

interpretation and in the clear influence of their personal musicality on the way the material is couched. Their performance, despite the alienated nature of its production, has, somehow, an undeniable intimacy. There is a juxtaposition of tendernesses, a calling back and forth across thousands of miles, a joining of aims that makes even an artificial simultaneity affecting in the extreme. I am going to resist the temptation to analogise Epstein's work to something having to do with the better angels of human nature in the harshest depths of the pandemic, largely because it does the work a disservice to localise it thus. It is really about what Epstein says it is about in those adjectival pairs that permeate the text: those distances and closenesses, clarities and unclarities, edges and washes. It is beautiful, balanced here between those opposites.

Evan Johnson

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Rósa Lind, *Kandinsky Kunstwerke*. Geoffrey Gartner, Laura Chislett, Mark Knoop. all that dust, ATD17.

The painter Wassily Kandinsky is credited for his contributions to abstraction in visual art. He often looked to music as the genre par excellence for expression devoid of signification: 'Music, by its very nature, is ultimately and fully emancipated and needs no outer form for its expression.'¹ An avid spiritual theorist, he sought personal and emotional fulfilment in the Gesamtkunstwerk – in 'monumental art'² – which, in today's lingo, might be understood as the High Romanticisation of interdisciplinarity.

Into this context steps composer Rósa Lind with an album of electroacoustic music entitled *Kandinsky Kunstwerke*. Taking a Kandinsky painting as her point of departure for each of the three works featured, Lind plots an extraterrestrial trajectory through solo instrumental writing. A sense of wonder pervades this album – the culmination of decades of compositional inquiry – as Lind looks to astrology for spiritual fulfilment. In Lind's idiom, I hear Kandinsky's searching rhetoric echoing through time.

The first track is a work for amplified cello, gong and tape, skilfully interpreted by Geoffrey Gartner. In *Extrema: A Galilean Sarabande* we hear curves traced in air, tension focused by

the performer at the point of melodic extremity, where the sound has reached its periphery. The composer furnishes our imagination with the Galilean moons of Jupiter. Callisto, Ganymede, Europa and Io: four indistinguishable movements, each a meditation on the outer reaches of the mind, coerced by physical laws and artistic prerogative into sound.

A recurring, single strike of the gong punctuates the cello's wandering narrative: as the composition moves away, so it must return to its point of origin. The gong serves to focus the music and to situate the listener – a northern star in Lind's wandering idiom. Or, rather, a distant Jupiter, dimly visible in the night sky.

The writing in *Extrema* oscillates between fevered Romanticism (there is a yearning in the melody, something exploratory and questioning, not least for the wonder of deep space evoked by the title) and stark modernism. At times we hear references to solo Bach, his voice splintering through Lind's telescopic lens. As the work reaches its finale, moments of gritty tremolo follow fragile harmonics, which hang in the air like dust escaping from a profound shadow (low-frequency radio samples from Jupiter). Perhaps this swinging temporal exploration is where we find the sarabande – a dance through history, processing solemnly through the courts of the late Baroque to the angular halls of the early twentieth century.

Next is *Courbe Dominante*, described by the composer as 'an abstract series of dance movements for flutes and other sound sources, from a planetary origin, through the resonant arcs of Saturn's rings to multiple vanishing points'.³ The flute (Laura Chislett) presents a palette of colour, darting between registers and articulation so that the ear is drawn primarily to contrast. We are aware of these gestures only as a collective, much like how the edges of Kandinsky's brown hues are softened next to the sharp blackness of the shapes in the foreground of his *Courbe Dominante*.

Ghostly radiation from Saturn interrupts the flute's manic soliloquy, if only for a brief moment, reminding us of the strangeness of it all. Where Kandinsky offers discrete gestures and a language of disconnection, Lind relies on angular intervallic shapes and disrupted melodies. Certainly, this language echoes that of the Second Viennese School, and the severance of the early modern spirit. If there is such a

¹ Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual In Art*, tr. Hilla Rebay (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946), pp. 35–36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³ Liner notes by Laura Tunbridge.

paradox, then this is a familiar vocabulary of exploration and alienation.

