

CDs AND DVDs

Linda Jankowska, Katherine Young: *boundarymind*. Carrier Records, Carrier 076.

Boundarymind, conceptualised by Linda Jankowska and Katherine Young, is a sprawling project that threads its way through a variety of translations, mediums and iterations. What began as a commission for solo violin ten years ago ultimately evolved into an extended collaboration, a multimedia installation in 2022 and an electroacoustic sound work released on Carrier Records, all of which take the title of the project. While it was the friendship that Jankowska and Young developed and built throughout this project that became the ‘fabric of *boundarymind*’,¹ the pair articulate how the project required a ‘village’ of collaborators – a community that is ‘woven into [its] fabric’,² and one that includes Molly Roth Scranton, Kera Mackenzie and Distractfold.

In a sense, without dismissing the impacts and meaning of these collaborative working processes, neither the kind of network that facilitated *Boundarymind*, nor the benefits that such working practices afford, are particularly uncommon. For this reason, one of the primary points of interest for this project is the levers it pulls to not only pour the meanings and reverberations of these connections and communications into an installation, but to also coax them into an electroacoustic work.

From a sonic perspective, of the four movements that ‘boundarymind’ consists of, the first is the most enticing, and arguably the most successful in articulating the social emphasis of the project. Sumptuous synthesised lines hum, flit and dart across the stereo space, and intermingle with a series of speech samples that document the piece’s creation. Meanwhile, acoustic objects jut, scrape and bounce across the foreground. The focus the project places on exploring the memory meanings of objects from the contributors’ childhoods and pasts shimmers across the work. The movement is limitless and pleasingly unrelenting, effectively drawing outsiders into

the shared conceptual and relational space from which the composition was produced.

In the second movement, the sonic properties of these objects are explored in greater detail as the work traverses a series of distinct sound worlds. Throughout, the production quality is exquisite and imaginative, and the tension that simmers under the composition maintains its quietening menace for the full quarter of an hour. Next, the third movement juxtaposes various fragments of material – playfully insistent pops and twangs and gentle thuds that bounce around a barking dog that harks back to the recorded speech from the first movement. The third movement then runs into the fourth, where speech samples return with glassy violin and bassoon lines framed by various meltings, squelchings and drippings that seem to signal the end of the world. Here, there is a fulfilling sense of something significant having been built – a swirling phenomenon that eventually collapses in on itself, or is otherwise left to its own devices as we listen to it perspire, decay and expire. And this feels particularly fitting for a piece that partly attributes the performance of the fourth movement to the audience present at the recording – conjuring images of large-scale participation, even if the mechanics and specifics of this process are left to the listener’s imagination.³

However, while the fourth movement concludes the ‘boundarymind’ piece, it is then followed by another work – ‘bow breath crow’, a piece in three movements composed by Katherine Young and performed by Distractfold.⁴ The composition, for string trio and electronics, is accomplished and evocative, with the third movement in particular being powerfully ominous. However, its inclusion on the release feels a little arbitrary. Gone are the objects scratching themselves into being, instead replaced by string instruments and a fairly conventional compositional palette which somewhat lessens the world-building

¹ Linda Jankowska, and Katherine Young, *How to boundarymind*, album liner notes (New York: Carrier Records, 2023).

² *Ibid.*

³ The project’s website describes how community recording sessions were held at 6018 North, and members of the public were invited to contribute objects and sounds to these sessions. *Boundarymind*, ‘About’ [Webpage], <https://www.boundarymind.com/>. However, the role the audience played with regards to the fourth movement of the ‘boundarymind’ piece is not explicitly stated in the release’s liner notes.

⁴ Linda Jankowska (violin), Katarzyna Zimińska (viola) and Alice Purton (cello).

and world-ending sensations of the preceding piece. Although the artists state that the piece is conceptually strapped to the *boundarymind* project,⁵ 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.⁶

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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

⁵ '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.

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