

music we'd like to hear

Friday 19 July 2019

Séverine Ballon

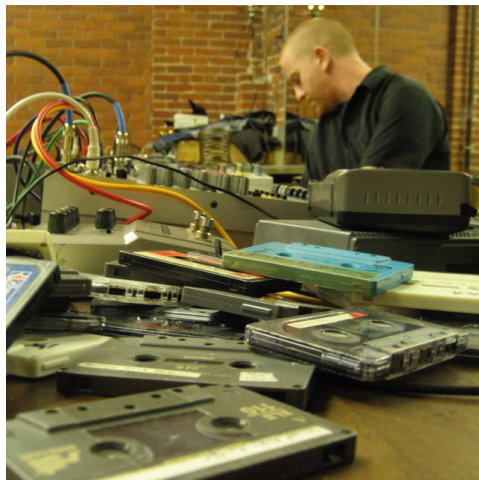
Cloches fendues I and II (2018)



Composing for one's own instrument the cello is like a secret garden, a daily walk to observe the cultivated sounds, to look at them with a magnifying glass, to organise them and discover their very rich and fascinating lives. Rich sounds emerge from small fractures, points of instability that are scrutinized and made audible. *Cloches fendues I and II* are part of a series of pieces composed between 2016 and 2018, recorded for the All That Dust label.

SB

translation Tim Parkinson



Newton Armstrong

A line alongside itself (2019)

Séverine Ballon, cello

Newton Armstrong, audio

A line alongside itself is a part of a series of pieces that explore the in-between of musical line and surface. All of the pieces are made of repeating, self-similar patterns, and all are concerned with the gradual transformation of space and texture.

NA

[interval]

Michael Parsons

Tenebrio (1995)

for two Yamaha CX5M Music Computers



Tenebrio for computer-controlled electronic sound (FM synthesis) was composed in 1995. One of a series of 'Nocturnes' commissioned for late-night listening by BBC Radio 3, it was first broadcast at midnight on 30 December 1995. *Tenebrio* is an obscure Latin word meaning 'night wanderer'. The piece was composed using two CX5M Yamaha music computers. The preset timbres of the CX5M were edited and reprogrammed. The opening noise-like crackling sound of indefinite pitch is gradually transformed by expanding its frequency width to reveal unfamiliar sequences of increasing pitch-range in the form of a

'random walk'. These are contrasted with the introduction of long-sustained sounds and slow glissandi. The piece is 12'30" in length, showing a gradual evolution from obscurity towards openness and transparency.

MP

John McGuire

A Cappella (1995)

Beth Griffith, soprano



John McGuire describes the process of constructing *A Cappella*. He indicates that he started by recording single tones sung by Beth Griffith. He made three groups of recordings, allotted to the vowels e, ah and u. Each of those groups of vowels consisted of 11 or 12 pitches, individually recorded at intervals of a major second or minor third, which translates to the range of Griffith's voice.

The groups were treated like digital instruments, which McGuire could use at will. Then different sets of sound were extracted, combined into strands of changing vowels. These strands in turn were overlaid and synchronized to execute the polyphonic sequences of two virtual choruses.

In a performance Beth Griffith sings live to the playback of these two choruses made up of samples of her own voice. There is a certain pattern or



sequence to Griffith's interaction with the virtual choruses. There are also spatial aspects acted out during the performance, concerning closeness versus distance as well as left and right placement. Speed and register are other variables, which are utilized to make this a rare musical experience. Finally McGuire defines the principle stages in the production of the taped sections:

1. Recording of the vocal samples.
2. Fairlight computer/synthesizer processing of the samples.
3. Sequencing of the processed samples with a Cubase sequencer.
4. Addition of dynamics and spatial motion in Protools.

