

almost no initial attack. The two cellos (Christopher Brown, Natasha Zielazinski) wind around each other, descending to the depths of the instrument and vanishing at the end of the piece as if the sonority has collapsed.

The longest piece on the album is *Colour Catalogue: Whites* (2018), for bass clarinet (Heather Ryall), two flutes (Fiona Sweeney, Katie Macdonald) and two cellos (Evie Coplan, Christopher Brown). The instruments, generally introduced in alternating pairings separated by silence, produce fragile sonorities that require close attention. The fluttering of the bass clarinet makes the listener feel as if they are present in the bell of the instrument, and Ryall's control of harmonics after about 7 minutes, paired with breathy flute sounds, is a striking moment. Lim's objective description of the piece is 'a catalogue of different gradients of sound'; she creates a timeless atmosphere, and the piece ends suddenly as if this is just a fragment of something that could carry on forever.

Perhaps the most surprising piece on the album is *flicker*, for piano, performed by Alvin Leung. Lim views the piano not as an instrument with hammers and pedals, but as a stringed instrument whose strings can be plucked or gently struck, only to decay almost immediately; only very occasionally does a 'natural' piano key sound. Again, the focus is on delicate sonorities at very low dynamic levels, though there is necessarily more attack than in the other pieces on the CD, and the reiterating rhythm suggests a flickering flame. From about 4'33", plucked chords are interspersed with silence. Hugely narrowing down the range of possibilities of the piano, Lim's aim is to 'explor[e] a single sound from various angles', and again an unsuspecting listener might be surprised by the origin of the sound source.

It seems that this fragile recorded music is very much an idea in the air. Lim's work can be compared to Georgia Rodgers' 2019 *all that dust* CD, which I reviewed in 2020 (*TEMPO*, 74, no. 294) and which also explores sound at the threshold of audibility in microscopic detail. Both Rodgers' and Lim's recordings are ideal for home listening, and although Rodgers shows more interest in how the performance space is an integral part of a work, Lim has an intriguing ear for unusual sonic combinations. Lim's CD is a fascinating introduction to her musical language; it will be interesting to see how she develops as a

composer, perhaps moving towards larger formations?

Caroline Potter

10.1017/S0040298222000948

Harry Partch, *Delusion of the Fury*. Ensemble Musikfabrik. Wergo, Wer 6871 2.

In 2014 I went to see Heiner Goebbels' production of American composer Harry Partch's *Delusion of the Fury* at the Edinburgh International Festival. In the rich, intimate interior of the King's Theatre, the futuristically clad ensemble sat on a stage piled high with unusual instruments that, in the words of Bob Gilmore, looked like 'the artefacts of some imaginary ethnic group, a compost of allusion to flower stems, tendons, human sexual organs, claws, stamens, dismembered limbs, petals'.¹

The two acts – the first 'very serious', the second 'highly farcical' – tell separate tales that are linked by their exploration of putting anger aside in favour of forgiveness. The first presents a warrior who meets the ghost of a rival he slew, while the second shows an altercation between a hobo and woman who has lost her lamb, which is then pronounced upon by a myopic judge. Or, at least, this is the bare bones of the plot derived from the synopses and literature. At the time I am not sure I knew entirely what had happened, or what it meant, though I did know I would jump at the chance to hear it again.

The evening was a mixture of ritualistic scenes with distinct rhythmic characters and intoning voices. Triadic organ passages repeat rather like rock progressions, if prog rockers had been interested in dividing the octave into 43 intervals. A snaking zither melody returns at periodic intervals, while various drums and bells, flutes and pipes comment on proceedings. The voices for the most part do not offer any recognisable text, instead offering statements such as 'O la klu/Boo day tho/Klu la o/Tho day boo day'. These descriptions can make it sound like a menagerie of exotica but somehow it coheres into a special Partchian unity. It is informed by a profound appreciation of music cultures from around the globe, as well as a connected conviction that Western music had taken a wrong turn with the move towards equal temperament. The recording here was made one

¹ Bob Gilmore, *Harry Partch: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 1.

year after that Edinburgh performance, so Partch fans have had to wait rather longer than might be expected for its release.

