

CANADA CONNECTIONS

Philip Thomas *piano*

Tuesday 30th October 2012

Christopher Fox *Thermogenesis*

Marc Sabat *Nocturne* (UK Premiere)

eldritch Priest *...soot?aporia* (UK Premiere)

-- INTERVAL --

Martin Arnold *Vines & Tubers (Nightshades)* (UK Premiere)

i. Woody

ii. Deadly

Bryn Harrison *Vessels* (World Premiere)

This is the first of two programmes which have sprung from recent discoveries of music from Canada. As I've come to know the music of a number of Canadian composers I've felt strongly that there are similar areas of exploration between their music and that of many of the composers with whom I feel an affinity in the UK. In particular the influence of the American experimentalists John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff (as well as others such as Alvin Lucier and James Tenney) is keenly felt in their music but is more a point of aesthetic connection than a concerted effort to develop an 'experimental' movement.

What unites all the composers here is a rejection of traditional dramatic narratives. Instead there is a focus upon the immediacy of the moment and the 'now-ness' of the musical material. In the pieces featured tonight however there is a difference between the two nations – the British composers work their material through process, albeit large-scale processes which may or may not be immediately perceptible in the detail. The Canadians, however, adopt a looser approach to the material, allowing it to unravel, stop and start, meander. This makes for quite a radical contrast, and throws into question previous assumptions and ideas about musical form. With all the composers included in this programme there is an element of curiosity – how does this music function? How does it hold together? And how do we perceive music through time?

Christopher Fox *Thermogenesis* (2005)

Thermogenesis is the central section of the ensemble triptych, *Terra incognita*, but may also be played as an independent work. The central preoccupation of *Terra incognita* is coldness: mythical, metaphorical and physical. *Thermogenesis* was conceived as a demonstration of how a pianist might attempt to get warm in a very cold climate.

Thermogenesis was written in early 2005 and is dedicated to Susan McNally, who keeps me warm. It was premiered by John Snijders in St. Paul's Hall, Huddersfield on 26th November 2005 as part of the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

[CF]

Christopher Fox was born in York in 1955, grew up in the north of England and now lives in London. In 1981 he won the composition prize of the Performing Right Society of Great Britain; since then he has established a reputation as one of the most individual composers of his generation. Fox's work has been performed and broadcast

world-wide and has featured in many of the leading new music festivals, from the Amsterdam PROMS to the BBC Promenade Concerts and from St Petersburg to Sidney. In recent years he has established particularly close relationships with the Ives Ensemble in the Netherlands, for whom he wrote the evening-long ensemble installation, *Everything You Need To Know* (2000-1) and with Apartment House in the UK. Fox's music is widely available on CD, with a portrait CD on NMC, four portrait CDs on Metier and other recordings on Artifact, BVHaast and FMR. Fox has been hailed by Andy Hamilton in *The Wire* as "a tantalising figure in British Music"; Paul Driver in the *Sunday Times* has described his music as "impressive, thoughtful, entertaining and extremely varied". Paul Griffiths, writing in the *Times*, has said of Fox's work that "he takes simple ideas but he makes them sound quite wonderful".

Marc Sabat *Nocturne* (1996)

Nocturne was composed as a study of metric modulations in slow tempo. Each new pattern is introduced as a polyrhythm in relation to the currently sounding cycle. In time, its own tempo is allowed to dominate and redefine the perceived pulse. The mathematical relationships of tempi are perceived as simple intervallic expansions and contractions of the following passage of time. The piece is dedicated to Linda Caitlin Smith.

[MS]

Canadian composer Marc Sabat (b. 1965) has been based in Berlin since 1999. His work with acoustic instruments and electronics draws inspiration from investigations of the sounding and perception of Just Intonation, American folk and experimental musics, and the relations between musical and visual artforms. His pieces have been presented internationally in radio broadcasts and at festivals of new music including the Donaueschinger Musiktage, MaerzMusik, Darmstadt and Carnegie Hall. Recordings and scores are available from Plainsound Music Edition. The CD *wave piano scenery player* was recently released by World Edition (Köln) and a new album is planned from mode records (New York).

