

of their fastidiousness, the durations of the two recordings differ by only five seconds.

*Oxford 1817*, I is the earliest piece on the disc, dated 1966–67. Composed in his early 20s, it is a cycle of three brief songs, none exceeding two minutes. In their concision, brevity and material, they are very effective, demonstrating the haunting lyricism to be developed further in the later work. However, these pieces lack an urgency that the later work has. Mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean balances a generosity of interpretation with an incisive musicianship.

*Botany Bay*, for cello, alto flute and mezzo, demonstrates a unique formal quality to this music. Further developing the connection to Romanticism, the music is both freely organic and clearly sectional. The sections alternate two characteristics: on one side, microtonal gestures from the flute and cello writhe about, while on the other, a drone anchors the musical landscape for the mezzo's music to enter.

*Blessed be I* (1992) and *III* (1996) are both settings of the Sermon on the Mount. The first is from the gospel according to Matthew. It is very pretty music indeed. The harmonic space is a sort of white-note-only, very gentle gestural language – quite surprising to hear from this composer. *Blessed be III*, from the gospel according to Luke, for mezzo, flute and piano, contrasts heavily. The harmonic and gestural language is much sharper and more dissonant. But lyricism is no less present here than in the other work on this album.

The longest work and undoubtedly the centrepiece of the disc is *Wisdom*, commissioned by the Marsyas trio. While the rest of the music on the album is interesting for any number of reasons, it is simply lacking a sense of scope that one would associate with the Finnissey of *English Country Tunes* or *The History of Photography in Sound*. In *Wisdom*, a wide interval between the cello and flute like a tolling bell encases the singer's song. She sings about isolation, abandonment, loneliness. This piece was written during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. Finnissey has very effectively captured the condition of that moment in time. The lyrical style remains, as ever, as does the balance between free organicism and clear structure: there are very narrow transitions that one doesn't clock as such until it's too late. A stratum of history has been peeled away or bubbled up and suddenly the piano quotes Beethoven op. 111, movement II. This beautifully voiced root-position C major sonority emerges like a picture of tranquility. Then in a moment the music progresses elsewhere, different material is explored, then a new quotation has emerged

or else a later part of the same Beethoven movement. This piece is a real journey.

The next seven tracks, *Salomé*, *June* and *An den Mond*, all display similar artistic qualities: maturity of craft, focused creative scope, the same set of instrumental forces. In isolation each is a lovely piece, but in the sequence of this album they unfortunately lose their definition. *Salomé I*, for voice and piano, features three streams of music stratified by register in a kind of awkward conversation with each other. The pianist's left hand converses with the right, the right hand with the singer and the singer with Richard Strauss. *Salomé II* works with a much more unified texture than its predecessor. Gentle pulsations in the piano give the impression of waiting. Similarly, *June* has a first movement built around a kind of unquiet waiting or striving followed by a plateau. It ends with a beautiful flute solo, the pay-off of the whole piece. The three movements of *An den Mond* feature new configurations of the same elements explored elsewhere: Schubert quotations, the same text set differently, a general feeling of waiting. Betts-Dean delivers a particularly strong performance in these pieces.

Alex Huddleston

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Hugues Dufourt, *Surgir*. ensemble recherche, WDR Sinfonieorchester, Ensemble Nikel, Remix Ensemble, Yaron Deutsch, Nicolas Hodges, Johannes Kalitzke, Peter Rundel, Ilan Volkov, Mariano Chiacchiarini, Sylvain Cambreling. bastille musique, BM027.

Composer Hugues Dufourt (b. 1943) is well known for his research in spectral composition and electronics undertaken at, among other venues, IRCAM and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). He has created a large body of work for orchestra and chamber forces, as well as a more modest collection of vocal pieces. *Surgir* is a generous three-CD set of compositions dating from 1984–2022, the early title work joined by the Tiepolo Cycle, pieces for piano and orchestra and music featuring electric guitar.

*Surgir* (Arise; 1984) is nearly half an hour long, and is powerful, at times nearly bellicose. Widely spaced verticals project spectral harmonies, which are then broken up into diverse attacks by individual players and small units of the ensemble. Drumming is a concomitant near-constant, from thrumming in the background to thunderous martial rhythms. The use of

brass in blocks and sustained calls also reflects this atmosphere. WDR Sinfonieorchester, conducted by Johannes Kalitzke, perform *Surgir* with emphatic presence and an intricate sense of balance.