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Deeply engaged in the development of her repertoire,

Séverine Ballon's practice draws as much on key works from the repertoire as on her numerous collaborations with composers, working in the intimacy of the fabric of sound. She has premiered many solo works, including those by Rebecca Saunders, Chaya Czernowin, Mauro Lanza, Francesca Verunelli, Marianthi Papalexandri-Alexandri. She studied the cello at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin and in Lübeck with Joseph Schwab and Troels Svane. In 2004-2005 she was 'academist' at the Ensemble Modern (Internationale Ensemble Modern Akademie). She perfected her contemporary cello technique with cellists Siegfried Palm, Pierre Strauch and Rohan de Saram. In 2005-2006 she was solo cellist of the Toulouse Chamber Orchestra, but subsequently decided to concentrate on contemporary music and on the premiere of new works. In 2008-2009 she was resident artist at the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. Thanks to the Harvard French Scholarship Fund and an Arthur Sachs grant she was a fellow at Harvard University in 2014/15, and in 2016-2017 she was a Visiting Artist at CCRMA/Stanford University. Her solo CD, 'Solitude', was released on label Aeon/Outthere in 2015 and her debut-CD as a composer 'Inconnaissance' was released on the label All That Dust. She composed and performed the original score for the feature-length film 'The Ornithologist' (2016) by João Pedro Rodrigues.



Newton Armstrong is a composer, electronics performer, and occasional builder of electronic musical instruments. Much of his work focusses on forms of music-making that emerge in the composed interactions between people, technologies, and their environments. His music has been performed at festivals and events such as Darmstadt, Festival d'Automne à Paris, Festival of Exiles (Berlin), What is Music? (Melbourne), Movement Research Festival (New York), Grønland Kammermusikkfestival (Oslo), Images Sonores (Liège), Ars Musica (Brussels), and Music at Villa Romana (Florence).



Michael Edward Parsons (born 12 December 1938) is a British composer. Since the 1960s, when he met Cornelius Cardew and helped found the Scratch Orchestra, Parsons has been strongly associated with the English school of experimental music. He was born in Bolton and studied at St John's College, Oxford before taking up composition lessons under Peter Racine Fricker at the Royal College of Music in London in 1961. In the 1960s he met Cornelius

Cardew; Parsons attended Cardew's experimental music classes at Morley College since 1968. In 1969 Cardew, Parsons and fellow composer Howard Skempton founded the Scratch Orchestra, an experimental free ensemble devoted to performing contemporary music. The Orchestra broke up in early 1970s, partly as a result of the politization led by Cardew. Parsons was among the Orchestra members who refused to be associated with the Maoist politics Cardew was propagating, and left. In 1970 Parsons started working as visiting lecturer in the Fine Art department of the Portsmouth Polytechnic and in the Slade School of Art, University College London. In 1974 he and Skempton formed a duo to perform their own works. In 1996-97 Parsons was a bi-fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge. During this time he organised concerts at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge. Since the early 1960s Parsons has also been active as a writer on music; his writings include a number of important articles on contemporary English composers.

Parsons' music is influenced by Anton Webern, composers of the so-called New York school (John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff), various English composers he met through Cardew and the Scratch Orchestra, and, since the Portsmouth years, "Systems" artists such as Malcolm Hughes and Jeffrey Steele.

John McGuire initially studied composition with Robert Arthur Gross at Occidental College, where he earned a BA in 1964 (Anon. n.d.; Custodis 2004, 142; Gross 2014). He received a succession of three Alfred E. Hertz Traveling Scholarships from the University of California at Berkeley (1965-66, 1966-67, 1967-68), and a Fulbright Traveling Scholarship (1966-67), which together enabled him to study with Krzysztof Penderecki at the Folkwang Hochschule in Essen from 1966-68, and at the Fourth Cologne Courses for New Music, under Karlheinz Stockhausen, in 1967 (Anon. n.d.; Custodis 2004, 142. Two scholarships from the State of North Rhine-Westphalia for studies in Germany made it possible for him to participate in the composition studios given by Stockhausen at Darmstadt in 1967 and again in 1968. Returning to the United States, he continued his studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where his composition teachers included Ingolf Dahl and Seymour Shifrin. After completing his MA there in 1970, he once again moved to Europe, at first studying computer