There was a question whether the disorientating immersion of the live performance would transfer to CD. Partch himself was always keen to stress the totality of his theatrical conception, as experienced in the 'seen and heard performance'. He states that the 'concept of this work inheres in the *presence* of the instruments onstage, the *movements* of musicians and chorus, the *sounds* they produce, the *actuality* of actors, of singers, of mimes, of lights; in fine, the *actuality* of truly integrated theatre'.² He goes further, claiming that he 'could no more become a writer of acceptable concert music than I could become an acceptable kangaroo'.³ While seeing the full production would be ideal, there is a drama to the sounds of the instruments and mildly eccentric use of voices that gives the imagination more than enough sustenance. From memory, the staging did not seek to explicate the precise meaning behind the mysterious scenario, also giving room to the musical expression.

The disc manages to conjure up so much of what was fascinating that evening. This does not necessarily mean that the music exists alone as a fascinating object without the drama but, rather, that the drama is so ingrained in the music its expression is in a way inherently dramatic. The loving recording of the various instruments also helps this sense of immediacy. For example, I do not envy the sound engineer trying to capture the giant marimbas for which Partch had a penchant. So big are they that their resonators must necessarily be shorter than the physical ideal and, in person, it was as if the instruments created a short-lived breeze that brushed past your ears. The CD conveys it all, though, with remarkable clarity.

The barriers in place for Musikfabrik's performance of this work are more than enough to make most ensembles run for the hills. Gilmore, describing the composer's oeuvre in general, states that perhaps the most 'controversial aspect of the entire enterprise is the sheer unavailability of much of Partch's work', this being the chief reason performances are few and far between.⁴ The first major challenge concerns the instruments, which include

a wonderful array of marimbas, guitars, 'chromolodeons', 'cloud-chamber bowls', 'kithararas' and 'harmonic canons'. Partch's original instrumentarium, which he created to aid the performance of the tonal system he developed, is ageing and only available for research at the University of Washington, Seattle, and not to be transported. Almost the entire set of instruments (some 40-odd) was recreated by a dedicated team, with instrument builder and percussionist Thomas Meixner contributing over 20. This is the work of years and the results are staggering.

The second challenge resides in the fact that the instruments and the piece require musicians who assume unusual, multiple roles. Players from the ensemble learnt entirely new percussion instruments; they double-up as the chorus, as dance troupe, and some are featured as vocal soloists. As Partch himself stated, 'I believe in musicians who are *total* constituents of the moment, irreplaceable, who may sing, shout, whistle, stamp their feet. I believe in players in costume, or perhaps half-naked, and I do not care which half'.⁵ Special mention should be made of Christine Chapman (usually playing French horn in the ensemble), who gives a gripping account of the Old Goat Woman. It seems as if the entire ensemble changed its way of working for this one endeavour. The instrumental playing is also regularly of the highest order, tightly moving between the rhythmic scenes, and with some fantastic mallet percussion playing.

Finally, this is an effort that must have required a phenomenal amount of financial support alongside its status as a passion project. The production is an international collaboration between the Ruhrtriennale, Holland Festival and Lincoln Center Festival, and received funds from the Kulturstiftung des Bundes and Kunststiftung NRW. It is a feat that will not easily be repeated.

That this is an excellent disc does not need restated, yet it may well be more than that. There is a sense of importance that emanates from this performance, from this project, that is unique. As a document of large-scale Partch performance it is peerless and, as such, it is filling one of the most intractable gaps in recordings of twentieth-century American music, though mention should be made of Bridge Records, who continue to put out Partch recordings at regular intervals. Nevertheless, Musikfabrik's release feels like a landmark and, with the complete

² Harry Partch, 'Introduction', in *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, ed. Thomas McGeary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. i–xxx, xxvii.

³ Harry Partch, 'Preface to *Delusion of the Fury*', in *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, ed. Thomas McGeary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 250–55.

