kinds of interference assume a musical life of their own'. But I find the specificity of Baker's inspiration wonderful. Though I suspect it's not unusual for composers to be influenced by current events and what is streaming or floating through airwaves at the moment of composition, their sources are simply not often revealed so plainly. Baker wants us to know his sources and maybe even seek them out to retrace his steps.

What is special about music and art for Baker, I think, is the human desire to make meaning out of everything in our lives, musical and not. For him, a composition is autobiographical, a moment in time: what he has seen, what he has thought about, what he has listened to. A notes app converted into musical creation. I can hear detractors already: what does this have to do with the music? Too Much Information. Let MUSIC speak for itself. But I love the notes, and not because I need them to understand the music. The music can be perfectly understood on musical terms: Baker mixes genres, rhythms and melodies; he hops-cotches across registers and gestures; he is a masterful orchestrator (and the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group masterful interpreters). I love the notes because meaning is elusive, and we have in Baker someone who is actively making meaning of the world through writing music, and we can follow along. That is what the internet is best at: putting old and new, deep and shallow, popular and esoteric all on the same plate. Baker too. Dig in.

Julie Zhu
10.1017/S0040298224000433

Soosan Lolavar, *Girl*. Lolavar, Lovelady, Jabiru, Eshghi Sahraei, Saviet, Albayati. Nonclassical, bandcamp. Chris Rainier, *Chris Rainier Sings the Music of Harry Partch*. bwaa., bandcamp, bwaa.027.

> 'There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia.'
> Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*

The two albums brought together here rely on none of what Foucault calls (writing on Boulez) 'prior mutuality'. There are things they just do not share, kinships perhaps better served by a review (an aesthetic paradigm, for instance, or a cultural history, a mode of address). And yet to live within either – as I recommend you do – is to negotiate precisely the question of an adequate living within. Underpinning (or is it undermining?) both Soosan Lolavar and Chris Rainier's work is a body which continuously refuses to be sufficiently habitable. Always on the move and ontologically estranged, it nevertheless remains in permanent proximity, accessible only as the absent structuring force of Being's characteristic thrownness. This is a music of that elusive, inhabitable place, there, where the other rests inside the self.

We might linger a moment longer with that word. One of a select few enantiosemes still drifting in modern English, 'inhabitable' owes its problematic parentage to the double 'in-' of Latin via French, where the prefix could be read to mean both habitable-within and not-habitable. Latin used the term interchangeably while later French tended towards more exclusive negativity; English has resolved the confusion to some degree with the additional prefix 'un-', masking the duplicity with a new construction that doubles down on negation ('uninhabitable'), though that has only softened the original without relieving its polysemy. Either way you read it, the word keeps its irreconcilable opposite stitched forever in its thigh: to in-habit is to careen without arrival between endurable comfort (fitting like a glove, second skin, home) and the inhospitable, (there where (the) I cannot be).

Both *Girl* and *Chris Rainier Sings the Music of Harry Partch* are depositories of a decade-long cathectic investment on the part of their respective creators into problems of in-habitable bodies. Soosan Lolavar has written extensively on her experience as an Iranian woman in England, on belonging and cultural otherness, on the intransigent straddle between worlds, on acoustic Orientalism. Her compositional sensibilities are informed by conjunctive performance work with the hammered Iranian santoor, where her practice extends and destabilises the traditional techniques of her ancestral instrument as a means of negotiating hybrid selfhood in the modern West. *Girl* collects four works from this auto-theoretical engagement, played by the transnational chamber orchestra Ruthless Jabiru and a trio of Lolavar's favoured collaborators. Chris Rainier, meanwhile, an Australian also abiding in London, made his name as one of a generation of fringe folk artists with a virtuosic proclivity for unorthodox instruments and a distinctive, rough-and-tatter croon. Since his 2018 album *Zozobra*, Rainier has recorded primarily on a self-made recreation of Harry Partch's three-string Adapted Guitar 1; the fixation escalated in 2020, when all four tracks on his *Yuma* borrowed titles from Partch's *Genesis of a New Music*. The new album is a culmination of that labour of embodied close-reading, at last

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298224000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

bringing Rainier's boy-and-his-guitar intimacy to bear on Partch's notated music.

