

appearance. Sometimes a figuration is repeated 30, 40 or more times, sometimes fewer, occasionally more. The pattern or rule which determines how many repetitions occur is impossible to determine from listening – as soon as the listener feels that they can anticipate the movement from moment to moment, Harrison's score surprises them. In the context of this piece, repetition is a way of creating a kind of friction, a tension between what is expected and what actually happens. This tension is evident throughout the work, as the repeated patterns gradually change and evolve over time. This lack of predictability is a defining feature of Harrison's mature style, even though his music seems to be based on doing the same thing over and over. In fact, one of the most impressive aspects of the piece is the way in which Harrison can create a sense of forward momentum despite the repetitive nature of the music. There is, even on repeated listenings (another coil of repetition drawn around Harrison's existing spirals?) something intoxicatingly unpredictable and mercurial in this music. The vast span of time is filled with continual streams of notes, endless repeated phrases, which paradoxically suddenly end without warning or signal, and which then might (or might not) return later in the piece – a few bars later, or perhaps 30 minutes later. The whole teleological basis of the piece seems designed to eliminate its own existence, a carefully planned and logically time-structured series of musical events which somehow overcome their own relationship with the regular process of time – reflection Harrison's fascination with '...the whole notion of time in music and, in particular, by the ways in which repetition and change may occur...' and the shift, '...away from a dialectical time towards a less goal-orientated way of construction'.²

Like much of Harrison's mature work this piece draws on the practices of minimalism, but the listener is drawn in by the music's intricacy and detail; there is much more occurring than the simple repetition of musical patterns, or the phase-based audible processes of Reich et al. The particular features of the soundworld created in this piece are the complex, deliberate and distinct variations introduced into the timbre of Saviet's solo violin, utilising the parameters of bow placement and pressure to create subtly shifting graduations of timbral fluctuations. The

slow, methodical transitions from *sul tasto* to an extreme *sul ponticello* position (almost playing on the actual bridge of the violin), effected while repeating the same note sequences, are immediately striking, and the shimmering spectrum of overtones and harmonics revealed create endlessly fascinating auditory phenomena. In addition to this, Saviet demonstrates a wide range of bow pressure, from airy *flautando* through to an almost pitchless overpressure. This fine attention to timbral detail and gradual change over time is a hallmark of Harrison's music, and even without studying the score, the intellectual consideration behind the construction of this piece is clearly and instantly apparent.

The fact that Harrison is fortunate to be well served by such a champion of his music cannot be understated. As the commissioner and the performer of the initial shorter versions of this work, as well as the much longer version heard here, Sarah Saviet has demonstrated her commitment to this piece – a commitment which is more than matched with playing of unrelentingly sustained focus and intensity throughout the entire span of the recording, revealing a remarkable level of physical and emotional stamina. There may be one or two invisible edits, but this performance carries the conviction and direction of a single, extended recording take. Saviet's playing is never less than precise, absolutely packed with intention and authority. When listening, the stark beauty of her playing, and the range of timbral variations she draws upon are the shades of light and dark which Harrison has used as his palette for this elongated version of the piece. *A Coiled Form* is a work of remarkable beauty and complexity. Harrison's attention to detail and his innovative approach to composition make for a piece that is both hypnotic and engaging.

Florence Anna Maunders

10.1017/S0040298223000219

Michaela Gleave, Amanda Cole, Louise Devenish, *Cosmic Time*. The Sound Collectors Lab, Bandcamp.

Cosmic Time is a new work for percussion and electronics created by visual artist Michaela Gleave, experimental instrumental and electronic composer Amanda Cole and contemporary percussionist Louise Devenish.

Originally, the work was developed for live performance with four percussionists, each representing a different 'spirit' of the universe,

² <https://www.james-saunders.com/interview-with-brynharrison/> (accessed 31 May 2023).

with costumes designed not only for their appearance but also for their sonic qualities, rustling and swirling as the percussionists moved around the stage. The visual aspect is obviously missing from this studio version, but the creators were keen to emphasise the collaborative inputs of all three artists on both the audio and visual aspects of the project.