⁴ Gilmore, *Harry Partch*, p. 5.

⁵ Quoted in Gilmore, *Harry Partch*, p. 350.

set of instruments now at their disposal, it may not be the last.

What a commitment. What a performance. What a group.

Neil T. Smith

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Jack Sheen, *Sub*. Octandre Ensemble, Hargreaves. SN Variations, SNCD11.

It makes sense that our notion of musical time derives from our heart, from our breath.¹ The musical vision of time made by humans for human consumption is of course anthropocentric, so much that we are conditioned to expect some kind of regularity in rhythm and form, as reliable and unconsidered as our next heartbeat or our next breath. What distinguishes Jack Sheen's album *Sub* is its commitment to an alternative musical time, where there is constant though unpredictable motion, a layered world in which gestures drift over and past and under a cloud of pink noise, but we are unsure when each will begin or happen next.

Performed by Octandre Ensemble and conducted by Jon Hargreaves, *Sub* is a collection of 11 tableaux between two and seven minutes long. The pieces, then, are song-sized, but the scope of the spectrum evokes large landscapes where foreground and background interchange identities. The first track, *Sub One*, exemplifies the kind of sound painting that embodies all the tracks. It begins with four violas circular bowing muted strings, creating a cavorting noise layer, punctuated by a repeating rhythmic melody on the two bass clarinets, while the five alto flutes and two trombones hold a steady ground of air and alternating held notes F and E. The landscape is steadfast and immersive, a single living diorama, and ends as abruptly as it begins, like the delineation between picture frame and wall.

This abrupt silence, the spaces between the 11 movements, may be the most meaningful part of the entire work, the musical event that each piece works towards. In the video of a live performance of *Sub* shot by Laura Hilliard that comes with the album, these silences are fixed and thus curated: the right amount of rest and

reprieve before the next full frequency spectrum of noise and sensual mingling of pitches. The digital tracks, however, leave the duration of the silence up to the listener – I would not have minded if all 11 movements were on one long track with intentionally composed silences.

As a whole, it is not a stretch to think about *Sub* as a metaphor of the messiness of life. The tapes of field recordings and generated noise make up the substrate on which the instrumental gestures grow. The display of the stochasticity found in nature encircles our attention, which both swells and shrinks, encouraging and pointing to the kind of noisy distraction that pervades our attention-seeking society. Our skin is a boundary between our flesh and what is outside, but our ears do not have the privilege of such a barrier, and so we develop a tolerance for the noise of the street, the noise of our organs, the noise of our lives. Perhaps this is why Sheen and sound engineer Simon Reynell in mastering placed the taped noise at the surface of the album. The noise is not simply projected in space, at Menuhin Hall where it was recorded, but rather it sounds closer to our ears, as if the digital sound were mixed in. We must wade through this noise for those moments of silence that are more precious than ever, and Sheen sets up the context for us to appreciate the silence that we take for granted.

Furthermore, it is not easy to compose organicity, an impossible mixture of order and disturbance. Sheen's repeated loops – sliding in and out of a consistent time and deftly performed by Octandre Ensemble – become fluid lines that define a form one moment and divide it at another, suggesting a limitless space ever mutating in imagination yet also a beautiful, sonic refuge.

Julie Zhu

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Revoiced. Corvus Consort, Ferio Saxophone Quartet. Chandos, CHAN20260.

Freddie Crowley, the conductor of the 13-voice Corvus Consort, calls his new album with the Ferio Saxophone Quartet *Revoiced*, which is apt because every short item, except one, 16 in all, has been arranged or transcribed by Crowley. Of the four new-ish pieces, three are existing works revamped by Crowley or the composer, and only Owain Park's *Miserere after Allegri* is specifically written for this combination of saxophones and choir. Thirteen of the tracks are

¹ People prefer music with tempi similar to their normal heartbeat. See Iwanaga M, 'Relationship between Heart Rate and Preference for Tempo of Music', *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 81, no. 2 (1995), pp. 435–40.