

Exposure

There is no more revealing a medium in music than the human voice. Coming from deep inside the body, carried on the breath, acquiring resonance in the head, shaped and channelled through the same mouth and lips through which we speak and with which we kiss – this sound, not filtered through wood, metal or gut, cannot be separated from the human being that made it. By the time it leaves the body, it is intrinsically, inextricably personal.

Singing is a supreme act of self-exposure, its directness only partly inflected by technique and by the masks of expressive convention. The composer of vocal music, too, is exposed by the way the voice reveals her own technique, her meaning and manner, in a similarly direct way. There is no room for obfuscation here: everything is laid bare in the corporeality of the act. As Morton Feldman said of William Byrd: 'Simply by having the genius to know his music was coming from those voices, Byrd has left us with an unfathomable mystery. Listening, we surmise that not 'musical meaning' but human breathing brought music into the world.'

Each of the composers on this disc accepts the inevitability of exposure; embracing it, they require in turn that the singers set aside their own masks and find new ways of imagining vocal sound and expression. Joanna Bailie asks us to imagine the ensemble as a barbershop group, wordlessly 'harmonising the world' against a background of processed environmental sound; Bryn Harrison and Richard Glover treat voices almost instrumentally, creating an intriguing dialectic between the personal and the impersonal. Stephen Chase pulls the rug from under his performers' feet by asking them to make spontaneous decisions about pitches and rhythms in his experimental settings of Ernst Jandl, while Claudia Molitor slyly undermines the conventional relationship of text and musical 'meaning' by setting the printer's placeholder text *lorem ipsum*. And the idea of self-exposure is confronted explicitly in two very different works, James Weeks' *Nakedness* and Aaron Cassidy's *A painter of figures in rooms*.

Like the twisted, contorted figures in the paintings of Francis Bacon that inspired it, Cassidy's work attempts to strip off the protective persona we project to the outside world, and reveal, through distortion and dislocation of vocal physiology, a more fundamental humanness. Rather than use their voices conventionally – either intuitively or in learnt ways – the singers are asked to atomise the process of vocal production itself: breath, larynx, tongue, mouth, all of these are given different tasks, layered in a rhythmic counterpoint that places ferocious technical demands on the performer. Imprisoned in a multidimensional net of physical actions, the singer cannot think 'musically': what emerges, Cassidy argues, is a 'kind of unfiltered expressivity. I've aimed to generate a

direct and immediate form of vocalization that isn't filtered through speech, through language, through the usual self-aware, reflexive ways that we tend to use our voices...It doesn't refer to anything outside of itself. It is the physiology of the voice laid bare, but, like the Bacon paintings, there is no way to dislocate the mouth, the voice, from the self.'

James Weeks' *Nakedness* also demands of the singer an extreme act of self-exposure; here, however, it is an attempt to achieve something impossible – an ever-quieter, longer, purer, single tone – that reveals the naked self. Divested of vibrato, strength and lyric flow, the voice becomes fragile and vulnerable, wavering and petering out under the stress of the breath; we begin to listen for these moments of failing sound, becoming attuned to the tremors that precede each eventual extinction.

There is a similar sense of the voice being placed under the microscope in Richard Glover's *Corradiation*. The title, he explains, describes 'a conjunction or concentration of rays in one point. The rays, in this instance, are the individual lines of the singers.' Two voices move upwards by infinitesimal degrees, two voices move downwards, the two pairs eventually arriving an octave apart. Listening in to this slow-motion process, we are aware of an ever-increasing sense of tonal disorientation and at the same time an ever-increasing strength of gravitational pull as the octave approaches: the eventual arrival on this simplest of harmonies has the force of a revelation, as of a long-buried truth.

The experimentalist notion of subtlety-in-simplicity (or complexity-in-clarity) can also be found in Stephen Chase's settings of the Austrian poet Ernst Jandl. Each composes out a single musical proposition, whether it be the slow, microtonal decay of the pure harmonies of *trost im wolken* (a poetic inversion of Glover's revealed octave), the playful permutations of *suchen wissen* or the drolly ironic formalism of *im park [szene]*. The influence of Christian Wolff is felt in the indeterminacy of pieces such as *why can i not, mein* and *Lied/Song* in which the singers are invited to make choices about the pitches they sing, producing a music which has the freshness of a new discovery each time.

