

Baroque and Renaissance music, and even the four new pieces sound old, heavily influenced by their surroundings or taking early vocal pieces as their starting point. I wouldn't normally listen to this kind of album: despite the new pieces, it just stirs my prejudices and seems the kind of cosy product, with its Bach, Gabrieli and even Schütz lollipops, aimed at the ageing festival/music club-goer or perhaps as a kind of promotional calling card. It's not really my kind of dog-walking, chill-out fare either. There is even a faint whiff of Garbarek/Hilliards, particularly in the occasional soaring soprano saxophone line, which we kind of liked when it first came out in 1994, but on reflection just turns out to be manufactured posh kitsch. Having said all this, despite myself and putting aside the general warm bath foaminess of it all, this is a hugely enjoyable disc, largely because of the excellent performances, particularly those of the choir.

The choir make a wonderful sound – well balanced with the young voices matched and blended. Unlike the saxophones, their tone colours vary, depending on what they're singing, and I like the graininess and occasional grit they use in the lower voices, particularly the tenors. The Ferios got together when they were students at the Royal College of Music, and they are very good players. Their style here is a consistent mezzo voce monotone, which in itself is very beautiful, but they rarely play loudly and certainly not with attack, which I'm assuming is a conscious choice for this repertoire. There is seldom any clear articulation or front to the notes, and much legato smoothness. The exception is the lovely baritone playing of Shevaughan Beere, whose unassuming chuffing along on the bass lines sounds for all the world like a Baroque bassoon – I found my ear being drawn away from the elegantly manicured top lines. They have thought about sound so that at certain moments you could mistake their close harmony for a chamber organ, or elsewhere – in Schütz, for example – soft-edged cornets and sackbuts. There are precedents for saxophones in early music – Alan Hacker put a pair of soprano saxophones in Monteverdi's *Vespers* back in the 1980s. The Royal College's director is Colin Lawson, a very fine period clarinettist and pioneer of historically informed performance. In his books and elsewhere he has quite a lot to say about woodwind articulation in early to classical music, before the ironing out of Romantic legato style got hold of it.

The four new pieces are perfectly acceptable if unexceptional. Owain Park's modern take on

Allegri's *Miserere* plays with much of the original music, twisting here and there chromatically with the soprano saxophone getting the high C towards the end. James MacMillan's *Christus vincit* from 1994 is what you expect, expressively slow and atmospheric, with the eight vocal lines of the original split between voices and saxophones, those high soprano parts going to the soprano saxophone. American composer Sarah Rimkus' *Mater Dei* also sounds surprisingly old despite the chromaticism, but builds to a powerful climax with the choir making a thrilling sound. The most interesting of the four is Roderick Williams' *Ave verum corpus*, which pushes the ensembles with rich and interesting textures, taking Byrd's motet as its starting point. This version was made by Williams for these performers. A lot of work has gone into this project and while I can't really see the aesthetic or intellectual point of it all, it is a gloriously enjoyable noise, and maybe that's enough.

Roger Heaton

10.1017/S0040298222000973

Gerald Barry, *In the Asylum*. Fidelio Trio, Redgrave, Barry, Mary Dullea, Darragh Morgan, and Adi Tal Mode, CD 332.

Gerald Barry (b. 1952) is well known for his theatre music; his latest opera, *Salome*, will premiere in 2024. His chamber music has also proved pivotal, in terms of reception and in developing language for larger works. The pieces collected on *In the Asylum* range from piano solo on up to piano quartet, and there are both miniatures and a hefty violin and piano duo. Barry's penchant for quotation, including self-quotation, is in full force, as are the surprising twists and turns of genre, texture and dynamics that typify his music.

Repeated chords and single notes provide a knotty texture in 1998 (1998). Barry describes it as 'explosive', and the ostinati are certainly that. The harmonic language overlays dissonant collections with a strand of early Romanticism. Barry even sneaks in a few sped up Beethoven quotes. This hybridisation of harmony and gestures provides music in which there is an uneasy tension between different demeanors that eschew conventional development for constant morphing of gesture within the aforementioned boundaries. The music speeds up and slows down like an errantly timed music box. As the piece progresses, the texture thickens and explosiveness is foregrounded.