The four performers on the album are percussionists Louise Devenish, Hamish Upton, Kaylie Melville and Nat Grant, four members of The Sound Collectors Lab, a percussion-focused collective of researchers, artists, performers and academics based at Monash University, Australia. The group was established by Devenish in 2012, and has been in its current formation since 2020. In eight interweaving tracks performed over 40 minutes, the performers explore ‘representations of time ranging from the endless circling of planetary forms, to... human breath and the fluttering heartbeats of desert mice’.¹ The work ‘takes concepts of time on a cosmological scale’,² with the creators researching different historical, musical and scientific methods of conceptualising sound, from orbital resonance to harmonic sequencing. Fortunately for this reviewer, who barely has GCSE-level knowledge on the subject, the listener does not have to understand complex scientific ideas in order to appreciate the work.

The album opens with *Big Bang*. The shortest track, a single huge crash of gongs and cymbals is left to ring for 40 seconds, giving the listener space to enjoy the pulsing resonances. *Cosmic Soup* is a primordial soundscape of swirling sub-bass frequencies, thunder and wind, with occasional higher harmonics emerging from the darkness. *Galactic* features singing bowls, vibraphone, glockenspiel, tapped and bowed metal and glass sounds, creating delicate bursts of crystalline resonance. This is also the case with the beginning of track 4, *Stellar*, in which lighter bells, triangles, crotales and finger cymbals portray a galaxy filled with twinkling stars, while the sub-bass rumbling of the universe continues almost imperceptibly underneath, filling the space between the pinpricks of light. As we get closer to our own earthly landscape in *Planetary*, a pulse becomes apparent – the high-pitched metallophones of the previous track now producing a curtain of sound with identifiable rhythmic

patterns, enveloping the slower footsteps of terrestrial evolution played on the lower notes of the vibraphone.

While the previous tracks have all flowed more or less seamlessly into each other, there is now a brief pause before *Chemical*, and the soundscape changes considerably. Now there are electronically manipulated sounds of brushes and drumskins – solids, liquids and gases melding in a quiet bluster of activity that evokes the sounds hidden below the surface in *Big Bang*, now very much apparent as we have zoomed in with our sonic microscope. For the first time in this generally meditative album, there is a real feeling of industry and impatience.

Track 8 considers *Biological* time, and we now clearly hear membranophones presenting the pulse of our hearts, our eardrums, our bellies, our skin. Moving gradually over six and a half minutes from untuned bass drums through timpani, higher and higher toms up to congas and bongos, before finishing with woodblocks, claves and castanets, we hear the heartbeats of earth’s creatures from blue whales to the tiniest insects. The clarity of direction in this movement does not, however, make it predictable, and the skill of the players in blending between one group of instruments and the next means we are carried along with the sounds without it being jarring. At the conclusion of the track, the metal and glass sounds begin to return, leading us into the last movement, *Esoteric*. Here, the players consider time as a spiritual journey, a transportation beyond and space and time as we learn who we are and consider our place in the universe. The abundant use of singing bowls on this track provides this contemplative atmosphere as – apart from their obvious connection to meditative practice – the players allow time for each note to breathe, to resonate, to bloom, to beat against other resonances and – in the end – to die out.

If all of this sounds very clichéd and obvious, you would be forgiven for thinking so. There is a very clear, programmatic journey on this album that is not to everybody’s taste: the Big Bang represented directly as a big bang; each movement getting less and less ethereal as we are guided from the outer reaches of the cosmos to the heartbeats of individual organisms. From the opening track the piece does exactly what you expect it to do, and this is how the Sound Collectors Lab sell themselves short. What sets *Cosmic Time* apart from the myriad other pieces about the cosmos is its interdisciplinarity: the live performance featuring elaborate sound-making costumes, and the research into many different methods of measuring time, used as

¹ Louise Devenish, ‘*Cosmic Time* by Michaela Gleave, Amanda Cole, Louise Devenish’, *Bandcamp*, 2022, <https://louisedevenish.bandcamp.com/album/cosmic-time> (accessed 23 January 2023).

