

Stylistic changes between the earlier and later works on this CD point to Einar's evolving musical thought. He freely acknowledges the trajectory of his work in his Ph.D. thesis and prolific writing about music. Here is a composer with a clear voice, who continues to question every sound he imagines.

Edmund Hunt
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Andrew Greenwald: *A Thing Made Whole*. Austin Wulliman, Wild Up, Ensemble Pamplemousse, Contemporary Insights Ensemble. Kairos, 0022001KAI.

For a commonplace word, 'thing' has a vast array of meanings, covering both formal and informal significations of individual objects at face value and any following referents. Perhaps fittingly to this vagueness, a brief etymological reconnaissance reveals that the term once referred to an 'assembly' but does not specify the content of such a gathering. Indeed, in attempting to describe 'thing' it is difficult not to use the word itself. Such considerations are of apparent importance to composer Andrew Greenwald in his recent release, *A Thing Made Whole*. Sounding almost like the title of a pseudo-philosophical essay (an image reinforced by Evan Johnson's liner notes, which situates 'thingness' and Greenwald's work against 'transcendence'), the suite of seven pieces composed between 2016 and 2021 includes sections for both soloists and chamber ensemble, performed by Austin Wulliman, Wild Up, Ensemble Pamplemousse and Contemporary Insights Ensemble. So, has Greenwald's offering tied together the vagueness of 'thing' to create a coherent 'whole', or does the music remain non-committally listless?

A Thing Made Whole I opens with a misleading prelude, a minute of drifting violin harmonics, after which follows a moment's silence. On re-entering, the remainder of the piece consists of a collection of 'new music' techniques: crunching bow sounds, percussive taps and inconsequential alterations to pacing, among which flickers of a melody are disguised. If there is a coherence to these components – or even if they are intended to be illustratively transient – then this derivative musical material does not beckon me to make sense of it either way. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that Austin Wulliman performs the piece so deftly, when this collection of 'things' is already so firmly in the repertoire of any contemporary violinist.

The second part dances in the detritus of the first. The humdrum commitment to reshaped quietude continues, with the subtle addition of a field recording of a forest, until the piece finds its feet at around 4'30", when gentle piano chords and stumbling melodic lines are supported by low, fragile growls from the woodwinds and percussive taps and harmonics from the strings: it is here, for the first time, that we hear Greenwald's voice. This moment of distinctiveness sets in motion far more rewarding musical decisions: a muted polyphony of animated growls from which the Feldman-esque piano arises, dwindling into soft violin sounds before pausing and re-energising itself for the final four minutes.

The third part of *A Thing Made Whole* returns to the safety of contemporary music. The subtlety of the energy heard in the latter half of the previous section is lost, sounding almost improvisatory at points. Judging by the score, this is hardly because of Ensemble Pamplemousse's performance, which is polished to a near mechanical degree (the same cannot be said for the final page of the disc's notes, where the group's name is misspelled). This tired momentum continues until c. 8'40", when silence sets in motion a sort of 'moment form' compromising small episodes interspersed with sonic absences. Individual in character, none of these reiterate nor develop the more distinct compositional voice heard in the preceding movement: undeniably some *nice* sounds, but none that particularly identify the piece as Greenwald's nor indicate a committed aesthetic of blankness.

The fourth part of this 'move towards wholeness' exists within a similar soundworld to those of the previous chamber pieces: that is, a largely highly controlled, faint pandemonium that sounds almost *ad lib*. Percussive scrabbles punctuate and ignite sustained muted tones, made particularly apparent with the introduction of the electric guitar around 1'30", which introduces distinct bass clarinet multiphonics to bridge the gap into Wandelweiser-esque chords at 4'00". Indeed, to continue this comparison, around 30 seconds into this section, there is a very low and quiet sliding tone: I cannot tell if this somehow emanates from an instrument, comes from fixed media or is an ambient sound in the recording space, which is made more confusing by the relatively loud rustling of a page turn that follows. Regardless, this ephemerality of ethereality creates novelty in a way that the remaining half does not, languidly derivative of the former's materials and structures – a chiefly similar approach to that of the preceding piece at making a nebulous 'thing' whole, then.

