

Jonathan Harvey



Peter Lieberson & Roger Reynolds *Antares*

New Focus Recordings CD

Roger Reynolds's solo percussion piece *Sanctuary* rethought the relationship between percussionist and instruments, feeling utterly unlike any other percussion music to date. His 1982 piece for string quartet, *Shadowed Narrative*, pulls off a comparable trick of functioning outside the lingua franca of contemporary string quartet writing. The basic concept sounds simple: each movement is 'led' by a soloist while the remaining instruments shadow their turns of phrase and gestures. But Reynolds's hall of mirrors stretches our ears by keeping the dynamic level almost inaudibly low, and dropping memories and anticipations of material inside the main narrative: you're never absolutely certain where you are. Peter Lieberson's 12 tone *Tashi Quartet* feels painfully generic in comparison.

Katherine Young *Pretty Monsters*

Public Eyesore CD

Pretty Monsters is Brooklyn bassoonist and composer Katherine Young's quartet: Young (bassoon, electronics), Owen Stewart-Robertson (guitar, electronics), Erica Dicker (violin), Mike Pride (drums, percussion). And every step of the way, Young keeps you guessing about what sort of music she's making. Her opener, "Relief", passes raw and expressively untreated material around the quartet: a geeky octave leap drops out of Young's bassoon as the rest of the musicians stutter fretfully. The enigmatically titled "Patricia Highsmith" segues into "Feldsap", both pieces gorging on grungy rockist grooves. Stewart-Robertson's brawny guitar solo dominates the surface, but underneath Young has implanted a gnarly electronic loop. "Crushed" also moves forward by undermining what you've assumed is its structure. Bachian arpeggios ascend by stealth, reaching higher and higher until Dicker is all out of violin and a network of underlying ensemble lines take the weight – which themselves are elbowed into oblivion by enraged white noise. □

William Hutson on reality filters, Kamchatka dreaming, and baggage-free plunderphonics

Jacques Brodier

Filtre De Réalité

Penultimate Press LP

Jacques Brodier's *Filter of Reality* is an electronic instrument cobbled together from radios, light-sensitive optical modulators, oscillators, antennae and more – a Frankenstein's monster of a synthesizer, unholy and abominable in just the right way. He has been making music with his creation for decades, but this mysterious LP is his first ever release. It's unclear whether these tracks are recent or archival, dating back to when he first began experimenting with sound in the 1970s. If they're 20 or 30 years old, some of these pieces would sound very much of their time, but more like skilful throwbacks if composed today. One hears the strong influence of classic concrète music, but there's a crunchy, damaged quality that aligns the work with that of 80s underground collage artists like r/w and If, Bwana. Garbled radio voices are ever present and, in places, Brodier's swirling modulations suggest a beautifully scratchy interpretation of Louis and Bebe Barron's *Forbidden Planet* score.

Droughter

Skin Gentlemen's Club

Obfuscated CD

Kevin McEleney's music offers little to listeners who aren't already fully committed to Noise, and *Skin Gentlemen's Club* isn't likely to cross over or convince the uninitiated. What it will do, though, is impress any Noise fan who hasn't yet discovered Droughter's searing, impassioned work. Using what sounds like the most basic collection of distortion pedals and microphones – essentially the 'classic guitar/bass/drums set-up' of Noise – McEleney deftly conjures a varied soundworld of thunderous crashes, power sander buzzing, and creepy Industrial crumbling. The album's live feel, created by the room-like quality of the audio and McEleney's single-take approach, makes the whole affair very intimate. It's like eavesdropping on events that would have happened with or without a recorder there.

Bryan Eubanks & Catherine Lamb *Untitled 12 (After Agnes)*

Sacred Realism CD

I recently visited the Whitney in New York and was disturbed to find that the room containing several large Agnes Martin paintings from the early 1960s was polluted by an unwanted soundtrack. An audio-visual installation next door was so loud that its music sounded like it was broadcast by design into the Agnes Martin room. While

translation and adaptation across media is a complicated issue, I feel safe saying that the Whitney's gaudy sonic accompaniment to Martin's serene formalism was entirely inappropriate. Much better would have been *Untitled 12 (After Agnes)*, a superb generative composition by Bryan Eubanks and Catherine Lamb, named in tribute to one of Martin's later paintings. The CD contains an hour-long excerpt from what is an indefinitely running SuperCollider patch, which continuously produces a soft wash of white noise and sinewaves. Like Martin's paintings, the music's detail only becomes apparent through focused attention. Step back and it could be mistaken for an undifferentiated hiss of mid-value greys.