Claudia Molitor is also concerned with the idea of composition as discovery, describing her wish to 'approach every piece as if I'd never written one before...to approach every piece from a sense of rarefied naivety'. *Lorem ipsum* achieves a characteristically changeable mood pitched somewhere between childlike playfulness and something altogether more wistful and introspective. She explains: 'The sound of Latin provokes in the listener a sense of history and of 'meaningfulness', yet the text means nothing and only exists to allow the sounds to be articulated by the voice. The piece plays with the notion of contradictory indications, sometimes using comical sounds, but always with sincere frivolity.'

More opaquely coloured is Bryn Harrison's *eight voices*, consisting of four densely-textured sound panels of looping chromatic motifs. In each panel, each of the eight singers is given eight bars of material, which are grouped into a number of larger cells. These cells are then repeated a certain number of times, a different number for each cell in each voice part, creating a constantly varied overlapping and intertwining of repeated gestures. Harrison writes that 'my intention has been to create the perception of an object that appears both static and in motion, comparable perhaps to the flow of water in a stream or watching a torrent of rain. At the start of the piece, these events are presented quickly so that the perceptual boundaries between sensation and the direct apprehension of movement – what it is that is passing – become blurred.'

A feature of several of the pieces on this disc is a preference for an abstracted vocal sound from which individual subjectivity has been to a great extent erased, and with it the need for a text to 'express'. It would be wrong to surmise that works like *eight voices* lack 'humanity', however: rather, it is the relationship between our humanity and the world around it, in the sense of our *perceptual* relationship to the universe, that is explored and reflected in these works. Joanna Bailie's *Harmonizing (Artificial Environment no.7)* situates her barbershop sextet of singers within the real world captured by her portable recorder: recordings of environmental sound – a dawn chorus, a carousel at London Zoo and three recordings of planes – form the basis of her three movements. These recordings are then lightly processed and analysed sonically, and chords are formed from the salient pitches of this analysis. The chords are then mapped onto the appropriate points in the recording, both to be sung by the ensemble and sounded on sine tones on the tape. The result is what the composer describes as a 'fictional sound environment' in which the field recordings 'lose their accidental everydayness and become something that is (paradoxically) inevitable/composed/meant to be.' But this fictional environment is a hall of mirrors. Multiple perspectives are formed: the singers' role is ambiguous, both a part of the scene and outside it – player and onlooker in one. Are we harmonising the world, or is the world harmonising us?

Artist Profiles

EXAUDI

'...one of the most sensationally gifted vocal groups performing in the UK at the moment'
Gramophone

Since its debut in 2002, EXAUDI has emerged as one of Britain's leading contemporary music ensembles. Founded by James Weeks (director) and Juliet Fraser (soprano), EXAUDI is based in London and draws its singers from among the UK's brightest vocal talents. The ensemble typically works as a consort rather than a choir – usually one voice to a part, ranging from three to eighteen voices – and draws inspiration for its sound from that of early music ensembles, a strong but focused tone that is ideal for the performance of harmonically intricate contemporary music. Many EXAUDI programmes combine the new with the old, and the ensemble is equally in demand for its performances of music of the High Renaissance and early Baroque.

EXAUDI's special affinity is for the radical edges of contemporary music, at home equally with maximal complexity, microtonality and experimental aesthetics. The newest new music is at the heart of its repertoire, and it has given national and world premières of Sciarrino, Rihm, Finnissy, Fox, Posadas, Eötvös, Ferneyhough, Gervasoni, Skempton, Ayres, Pesson, Poppe and Fox among many others. Through its commissioning scheme, EXAUDI is particularly committed to the younger generation of composers currently in their twenties and thirties, and is proud to champion the work of major emerging voices including many of the composers on this disc.