Barry plays *All day at home busy with my own affairs* (2015), which has a primarily duo texture in dissonant counterpoint with chordal accents. The music is in *moto perpetuo*, taking on a pedestrian quality. In *Salome*, the same music is interpolated but played with far greater menace. It ends with a puckish minor-third gesture that is then picked up in the next piece. Barry proves to be an eloquent interpreter of his own music.

Violinist Darragh Morgan and pianist Mary Dullea perform *Midday* (2014), with its own inexorable ostinati of minor thirds and repeated notes interspersed with rests. Two thirds of the way in, bass clusters and repeated unisons appear and announce an entirely different texture, in which disparate chunks of material are played between even longer rests. Instead of minor thirds, fourths and minor seconds abound, accompanied by low-register chords. Minor thirds, in a lower register than before, and repeated notes return in the final section and the texture once more thins out. The repetitions are not concluded with any sort of cadence point; they simply stop. Morgan and Dullea have a keen sense of pacing and allow the rests to spaciously resonate.

In *Le Vieux Sord* (2008), Barry allows his mischievous streak full reign. A solo piano piece, it is a manic, polytonal traversal of 'Auld Lang Syne'. Searing clusters and stretched out versions of the melody alongside a boisterous accompaniment make for an ironic setting of this golden oldie. There is an Ivesian cast to the clusters and bumptious demeanor. Dullea plays the piece both for humour and virtuosity with a muscular approach entirely in keeping with the material.

Baroness von Ritkart (2010), for violin and piano, consists of three minute-long miniatures of a far gentler demeanour than the surrounding music. It takes until the third movement for the piece to rise above piano. Once again, little cells of repeated material are interspersed with rests – an aphoristic, but fetching, little triptych. Morgan and Dullea shift gears seamlessly.

The title work, written in 2000 for violin, cello and piano, adds cellist Adi Tal to the proceedings. It begins with a hushed, wayward violin melody that soon rises to forte and is accompanied by a cello countermelody and chordal stabs from the piano. Disjunct intervals of an expressionist character are the order of the day here, with Barry exorcising his Bergian impulses. A brawling welter of clusters interrupts, only to be followed by the opening's soft music. A compound-metre dance is next, with the three instruments connected in a lockstep rhythm. A slow, lyrical passage succeeds this, only to be thrust aside by a brusque series of

violent eruptions. The dance, delicate again and at half speed, with regular interruption from *sforzando piano* chords, is ultimately overwhelmed by a boisterous double time of the dance and then a brief kaleidoscopic presentation of the various shards of music to close. *In the Asylum* uses juxtaposition to illustrate the emotional challenges of psychiatric patients. Its sharp formal shifts create a paradoxical intent: violent music that elicits compassion. Morgan, Tal and Dullea enact this emotional juxtaposition with fervent playing and strongly articulated dynamic contrasts.

Ø made a positive impression upon its premiere in 1979 and was a piece, alongside '____', that brought Barry to the attention of audiences and the musical establishment. Here in an arrangement for viola, cello and piano, it begins with a long section of slow, winding melodies and pregnant silences. Suddenly, a modal, angular melody in stentorian octaves in all three instruments replaces this music. A gigue using the same melodic material provides a flourish at the end of the piece. Ø's shocking conclusion is likely what drew many listeners to the idea that his was a distinctive voice willing to explore unconventional formal designs to craft pieces of compelling individuality.

The Fidelio Trio play the final work on the recording, *Triorchic Blues* (1990). Heterophonic motives are taken at a brusque dynamic and galloping pace, with lines ascending at the beginning of each phrase, only to be succeeded by still others in motoric fashion. There's nothing overtly bluesy about the piece, but once again Barry uses his minor-third motto (G–Bb, frequently transposed) as a little doffing of the cap. All of a sudden, everything pulls back to a soft incarnation of the ostinati, doing a final build to an abrupt conclusion.

In the Asylum demonstrates the versatility, interest in form and, above all, imaginative sense of play that typify Barry's music. In highly detailed performances that highlight contrasts in the music, the recording provides a compelling collection of Barry's chamber music.

Christian Carey

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Anna Thorvaldsdottir, *Aerial*. LA Percussion Quartet, Icelandic Symphony Orchestra, CAPUT, Nordic Affect, Duo Harpverk, Franzson, Volkov, Dorsteinsdottir. Sono Luminus, SLE-70025.

Anna Thorvaldsdottir's music embodies a world of barren beauty and vast landscapes. Her