

Music We'd Like to Hear, Friday 17 July 2015

## Portrait Concert: Martin Arnold

*Points and Waltzes* (2012) for piano

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*Slip Minuet* (2014) for violin

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*The Spit Veleta\** (2015) for violin and piano

Mira Benjamin, violin

Philip Thomas, piano

\* Commissioned by Music We'd Like to Hear  
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I've said before that I think of all of my music as dance music: a happening to move with/a place to move around in. With the pieces on this programme the links to other dance music are more overt: three dances in triple time, a waltz, a minuet and a veleta.

In 16<sup>th</sup> century England a 'point' was a piece of contrapuntal composition (no doubt related one way or another to 'counterpoint') and *Points & Waltzes* is to a large extent that. But when I first heard 'point' applied to the wonderful, non-narrative polyphonic meander of Elizabethan *fantasies*, I liked to think of it as the smallest instance, a moment; music as a succession of particular details being passed through as part of a continuum. And for *Points & Waltzes* the continuum is a waltz – it's always a waltz, obscure or not – though not the rolling, whirling psychedelia of the Viennese sort, but a slow dance: at the tempo of Richard Thompson's *Waltzing's for Dreamers*.

*Slip Minuet* is the slowest dance here. Or rather, it's in slow motion; it's something quicker slowed down. 'Slip' is taken from another kind of dance, the slip jig, for like the slip jig my slip minuet is in 9/8. But there's also something about the assortment of meanings available for the word slip – both as a verb and a noun – this, I think, makes it apt for this piece.

The 'veleta' is a sequence dance (I prefer the Scottish country version): series of prescribed moves – a different series for each of the dance partners – that extend over a number of bars (usually 16). My veleta retains the relationship of having both members of the duo move together, working through intermeshed, complimentary series of continuous events. But there is no particular perceivable order to the sequence. That's where the spit comes in – it's in the title as a nod to Georges Bataille's famous definition of *informe*, usually translated as 'formless':

A dictionary begins when it no longer gives the meaning of words, but their tasks. Thus formless is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. [...] On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.

Not surprisingly, Bataille goes farther than I would. But his *informe* does embrace an unstable condition that all my work aspires to: formless, not as lack or as a denial of substance, but as a repudiation of the idea that there is an outside that can be abstracted, generalized and evaluated as separate and distinct from an inside.

*Points & Waltzes* was written for and is dedicated to Philip Thomas; *Slip Minuet* was written for and is dedicated to Mira Benjamin; *The Spit Veleta* was written for and is dedicated to the both of them, all with the deepest respect and gratitude. Mira and Philip, thanks so much!

Martin Arnold, July 2015

**Martin Arnold** is a musician based in Toronto. His compositions are played internationally and he is an active member of Toronto's improvisation and experimental jazz/folk/rock communities performing on live electronics, banjo, melodica, and guitar. Recordings devoted to his written compositions are available on Collection QB (Quatuor Bozzini: Aberarre) and Autumn Records (Tam Lin), and his work as a guitarist (of sorts) can be heard on The Ryan Driver Quintet Plays the Stephen Parkinson Songbook (Tin Angel Records). Martin lectures part-time in the Cultural Studies Department at Trent University and the Department of Art, Culture and Media, at the University of Toronto, Scarborough. Martin also works as a landscape gardener.

**Mira Benjamin** is a Canadian violinist, researcher and new-music instigator. She performs new and experimental music, specialising in microtonal string performance practice. She actively commissions music from composers at all stages of their careers, and develops each new work through multiple performances. Most recently she has collaborated with Cassandra Miller, Martin Arnold, Richard Glover, Isaiah Ceccarelli, Amber Priestley, and Scott Mc Laughlin. Mira co-directs *nu:nord*, an international community-building project that engages artists from Canada, Norway and the UK. Originally from Vancouver, Mira lived for ten years in Montréal, where she was a member of Quatuor Bozzini. She moved to London in 2014. Mira gratefully acknowledges the support of the Canada Council for the Arts in 2015-16.

**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 suggest connections. He is particularly drawn to the experimental music of John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff, and composers who broadly work within a post-Cageian aesthetic. In recent years he has been particularly associated with the music of Christian Wolff, giving the world premiere of his *Sailing By* in 2014 and *Small Preludes* in 2009, the UK premiere of *Long Piano* (Peace March 11), having co-edited and contributed to the first major study of Wolff's music, *Changing the System: the Music of Christian Wolff*, published by Ashgate Publications in 2010, and currently recording all of Wolff's solo piano music for sub rosa. He is an experienced performer of John Cage's music, having performed the *Concert for piano and orchestra* with both Apartment House and the Merce Cunningham Dance Company as well as most of the solo piano and prepared piano music, including a unique 12-hour performance of *Electronic Music for piano*. He has commissioned new works from a number of British composers whose ideas, language and aesthetic have been informed in some ways by the aforementioned American composers, such as Stephen Chase, Laurence Crane, Richard Emsley, Christopher Fox, Bryn Harrison, John Lely, Tim Parkinson, Michael Parsons, and James Saunders. He continues to live in Sheffield, where he premieres the majority of his programmes, with his wife Tiffany and children Naomi and Jack.

Music We'd Like to Hear 2015, curated by John Lely & Tim Parkinson

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