Jim Haynes

Kamchatka

Contour Editions CD-R

Named for what I've only ever heard of as a strategically valuable Risk territory, Jim Haynes's *Kamchatka* is a distant, haunted tribute to an imagined place. While the Kamchatka Peninsula is certainly real, located on the far eastern shore of Russia, thankfully his new CD isn't another dreary collection of field recordings collected in an 'exotic' country. In fact, Haynes has never been to his album's titular land. Instead, he weaves radio static and crackle into a pair of delicate, but coarse drones. There's an emptiness to the sound, as if some kind of content has been evacuated. Perhaps its vacancy derives from Haynes's lack of knowledge of the real Kamchatka. But the album finds its character in backgrounds, in what remains when figures disappear, or were never there to begin with.

Andrew Lafkas

Making Words

Sacred Realism CD

Large group improvisation can be unwieldy. Scores for such ensembles are often designed to severely limit the players, either by restricting them to only a few available notes or sounds, or giving them specific times during which they can play. The compositional nature of *Making Words* is not made clear by simply hearing the piece, but what stands out is how coherent it sounds. The group of 15 players sustain a constant level of tension, hovering cloud-like, never really building up or giving in to climax or release. Yet Lafkas never lets the piece become a drone. On the micro level it's absolutely filled with activity and interaction. It's an impressive feat, constraining improvisors from engaging in the more obvious structural clichés of narrative progression, while still allowing them the ability to engage with each other.

Enzo Minarelli

Fame

Pogus Productions CD

A review of this size cannot adequately address the ambition of Enzo Minarelli's

new CD of computer-processed sound poetry. The extensive sleeve notes feature detailed descriptions of the 20 tracks, explaining how they're composed and why they're each dedicated to figures as diverse as Ghengis Kahn and Stéphane Mallarmé. Regardless, *Fame* makes truly fascinating listening. Guttural sputters and tongue clucks are atomised into delay patterns, and stretched into sizzling swells of tones. Sonically, Minarelli's music might remind listeners of Trevor Wishart, but his playful relationship to language and to the history of abstract poetry bleeds through the album's tasteful, though rudimentary, digital processing.

Jar Moff

Commercial Mouth

Pan LP

Bill Kouligas's Pan is becoming one of those rare record labels whose curatorial vision is so strong, and so universally praised, that I'm almost desperate to find fault with any new release. Perhaps it's a misguided attempt at being contrarian because I can find no fault in *Commercial Mouth*, Jar Moff's debut LP for the label. Built from samples of pre-existing popular music, his record resembles the work of other experimental plunderers like Joseph Hammer, David Kirby and Jason Lescalleet, only with an occasionally more accessible rhythmic drive. Moff layers loop upon loop on each other until he's pieced together a stumbling assemblage of de-natured snippets. But where it succeeds is in its refusal to use any individual sample as an ironic reference. Moff's samples come free of cultural baggage, not fundamentally different from any other elements used in music making.

Tim Olive & Alfredo Costa Monteiro

33 Bays

845 Audio CD

33 Bays contains two long, involving improvisations by Tim Olive and Alfredo Costa Monteiro. Olive plays a tabletop guitar like an itchy, caffeinated Keith Rowe – similar timbral palette, but none of the patience – while Costa Monteiro is credited with electroacoustic devices. The latter is one of those players who seems to show up to each new recording session with a completely different collection of materials, only to always sound impressively like himself despite his instrumental philandering. The CD shares some of its DNA with the music of the Dotlim/Balloon & Needle school of Korean improvisors like Hong Chulki and Choi Joonyong – only it's less fraught – or that of Costa Monteiro's better known duo, Cremaster: all scratchy, tumbling noise with a quick, start/stop pacing. Both tracks are energetic and full of ideas, and while there's not much in the way of novelty, it serves as a particularly good document of this particular brand of improvisation. □