Sabat studied at the University of Toronto, at the Juilliard School in New York, as well as working privately with Malcolm Goldstein, James Tenney and Walter Zimmermann. He teaches at the Universität der Künste Berlin, and has been a guest artist at the California Institute of the Arts, at the Escola Superior in Barcelona and the Paris Conservatoire. In 2010, he was an artist-in-residence of the Villa Aurora in Los Angeles, followed in 2011 by a one year residency at the German Academy in Rome, Villa Massimo.

eldritch Priest ...*soot?aporia* (2003)

...*soot?aporia* is a dirty impasse, a black vertigo where one untimely non-adventure follows another. Here, things hang together more by accident than by purpose. This work has a fondness for the Lotus-eaters, a mythological race of people whose primary source of food was the addictive soporific fruit and flower of the eponymous plant. Drowsy and languid, and as though coming from some remote corner of the baroque where ornaments overflow their armatures, ...*soot?aporia* peregrinates the pleats and wrinkles that flicker at the edge of sleepy melodies.

[eP]

The above note is typical of Priest's general artistic concerns, which seem to centre upon the questioning of music's reality and (non-)meaning. To my ears, ...*soot?aropia* moves from familiarity to unfamiliarity, from activity to non-activity,

in very curious ways. Like the music of his fellow Toronto-dweller Martin Arnold, his sense of form is elusive, both attractive and distancing. He has composed music for instruments that are drawn from both 'high art' and 'amateur' contexts, and some of his recent pieces are characterised by melodic unfoldings over a long time-frame. These traits combine to mark out a highly distinct and individual artistic voice.

[PT]

eldritch Priest's writing on aesthetics and experimental music has appeared in various journals, including *Postmodern Culture* and *Radical Musicology*. His book *Boring Formless Nonsense: Experimental Music and the Aesthetics of Failure* will be published by *Continuum* in 2013. In addition to his academic work, eldrich is active as a composer whose works have been performed in North America and Europe. He lives in Toronto, where he is co-artistic director of the experimental music collective Neither/Nor.

Martin Arnold *Vines and Tubers (Nightshades)* (1997)

Vines and Tubers (Nightshades) was composed for and premiered by Canadian pianist Eve Egoyan, who has been a champion of Martin's work and indeed many of the Canadian composers featured in the two programmes. Typically, the music has a meandering quality which feels gently radical within the context of most narrative-driven Western music – as the composer wrote of another piano piece, 'Rat-Drifting': 'The idea of being highly motivated to reach a goal has nothing in common with my music, thus we're drifting not running'.

In the first movement, 'Woody', the piano is prepared by laying extremely thin aluminium foil over the range of the piano strings that are used. On top of that are randomly placed foil cupcake holders, which are allowed to bounce freely. In the second movement, 'Deadly', these cupcake holders are used as means of generating sounds along the prepared piano strings.

[PT]

Martin Arnold is a composer and performer of music, an arts administrator, a writer and a teacher based in Toronto, Canada. Martin's compositions have been played nationally and internationally by performers/ensembles including Roger Admiral, Arraymusic, Aventa, Belladonna, The Burdocks, The California E.A.R. Unit, Stephen Clarke, Continuum, Les Coucous Bénévoles, Marc Couroux, Cowpaws, Ensemble Kore, Ensemble QAT, Eve Egoyan, Lori Freedman, Jürg Frey, Gay-Jordan Duo, Hemispheres, Marmots, Natalie Michaud-Alain Trudel-Geneviève Soly, the Modern Quartet, Motion, Opera Aperta, Cléo Palacio-Quintin, Helen Pridmore, Quatuor Bozzini, the rioT Trio, Sabat-Clarke Duo, Marc Sabat, Sound Pressure, Strange Companions, and Philip Thomas.

Martin is also an active member of Toronto's improvisation and experimental jazz/roots/rock communities performing on live electronics, banjo, melodica, guitar, and hurdy-gurdy. In particular, he performs and records with Eric Chenaux in a number contexts and is electric guitarist in the Ryan Driver Quartet.

Bryn Harrison *Vessels* (2012)

Ten years ago I commissioned, and again premiered in Sheffield, a solo piano work from Bryn Harrison, a work entitled *être temps* (literally 'being time'). 'Time' and how we perceive it is a central concern of Bryn's music – how material unravels in and through time, how we engage with sound at different levels as time goes by. *Vessels* is no exception but the material is somewhat different from that of previous works – here the material used has more obviously tonal references, though as

different layers of material interact the tonality becomes blurred. It takes as its cue Howard Skempton's recent string quartet *Tendrils*, which adopts one of Messiaen's 'modes of limited transposition'. In *Vessels* the pitches of the mode are worked through in patterns to create a circular motion, which is clearly heard even if the actual pattern itself may not be identified. This is slowly worked out over a long span of time, resulting in one of the most sensuous and absorbing works of the composer's output.

