

material and inspiration for the composition. In releasing *Cosmic Time* as an audio-only download, both of these aspects are lost on the listener. With the flexibility of an online release, would it not have been possible to have included some video clips of the performance and a brief explanation of the research process?

What I find more satisfying, however, is the skill of the creators and the performers in choosing their sounds carefully, giving each movement time to develop without outstaying its welcome. While this album may not provide anything particularly new, it does what it does very well, without sounding like something you may hear piped through the speakers of a health spa. I am particularly struck with the restraint of the performance – at no point is there a sound or individual performance that intrudes on the atmosphere being created at that time. Each movement is discrete but blends beautifully into the next, making a balanced whole, a reflection of the egalitarian nature of The Sound Collectors Lab themselves, who from the outset have focused on ‘plurality and collaboration’.³

Without knowing the interdisciplinary context or scientific background to the research, there is little on this release that would particularly challenge the listener. Yet I would highly recommend setting aside 40 minutes to turn down the lights, get comfortable and listen to this album on headphones. Gleave, Cole and Devenish have created a beautiful meditation on time and space, and taking a moment to slow down and join them is a very welcome experience.

Peter Falconer

10.1017/S0040298223000220

Christopher Fox, *Trostlieder*. EXAUDI, Weeks. Kairos, 0022005KAI.

Back in 2006, the still-fledgling vocal consort EXAUDI devoted their second CD to the music of Christopher Fox. *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory* was released on NMC in 2006, and the relationship between composer and singers has proved exceedingly fruitful ever since. Numerous dedications and first performances have followed that first album, as well as, in 2009, a second,

Catalogue irraisoné, released on Métier. In the meantime, Fox's music has become increasingly honoured: the portrait discs have multiplied, his name is mentioned frequently among younger composers as an influence, and in 2017 a book of essays dedicated to his music (and edited by Rose Dodd) was published by Ashgate. For their part, EXAUDI have gone from strength to strength to become not only one of the country's leading vocal groups, but also one of its leading new-music ensembles, full stop.

So it is fitting to have here, at the start of EXAUDI's third decade, a third Fox album. In comparison with the crisp austerity of *Catalogue irraisoné* (a collection of objets trouvés balanced on the edge between music and concrete poetry) and the miniaturist compendium of *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory*, *Trostlieder* is positively sumptuous; with its numerous allusions to the music of the English, German and Italian Baroque, it represents a side of Fox's vocal music that has hitherto been under-represented on record.

This sound is thanks in large part to that ongoing relationship with EXAUDI. James Weeks' group is renowned for its equal sensitivity to early and contemporary music, and for the many ways in which it has productively braided the two together. *Trostlieder* is dominated by works written for EXAUDI: as well as the title composition (2015) the group is also dedicatee and first performer of the three madrigals, *Canti del carcere* (2013–18), written for EXAUDI's Italian Madrigal Project, and of *Preluding* (2006), composed shortly after that first recording and co-dedicated to the memory of Michael Tippett.

The *Trostlieder in Widerwertigkeit des Kriegs* (to give the work its full title) were composed as companion pieces to selections from Heinrich Schütz's late, severe *Geistliche Chormusik* for an EXAUDI concert at the Wigmore Hall in December 2015. Noting that Schütz had lived most of his maturity under the shadow of the Thirty Years' War, Fox turned to the *Trostgedichte in Widerwertigkeit des Kriegs* (Poems of Comfort in the Awfulness of War) by Martin Opitz, vivid descriptions of the economic and social devastation of the war. (There was a personal connection, too, in Fox's own family's origins in Pomerania, where much of the war was fought; and no European will miss the ongoing relevance of Opitz's harrowing images.) Often starkly declamatory, Fox's settings recall the gradual turn to austerity and simplification of Schütz's music that accompanied the devastation of war. Yet they are also possessed of expressive nuance: the second song is chill and tender in its description of the inevitable turning of the seasons ('The field is rich with

³ Louise Devenish, 'Projects – The Sir Zelman Cowen School of Music and Performance', www.monash.edu/arts/music-performance/the-sound-collectors-lab/projects (accessed 1 March 2023).

blessings throughout the year / and by turn hidden beneath cold, frost and rain’); the third is a kind of psalm with refrain, with each verse given to a different solo voice (the punchy precision of the writing here does recall *A Glimpse of Sion’s Glory*); the fourth switches gears with each stanza across a range from hocketing polyphony to homophonic chant.

