



blessings throughout the year / and by turn hidden beneath cold, frost and rain’); the third is a kind of psalm with refrain, with each verse given to a different solo voice (the punchy precision of the writing here does recall *A Glimpse of Sion’s Glory*); the fourth switches gears with each stanza across a range from hocketing polyphony to homophonic chant.

By comparison, the *Canti del carcere* are richly ornamented, befitting their Italian inspiration. Nevertheless, in setting commentaries on Dante in Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (as well as words by Dante himself), they are no less serious in their subject matter. The texts are not set strictly, however: in the first (‘fantasma’), it is shattered into fragments; in the second (‘senso comune’), the consonants are all omitted, leaving only a vowel-shadow of Gramsci’s words; and in the third (‘suo tormento’), the text is read outwards from the centre, reflecting its discussion of the torments of foresight and hindsight. The character of the music in each instance emerges from these constraints: a lyrical, aphoristic gestuality; a strangely chiming atmosphere of sung timbres; and a quasi-serialist pointillism. The shorter *Preluding* also takes a sidelong approach to its text, somehow cramming all 150 lines of Wordsworth’s *Was it for this* into just nine minutes of music. Appropriately, the score indicates that this music should be sung ‘like a gale’; EXAUDI’s commitment to Fox’s music in the teeth of this formidable challenge is abundantly clear.

A fourth work, *A Spousal Verse* (2004) – distinctly English-tinged in its abundant false relations – was written for another group of early music specialists, The Clerks. The Clerks recorded this on their 2009 Signum Classics album *Don’t Talk, Just Listen* (a title taken from Fox’s *20 Ways to Improve Your Life*). In comparison to their slower, more languorous version, with its solo line sunk deeply into the choral refrains, EXAUDI’s performance is mellifluous and onrushing, a breathless anticipation of marriage, rather than a last night’s solitary rest.

The comparison is useful: all of EXAUDI’s performances here resist indulgence, preferring instead presentations as though through a crystal-clear glass. It is an approach that suits Fox’s music, which at times positions itself in relation to its materials somewhere between *Verfremdungseffekt* and genuine affection. (The album closes with the short *Song* (24.iv.1916) of 2016, a commemoration of the Easter Uprising whose melodies are generated from the singers’ names by way of a musical cipher.) Ironically, such clarity does not always make music

straightforward to read: like a Heston Blumenthal concoction, it is somehow both cool and warm at once, both ironically detached and playfully open. It’s not a bad trick, though; and in a world plagued by extremes of earnestness and deceit, it is refreshingly welcome.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

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Martin Iddon, *Naiads*. Apartment House. Another Timbre, AT202.

Submerged in murky depths, among floating algae, rising bubbles, held breath, perhaps for too long. Aquatic imagery is very strong on this album. The naiads were freshwater nymphs of Greek mythology. There are five types of naiad, each associated with a type of body of water, and each naming a piece of chamber music recorded by Apartment House for this release. They are, in track order: *crinaeae*, the nymphs of fountains and wells, *pegaeae* of springs, *limnades* of lakes, *potameides* of rivers and *eleionomae* of marshes. At its best, Martin Iddon’s music is marked by its stunning refinement and elegance. His relentless focus on contrapuntal technique, especially prolation (DuFay’s motets are a frequent touchstone), allows for a unique and grounded complexity. It produces the completely organic emergence of otherwise simple macro phenomena like harmony and form. Even quite simple and mundane material can become magical. Although Iddon claims there was no tone painting or characterisation from the nymphs referenced in its title, I found that each piece snapped into a clear and compelling image when paired.

*crinaeae*, for Pierrot-plus, is deliberate, slow, murky music. Currents ooze from the violin, cello, bass clarinet and flute – boomy low-register beatings and rich wispy filamentals from a flute haltingly sounded, a violin draggingly bowed. Pops and jets and eddies from piano and percussion brightly pierce through. There are complex rhythmic structures guiding the similar but different strata; groupings are replicated across the instruments in a fractal structure. To say spa music would strike most any composer as the worst of insults, but in light of the strongly conceived and realised aquatic thematic, I intend the term not as a value statement, but simply as a descriptor. The sparse liner note reads: ‘Those who sought rejuvenation in [the naiads’] waters might receive the gifts of Tiresias or Phlebas: to

prophecy or to drown.’ Water rejuvenates and is deadly – the latter achieved in this music through a kind of labyrinthine repetition. At length, the piano striates time evenly and persistently to mark the conclusion, and to return us out of this beautiful world.

