

with personal idiosyncrasies, Miller drew inspiration from three phrases in Thomas Tallis' 1560s setting of verses from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. She expanded these phrases into three distinct segments: the first serving as an introduction and foreshadowing the impending wound-up intensity and heavy turmoil of the second part with its gradual build-up, while the third functions as a tranquil postlude – a contemplative afterword.

Much has already been said about the parallels between early music and new music: for example, the way time works in such compositions and, more broadly, how we listen to them. It is no wonder that such fusions have become commonplace, yet achieving a successful and engaging synthesis is not easy; it requires great skill and, perhaps, a bit of luck. In Miller's case, one can instantly recognise the echoes of Tallis' old music from the distant past with its dominant–tonic resolutions leapfrogging each other. Yet there is something alluringly odd about this music: the melodic fragments intentionally avoid coincidence, coming in and out of focus at will. Such blissful cacophony has increasingly become a feature of music written in the past few years, resembling, to me at least, our daily existence. Just as in life, choices must be made and sonic sacrifices accepted. The same holds true for *The City, Full of People*: its tenacious blend of stillness and momentum deserves careful consideration.

The second piece on the album, Laurence Crane's *String Quartet No. 2* played by the Esposito Quartet, also explores dominant–tonic resolutions, but in a more direct way. It opens with chorale-style tonic and dominant 7th chords that alternate, creating a monumental sense of push and pull, just like in the European music of the common-practice period. Hence, the title of the work, carrying the burden of tradition, seems more than appropriate, though one will not find excessively ornate melodic lines, intertwining into a complex web of motifs and chords, or vibrato-rich timbres of violin, viola or cello. It would not be Laurence Crane himself were he to simply copy older work's features and traits without adding his own twist to the established genre of the past: the same swaying motion of the tonic–dominant relationship is transplanted on to any two chords that happen to neighbour each other. They rock back and forth, occasionally losing their charted path and leading listeners to unknown places.

Here, repetition plays a significant role in discombobulating and stupefying: chords resolve in slightly different ways or contain subtle alterations. Sometimes, they follow up with melodic

extensions, elegantly tripping the listener up in one way or another but always unexpectedly. It is precisely this feature – the subtle type of repetition – that doesn't render the development of the piece predictable. Conversely, his earlier piano works built on the more direct, surface-layer repetitions and unexpected changes that undermined their flow. *String Quartet No. 2* is certainly one of Crane's silkier and more placid pieces. Unlike his previous work *Natural World*, which truly struck as a fresh approach in Crane's writing, this composition feels like a return to a well-refined formula. We are bestowed with musical artefacts from a time long gone only to make sense of how we hear and perceive them here and now, in their transcendental acoustic glory.

The sense of crisp resolution, crucial to Crane's work, gives way to more nuanced and intertwined interactions in Linda Catlin Smith's *Folio*, where beautiful vocal lines flow freely and wander in different directions. The words are set to texts in two collections of writings by Emily Dickinson: *The Gorgeous Nothings*, which features her envelope writings (fragments of poetry penned on used envelopes), and *Open Folios*, which presents facsimiles of some of her later writings. While certainly pleasant to the ears, given the magnificent performance by Chamber Choir Ireland under the direction of Paul Hillier, I wish there were more unexpected changes of texture and register to create an icy sense of drama – something I genuinely appreciate in Smith's writing. The composer's recent portrait album *Dark Flower*, on Redshift Records, stands as a fine testament to her abilities. In *Folio*, the music gets slightly louder and more apprehensive over time, and the occasional chromatic shifts help vary the colour. Yet the conclusion of the piece may leave some listeners feeling less fulfilled.

But to answer the question posed above: should the pieces on *Folks' Music* be preserved into the future? Certainly yes! They deserve to be played over and over again and appreciated from different perspectives, both vertical and horizontal, textural and polyphonic, modern and old. And while they all have one foot in the past, with various remnants of chords, texts and consonances, the other foot anchors sturdily in the future.

Marat Ingeldeev

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Eva Zöllner, *voces, señales*. Genuin, GEN 23838.

