

Water Music features improvised water percussion from Beibei Wang. As water is constantly changing, so too is this music. Other than an ironic reference to Handel in the title, this is a rather enigmatic piece. The strongest moment is a triumphant fanfare accompanying the flushing of a toilet. This happens several times. *Sweet Wishes* has Paxton return to his trombone. This is even more enigmatic than the previous piece. It would seem that Tim Rutherford-Johnson would agree; his discussion of this piece in the liner notes doesn't actually discuss it at all. The interesting edge-of-coherence explored elsewhere on this album I think has been missed here.

In stark contrast, *Bye* is the most focused and restrained piece on the album and is a welcome gesture of settling down. Saxophone, clarinet and wah-wah trombone play a stately chorus, like the pilgrims' chorus from *Tannhäuser*. The compositional task here is the effort to get out of this material, because, as beautiful as it is, it is like an endless loop of self-similarity. A very large-scale everybody-doing-everything climax tries mightily to achieve this. But once this train is in motion, Paxton seems unable to really alter its course – he can only add surface elements more or less in tension with a deeper momentum.

There is so much to enjoy in this music, not least the extraordinarily vibrant and virtuosic playing from the Dreammusic Orchestra and Ensemble. From what I can tell, this group essentially is Alex Paxton and his friends, and this album is very much centred on him. He is credited for conducting, recording and mixing all six tracks, and the ensemble has no footprint unaffiliated with him.

While listening, I found myself constantly evaluating how annoyed I was. I doubt this is a desired vector of listening. It went like this: somehow I had the impression that he was watching me, evaluating my response and throwing some shiny new thing as soon as my attention flagged. While it demonstrates an extraordinary musical situational awareness, it is also a rather exhausting dynamic. Rutherford-Johnson writes that Paxton was a music teacher to young children while in graduate school. That experience has clearly informed his compositional approach. I really do think that there are wonderful elements to this music, though I also feel as though I have been treated like a child. But perhaps this is not such a bad thing.

Alex Huddleston
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Erkki-Sven Tüür, *Canticum Canticorum Caritatis*. Collegium Musicale Chamber Choir, Üksvärav. Alpha Classics, Alpha 917.

Erkki-Sven Tüür (b. 1959) is among the most prominent Estonian composers from the generation after Arvo Pärt. In the mid-1990s, several of his pieces, notably the *Requiem* (1994), *Passion* (1995) and *Symphony No. 3* (1997), garnered international attention, as well as recording contracts from ECM and EMI. His opera, *Wallenberg* (2000), premiered at the Dortmund Opera in 2001.

Canticum Canticorum Caritatis (Alpha Classics) is a portrait disc featuring a cappella pieces. All of the recorded works, except for one, were composed for and dedicated to Collegium Musicale. Tüür has gone through several phases in his career, from more modernist beginnings to an intuitive inclusion of triadic harmony. His current direction involves both numeric derivations and intuitive decisions. He describes this as being encoded via genetic information and influenced by an environment, and rotation plays an important role in his recent composition's designs. Many of Tüür's works are large in scope; these choral works are by no means insubstantial, but they demonstrate the composer's viewpoint when addressing more compact formal designs.

Collegium Musicale Chamber Choir, conducted by Endrik Üksvärav, provide detailed performances with a wide dynamic range that belies their relatively small complement. Where required, fleet rhythmic articulation is seamless. Even in the most complex passages, Collegium Musicale perform with impressive tuning and balance. This is demonstrated by *Trigolosson Trishagion* (2008), a piece influenced by Orthodox theology in which the choir sings in Russian, Estonian and Greek. Melismatic chant-like melodies and descending chromatic passages are juxtaposed with bitonal chords. Some of these materials recall the tintinnabuli methods of Pärt, while others are more closely connected to composers such as James MacMillan and Tarik O'Regan, who explore similar material in linear and vertical dimensions.