*L'Origine du monde* (The Origin of the World; 2004), inspired by the eponymous painting by Gustave Courbet, is a chamber piano concerto, but one in which the piano part is dedicated to resonance, primarily of rearticulated chords, rather than virtuoso soloing. Remix Ensemble, conducted by Peter Rundel, are joined by pianist Nicolas Hodges in an engrossing performance of this attractive piece. The harmonic design swells from the piano into pitched percussion and then winds and strings. As the piece builds to its climax, brass gestures bring shakes and glissandi into the foreground. The coda combines ascending verticals from the piano and sustained overtone chords in the rest of the ensemble.

Hodges asked Dufourt for a full-length concerto and the imposing half-hour-long *On the wings of the morning* (2011–12) was the result. When left to its own devices the WDR Sinfonieorchester, conducted by Ilan Volkov, lets rip in fortissimo attacks. These are juxtaposed with softer passages combining strings played *molto vibrato* and sinuous wind solos. Hodges is given ample space for audibility in his own solos, with complex verticals in dynamically subdued sections and forte virtuoso angularity in others. Multiphonics appear frequently, particularly in the four clarinets. Shortly before the premiere, it was discovered that only using the French, not German, fingering system would allow for the specificities of tuning required. Four replacements were found for the Teutonic-technique-trained regulars. Later in the piece, piano and pitched percussion play an animated colloquy that is joined by glissandi in strings and winds. After two repeated piano chords, the orchestra join for an undulating final gesture.

The four-part Tiepolo Cycle was composed for ensemble recherche and features the pianist Jean-Pierre Collot. It was inspired by the splendid ceiling fresco by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo at the Würzburg Residence. The four continents seen in the fresco serve as titles for the pieces. Tiepolo Cycle had an extended genesis, begun in 2004 and only premiered complete in 2016. *L'Afrique d'après Tiepolo* (Africa after Tiepolo; 2004–2005) pairs vibraphone and piano in a similar pattern to that used in *L'Origine du monde*. This is interspersed with expressive lines in the strings and a dyadic gesture in the clarinet. Sustained winds are added to the piano and

pitched percussion, lending weight and shape to the resonant verticals. The work closes with an emphatic passage for pitched percussion and string glissandi that evolves into a fleet motoric ostinato. The cadence point involves soft chordal repetitions in the piano and a delicate clarinet solo. *L'Asie d'après Tiepolo* (Asia; 2008–2009) retains material from *L'Afrique*, notably the piano verticals and multiphonic winds, but unpitched percussion in off-kilter attacks and a wayward spun violin solo frequently appear in the foreground. Microtonal harmony, emphasising the upper register of the winds, makes for a lustrous new texture, one that is then juxtaposed with mid-register strings, bass clarinet and the ubiquitous piano chords. Hushed clarinet and flute lines intermingle in a delicate denouement.

In *L'Europe d'après Tiepolo* (Europe; 2010–2011), flute and percussion play in a completely different demeanour, with vicious fortissimo attacks. The piano adopts verticals again, but now the voicings are tighter and the approach clangorous. Drum rolls swell while winds and strings play angular lines. Vigorous attacks on overtone chords by the whole ensemble alternate with these linear passages. A long section of overlapping glissandi marks a section boundary, after which the piano announces a new series of harmonies, then taken up by the rest of the ensemble, replete with microtonal and multiphonic inflections. The piano moves to the foreground while the others recede and string glissandi distress the edges of the framework. Vibraphone joins the piano in tumultuous chords for a few minutes, belatedly rejoined by trilled winds and cymbals, then a haunting alto flute solo accompanied by pianissimo piano and chimes in a surprising valediction.

*L'Amérique d'après Tiepolo* (America; 2015–2016) concludes the cycle, with the piano taking on a more assertive role that alternates fleet arpeggiations with passages recalling the vertical sonorities from previous parts of the cycle. Ascents via glissandi, scalar passages and arpeggiations are passed from instrument to instrument, with percussion, both pitched and unpitched, particularly emphatic in a gradual *accelerando*. A number of microtonal harmonies and trills in the winds introduce a new section with a slow bass drone synced with distressed altissimo chiming. Piano verticals are reintroduced as a retrospective gesture, not just for this piece but the whole cycle. They are overtaken by a return of the drone, abetted by colourful harmonies and a brisk cello solo punctuated by gongs and altissimo winds. An

extended coda returns to the juxtaposition of piano verticals and an expansive deployment of spectral chords. Muscular playing ensues, concluded by reiterated cymbal attacks.

