

clash of traditional music with contemporary urban life is an embodiment of the dialectical relationship within which Prudencio and OEIN currently work. The interaction of this modernising and remembering brings up questions of history and socio-politics, and the simple one of identity.

*Cantos funerales* (2005) is simply my favourite work on this album. The piece is an exploration of how the Aymara reflect upon death, looking at their rites, theological ideas and considerations of the realm of the living and the realm of the dying and how they interact. In a manner comparable to Bronius Kutavičius (1932–2021), who explored ways of reimagining, through invented oratorios, what ancient pagan societies in the Baltic could have been, Prudencio has composed a sort of ‘requiem’ in an Aymara tradition that could have been.

The airy sounds of the sikus juxtaposed with the various percussive instruments conjure up a powerfully reverent space, and the sudden unleashing of the largest drums is a powerfully transcendental moment, which stuns me every time I listen to it – I have had the pleasure of indulging in this piece for approximately four months, and the effect hasn’t lessened. Though significantly smaller in scale, another comparison I feel is particularly compelling is John Tavener’s (1944–2013) *The Veil of the Temple*, where part of the musical experience is the journey the music takes you on. Both works create a space to contemplate certain ideas, before taking you to the next necessary stage on this spiritual journey.

Reflecting on the album as a whole, it is hard not just to write like a giddy child. I am reminded of the day when I, a particularly anxious 18-year-old, discovered the music of Horațiu Rădulescu (1942–2008): there was very little (if anything) I could compare it to at the time. I have been struck by Cergio Prudencio’s work in the same manner. This, combined with the exemplary performances of the members of OEIN, make this an album that is a necessity – especially for anyone who says they are interested in music from the Global South. In short, this is a musical reckoning which you must listen to.

Ben Lunn

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Richard Baker, *The Tyranny of Fun*. Baker, CHROMA Ensemble, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Downie Dear, Benjafield, Brannick, Janes, Maxwell, The Choir of King’s College, Cleobury. NMC Recordings, NMC D275.

In the composer portrait album *The Tyranny of Fun*, Richard Baker is shown to be an adept and versatile sound collagist and sculptor. Spanning three decades, the survey of Baker’s compositional life includes multiple pieces for chamber ensemble – miniatures and concerti – as well as for a percussion duo, unaccompanied choir and diatonic music box, the latter a charming two-minute solo called *Crank*. This inviting amuse bouche fittingly starts off the album, as it was written the earliest, in 1994, when Baker was not yet a quarter-century old and studying with Louis Andriessen at The Hague, but it was performed by Baker recently, in 2023, almost 30 years later, bookending all of the works on *The Tyranny of Fun*, which are about evenly distributed through time.

A composer and conductor, Baker is very skilled at crafting curious three-dimensional sound objects from Western classical musical instruments. When I listen to *Motet II*, my favourite piece of the album, I am suspended between an understanding of the extended sounds of known instruments and an incomprehension at the delicious togetherness that creates a meaning at once cohesive yet difficult to describe in specific terms. Each of the seven parts of *Motet II*, performed by the phenomenal CHROMA ensemble, hovers around a minute and a half, and are all delectable musical creations. The string and brass pairings forge unforgettable sound colours both bright and grounded. The timbral play is amazing, due to exceptional percussion writing. And the recording is so clear – by the experienced David Lefebber, who is an engineer and producer on many of NMC’s recordings – allowing individual instruments to speak and be understood as themselves but also to fuse into fresh chimeras romping in their special soundworlds.

In the programme notes of *Motet II*, Baker writes that the piece was ‘composed against the backdrop of tumultuous world events: a global pandemic; the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the subsequent wave of international protests against structural racism; a contentious presidential election in the USA’. Musically, the material ‘comes from two sources: a television performance of a Welsh folksong by American actor and singer Eartha Kitt, *Mae Nghariad yn Fenws* (“My Lover is Venus”) and a BBC Cymru news item about the appearance of racist graffiti in the village of Penygroes in north Wales.’ Now, Baker doesn’t expect us to glean this level of context from the music, and he even says that ‘the piece is not narrative or descriptive and the consequences of these various

kinds of interference assume a musical life of their own'. But I find the specificity of Baker's inspiration wonderful. Though I suspect it's not unusual for composers to be influenced by current events and what is streaming or floating through airwaves at the moment of composition, their sources are simply not often revealed so plainly. Baker wants us to know his sources and maybe even seek them out to retrace his steps.