The album continues with *Trente*, a 30-movement work for piano after Kandinsky's segmented painting of the same name. It is here that I finally understand the importance of (Gesamt)kunstwerke, as although each of the movements is named for a single constellation, *Trente* is a vast intertextual survey of mythologies of the night sky.

The piano navigates between polarities of harmony and register. The direction of the music is sometimes obscure, but perhaps this is what the composer intended for her listeners. As due north is shrouded in the glittering constellations of the piano's upper register, so too is the musical compass, the inner logic of the work. We are afloat in the zero gravity of the piano's sustain pedal and expansive compound intervals.

The prepared techniques in the tenth movement, 'Lyra' – a plucking of the strings inside the body of the instrument – is a welcome development in the language of this work. We are introduced here to a distinctive character, a vulture or eagle carrying a lyre, and we hear the bird's sharp talons on the strings of the harp. The character work continues throughout *Trente*, with diverse prepared techniques returning for the likes of watery 'Hydra' and vain 'Cassiopeia'.

I appreciate the restraint in Lind's writing. *Trente* might be best understood by its moments of silence, of absence, of the void. In 'Virgo', the listener is invited into the quietest moments of the work, and the ear stretches to catch the low resonance of sympathetic vibration in the piano. I found myself intently listening to the silence long after the track had stopped.

Somewhere in the starry character survey of *Trente* I lost the original reference to Kandinsky's work of the same name. For music so figurative, so explicit in its titular description, Lind's *Trente* seems light years away from Kandinsky's abstract, black-and-white painting. Indeed, Kandinsky himself wrote scornfully of programme music, the antithesis to his abstract mission: 'How miserably music fails when attempting to express the exterior form, is shown by narrowly understood program music.'⁴

Insight is offered, perhaps, in Kandinsky's writing on black and white in colour theory: 'White affects us with the absoluteness of a great silence... It is not a dead silence, but one full of possibilities... [a] silence which has suddenly

become comprehensible... [Whereas] like a nothingness after sunset, black sound is like an eternal silence, without future or hope. Represented in music, it is as a final pause, which precedes the beginning of another world.'⁵

Another world, indeed. Many worlds, really, within Lind's interstellar, intertextual album.

Kate Milligan

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Lei Liang, *Hearing Landscapes/Hearing Icescapes*. Liang, Aguila, Díaz de Cossio, Hinrichs. New Focus Recordings, FCR360.

How might a musical composition demonstrate meaningful engagement with research in other fields? For composers, especially those involved in academia, this can seem like a tired and redundant question. Artists are familiar with the wealth of possibilities afforded by cross-disciplinary collaboration. Practice-based methodologies, sometimes drawing on strategies such as data sonification and process-driven composition, can facilitate demonstrable links between non-musical source materials and musical outcomes. Nonetheless, any creative process that seeks to transform non-musical research materials into artistic practice can raise fundamental questions regarding the nature of meaning, understanding and communication. Where does the research end and the music begin – if these distinctions are even useful? *Hearing Landscapes/Hearing Icescapes*, by Chinese-born American composer Lei Liang, is the striking result of two contrasting research projects. The composer's programme note draws attention to the multidisciplinary, collaborative environment that enabled these pieces to come to fruition.

The first work, *Hearing Landscapes* (2014), is a three-movement electronic work with a total duration of around 20 minutes. Materials available through the composer's website and Lei Lab, the research centre spearheaded by the composer at Qualcomm Institute (UC San Diego), provide fascinating details about the project. To create this piece, the research team focused on the landscape paintings of Huang Binhong (1865–1955). Lei Liang frames the project as an attempt to reconstruct a lost world, beginning with the questions 'can images be heard, and can a sound be seen'.¹ While an

⁴ Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual In Art*, p. 36.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹ <https://vimeo.com/170868203> (accessed).