[PT]

Bryn Harrison (born 1969) studied for an MA in composition with Gavin Bryars at De Montfort University, Leicester. His music has been performed extensively in the UK at most of Britain's leading festivals and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. He has established a particularly close association with the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival receiving prizes there in 1993 and 1995 and commissions from the festival in 1999 and 2002 and again in 2008 where he was a featured composer. In 1999 he was selected to compete for the International Gaudeamus Prize in the Netherlands and since then he has received many performances throughout Europe, USA and Japan, including those at festivals such as Wien Horgange, Ultraschall, Hannover Biennale, Festival Klangspuren, Europaischer Musikmonat, Wittener Tage and the Paris Festival Automne. Commissions include those for the London Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Recherche, Apartment House, Plus-Minus, Klangforum Wien, Ixion, London Sinfonietta, Chroma, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Asamisimasa as well as performances from duos and soloists such as Darragh Morgan and Mary Dullea, Duo Contour, Anton Lukoszevics, Irvine Arditti and Mieko Kanno, Susan Knight, Clive Williamson, Andrew Sparling, Jonathan Powell, Philip Thomas, Teodoro Anzellotti, and ELISION Ensemble. He has a particular interest in the relationship between painting and music and has collaborated extensively with painter and printmaker Mike Walker. Bryn is currently Head of Composition at the University of Huddersfield. He lives near Halifax, West Yorkshire with his wife Jane and three children Harry, Dillon and Erica.

Philip Thomas specialises in performing new and experimental music, including both notated and improvised music. He places much emphasis on each concert being a unique event, designing imaginative programmes that provoke and reveal connections. Philip's most recent solo projects have included a showcase of British experimental music in Basel, Switzerland; a 12-hour solo performance of John Cage's *Electronic Music for Piano* as part of hcmf 2010 (subsequently broadcast in part, with interviews, on BBC Radio 3); the UK premiere of Tom Johnson's *The Chord Catalogue*, portrait concerts of Markus Trunk and Laurence Crane; and a survey of the music of Christian Wolff, including a number of UK premieres along with newly commissioned works by Steve Chase, Tim Parkinson and Michael Parsons.

Philip has recently released three CDs: *Fields have Ears*, featuring two solo and one ensemble works by American composer Michael Pisaro; one of improvisations with pianist Chris Burn and bassist Simon H Fell (which has received numerous favourable reviews, including Paris Transatlantic: "a truly outstanding album, one that any self-respecting fan of new music in whatever form can't afford to be without") on the *another timbre* label, and piano music by Tim Parkinson on *Edition Wandelweiser*. His debut solo CD 'Comprovisation' was released in 2007 on the Bruce's Fingers label (BF66). Based upon his recent series of concerts featuring music exploring

improvisation and notation, it features music by Mick Beck, Chris Burn, John Cage, Simon H Fell, Michael Finnissy and Paul Obermayer. He also features on the recent James Saunders portrait CD (on *another* timbre). Future releases include the complete piano works of Christian Wolff

Philip is a regular pianist with leading experimental music group Apartment House, winners of the 2012 Royal Philharmonic Society award for Chamber Music and Song, and with whom he has appeared at numerous festivals across Europe and the UK and given a number of broadcasts for the BBC and WDR. Recent performances with them have included a sold-out portrait concert of John Cage at the Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the International Chamber Music series ('Their performances are always revelatory, and the concert of John Cage's music at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in September 2011 was an epiphany, confirming the status of Apartment House as one of the most innovative and exciting chamber ensembles in Europe.', Royal Philharmonic Society); a performance of John Cage's *Winter Music + Atlas Eclipticalis* at hcmf 2010; a performance of Stockhausen's *Kurzwellen* as part of the BBC/Sound and Music's festival 'Cut 'n' Splice' (subsequently broadcast on BBC Radio 3); John Cage, Cornelius Cardew, James Clarke, Philip Corner, Laurence Crane, Christopher Fox, Rytis Mazulis and Christian Wolff. Recently he performed John Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* with Apartment House as part of a programme which he directed celebrating the 50th anniversary of the 1958 New York Town Hall Cage retrospective.

In 2010-11 Philip performed with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, as part of their 'Legacy Tour', at the Barbican, London (part of the MCDC's last-ever UK appearances), and in Clermont-Ferrand. Other recent collaborations have included programmes of experimental music with the pianist Ian Pace and a piano and electronics duo with composer James Saunders.

He is currently a Reader at the University of Huddersfield, where he heads the performance curriculum. He writes frequently about performing experimental music and has recently co-edited and contributed to a book of essays about Christian Wolff for Ashgate Publications, *Changing the System: the Music of Christian Wolff*.