

and world-ending sensations of the preceding piece. Although the artists state that the piece is conceptually strapped to the *boundarymind* project,<sup>5</sup> the relationship between the two works is uneasy, and placing greater distance between 'bow breath crow' and the 'boundarymind' piece may have been mutually beneficial to each.

Alongside the recordings of these two pieces, the release also includes an informative set of liner notes (titled *How to boundarymind*) that introduce a number of the methodologies that underpinned the project, as well as a collection of photos and two text scores. These scores for 'boundarymind', written by Jankowska and Young, offer two interpretations of the collaborative process, which are then framed as numbered sets of gentle, thoughtful and reassuring instructions that begin to articulate the emotional impacts of the collaboration and encourage readers who may be inclined to explore collaborating in a similar manner. It is with regards to the first effect that these scores are valuable – they give weight to the emphasis that the creators place on the collaborative and relationship-building elements of *Boundarymind's* working process, and their intimacy and informality invite an audience of outsiders into the work. In this respect, the scores (and the liner notes in general) are integral to an experience of the work. And, for this reason, it is perhaps problematic that they may be overlooked by those who only encounter the electroacoustic work's sonic output. The project is ambitious, and the concepts that underpin it are exciting and effective. However, it is perhaps the case that the format of the work's presentation diminishes the sense of this ambition and of its efficacy; the project is certainly much more than an electroacoustic work, so encouraging the potential for it to be read as such arguably does it a slight disservice.<sup>6</sup>

Aaron Moorehouse  
10.1017/S0040298223001055

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Jonah Haven, *gasser*. Wolfstone, Ensemble Proton Bern, Mayrhofer, Ensemble Recherche, Trio Catch, Duo XAMP. Wergo WER64412

In 2022 I attended the first performance of Jonah Haven's *eleven years of pleasure* at the

Klangspuren Festival in Schwaz, Austria, where Haven was taking part in the festival's Composers Lab scheme. Opening with wind multiphonics, key slaps, disjunct piano stabs and bass rumbles, his piece began in all-too-familiar new music territory. Even as the music started to coalesce around single sounds (a scraping cello harmonic, for example), it did not appear especially striking. Yet then something remarkable happened: from seemingly nowhere, the piano began a slow chorale/tolling of mid-register chords, thick and knotted, but gently articulated, like puffs of smoke. (The comparison that came to mind at the time was a similar effect in Linda Catlin Smith's *Moi qui tremblais*.) And for the next seven minutes – three-quarters of the piece, in fact – this piano haze was sustained. The rest of the ensemble brought back some of the earlier, 'noisier' gestures, attenuated and fragmentary; but now within a transformed emotional landscape, as residues, drifting particles, memories or failed attempts at power. It was as if the temperature in the room had completely changed. Haven's programme note to this piece contains an obscured reference to the filled shark, a so-called living fossil, whose prowling, open-mouthed existence in search of prey (and its frankly phallic appearance) seems to be a metaphor for sexual desire. But at the same time, the unmistakably melancholy tone of the piano's chorale, and the steady decay of the rest of the ensemble around it, speak to the fragility of this ancient species: in 2007, a female was famously brought to a Japanese marine park but died within hours of being caught. On stage, several of the players were visibly moved, even struggling to continue in the face of the music's extraordinary emotional effect.

*eleven years of pleasure* is too new a piece to have made it onto Haven's first portrait CD (you can find it on the composer's Soundcloud page). But its devastating deployment of off-kilter structures and sonic affect is not a one-off. The sound that begins the CD's first track – 2019's *aren't wet* for bassoon and violin – is characteristic. Prepared with a plastic bag stuffed inside, the bassoon circular-breathes a long, rasping split tone, while the violin, using a bow wrapped in metal wire, maintains an equally scratchy but less strident drone alongside it. It is not ASMR exactly, but it is ASMR-adjacent: the combined sound both off-putting on its surface and deeply seductive once one penetrates inside its flickering, stuttering layers. There is strain in it, but also delicacy, and a subtle correspondence between the two players as they try to

<sup>5</sup> 'bow breath crow' was the first collaboration between Jankowska and Young, and was intended to be an integral part of the show they were in the process of planning.