A Thing Made Whole V is simultaneously the most enthusing and frustrating movement of the disc. Through the *mêlée* of fragmented and fractured strings there emerges a piano line, sounding like half-remembered (or half-forgotten) Van Morrison. Creamy and wandering, these keyboard lines make me reassess my entire listening experience: is this the disguised doctrine that I have been drawn towards for the past 50 or so minutes that would outline a coherent whole? I wish it was, but I sense that it is not. What could have been a more subtle and ambiguous instance of arrival, and therefore a more novel investigation of coherence, is undermined in two ways: first, this misplaced moment's indulgent duration, as Greenwald is direct in a way that seems at odds with the rest of his writing; second, perhaps because of this lounging, it becomes apparent that the piano writing is hardly engaging in its language. Indeed, on re-listening to the other movements, if *V* is the whole then I cannot hear it in the 'things' at all, making it come across as somewhat gimmicky.

Moving abruptly away from the soundworld of the fifth, the penultimate movement coherently speaks in a derivative dialect of contemporary classical music, presenting an intricate weaving of discordant solo-guitar harmonics and barely pitched fretted notes. However, and perhaps because of this, props must be given to performer Mauricio Galeano, who navigates the flurry of material with graceful tact.

Arriving at the final movement, the listener is greeted by swirling chromatic piano and bubbling bass clarinet lines, before the rest of the ensemble join at around a minute in, to create an alternation between a delirious din, late Cageian harmonies and hints of the lounge piano material. A summative postlude of the past hour, then, that is perhaps the whole, as a stand-alone piece of music this final offering by far has the most character of the disc and does not rely on the rest of the suite.

To return to the title of the disc, 'whole' derives from the Old English *hāl*, meaning 'healthy' or 'safe', which is fitting for *A Thing Made Whole*. We hear many musical ideas over this album's hour and 15 minutes, but the majority of these speak of and to a timeworn body of contemporary music, such that the work lacks vitality in its explorations of coherence in musical form. That said, when Greenwald breaks free from this genre, his compositional voice – the way he uses timbre, line and pacing – is both novel and alluring. However, the overwhelming derivation draws attention to a more fundamental question that remains problematically

unanswered: why continue the well-established investigation of 'wholeness' in relation to this musical idiom? These 'things', this vagueness, result in an album that I sense wishes for more than its conservative realities achieve.

Ed Cooper

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Elizabeth Millar, Christof Kurzmann, *rare entertainment*. Mystery & Wonder, mw009.

I am finishing this review in the Barbican Centre in central London, having just come from my flat in the east of the city. Perhaps this predetermines me to foreground an idea of urbanity when thinking about this music. The album does guide me in this direction with its cover image, a quotidian sight of two – I don't know what they are. Traffic not-cones? (A Google Image search showed me many articles about construction and destruction and delays.)

Recorded live at the Suoni per il Popolo Festival in Montreal in June 2019 and released in August 2022, this release showcases the 'first meeting' of Austrian electropop/new-music improviser Christof Kurzmann and Canadian/Australian sound artist Elizabeth Millar. The way in which the album is constituted of electronic textures in combination with either heavily modulated or very close-mic'd acoustic sounds gives it the effect of something which was created in the studio. Each sound (and there are many sounds) feels carefully placed, both from moment to moment as well as in the sense of a larger structure. I find it compelling that this is the product of a duo, and a live concert; it is much easier to imagine either lots of people contributing their small sounds or one person managing everything in post-production.

The album is accompanied in its write-up by fragments of an e. e. cummings poem, *it is at moments after i have dreamed*, a line of which provides the title, *rare entertainment*. I was struck by another of the fragments of the poem: *the glassy darkness holds / the genuine apparition of your smile*. For me, the idea of a 'glassy darkness' is so very accurate to this music.

When discussing this release, my friend Sidney mentioned the 2008 release *The Breadwinner* (Graham Lambkin/Jason Lescalleet), *Duos for Doris*, a 2003 release (Keith Rowe/John Tilbury), and the music of Michael Pisaro, as reference points. They all sit in a similar sonic and methodological space; however, none reach the coldness of *rare entertainment*. The depth and timbre of the