



replicate something of the mbira's rattle, while the strings and flute often are suggestive of the mbira player's voice. The composition is far more delicate than the exclamation, *dololo*, might suggest. I do, however, hear the subverted expectation of finding nothing where you had hoped to find something (or someone): lush melodic lines are curtailed and fractured, rhythmic ideas are interrupted and structural teleology is negated. What we are looking for is gone.

Dololo is followed by a second strongly South African work, *Mamela Mamela Mamela* (2018). Scored for solo violin and originally commissioned and recorded by Lieva Starker (to whom, for full disclosure, I am married), it is here performed by David Bester. The title, which in isiXhosa means 'Listen, listen, listen', is a bold directive but perhaps should be thought of in terms of being drawn into a space of confidentiality: 'listen, come close, I have something to share with you'. Indeed, the first part of the work is in terms of pace and structure suggestive of Nguni storytelling, in which time and care are taken in weaving complex narratives from scattered events or disparate characters. These shorter evocations eventually move into a section of more sustained melodic writing that ends in a soaring melody accompanied by the violinist whistling a quotation from David Bowie's 'Starman'. Again, Morrison's writing is delightfully witty here, even if memory's longing is never far away.

The album closes with *Study for marimba and thunder sheets*, which was devised with Jonathan Boony (marimba) during a workshop in 2018. The work reflects the aesthetic of minutiae heard in *The Actors* and the second movement of *Five Times Recycled*. We are taken here slowly through a continuous progression of swelling chords produced in the tremolo marimba and by sympathetic resonances in the thunder sheets activated by transducers. It is a less overtly humorous piece, but it still retains a sense of playfulness in its inventive curiosity and inquisitiveness around sound's materiality. Indeed, Morrison herself performs in this recording, playing with the transducers on the thunder sheets.

Written in the wake of a painful personal loss, the works on this album remind us that grief and joy are always bound up together in strange ways. There is certainly a sense of sadness lurking in many of these works, but it is a sadness that is always entangled in moments of wit, playfulness and delight. As a debut album, *No grief without joy* sketches a process of becoming but does so by grappling with the themes that we

often only hear in the works of far more established composers. It is a raw and moving collection presenting intelligent, inquiring and compelling writing.

William Fourie

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Soosan Lolavar: *Every Strand of Thread and Rope*. Saviet. all that dust, ATD18.

This short (26-minute-long) album showcases four pieces for solo violin by the British-Iranian composer Soosan Lolavar, composed for the stunning violinist Sarah Saviet, who is based in Berlin and regularly performs with the Riot Ensemble. In fact, the second track, 'Undone', was the first of the four to be composed, during the 2020 lockdown as part of the Riot Ensemble's *Zeitgeist* series of works for solo performers.

The *Zeitgeist* series was written for musicians who, of necessity, were only able to make music on their own and share their art online. Lolavar explained in a video introduction that the title 'Undone' references how she was feeling during lockdown, when everything that kept her secure was being moved in a way that wasn't entirely comfortable.¹ Many of us will recognise her mixed feelings of vulnerability and destabilisation, combined with the odd normality of being at home all the time.

The most unusual feature of *Every Strand of Thread and Rope* is the tuning of the violin, which moves the instrument into territory closer to the viola. Laura Tunbridge's programme note explains that 'Lolavar devised her initial pitch materials on the santoor, a hammered dulcimer that is tuned to a particular mode; in other words, it cannot modulate midway through a piece. She sent her ideas to Saviet, who explored them on a violin tuned down a minor sixth.' This is *scordatura* taken to an extreme. Apparently, the use of tremolando and glissando 'nod to traditional santoor techniques', and 'the emphasis on limited pitch materials relates to Iranian classical music and its melodic focus on the interval of a tetrachord'. This exploration of ideas from both Western and Iranian classical traditions is characteristic of Lolavar's musical style.

