

THE WIRE 342 | AUGUST 2012

WIRE



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Adventures In Sound And Music
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The multidimensional woman
Nina Power meets **Maria Minerva**

An Afro-jazz odyssey
Val Wilmer encounters **Buddy Pipp**

Peter Cusack
Kassem Mosse
Peter Ablinger

Mark Fisher on **Roxy Music**

ARIEL PINK

The coming of the beta male

Ariel Pink | Maria Minerva | Buddy Pipp | Peter Cusack

Nate Wooley



long, detailed paragraphs slightly shift emphasis – playing a line ending with a full stop, same line heard again this time left dangling with a semicolon.

Red Trio & Nate Wooley *Stem*

Clean Feed CD

I don't buy the label's hard-sell assertion that this encounter between New York trumpeter Nate Wooley and the Portuguese Red Trio – Rodrigo Pinheiro (piano), Hernani Faustino (bass), Gabriel Ferrandini (drums) – was "blessed by musical chemistry". Nor am I saying *Stem* is a particularly bad record. By track three (of five), some intriguingly non-classifiable hybrids of toneless trumpet sounds, inside-piano fumbles and cymbal work have begun to emerge; but the stop-start caution of the beginning – neither side willing to nail much to the mast, leaving nondescript patterns hanging – is 50 shades of grey at least. Not a "magical first encounter", no, but a curious flashback to American star-meets-European rhythm section recordings in the tradition of similar so-so dates by Charlie Parker, Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster et al.

Jürg Wickihalder Orchestra *Narziss Und Echo*

Intakt CD

After a little while, I lost count of the clichés in *Narziss Und Echo*. Jürg Wickihalder's music-theatre piece for voices and jazz big band is hooked around the myth of Narcissus and Echo as told by Ovid. A long, hammy delivered introduction in German that immediately kills the dramatic impetus stone dead if you can't speak the lingo? Tick. A jaunty, curtain-raising 'overture'? You got it. Music that sounds like badly recycled Kurt Weill and Stephen Sondheim made to serve a text you'd be better off reading without the 'benefit' of music? Tick, tick, tick. Might there be a moment where Wickihalder let his music break free to carry the weight? Not that I heard. A total misfire, making one appreciate how cannily Mike Westbrook's projects in a similar vein are conceived. □

Andy Hamilton on musical twitter feeds, untouchable piano sounds, and the power of looping

John Luther Adams *Songbirdsongs*

Mode CD

Since the 1970s, Adams's music has drawn on the vast landscapes of Alaska, where he lives. However, in *Songbirdsongs* (1974–2006) he turns to Western music's ancient concern with birdsong, translating but not transcribing. I'd thought of Adams's music as having tendencies towards New Age, and birdsong hasn't exactly been unexplored in modern music, but these pieces are fresh and delightful. Players are given a collection of unordered phrases to interpret, from instructions derived from each species's singing behaviour. On "Wood Thrush", two piccolos duet, echoed by celesta and xylophone; the bird constantly recombines its whistles and flourishes, never singing the same song – and rarely the same whistle or flourish – consecutively. "Mourning Dove" features ocarinas, ceramic wind instruments that echo the bird's haunting call. A beautiful recording by The Callithumpian Consort, directed by Stephen Drury.

Martin Arnold *Aberrare*

Disques Actuelle CD

"I love melody; but I'm not concerned with themes [or] tracing narrative. I care about continuation, not progression," comments Martin Arnold. The Toronto composer, who studied with Frederic Rzewski, John Cage and Louis Andriessen, is involved with the city's free Improv scene, on live electronics, banjo and hurdy-gurdy, and works as a landscape gardener. The latest disc by the excellent Quatuor Bozzini from Montreal features his music for strings, including the quartets *Contact*; *Vault* (1997) and *Aberrare (Casting)* (2004–9). It reveals a totally distinctive soundworld – breathy, ethereal, suffused with a beguiling modality and subtle, unobvious propulsion. Also included are two duos, "Slew & Hop", and "Liquidambars". While Arnold has been inspired by artist Barbara Kruger to create work that is "not exemplary but merely different", these performances by Quatuor Bozzini are exemplary.