And so both albums turn around a vacant, unsettled centre. The body which this music seeks to occupy, litigate, excavate, caress (Partch's *corpus*, for Rainier; Lolavar's shadow-double, for her) is forever in flight: never heard except everywhere, structuring the seeking without being found, it is a music taking place elsewhere. This is a music of inhabitance.

That three of the four tracks on *Girl* are solo features is no accident. The continuous occupation of her practice is constructed alterity: how identity destabilises and must be redrawn under shifting contexts. Lolovar's music naturally congeals in the tension between individual and ensemble environment: in 'I am the spring, you are the earth', the santoor enters as both clarifying stroke and the object of disruption. In the slow progress of the undeniably Iranian instrument's acoustic acclimation, the warbling string drones are rezoned and drawn by gritty force into a fragile but enveloping harmony uncovered in the santoor's residue; there is real sweat involved in negotiating a non-reductive relationship with one's own otherness. Alterity comes to a similar and more literal head in 'Tradition – Hybrid – Survival', Lolavar's concerto for cello and strings. There, the ensemble trifurcates into 'local', 'diasporic' and 'outsider' groups, distinguished by their relationship to material and time. The soloist, labouring to 'code-switch', gradually accrues its own chameleonic language that facilitates temporary inclusion in any group while resisting assimilation, favouring instead the lonely eloquence of non-duplicitous hybridity.

'Undone', meanwhile, expands on collaborative work Lolavar undertook with Berlin violinist Sarah Saviet in the early months of lockdown (documented on their joint album *Every Strand of Thread and Rope*). The destabilisation of Saviet's extreme scordatura results, as the title suggests, in a timbral unwinding that forces the instrument into vulnerable scenarios of approximation and slippage (played here with Saviet's rare gift for elegance in the most attenuated of circumstances). The re-orchestration presented here tucks shoals of echoing intensities in the husky shadows of her tremors, not so much an accompaniment as an unbearable illumination. The attendant ensemble catches in the exposed wood of the slackened instrument and casts it into vast arenas of glaring magnification. What is outside the solo is revealed to be only a projection of its infinite interiority, a ravelled body catasterised by infinite pricks of light.

But it is in 'Girl', the title septet, where the estrangement of cultural self – and with it the question of habitation – comes under its most intense scrutiny. The girl in question is the object of desire as she figures in 'Dokhtare Boyer Ahmadi', the Luri folk song of unrequited love. The song's early presence is elliptical, finally burgeoning in the still centre but lapped at on all sides by the lingering fluid of Euro-modernism. When the song finally snags, wavers and dissipates back into the coruscated waters of timbral gesture, however, it is not a pronouncement of defeat. The unspooled song refracts the noisy intensity of the opening into what are now much softer and more shrouded filaments, as if the sudden melodism had retroactively drained the sound masses of their impassive heft. Certainly not for nothing is that's song's recurrent lyrical invitation 'come, abide with me': the bringing to speech of an unfulfillable desire for co-habitation is itself enough to enact an imperfect reconciliation between diametric oppositions.

Across both the track and the album that shares its name, European and Iranian musical identities enter into charged and slippery pathways of genetic exchange. Forever both and always neither, Lolavar's music wavers constantly in diasporic alienation from itself, reconciled in the promise of their continued estrangement.

Harry Partch's preservationist instinct has, in some ways, stood in its own way. Terminally fixated on posterity, desperately afraid of artistic misappropriation and humbled before the unfeasible reality of his homespun instrumentarium, Partch threw himself into documenting authoritative interpretations of nearly every fragment in his catalogue. In doing so, he installed his own body and voice as inseparable from the experience of his music, thus inadvertently insulating it from organic reinterpretation and transmission in the same gesture that protected it from harm. The history of Partch performance practice has been, for better or for worse, one of documentarian pedantry or indexable infidelity: every performance must inevitably strike up against the ur-textual corpse of the haunting man himself.