By comparison, the *Canti del carcere* are richly ornamented, befitting their Italian inspiration. Nevertheless, in setting commentaries on Dante in Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* (as well as words by Dante himself), they are no less serious in their subject matter. The texts are not set strictly, however: in the first (‘fantasma’), it is shattered into fragments; in the second (‘senso comune’), the consonants are all omitted, leaving only a vowel-shadow of Gramsci’s words; and in the third (‘suo tormento’), the text is read outwards from the centre, reflecting its discussion of the torments of foresight and hindsight. The character of the music in each instance emerges from these constraints: a lyrical, aphoristic gestuality; a strangely chiming atmosphere of sung timbres; and a quasi-serialist pointillism. The shorter *Preluding* also takes a sidelong approach to its text, somehow cramming all 150 lines of Wordsworth’s *Was it for this* into just nine minutes of music. Appropriately, the score indicates that this music should be sung ‘like a gale’; EXAUDI’s commitment to Fox’s music in the teeth of this formidable challenge is abundantly clear.

A fourth work, *A Spousal Verse* (2004) – distinctly English-tinged in its abundant false relations – was written for another group of early music specialists, The Clerks. The Clerks recorded this on their 2009 Signum Classics album *Don’t Talk, Just Listen* (a title taken from Fox’s *20 Ways to Improve Your Life*). In comparison to their slower, more languorous version, with its solo line sunk deeply into the choral refrains, EXAUDI’s performance is mellifluous and onrushing, a breathless anticipation of marriage, rather than a last night’s solitary rest.

The comparison is useful: all of EXAUDI’s performances here resist indulgence, preferring instead presentations as though through a crystal-clear glass. It is an approach that suits Fox’s music, which at times positions itself in relation to its materials somewhere between *Verfremdungseffekt* and genuine affection. (The album closes with the short *Song* (24.iv.1916) of 2016, a commemoration of the Easter Uprising whose melodies are generated from the singers’ names by way of a musical cipher.) Ironically, such clarity does not always make music

straightforward to read: like a Heston Blumenthal concoction, it is somehow both cool and warm at once, both ironically detached and playfully open. It’s not a bad trick, though; and in a world plagued by extremes of earnestness and deceit, it is refreshingly welcome.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

10.1017/S0040298223000232

Martin Iddon, *Naiads*. Apartment House. Another Timbre, AT202.

Submerged in murky depths, among floating algae, rising bubbles, held breath, perhaps for too long. Aquatic imagery is very strong on this album. The naiads were freshwater nymphs of Greek mythology. There are five types of naiad, each associated with a type of body of water, and each naming a piece of chamber music recorded by Apartment House for this release. They are, in track order: *crinaeae*, the nymphs of fountains and wells, *pegaeae* of springs, *limnades* of lakes, *potameides* of rivers and *eleionomae* of marshes. At its best, Martin Iddon’s music is marked by its stunning refinement and elegance. His relentless focus on contrapuntal technique, especially prolation (DuFay’s motets are a frequent touchstone), allows for a unique and grounded complexity. It produces the completely organic emergence of otherwise simple macro phenomena like harmony and form. Even quite simple and mundane material can become magical. Although Iddon claims there was no tone painting or characterisation from the nymphs referenced in its title, I found that each piece snapped into a clear and compelling image when paired.

crinaeae, for Pierrot-plus, is deliberate, slow, murky music. Currents ooze from the violin, cello, bass clarinet and flute – boomy low-register beatings and rich wispy filamentals from a flute haltingly sounded, a violin draggingly bowed. Pops and jets and eddies from piano and percussion brightly pierce through. There are complex rhythmic structures guiding the similar but different strata; groupings are replicated across the instruments in a fractal structure. To say spa music would strike most any composer as the worst of insults, but in light of the strongly conceived and realised aquatic thematic, I intend the term not as a value statement, but simply as a descriptor. The sparse liner note reads: ‘Those who sought rejuvenation in [the naiads’] waters might receive the gifts of Tiresias or Phlebas: to