EXAUDI's many international engagements include Wittener Tage (Germany), Darmstadt Ferienkurse, Musica Viva (Munich), Muziekgebouw (Amsterdam), IRCAM (Paris), Festival d'Automne (Paris), Pharos (Cyprus), Musica (Strasbourg), MAfestival (Bruges), CDMC (Madrid), MITO Settembre (Milan/Turin) and Quincena Musical (San Sebastià). The ensemble has also collaborated with many leading soloists and ensembles including London Sinfonietta, musikFabrik (Rihm *Vigilia*, Ferneyhough *Finis terrae*), Ensemble Modern (Eötvös *SCHILLER: energische Schönheit*), CBSO (Boulez *cummings ist der Dichter*), Ensemble L'Instant Donné (Gervasoni *Dir – In dir*) and Ensemble InterContemporain (Poppe *Interzone*).

EXAUDI has appeared at many leading UK venues and festivals, including Spitalfields, Wigmore Hall, BBC Proms, Aldeburgh, Soundwaves, City of London, Bath, FuseLeeds and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festivals, Dartington International Summer School, Kings Place, Wigmore Hall, South Bank and National Portrait Gallery. Recently the

ensemble has developed particularly strong links with Aldeburgh Music, resulting in a number of concert appearances, broadcasts and residencies since 2006. EXAUDI broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3, and has released critically acclaimed recordings of Finnissy, Lutyens, Skempton and Fox on the NMC, Metier and Mode labels.

Profiles

Joanna Bailie was born in London in 1973 and has been living in Brussels since 2001. She studied composition with Richard Barrett, electronic music at the Koninklijk Conservatorium in Holland and in 1999 won a fellowship to study at Columbia University. Her recent work includes chamber music, installation and music theatre, and is characterized by the use of field recordings together with acoustic instruments.

Her music has been performed by groups such as Ensemble Musikfabrik, L'instant Donné, EXAUDI, Ensemble Mosaik, The Nieuw Ensemble, Apartment House, The London Sinfonietta and the Ives Ensemble. She has been broadcast by BBC Radio 3 on many occasions and programmed at events such as the Venice Biennale, Huddersfield, SPOR Festival, Festival Reims Scènes d'Europe, Darmstadt, the Borealis and Ultima festivals in Norway and the Transit festival in Belgium.

Together with composer Matthew Shlomowitz, she is the founder and artistic director of Ensemble Plus-Minus and in May 2010 she was the guest curator at the SPOR Festival in Aarhus, Denmark.

The work of **Aaron Cassidy** (b.1976) has been programmed by leading contemporary music specialists including ELISION, Ensemble SurPlus, musikFabrik, EXAUDI, Ictus Ensemble, ensemble recherche, 175 East, Talea Ensemble, the Kairos, Diotima, and JACK string quartets, and soloists including Garth Knox, Ian Pace, Mieko Kanno, and Christopher Redgate, at festivals including Donaueschingen, Ultraschall, Warsaw Autumn, Huddersfield, Darmstadt, Gaudeamus (Jurors Prize nominee, 2002 & 2004), Bludenz, June In Buffalo, and the ISCM World Music Days. In July 2008, ELISION presented a portrait concert of his work for broadcast on ABC Classic FM, and in 2009-10 the ensemble completed an extensive recording project of his work in conjunction with Radio Bremen. He has received grants, stipends, and commissions from Südwestrundfunk, allerArt Bludenz, the Yvar Mikhashoff Trust for New Music, Hauptstadtkulturfonds Berlin, New York Foundation for the Arts, ASCAP, the American Music Center, Arts and Humanities Research Council, British Council, and PRSF 20×12/London Cultural Olympiad 2012. Recordings of his work are available on NEOS, NMC, HCR, and New Focus Records. Cassidy joined the staff of the University of Huddersfield in 2007 and currently serves as Reader in Composition, Coordinator of the MA by Research, and part of the Directorate of the Centre for Research in New Music (CeReNeM).