Ros Bandt/Johannes S Sistermanns *Tracings*

Wergo CD

Sonic collaborations by sound artists Ros Bandt from Australia and Johannes Sistermanns from Germany. *BYOS Bring Your Own Sounds* from 2006 features some neat touches, including the way that the prelude sweeps into the sounds of gannets on

"Vivace", and the treatment of what I take is the mewling of a cat on "Catwalk". The artists performed and broadcast the 41 minute *A Global Garden For Percy* (1997) in memory of Australian musical radical and maverick Percy Grainger, building a sonic bridge between Frankfurt, where he studied, and Melbourne. What's missing in its attractive watery and tintinnabulous episodes is the sense of an extended statement, and probably the most successful piece here is the briefer, evocative *Kami* (1997–2011), with its haunting wind and fire effects, over what I assume is a sho or Japanese mouth organ.

Morton Feldman *Patterns In A Chromatic Field/Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello*

Matchless DVD

At the 2006 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, John Tilbury and The Smith Quartet performed all of Morton Feldman's works for piano and strings. This three hour music DVD is the second of three recordings of these performances released by Matchless. It pairs two of the composer's characteristically extended late pieces, *Patterns In A Chromatic Field* (1981) for piano and cello, with Feldman's last completed work, *Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello* (1987). Tilbury has spent decades striving for what Feldman called sound's "untouchableness – trying to conceal the idiosyncrasy of piano sound by subduing the point of attack." That's strictly impossible for a human performer, and maybe Feldman's ideal is ego-less production of sound – as his friend Rothko, perhaps, aimed at an ego-less production of images. Certainly, in these superb recordings, the pianist and his colleagues totally subdue ego in the service of art.

Dai Fujikara *Secret Forest*

NMC CD

Fujikara was born in Osaka and studied in London, and integrates Japanese elements in a predominantly Western compositional style. On this compilation by the young composer, *Secret Forest* is performed by the ensemble Art Respirant, and *Okeanos* by the Japanese ensemble of the same name, combining oboe, viola and clarinet with Japanese instruments. Fujikara is adept at an international modernist idiom, but the result isn't distinctive or individual enough to have pulled me in yet.

Heiner Goebbels *Stifters Dinge*

ECM CD

Goebbels's home is the theatre, where his works really need to be experienced. That's certainly true of his utterly magical *Hashirigaki*, a tribute to The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. That said, the audio version of *Stifters Dinge* achieves its own distinctive effects. This 'performative installation',

first presented in 2007, is a homage to 19th century Austrian nature writer and poet Adalbert Stifter. A sculpture of five grand pianos, without pianists and mechanically rigged up to produce a huge range of sounds, is supplemented by montages of elemental sources including wind, water and ice. "The Thunder" begins with awesomely rhythmic industrial sounds, as William S Burroughs's gravelly monotone gradually intrudes; a quicker cross-rhythm introduces Malcolm X's stirring declamation. "The Rain" features a Levi-Strauss interview, against Bach's *Italian Concerto* and sounds of flowing water; "The Trees", full of foreboding, has a long reading from Stifter's *My Great Grandfather's Notebook*. "The Storm" builds its effect from multiple piano glissandos. Goebbels, in his masterly way, somehow creates a unified effect from disparate collage elements.

Bernhard Lang *TablesAreTurned*

GODrec 2xLP

Live recording of the Berlin premiere, with Rome ensemble Alter Ego and turntablist Philip Jeck. From the 1990s, Bernhard Lang connected academic philosophy with an underground aesthetic. Inspired by the unlikely combination of Techno and Leibniz's monodology, Lang's pieces *Differenz/Wiederholung* pieces treat ensembles as loop generators. *Tables Are Turned* develops a fragment of the song by German rockers Amon Düül, treating Jeck's lo-fi grooves as haunting, ethereal interludes between ensemble episodes – in their power of dissolution, I'm reminded of Ingram Marshall's *Sibelius In His Radio Corner*. As the piece develops, Alter Ego's mimicking of glitch and stuck turntables converges with Jeck's contributions, becoming increasingly indistinguishable. Lang rightly regards his turntablist collaborator as one of the century's greatest improvisors. The power of memory and decay in this idiom of sonic degradation helps to create the composer's most affecting demonstration to date of the power of looping.

Eva Polgar/Sandor Valy *Mondrian Variations*

Ektro CD

"What does a painting sound like?", asks visual artist Sandor Valy. Neglecting the obvious answer – "try dropping it or trampling on it, but otherwise nothing at all" – he constructed complex mechanical methods of transcribing works by Brueghel and then Mondrian. The idea was not music inspired by art, like Mussorgsky's *Pictures At An Exhibition*, but derived from paintings "with strict rules... The notes could not be touched and moved in favour of a more pleasant sound". That's certainly true of the Mondrian project, where pianist Eva Polgar helped translate colours and shapes into musical sound, but it's bizarre, ugly and pointless. □