It is precisely by centring that spectrality that Chris Rainier manages to move beyond it. As his title suggests, Partch's body is the object rather than the subject this time: it is Partch in/by/through Rainier we are hearing. The seven tracks collected on this vinyl (visually no less a thing of beauty than its sound; all of his albums are labours of love: it's hardly a surprise) comprise an equally idiosyncratic snapshot. Partch's most famous work comes first – *Barstow*, his

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298224000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press

catalogue of hitchhiker graffiti from the Mojave Overflow Bridge – but the rest are an assemblage of deep cuts, first arrangements and forgotten detritus. On tracks like 'The Intruder' – a yearning whisper, hardly a minute long but played with the aching fragility of one singing himself asleep alone beneath the stars – the mythic Partch of massed percussive fame seems impossibly far removed. Emphasising not the heady microtonal theory or the precision of his scores but rather the cigarette sighs of a fatigued voice and the ambient noise of a stray fingertip, Rainier unconceals Partch as what he perhaps was all along: a folk musician belonging steadfastly to the great legacy of Americana. Classical music has got him figured wrong; this is music that passes between imperfect bodies by way of campfire smoke and coffee, by dirty fingernails and sea spray, more familiar to Elizabeth Cotten than Tristan Murail. Math only ever served a rugged naturalism for Partch: here, perhaps for the first time since his death, this music feels natural again.

And so while Rainier's is an uncommonly assured and rigorous interpretation, the inevitable interrogations of fidelity – of a mimicry measurable against the real Harry Partch – are superfluous. The album is not a document of likeness (though Rainier has kept Partch's endearingly pragmatic habit of introducing every title as it arrives; it becomes him well), nor does it capitulate to the promised deference of a 'portrait album'. The 'Harry Partch' in the title is not a person but a kind of place, a resonant chamber set deep within the recesses of Rainier's own body, carved from years of admiration and affectionate attention, where his own voice mixes with archival dust in odd and enchanting sprays of light and memory. It is true in-habitance we hear, a body both utterly inseparable from Rainier's artistic sensibility and yet impossible to recall without destroying. The same is also true for Partch: this interior place in Rainier – and in each of us who forms a bond with his music – is the elusive site of his continued, inaccessible habitation.

Chris Rainier Sings the Music of Harry Partch is thus an act of mourning. It is a devastating and unbearably detailed account of intimacy's uncanny occupation, of the too close proximity a living musician knits with his unaware, ahistorical other. Rainier's anfractuous Adapted Guitar traces out the curving architecture of this cenotaph, but we never hear it except in glimpses. What we hear instead is the care, the gentle responsibility with which Rainier traverses and invokes without desecration the unknowable space of the other within (every act of mourning being, after all, the work of love).

Chris Rainier and Soosan Lolavar both stand to have inherited the utopian vision of musicianship Partch himself etched out back in 1940. His dream for the artist daring enough to venture beyond the 'safe cathedral of modern music' for the 'little-known country of subtle tones' – as both of them have – was one of too many bodies, of restless and transient inhabitance (from his essay 'Patterns of Music'):

> The zealot driving into this wilderness should have more than one life to give: one to create instruments within the tyranny of the five-fingered hand, to play the tones they find; one that will wrestle with notation and theory, so that they can make a record of what they find... still another that will create and re-create significant music for their new-old instruments and in their new-old media; and, finally, another that will perform it, give it – as a revelation – to the general wealth of human culture.

That both Rainier and Lolavar have given us of their wilderness is revelation indeed. Both albums are testimonies, documents of a distinctly modern and critical relationship to place, ownership and authority that takes as beautiful precisely that which destabilises the power of singularity. As in the Derrida quote that opened this review, every habitation contains the exile and loss of another inside it. To listen to either record – as I still recommend you do – is to attend to the impossible invocation of that exiled space, to hear the distant resonance of the invisible other whose exteriority is forever buried deep within.

Ty Bouque

10.1017/S0040298224000445

Christian Mason, *Time – Space – Sound – Light*. Octandre Ensemble. Winter & Winter, 910 291-2.

Most of the works on Christian Mason's new portrait disc make claims to nature. Their material may be reasonably traditional in gesture and timbre, but these pieces position themselves less as objects of contemplation inhabiting their own centres of gravity than as translucent scrims over the pre-existing world: glosses on birdsong, or more generally on the gesture and pacing of the sounds of the natural world, or on the resonance of its empty spaces.

The first track stakes the claim boldly: *A kingfisher dives into the sun*â ¦ is a completely unexpected opening to what presents itself as an album of instrumental solo and small-ensemble music. Mason describes it as an 'electronic soundscape', but what it in fact is is a gently

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298224000445 Published online by Cambridge University Press