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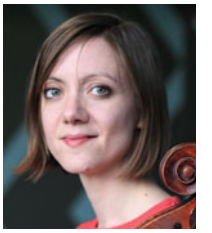
PROFILE: ELLEN FALLOWFIELD



Ellen Fallowfield by Deborah Tolksdorf

Cellist Ellen Fallowfield is an internationally active performer and researcher in the field of contemporary music. Her development in cello, and especially contemporary cello performance was formed by studies with Andreas Lindenbaum at the KUG, Graz and Martina Schucan at the ZHdK, Zurich and in masterclasses with Lucas Fels, Rudolf Leopold and Walter Grimmer. She undertook specialised studies in the performance of contemporary music at the Hochschule für Musik, Basel and with Klangforum Wien at the KUG, Graz. A grant from the Leverhulme Trust enabled her PhD studies at the University of Birmingham/Hochschule für Musik, Basel in the performance practice of contemporary music for cello (supervised by Prof. Erik Oña and Dr Mary O'Neill). During a two-year research fellowship at the Musikhochschule Basel, she extended her PhD work to create the online resource www.cellomap.com. She has performed at international festivals for new music, including Archipel Geneva, Acht Brücken neue Musik für Köln, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Ultraschall Berlin, Mixtur Barcelona, Musikfest Berlin, the Lucerne Festival, Wien Modern and Zeiträume Basel, is a member of several ensembles, including Eunoia quintet, Two New, Lemniscate and Neuverband. Close collaboration with established and developing composers is an essential aspect of her performance activity. She is currently investigating cello multiphonics under a research fellowship at the Hochschule für Musik Basel, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.

At what point did you realise that you wanted to specialise in playing new music?

When I was in my final year of bachelor studies at Birmingham, the (then new) composition lecturer Erik Oña ran a module in new music performance. He'd invited Caspar Johannes Walter to help coach the course as part of a teaching residency. It's hard to describe how exotic the Germanic new music scene (with Argentine-US flavours!) felt, so different to anything I'd played or heard before. Erik and Johannes would dip unapologetically into maths and physics, and they were absolutely strict and sincere about interpretation. That was a hook into contemporary music for me.

Afterwards, during my studies in Basel, Graz and Zurich, there were mentors and colleagues who opened up other worlds of new music. Andreas Lindenbaum, the cellist of Klangforum Wien was particularly inspiring; he has an investigative and inquisitive approach to cello playing that he never allows to slacken. Gradually, programming and performing in ensembles with colleagues, subbing with more established groups and having a research position that linked strongly to my performance activity started to feel like a very dynamic and interesting way to spend my time.

You're based in Switzerland. Do you think there are advantages to being based in Mitteleuropa?

Definitely. Basel is logistically an easy city to be based as a freelancer in terms of travelling and networking. It's close to lots of 'new-music cities' and is a place that all musicians seem to pass through at some point; there's a vibrant to-and-fro. Switzerland has generous funding structures for new music, from public and private sources. That's why the country is overflowing with young ensembles and composers. It's a really positive atmosphere, but sometimes it's a stretch sharing the audiences between us: it regularly happens in Basel that two or three new music concerts take place on the same evening. A strength of the continental new music scene (especially in Germanic countries) is the new music societies (IGNM) that exist in most medium-large cities. They commission and programme new work, invite guest performers and foster audiences. The UK new music scene would so benefit from ten or so such societies spread around the country.

Is there a distinct Swiss new music scene?

It's hard to characterise a distinctly Swiss new music scene: the German- and French-speaking areas tend to share characteristics with the countries that they share borders with. There are hubs of activity, including resident new music ensembles and festivals in most of the big cities, especially Basel, Zurich, Luzern, Bern, Geneva, Lausanne and Lugano, but there are also energetic and successful schemes to bring music to rural areas.

What led you to begin the Cello Map project?

It was originally my PhD dissertation, but I never felt that it really suited a 'book'-format. After graduating from Basel, I received a two-year grant at the Hochschule für Musik to extend the resource and turn it into a webpage. The original idea was to map scales of actions, i.e. cellists' movements, onto scales of sounds and approach the cello as a sound-producing object without prioritising traditional playing methods. By its nature a book adds weight to certain topics by ordering them in chapters with transparent relative lengths. The 'chapters' of www.cellomap.com seem less hierarchical to me and seem to invite the reader to browse from any starting point. In addition, videos are easily embedded and add real clarity to the text. I tried to use the videos to illustrate the scalic nature of technique, especially methods that had been previously classed as 'discrete' special effects.

The site has an international following, with regular users in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australasia. I'm always surprised at how far it has spread purely on a word-of-mouth basis, as we had no budget for marketing. Since the multiphonics section of Cello Map has always been the most popular, and I find the topic musically interesting, with a lot of unexplored promise and unanswered questions, I decided to focus on this in my latest research project at the Hochschule für Musik in Basel, which will result in a smartphone app. The app will provide easy access to fingering charts and recordings of harmonics and multiphonics but, in itself, it didn't feel like enough of a contribution, because there are so many aspects that don't fit neatly into fingering charts and required a bit more discussion. I decided to initiate this special issue to be able to discuss

these more open topics and to bring together similar work on other stringed instruments, which is something that I feel is not done often enough. Cross-referencing, bibliographical rigor and the building networks of information are often weak in performance practice research. I feel passionately about the need to change this, and to forge links between the exciting pockets of performance-based research that are currently operating in isolation.

Where next? Do you feel the world of string multiphonics has further potential?

Yes, from many different aspects. Firstly, I think, now that we have a firmer basis of understanding, performers and composers can have some fun with the technique, and explore the musical limits and colouristic possibilities, especially in an ensemble context. Secondly, I think the technique will be improved upon by performers over time, allowing for an expansion of the fingering charts to include more possibilities. Thirdly, there are still some gaps in the physical understanding of multiphonics, and I hope that some collaborative work between musicians and acousticians will work towards a more complete understanding of why we hear this chord-like filtering of harmonic partials. Finally, there are many other techniques that aren't strictly 'pure' multiphonics, but that produce beautiful multiple sonorities. The crossover between multiphonics and these sounds is a rich musical space to explore.

Finally, an impossible question: if you were making a recital programme today from your current repertoire, what would you play, and why?

That's tricky, well, if you mean a solo recital then a dream programme would be a suite of new commissions that all evolve from some kind of collaborative process, i.e., making new repertoire. I have many friends and colleagues who, with financial carte blanche, I would love to throw commission fees at and spend time developing works together with. Big 'repertoire' pieces that I play at every opportunity are: Beat Furrer's *Solo*, the form is so well-managed: two slow and careful intensifications of contrapuntal lines stretched over almost 20 minutes. It's very satisfying to practice and perform. I also love playing Xenakis' *Kottos*, because it feels like such a close reflection of nature but also, without being contradictory, so super-humanly difficult (being literally dedicated to a hundred-armed god). Another favourite is *Pression* by Lachenmann. It's played so often, and the scordatura is a pain in the context of a solo programme, but it's pretty close to musical perfection.

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