This is an album of contemporary accordion music from Colombia, written either for

accordion solo or for the instrument plus recorded sound. Eva Zöllner, who first visited the country in 2015, presents six composers who are little known to a European audience and with whom she has worked closely. They could not wish for a better champion.

The six pieces have some common sources of inspiration. In her informative booklet note, Zöllner points out that Colombia is the second most biodiverse country in the world, and the natural world (and contemporary threats to nature) is a central focus of many of the pieces on this recording. The troubled recent political history of the country is another recurring preoccupation.

The album title 'voces, señales' translates as 'voices, signs', and the pieces in their different ways relate to the contemporary Colombian context. Musically speaking, Zöllner writes that 'Vallenato, a popular folk music genre featuring rhythmically concise and virtuoso accordion solos, can be heard over loudspeakers on almost every street corner';¹ the accordion is therefore familiar to Colombian listeners in popular contexts. While some of the six composers draw on these popular roots, their musical language is without exception experimental and predominantly dissonant. The characteristic playing techniques of the accordion, in the hands of an expert player, seem to have inspired the composers: its infinitely subtle dynamic variation and ability to sustain sounds over long durations appear in all six of the pieces.

Ana María Romano G.'s *posdomingo 02.10.2016*, for accordion and fixed media electronics, features rustling natural sound interrupted by calls and shudders. Zöllner captures the sustained breath-like quality of the accordion, and in places she somehow appears to bend the pitch. About halfway through, it is surprising to hear urban noises, voices and dogs, which sound threatening in context, though soon the soundtrack reverts to nature sounds. The title references 'the day after the narrow failure of the referendum on the peace agreement with FARC, the guerrilla movement', which affected the composer, who composed the piece in response.

Carolina Noguera Palau's short *Canto del ave negra* (Song of the black bird), for solo accordion, is inspired by a popular song about a caged bird that has lost its freedom. Only towards the end do melodic fragments haltingly emerge from the rumbling depths. The composer refers to the accordion as 'a tremendously powerful

machine', and in her piece it has the depth and power of a pipe organ. Edgy, bass-dominated sonorities are grippy, almost tactile: we are a long way from birdsong in this haunting piece.

Carlos Andrés Rico's ten-minute-long *Nacido en el Valle, el Río y la Montaña* (Born in the Valley, the River and the Mountain), for accordion and tape, is directly inspired by the popular genre Vallenato. It starts with a lively melody, which soon dissipates into the sound of rushing water, and the piece continues to juxtapose popular-flavoured tunes with recorded sound, often with natural origins. The piece is fragmentary in character with sudden changes of mood, and overall it sounds like it would work better in conjunction with moving images that would make sense of its abrupt shifts in character.

Whether or not the accordion is coupled with electronics, its sonority in the hands of Eva Zöllner has features in common with typical electronic sonorities. This is particularly apparent in Daniel Leguizamón's *signo a cambio* (sign in return), a 14-minute-long piece inspired by two important historical Colombian figures, the painter Manuel Hernández and poet León de Greiff. This piece is almost entirely in the low register of the instrument, and although it is for accordion solo, the otherworldly rumbling and shuddering give the impression that the instrument has an unsuspected extra dimension. The ability of Zöllner to finely mould the accordion's sonority, stretching a sound way beyond the capacity of the human breath and shaping its dynamics with infinite care, is showcased in this piece. A spoken voice unexpectedly interrupts the flow after about ten minutes, adding an extra layer of mystery to this enigmatic work.

Natalia Valencia Zuluaga's *Brother*, for accordion solo, is named for the composer's brother and for a tree that appears in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. It starts with disarmingly simple, open intervals which are gradually undermined by friction-creating dissonance; melodic fragments emerge and come together in counterpoint. She initially focuses on the accordion's ability to colour a single sound with different tone colours, and in the middle of the piece, chunky chords with shuddering rhythms form a strong contrast with the preceding melody-driven material. We hear the sound of the accordion's bellows alone, like human breath, before the final section builds up to a wall of sound that dissipates all too quickly.