<sup>6</sup> Whereas, in contrast, the video documentation of the installation element of *boundarymind* is able to bypass these concerns.

manage and balance their impossible instruments. They manage this pretty well for most of the piece's ten minutes, but inevitably they founder and lose control, reaching a disjointed climax that collapses almost as quickly as it arrived.

*gasser*, for bass flute, lupophone, contrabass clarinet, contraforte, harp, piano, violin and cello, begins in a similar place, with a counterpoint of held winds and stuttering strings. Despite its instrumentation, the work's sound-world is not initially dominated by low bass tones – Haven has equally chosen his instruments for the aching tension they bring to the higher registers. But then there is that structural switch, this time midway through, as constriction gives way to deeper tones, darker colours and an uneasy kind of release. (Passing hints of Angelo Badalamenti's score to David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* give some idea of the overall atmosphere.)

*aren't wet* and *gasser* are two of four pieces on this recording that are connected (through their titles and their aphoristic programme notes) to a twenty-one-line poem by the composer, whose imagery evokes a related emotional complex of disgust and desire: 'i hold your hand, like you,/ i smell bad. i buy pastries now'. The best of them is the fifteen-minute *starnge nest* [*sic*] for bass clarinet, cello and piano (the fourth is *i burn a million years* for two microtonal accordions). A distant relation of Messiaen's 'Liturgie du crystal', *starnge nest* is a chamber music of independent musical layers, looping asymmetrically around one another (although not literal loops in Haven's case), with the piano providing a constantly shifting harmonic cage. Haven's piano writing is, again, the key: a jittering, birdsong-like continuum that is rolled out over long clarinet and cello harmonics. Hints of a tonal cadence fall in every now and then, almost as if by accident, and each time they do we are brought round in a circle. But for the most part the music maintains an edge state between absolute consistency and continual variety; a highly energised stasis.

Two slightly earlier works, *another ditch* and *slip letting by hand*, stand a little apart. The former, for alto flute, percussion and viola, leans a little heavily on a familiar new-music rhetoric of bow swipes and explosive breath tones, although the extreme reticence of its percussion writing (lightly brushed stone and steel) lends it an unusual accent. The latter, for violin and cello (both prepared), and marked by its noisy, sustained harmonics, ends in loud vocal declamations from both performers: an uncharacteristically clichéd gesture

that makes this perhaps the weakest piece of the six.

In his album notes, Gordon Kampe hears Haven's music in late modernist, Beckettian terms – as desperation and catastrophe. With respect to *i burn a million years*, which ends the album, he argues that the microtonal clashes between the accordions give lie to the 'mirage' of symmetry, and a 'false serenity'. As the two instruments articulate the work's gradual crescendo, their breathing 'gradually increases until it is intolerable, and we get the impression that these two hyperventilating chord-lungs can barely endure any more of their perpetual microtonal disconnection'. Far be it for me (a regular note-writer myself) to criticise a colleague's ears, but there is surely another reading available here too. Asymmetry, fluidity, the way a microtonal clash disturbs and unsettles what Kampe himself describes as 'our tonally socialized ears', to say nothing of all that panting and exertion – this is also a queer, sensual kind of music, engaged both lovingly and anxiously with the body and its presence. (A further clue is given by the composer's frequent use of nudes by Jenny Saville to illustrate his work online.) Since Lachenmann, composers have used an ever-expanding universe of preparations and extended techniques to defamiliarise the sound-world of concert music, with the effect of only making those sounds increasingly familiar. In his strongest works, Haven's achievement is to have found a way to invert them once more, not only to show us that defamiliarity but also to place us in the midst of it.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

10.1017/S0040298223001067

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Catherine Lamb, *parallaxis forma*. Explore Ensemble, Betts-Dean, EXAUDI. another timbre, at215

'The mathematics of harmony are explored through the physicality of the material world'<sup>1</sup> might sound like a hackneyed description of a new-music composer who has come under the influence of the material turn in the late 2010s. This is emphatically not the case for the American composer Catherine Lamb who has persistently explored the intersections of just intonation – or, more accurately, rational intonation – and the various effects the performers' bodies can have on the music since the

<sup>1</sup> [www.sacredrealism.org/artists/catherine-lamb/](http://www.sacredrealism.org/artists/catherine-lamb/) (accessed 29 November 2023).