Stephen Chase (b.1973) composes and improvises. His work veers erratically between conceptual and a-conceptual (following-his-nose) strategies where variously the interaction between performer, score and place draws attention to things such as the relationship between movement and sound production, the influence of group interactions upon the shape of a work, and the acoustic characteristics of a space. He has collaborated variously with Ross Parfitt, Philip Thomas, Exaudi, Apartment House, Ensemble Zwischentöne, Music We'd Like to Hear, Sound Intermedia, BBC Singers, Mick Beck, Coastguard All Stars, Husk, Gated Community, Damo Suzuki, THF Drenching, Bank Street Arts, omoplate sarangi, murmuration, and men in spats. He has co-edited a book of essays with Philip Thomas on the music of Christian Wolff for Ashgate.

Soprano **Juliet Fraser** has a repertoire dominated by the music from either end of the canon. She is principal soprano of EXAUDI which she founded in 2002 with James Weeks, and a regular member of Collegium Vocale Gent, directed by Philippe Herreweghe. As a soloist she has performed contemporary repertoire with the CBSO, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Endymion, and Plus-Minus Ensemble. She has collaborated closely with composers James Weeks (*amor de lonh; Nakedness*), Larry Goves (*Springtime; I do this, I do that*), Matthew Shlomowitz (*Songs about words and about the pleasure of misery*) and Stefano Gervasoni (*Limbus Limbo*).

Richard Glover (b. 1981) is a composer and writer based in Huddersfield, UK. He is interested in minimal approaches to process in music, particularly when applied to sustained tone environments. His music is performed and broadcast internationally, and he has a portrait disc out with Another Timbre. His writing on music covers experimental approaches to music making, including publications on Phill Niblock, minimalism and technology, and the temporal experience in experimental musics.

Bryn Harrison was born in 1969 and grew up in the Lancashire town of Bolton. After studying for a degree at the City of Leeds College of Music, Harrison turned his attention more seriously to experimental composition and went on to undertake a Master's degree with Gavin Bryars at De Montfort University, Leicester. Throughout his twenties and early thirties Harrison produced a steady output of solo and ensemble works and in the process developed an individual approach to dealing with time as a circular and repeating entity. His work came to the attention of several international ensembles such as Ensemble Recherche, Klangforum Wien, the London Sinfonietta, the London Symphony Orchestra and Apartment House with notable performances and radio broadcasts at international festivals both in the UK and abroad. More recently, Harrison has developed a

close working relationship with the Anglo-Belgian ensemble Plus Minus, the Norwegian group asamisimasa, the internationally acclaimed ELISION, and the vocal ensemble EXAUDI. Harrison is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Huddersfield from where he was awarded a PhD by Publication in 2007. His recent output has seen the further development of recursive musical structures with a series of compositions of long duration such as the 45-minute ensemble work 'Repetitions in Extended Time' (2008).

Claudia Molitor is a composer and artist whose work draws on the traditions of contemporary music but extends to video, performance and fine art practices. Her work is characterised by a sense of restlessness and 'mischievousness', continuously questioning the condition of composition and its own identity. Claudia's work is regularly performed and broadcast throughout Europe. It has been heard at festivals such as Wien Modern, hcmf//, Spor, Tete a Tete, the BBC Proms 2012, Sonica, November Music and sound, and at gallery events such as at Turner Margate and Bold Tendencies. Commissioners include the London Sinfonietta, hcmf//, the BBC and Cryptic. Recordings have been included in releases on the Jerwood Series, NMC Recordings, ORF 1 recordings and Sub Rosa. She is a lecturer of music at the University of Kent.

James Weeks's music has been performed by Apartment House, Quatuor Bozzini, Wandelweiser, EXAUDI, London Sinfonietta, New London Chamber Choir, Alison Balsom and Anton Lukoszevieve, among many others. Since 2005 the main focus of his music has been on solo and small-ensemble works exploring elemental or primary musical materials and processes, either left bare or built up into polyphonic structures of considerable density. Among recent major works his trilogy of instrumental solos *TIDE* (2007-10) was released by Apartment House on *Métier* in 2013. He is Artistic Director of EXAUDI and maintains a busy international touring schedule with the ensemble. In great demand as a conductor of new music, he has also worked with musikFabrik, London Sinfonietta, New London Chamber Choir, BCMG, L'Instant Donné, BBC Singers, Theatre of Voices and Endymion. He is Associate Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London.