² Devenish, ‘*Cosmic Time*’.

material and inspiration for the composition. In releasing *Cosmic Time* as an audio-only download, both of these aspects are lost on the listener. With the flexibility of an online release, would it not have been possible to have included some video clips of the performance and a brief explanation of the research process?

What I find more satisfying, however, is the skill of the creators and the performers in choosing their sounds carefully, giving each movement time to develop without outstaying its welcome. While this album may not provide anything particularly new, it does what it does very well, without sounding like something you may hear piped through the speakers of a health spa. I am particularly struck with the restraint of the performance – at no point is there a sound or individual performance that intrudes on the atmosphere being created at that time. Each movement is discrete but blends beautifully into the next, making a balanced whole, a reflection of the egalitarian nature of The Sound Collectors Lab themselves, who from the outset have focused on ‘plurality and collaboration’.³

Without knowing the interdisciplinary context or scientific background to the research, there is little on this release that would particularly challenge the listener. Yet I would highly recommend setting aside 40 minutes to turn down the lights, get comfortable and listen to this album on headphones. Gleave, Cole and Devenish have created a beautiful meditation on time and space, and taking a moment to slow down and join them is a very welcome experience.

Peter Falconer

10.1017/S0040298223000220

Christopher Fox, *Trostlieder*. EXAUDI, Weeks. Kairos, 0022005KAI.

Back in 2006, the still-fledgling vocal consort EXAUDI devoted their second CD to the music of Christopher Fox. *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory* was released on NMC in 2006, and the relationship between composer and singers has proved exceedingly fruitful ever since. Numerous dedications and first performances have followed that first album, as well as, in 2009, a second,

Catalogue irraisoné, released on Métier. In the meantime, Fox's music has become increasingly honoured: the portrait discs have multiplied, his name is mentioned frequently among younger composers as an influence, and in 2017 a book of essays dedicated to his music (and edited by Rose Dodd) was published by Ashgate. For their part, EXAUDI have gone from strength to strength to become not only one of the country's leading vocal groups, but also one of its leading new-music ensembles, full stop.

So it is fitting to have here, at the start of EXAUDI's third decade, a third Fox album. In comparison with the crisp austerity of *Catalogue irraisoné* (a collection of objets trouvés balanced on the edge between music and concrete poetry) and the miniaturist compendium of *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory*, *Trostlieder* is positively sumptuous; with its numerous allusions to the music of the English, German and Italian Baroque, it represents a side of Fox's vocal music that has hitherto been under-represented on record.

This sound is thanks in large part to that ongoing relationship with EXAUDI. James Weeks' group is renowned for its equal sensitivity to early and contemporary music, and for the many ways in which it has productively braided the two together. *Trostlieder* is dominated by works written for EXAUDI: as well as the title composition (2015) the group is also dedicatee and first performer of the three madrigals, *Canti del carcere* (2013–18), written for EXAUDI's Italian Madrigal Project, and of *Preluding* (2006), composed shortly after that first recording and co-dedicated to the memory of Michael Tippett.

The *Trostlieder in Widerwertigkeit des Kriegs* (to give the work its full title) were composed as companion pieces to selections from Heinrich Schütz's late, severe *Geistliche Chormusik* for an EXAUDI concert at the Wigmore Hall in December 2015. Noting that Schütz had lived most of his maturity under the shadow of the Thirty Years' War, Fox turned to the *Trostgedichte in Widerwertigkeit des Kriegs* (Poems of Comfort in the Awfulness of War) by Martin Opitz, vivid descriptions of the economic and social devastation of the war. (There was a personal connection, too, in Fox's own family's origins in Pomerania, where much of the war was fought; and no European will miss the ongoing relevance of Opitz's harrowing images.) Often starkly declamatory, Fox's settings recall the gradual turn to austerity and simplification of Schütz's music that accompanied the devastation of war. Yet they are also possessed of expressive nuance: the second song is chill and tender in its description of the inevitable turning of the seasons ('The field is rich with

³ Louise Devenish, 'Projects – The Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music and Performance', www.monash.edu/arts/music-performance/the-sound-collectors-lab/projects (accessed 1 March 2023).