What is special about music and art for Baker, I think, is the human desire to make meaning out of everything in our lives, musical and not. For him, a composition is autobiographical, a moment in time: what he has seen, what he has thought about, what he has listened to. A notes app converted into musical creation. I can hear detractors already: what does this have to do with the music? Too Much Information. Let MUSIC speak for itself. But I love the notes, and not because I need them to understand the music. The music can be perfectly understood on musical terms: Baker mixes genres, rhythms and melodies; he hops-cotches across registers and gestures; he is a masterful orchestrator (and the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group masterful interpreters). I love the notes because meaning is elusive, and we have in Baker someone who is actively making meaning of the world through writing music, and we can follow along. That is what the internet is best at: putting old and new, deep and shallow, popular and esoteric all on the same plate. Baker too. Dig in.

Julie Zhu

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Soosan Lolavar, *Girl*. Lolavar, Lovelady, Jabiru, Eshghi Sahraei, Saviet, Albatyati. Nonclassical, bandcamp. Chris Rainier, *Chris Rainier Sings the Music of Harry Partch*. bwaa., bandcamp, bwaa.027.

'There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia.'

Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*

The two albums brought together here rely on none of what Foucault calls (writing on Boulez) 'prior mutuality'. There are things they just do not share, kinships perhaps better served by a review (an aesthetic paradigm, for instance, or a cultural history, a mode of address). And yet to live within either – as I recommend you do – is to negotiate precisely the question of an adequate living within. Underpinning (or is it undermining?) both Soosan Lolavar and Chris Rainier's

work is a body which continuously refuses to be sufficiently habitable. Always on the move and ontologically estranged, it nevertheless remains in permanent proximity, accessible only as the absent structuring force of Being's characteristic thrownness. This is a music of that elusive, inhabitable place, there, where the other rests inside the self.

We might linger a moment longer with that word. One of a select few enantiosemes still drifting in modern English, 'inhabitable' owes its problematic parentage to the double 'in-' of Latin via French, where the prefix could be read to mean both habitable-within and not-habitable. Latin used the term interchangeably while later French tended towards more exclusive negativity; English has resolved the confusion to some degree with the additional prefix 'un-', masking the duplicity with a new construction that doubles down on negation ('uninhabitable'), though that has only softened the original without relieving its polysemy. Either way you read it, the word keeps its irreconcilable opposite stitched forever in its thigh: to in-habit is to careen without arrival between endurable comfort (fitting like a glove, second skin, home) and the inhospitable, (there where (the) I cannot be).

Both *Girl* and *Chris Rainier Sings the Music of Harry Partch* are depositories of a decade-long cathetic investment on the part of their respective creators into problems of in-habitable bodies. Soosan Lolavar has written extensively on her experience as an Iranian woman in England, on belonging and cultural otherness, on the intransigent straddle between worlds, on acoustic Orientalism. Her compositional sensibilities are informed by conjunctive performance work with the hammered Iranian santoor, where her practice extends and destabilises the traditional techniques of her ancestral instrument as a means of negotiating hybrid selfhood in the modern West. *Girl* collects four works from this auto-theoretical engagement, played by the transnational chamber orchestra Ruthless Jabiru and a trio of Lolavar's favoured collaborators. Chris Rainier, meanwhile, an Australian also abiding in London, made his name as one of a generation of fringe folk artists with a virtuosic proclivity for unorthodox instruments and a distinctive, rough-and-tatter croon. Since his 2018 album *Zozobra*, Rainier has recorded primarily on a self-made recreation of Harry Partch's three-string Adapted Guitar 1; the fixation escalated in 2020, when all four tracks on his *Yuma* borrowed titles from Partch's *Genesis of a New Music*. The new album is a culmination of that labour of embodied close-reading, at last