composition with Gottfried Michael Koenig at the Institute of Sonology of the University of Utrecht from 1970 to 1971. Having found the atmosphere in Germany congenial, following his studies in Utrecht he settled in Germany again in 1972 and remained for the next twenty-five years, at first working as a pianist with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Saarbrücken from 1972-75. From 1975 to 1977 he studied electronic music with Hans Ulrich Humpert at the Hochschule für Musik Köln, later working as an organist at the Kirche St. Nikolaus von Tolentino in Rösrath from 1979-82. He received six commissions from WDR in Cologne for pieces he realised in the electronic-music studio there, among them Pulse Music III in 1978, Vanishing Points in 1988, and A Cappella in 1997 (Morawska-Büngeler 1988, 108; Custodis 2004, 160, 210). He has also had works commissioned by Radio Bremen, from pianist Herbert Henck (48 Variations, for 2 pianos), from Dartmouth College, and from the Ministry of Culture of North Rhine-Westphalia. In 1995 he was composer-in-residence at the Akademie Schloss Wiepersdorf in Brandenburg. In 1998 he returned to his native country, working for a time as an editor for the Carl Fischer music-publishing firm in New York City starting in 1998. From 2000 to 2002 he taught advanced composition and twentieth-century music as a part-time Visiting Adjunct Professor at Columbia University. He is married to the soprano Beth Griffith, for whom he composed A Cappella in 1990-97 and Contradance in 2000-2004. Kyle Gann (2001a) describes McGuire as a "postminimalist". His music seeks a synthesis of minimalism and the serialism with which he had become acquainted during his studies in Germany, especially with Stockhausen. "His work over the next 25 years was devoted entirely to the exploration and development of various aspects of this synthesis, in particular the fusion of elemental tonal functions with chromatic time structures" (Anon. n.d.). He is regarded as one of the key figures in the Cologne School (Kapko-Foretić 1980, 50). His music is published by Feedback Studio (Cologne) and Breitkopf & Härtel

Beth Griffith (soprano) has appeared with Sequentia, Musikfabrik, Ensemble13, L'Art pour L'Art, Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Paris Nouvel Orchestra Philharmonique and has worked with composers John Cage, Morton Feldman, Mauricio Kagel and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Her one-hour, solo recording of Feldman's "Three Voices" was awarded the German Record Critics Prize.

Since her European debut in Mauricio Kagel's solo theater piece Phonophonie in 1978, the demand for Beth Griffith as soloist has taken her to such important music festivals as the Warsaw Autumn, Cologne Triennale, Wien Modern, Numus Festival, RIAC, Donaueschingen Musiktage, Darmstadt Summer Courses, Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik, ISCM and New Music America. In addition, her acclaimed performance of Morton Feldman's Three Voices has been heard on numerous stages from Prague, Berlin, London, New York and in between. Recent invitations led her to Grahamstown, South Africa, Gent, s-Hertogenbosch, Cologne, Wiesbaden, Raleigh, North Carolina and here in New York with repertoire ranging from

chamber works by Sorrell Hays, Dieter Schnebel, Wolfgang von Schweinitz, Manos Tsangaris, solo works by John Cage, Alvin Curran, Morton Feldman, Noah Creshevsky, John McGuire, Mattricio Kagel and Rodney Waschka.



"An extraordinary American soprano, Beth Griffith sang with a focus and presence (as she did everything) that held a listener at rapt attention. Griffith, a Texan, recently returned to the United States after a 20-year career in Germany. It is our good fortune" -- Mark Swed Los Angeles Times

"A real highlight of the festival was the exceptional singer Beth Griffith... Her vocal artistry surpasses the conventional with an incredibly wide gamut of tonal and expressive articulation... All this seems to happen in a kind of mystical atmosphere brought about by the unique performance of Beth Griffith, as singer and as human being." -- Suzana Martinakova Literarny Tyždenník Bratislava

"The piece that turned me to jelly, though, was A Cappella, by John McGuire, recently resident in New York after decades in Cologne. With impassioned expressiveness, soprano Beth Griffith sang syncopated vowel sounds over a sparkling electronic background, medieval but vibrant in its contrapuntal austerity." -- Kyle Gann The Village Voice

curated by John Lely and Tim Parkinson

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