Jorge Gregorio García Moncada's *Un amor, puro e incondicional* (A love, pure and unconditional), for accordion and fixed media electronics, is a piece with both political and personal

¹ Eva Zöllner, *voces, señales*, liner notes, p. 4.

roots by a composer who is deeply concerned with the role memory plays in music and in life. Its inspiration draws on feelings about the 1948 assassination of the politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, which ‘plunged Colombia into decades of violence’, and also on the composer’s memories of his mother playing the accordion. The recorded part, which includes fragments of text, has a subtle but insistent rhythm, giving a sense of unresolved urgency against a sustained accordion part. Zöllner’s control of the ever-shifting dynamics contributes a great deal to the success of this piece.

While some works include spoken word, no texts or translations are provided; it would have been helpful for the booklet notes to clarify the meaning. Overall, this recording is a voyage of discovery. We are a long way from clichés of popular music, and despite some of the programme note descriptions, there is little of the popular side of the accordion in this collection. The album is not only a showcase for Zöllner’s considerable musicality but also for the lively contemporary Colombian musical scene.

Caroline Potter
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Daniel M. Karlsson, *Mapping the Valleys of the Uncanny*. XKatedral, XK027.

The adjective ‘uncanny’ describes something that is not only enigmatic but also somehow unsettling because of its familiarity. In 1970, Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori utilised the term in his essay ‘Bukimi no Tani’ – that is, ‘The Uncanny Valley’ – to caution robot builders against making their creations resemble humans too closely, to avoid the possible terrors of likeness. Such warnings are taken in vain by composer Daniel M. Karlsson in his latest album, *Mapping the Valleys of the Uncanny*.

The whole album has been composed with algorithms that produce structures which are populated with acoustic sounds that have been heavily processed. To that end, the disc is supposed to be ‘uncanny’ and, presumably, resemble contemporary classical music, which it does very effectively, and there are undoubtedly some very nice, perhaps even beautiful, sounds here. The album opener, ‘Intersections of traversals’, presents a 40-minute-long smear of organ and orchestral sounds, resulting in undulating timbres that slip effortlessly between following and leading each other. Later, there are much shorter tracks, such as ‘Fundamental’ and ‘Finite Resources’,

each under two minutes, that feel like ephemeral études for solo instruments, presenting feebly alluring soundworlds that close just as they’ve hooked the listener – a poised blend of the sounds of Klaus Lang, late Morton Feldman and members of the Wandelweiser collective.

So, to the composer’s credit, *Mapping the Valleys of the Uncanny* does indeed sound like contemporary classical music. From what I understand of the press release and accompanying interview, this is what Karlsson set out to do. But to my ears it does so in a sort of removed way, because, well, I am listening to something that is intentionally designed to be *only like* contemporary classical music. Its construction is so mechanical that it feels bare, not unnerving as other examples of the uncanny might.

It seems, then, that Karlsson is very successful in his endeavours. Perhaps so successful that I feel compelled to consider the reasons behind uncanny music altogether. I can see why, theoretically, it might be interesting to make something explicitly limited to an image of its origin, but to listen to and try and have a relationship with, I personally find it much harder. Maybe the affects of the uncanny don’t translate between media: in a lot of visual art and robotics, I find it disconcerting, but here it comes across as automated and – I think this is the right term – *soulless*. Raising these sorts of questions is no small feat and is a credit to the disc.

But as a listener, as opposed to a musicologist, *Mapping the Valleys of the Uncanny* makes me miss messiness: the vulnerability of a composer, at some stage and to some degree, having to hold their hands up and say, ‘I did it because I thought it sounded good’. I think it’s these decisions that distinguish pieces that I like from those that I love. Karlsson’s removal of self is perhaps too effective: I can’t hear him.

I wonder if this removal of messiness – of *people* – within the creative process is most apparent through the overall structure of the album. *Mapping the Valleys of the Uncanny* clocks in at just under two hours and reasons for this grouping of pieces are hard to decipher. There doesn’t seem to be a path plotted that I might be (emotionally) guided down or resist, nor anything *resembling* either of these as further deployments of the uncanny. But, then again, if committed to the uncanny in method and output, then maybe my expectations of curation aren’t appropriate.

The uncanny extends into aspects of the release beyond the sounds. In the accompanying interview, Karlsson claims that through working electronically with algorithms, he’s had access to sounds and structures that he wouldn’t have had