The extreme *scordatura* means the violinist does not have total control of the instrument: the looser strings produce unplanned pitch shifts and harmonics, but at the same time, things

¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT8gG4cxZbg (accessed 6 August 2023).

never completely fall apart, as it still sounds like a violin. 'Undone' has both 'tense' and 'cantabile' sections: the tense ones feature hushed, mysterious tremolandi interspersed with silences, giving the impression of suspended time; in the cantabile sections, the violin's line is raw, exposed and vibratoless, audibly breaking free of Western equal temperament. It seems to be constantly on the edge of breaking into a sustained melody, though the line is also undermined from within, interrupted by scratchy friction.

The other three pieces followed in 2022; all feature the same tuning as 'Undone' and are based on the same mode. 'Warp' focuses very much on the lower range of the instrument, which is greatly extended by the downward tuning, with the violin sounding like a rather saggy viola. Saviet's scraping of the strings, at first delicate but increasing in momentum, results in unexpected sounds, sometimes grainy and sometimes producing harmonics. The piece has an improvisatory feel: the score features shapes which suggest, but do not prescribe, what the performer should play.

'Fibres', the longest piece on the album at eight minutes in duration, is 'meditative, light' according to the composer, and again silence plays a significant role in the discourse. The piece is so intimate and fragile that it could only truly work as a recorded artefact; the music, shifting between natural and harmonic sounds, often exists on the border of inaudibility, and the listener is constantly aware of the physical motion of the violinist activating the bow against the string.

On the other hand, the performance direction for 'Chainmail' is 'boldly, like a ritual', and its loud dynamic level provides a refreshingly direct contrast with the fragility of much of the rest of this recording. The structure of 'Chainmail' is repetitive, almost minimalist in its effect, but the repetitions gradually become less exact and take us in different directions. About two thirds of the way through the piece, a striking rhythmic figure turns the detuned violin into a strident instrument, and shortly afterwards, the music ends abruptly. Saviet's committed performance powerfully conveys the ritualistic quality of this final work of the collection.

The title *Every Strand of Thread and Rope* is not only a metaphor; it aptly draws attention to the physical properties of the instrument. Saviet's violin is close mic'd, picking up every grain of the violin sound, all the friction of bow against string, all the harmonics, as if the sonority of the instrument has been magnified. It is refreshing to hear that something creative

arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, and even more heartening that the more extroverted mood of the last piece on this album moves us back to music that would work well in live performance.

Caroline Potter

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Zeynep Toraman, *In a Dark House*. Toraman, Michael. *Obscure & Terrible*, 013.

In a performance economy where venues are closing, governments and universities are withdrawing support and decent money is scarce, performers and composers alike have started playing their own work themselves, and beyond that, developing 'sets': a concert's worth of material that can be repeated on a somewhat regular basis in more informal settings, rather than a piece that must be rehearsed to a particular execution for a climactic premiere. While some might look at the increase in improvisation, ambience and open-ended forms in new-music concerts in the past decade as a sign of diversification, there is also something to be said for how new music's de-institutionalisation has pushed composers and performers into media beyond the fully composed work. And while, like many innovations thought up by workers in a sector closing in on them, this scene's new standard has produced refreshing changes to our culture, it is ultimately an unhealthy situation for creativity when artists are disincentivised from large-scale collaboration, from long periods of writing and revision and from exploring the entire spectrum of indeterminacy and fixity.

In this context, Zeynep Toraman's tape *In a Dark House* is an achievement even beyond the obvious pleasure of its apperception. Toraman has as academic a composition pedigree as one can get and a relatively supported artistic scene in her home of Berlin, and yet she has released an album with four tracks of ambient, open-ended electronic material, alongside images of her leaning over a laptop, focused on in-the-moment performance at the live release show. These aesthetic choices are, obviously, also just that: choices, not last resorts, and there is something to be said for the scene capital a composer gains from having a versatile practice. In this environment that incentivises the fleeting, Toraman is to be commended for producing an album that leans into contemporary social