Missa brevis (2013) doesn't refer to a piece that omits movements from the Ordinary. Instead, it suggests the scale of the piece. The singing is lithe with varied textures and different ensemble deployments. It begins with layered bass voices in overlapping stepwise progressions: gradually, these move up the compass, culminating in rich stacked harmonies. In a canny swerve

from the norm, solo voices take over in the second Kyrie. The melody features soaring melodies, complex homophony and coruscating counterpoint. The Credo begins with wrenching dissonant chords and then unthreads these into canons. The most affecting sections are the Sanctus et Benedictus, which floats diaphanously and then incorporates stentorian cluster chords, and the Agnus Dei, into which the Sanctus et Benedictus proceeds *attaca*, where hushed secundal harmonies are interspersed with scalar melodies. A pianissimo octave setting of the word 'Amen' finishes the Mass with calm elegance.

In *Omnia mutantur* (2020), Tüür builds polychords and then wends between them with contrapuntal duos. The first section closes with hushed piquant verticals. The second half includes canonic writing punctuated by pungent forte chords. The final section moves from the bottom register to the top several times, creating sturdy cadences.

Written in 2020, the title piece, based on Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, describes the nature of love. It contains frequent dynamic contrasts and imitative passages that lead to polychordal pile-ups. A melodic trope involves a slow oscillation that widens and speeds up, sounding like it might take off at any minute. Harmonic passages are equally active, with small cohorts of the ensemble each performing biting segments that eventually are combined into impressively shimmering polychords.

Rändaja õhtulaul (Wanderer's Evening Song, 2001) concludes the recording with its earliest piece, written for the Estonian Chamber Choir. After the relative consistency of so much of the preceding programme, reflecting Tüür's mature choral voice, it is fascinating to hear this piece's different approach, melody and accompaniment rather than elaborate counterpoint, with duet passages accompanied by bell-like sonorities, evoking Pärt.

There are a number of excellent recordings of Tüür's music writ large. *Canticum Canticorum Caritatis* provides the listener with the opportunity to appreciate a more intimate side to Tüür's work. If you are new to this composer, this CD might not be the place to start, but it certainly is one on which to linger.

Christian Carey
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Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Klavierstücke I–XI*. Ogura. Thanatosis Produktion, THT22.

At the close of a review in this publication of Sabine Leibner's unacceptably sloppy recording

of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke I–XI* a few years ago, I expressed a desire for a twenty-first-century recording of this epoch-making cycle that would reflect 'an era in which the urgency of the aesthetic preoccupations that set [the series] in motion have perhaps faded a bit, and acquired a historical patina that can be seen from a distance, almost affectionately'.¹

Enter Miharu Ogura. Ogura is very young (not yet 30, and thus born 35 years after this cycle was completed) and first encountered Stockhausen's work only a few years before this live recording was made, in 2021. In other words, we are not dealing here with a Tudor or Henck or Kontarsky, who were there for the creation of these works and grew alongside them, nor with a Leibner or a Pi-hsien Chen, of a later generation but steeped in the tradition and musical milieu that these *Klavierstücke* played a part in engendering.

In other words, again: Ogura's relative youth and the freshness of her relationship with this repertoire help her show us a Stockhausen with the novelty worn off, and along with the novelty the polemic, and the messianism, and the rhetorical trappings. The new horizons opened by the *Klavierstücke* had been at least provisionally mapped, their implications digested, before Ogura was born. What is left, then, is the music, stripped of its baggage if not its swagger, and of its pretense if not its substance.

The pieces are presented here out of order. We begin with VI, alongside X one of the longest pieces of the cycle, largely dedicated to a language of clouds of individual points. These collections of events do not tend to form composite wholes like their cousins in X; they behave, rather, as tense whorls of charged particles, each with their own force fields keeping them separate from their neighbours.

This material proves to be an ideal showcase for Ogura's approach to the cycle as a whole. In her hands – here as elsewhere in this traversal, especially in those works based on clustered groups of events – the material's contrasts and fissures are respected but not emphasised. They are not glossed over or smoothed out, but nor are they allowed to dominate the music's counterbalancing debt to a tradition of filigree pianism that goes back, whatever Stockhausen may have said or been intending, from Ravel via Liszt to Chopin. It is not so much – and all

¹ Evan Johnson, 'Karlheinz Stockhausen – Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Klavierstücke I–XI*. Sabine Leibner. Wergo 73412', *Tempo*, 73, no. 288 (2019), pp. 101–102.