Yaron Deutsch is an electric guitarist who has impressive bona fides, playing for Klangforum Wien, Musikfabrik and his own group Nickel, as well as teaching at the Hochschule für Musik Basel and as Tutor of Guitar at Darmstadt. An entire disc is devoted to pieces Dufourt has written that incorporate Deutsch playing guitar. Particularly fetching is *La Cité des saules* (The City of Willows; 1997), which combines treble guitar attacks and electronics-abetted gestures, spacious harmonies and imposing bass notes. Over the course of the piece, echolations and pulsations emerge, making it an ambient showcase.

The sextet *Hommage à Charles Négre* (1985), referencing the influential nineteenth-century photographer, is uncharacteristic in its slow, soft surface, almost Feldman-like in demeanour. Deutsch trades verticals with a vibraphone with the motor on, as well as sustained notes with flute, oboe/English horn, clarinet and bassoon. Conducted by Mariano Chiacchiarini, the group creates a haunting ambience. *L'Île Sonnante* (The Ringing Island; 1989) features a duo between percussion and guitar. A Chinese gong provides metallic ascending slides, concurrent with distorted low-register guitar attacks. The vibraphone, this time with the motor off, provides slow counterpoint to the guitar. Vibrato bar on the guitar blurs the pitch, and volume swells by suspended cymbals create an ominous distressedness. After the other instruments drop out, the gong's sliding tone returns.

*L'Atelier rouge d'après Matisse* (2020) brightly depicts the reds of Matisse's painting, with an introduction by Nickel Ensemble employing pitched percussion, piano and bass register drone, which are soon supplanted by multiphonics on saxophone and raucous guitar lines with sustained overtones in the midst of feedback. Metrically articulated cymbals join vibraphone and echoing guitar lines. Piano attacks soon accompany the cymbals and repeated guitar notes that once again devolve into distorted octaves. Ascending gestures using the vibrato bar are accompanied by aggressive percussion attacks. Short melodic tags and distorted howls add overtones to the proceedings, connecting the piece with others by Dufourt. Swaths of repeated notes are accompanied by multiphonics on the saxophone and percussion alternating between chimes and triangles. A soft return finds the guitar distortion subdued in favour of

clean-toned dissonant harmonies. The guitar then performs a cadenza of repeated notes, wild chordal attacks, glissandi and harmonics. The saxophone abets it with repeating trills, followed by the piano playing rangy arpeggiations. The guitar's final cadenza is filled with swells and distorted lines, accompanied by percussion.

The notion of a French spectralist rocking out might seem incongruous, but the final work, *L'Enclume du rêve d'après Chillida* (*The Anvil of Dreams after Chillida*; 2022), moves from pianissimo passages that tested the engineers' capacities and fortissimo ones that resemble high decibel rock. A concerto, Deutsch is joined by WDR, conducted by Sylvain Cambreling. The last section is filled with guitar slides and emphatic riffing. It builds to a roaring cadence, only, as Harry Vogt writes in his programme note, 'Dufourt abruptly pulls the plug at the end.'

The record package is generous, including essays by Martin Kaltenecker, Harry Vogt and Sebastian Solte, an interview between Dufourt and Solte and replications of draft score excerpts. Dufourt has been well served by bastille musique, and by all of the interpreters recorded here.

Christian Carey

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Kenneth Kirschner, *three cellos*. Christopher Gross. greyfade, 007.

In 2019 the producer, recording engineer and composer Joseph Branciforte founded the greyfade record label. Its basic premise was, in the words of the label's website, 'the idea of a music release as a complete conceptual universe, integrating sound, compositional architecture, visual design, and text into a single object worthy of sustained engagement'. To this end, its first few releases (of music by Branciforte, Theo Bleckmann, Greg Davis, Phillip Golub, Kenneth Kirschner and Christopher Otto) took the form of tastefully coloured vinyl LPs in beautifully designed minimalistic sleeves. But while such a philosophy is intended to resist the aesthetically deadening (and financially crippling) effects of virtualisation on the business of making and selling records of experimental music, Branciforte is no Luddite. All greyfade releases are also available digitally (in better-than-CD quality), and the label's design aesthetic (of bar codes, data visualisation and waveforms) is clearly embedded in the digital world.