process of writing this review. In many ways it has what I've come to expect from Neil Luck – shades of the uncanny emerging from a wild inventiveness and playfulness, a deep running collaborative spirit, an experimental and expressive take on musicianship. But the success with which this album embodies and presents its conceptual framework through the fabric of the music itself is rare. It makes me excited to be an audience member as well as an artist today.

Joanna Ward

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Paolo Marchettini, *Ebony Chants*. Marchettini, Zhang, Chan, Shermulis. New Focus Recordings, FCR402.

This might be a disc for clarinet players and woodwind enthusiasts. There are 11 pieces (written between 2006 and 2022), some in short multiple movements, and the Rome-born, New York-based composer and clarinetist Paolo Marchettini (b.1974) plays all but one of them. His playing, and that of his three clarinet colleagues, is impressive. He is an expressive and characterful player both in the lighter pieces and the more experimental solos. The music seems to fall into three styles: unashamedly

light and frothy as in the *Cinque Fanfare Napoletane*, a pastiche for four players; a more serious music which sounds remarkably like the chromatic harmonic style of the Viennese composer Alfred Uhl's *Divertimento* for four players (many clarinet players will know this classic piece but *all* clarinetists will know Uhl's two books of studies (1940) written to introduce more 'modern' idioms); and a group of solo pieces which push his vocabulary towards extended techniques – for me these are the best music, some of them very short but always focused and beautifully played by Marchettini. The one piece he doesn't play is *Entrée*, a slightly longer intricate and energetic solo for bass clarinet, superbly played by Tommy Shermulis.

The opening solo, *Il canto del giorno*, sounds like an expansion of one of those slow, Copland-esque clarinet melodies, but the other solos are more experimental with multiphonics, fake fingerings giving new microtonal scales and so on. I like the recording because you hear everything: some slightly rattly keys, air and breathing sounds, that quiet smacking sound you get when the reed is detached from the lower lip at the ends of pieces, even the odd page turn all make for a more authentic concert sound – clarinet players will recognise and enjoy these 'noises off' and I suspect some of these pieces were recorded in one take or at least long takes. Everything is well written for the instrument and it all sounds very playable, so these pieces would suit conservatory or younger players who want to explore beyond the usual mainstream repertoire.

Roger Heaton

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Colin Alexander, *Solo Cello Works*. October House Records.

At first blush, Colin Alexander comes across as a model musical citizen in the neoliberal age. He is a wearer of many hats: a high-level gigging cellist, active composer and founder of the record label which has released this album, October House Records (OHR). Far from a vanity project, OHR has at the time of this writing released almost 40 albums in less than three years of operation. These releases are from a variety of musicians, but all have some affiliation with London's Royal Academy of Music. It is clear to me that the curatorial ear behind the catalogue and the compositional ear behind the particular music of this album are the same. It's all very beautiful