*pegaeae*, for string trio, begins with a section more silence than sound. Stepping melodic statements alternate with lengthy gaps of silence, evoking the springs for which they are named. The source is unknown, the water magically appearing, dribbling or tumbling from the side of a hill, vanishing just as quickly. The silence between melodic dribbles is, however, artificial, and one can hear the fades to infinity as they were drawn into the DAW. Some are really quite aggressive in their shaping. It is a shame that this obvious technical error was made with this recording. Happily, the discourse modulates slightly to a lush netting of slow glissandi to which the previous dribbles have become ornamentation. Once this texture is established, the second half is more of the same. Yet, for that, it is the case that this is some of the most exquisite music I have heard for some time. I struggle to pinpoint how exactly.

*limnades*, for piano, cello and vibraphone, involves some of the most extraordinary orchestration for a trio I know. It begins with a totemic gesture: C# to a repeated G, ripples on a silent surface. This music is very concerned with its materials, almost didactic. It quietly repeats pitches at different tempi, frequently in unison, sometimes two, and rarely three different pitches. Lithe gestures try to break out of the rippling repeated pitches, to no avail. These textures are spread equally across the three instruments with such grace that one hardly notices the virtuosity. The simplicity of the brilliantly handled materials makes me wonder if Iddon is trying to make this piece work, to make the work push out of itself. But like a lake, it is bounded. Eventually it gives in to the simplest, almost indulgent idea of steady pulses at 55 bpm of the same pitch in various octaves, including a beautifully and luxuriously captured piano in its lower register and concludes shortly thereafter.

*potameides*, for piano, violin, viola, cello, bass clarinet, flute and percussion, consists of diaphanous rapidly flowing lines with dripping repeated pitches. Though this has the largest ensemble of the album, it doesn’t sound at all larger for it – in fact, compared to its slower predecessor, it sounds smaller. The music flows, simply flows and one patiently waits for an event. In the context of the album, it feels to me like a

pure progression of time. I can’t help but wonder how it would read as an isolated piece of concert music. Gradually the roaming lines decrease in their density ever so slightly, and one notices the melodically sculpted nature of the repeating pitches. An ascending semitone is a palpable shift in the grounding of the local moment.

*eleionomae*, for piano, violin, cello, bass clarinet and flute, concludes the album in a totally different world. The contrast reveals the consistency of the preceding music. It was written with the intent that the performers’ eyes would be closed during performance. While all the pieces float in a temporal limbo, this one does so with different materials, which are, to my ears, more conventionally associated with a generic kind of new music. Sounds are much less pitchy, and in the context of the album, unfortunately, it registers only as a loss. The fascinatingly iridescent interface between pitch and noise which is so emblematic of the previous pieces is simply gone. The sounds here are much less lively, more stagnant, swamp-like, even.

The musicians of Apartment House have built an impressive catalogue for Another Timbre performing subtly beautiful works, often with unique approaches to aleatoric composition. Their work is defined by a supremely sensitive musicality and compassion that this repertoire requires. The recordings on this album, particularly the first three tracks, are a tremendous achievement.

Alex Huddleston

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Tim Parkinson, *Piano Trio 2020*. Plus Minus. Bandcamp.

It is not commonplace for a composer to successfully manage putting together two full-fledged albums in a year in the mysterious stewing-in-its-own-juice world of new music, where monetary and production resources aren’t abundant while demand for exceptionally good stuff is high. But in the case of Tim Parkinson, 2022 was certainly a fruitful year. After his music had been released on the UK-based label Another Timbre in July, packing a mixture of chamber works written in the last 20 years, eager listeners were able to further satisfy their appetite for Parkinson’s tunes when his newest album *Piano Trio 2020* was released at the end of November 2022. The titles of his pieces are often straightforward and Feldman-esque; they do not beat around the bush and communicate