

extended coda returns to the juxtaposition of piano verticals and an expansive deployment of spectral chords. Muscular playing ensues, concluded by reiterated cymbal attacks.

Yaron Deutsch is an electric guitarist who has impressive bona fides, playing for Klangforum Wien, Musikfabrik and his own group Nickel, as well as teaching at the Hochschule für Musik Basel and as Tutor of Guitar at Darmstadt. An entire disc is devoted to pieces Dufourt has written that incorporate Deutsch playing guitar. Particularly fetching is *La Cité des saules* (The City of Willows; 1997), which combines treble guitar attacks and electronics-abetted gestures, spacious harmonies and imposing bass notes. Over the course of the piece, echolations and pulsations emerge, making it an ambient showcase.

The sextet *Hommage à Charles Négre* (1985), referencing the influential nineteenth-century photographer, is uncharacteristic in its slow, soft surface, almost Feldman-like in demeanour. Deutsch trades verticals with a vibraphone with the motor on, as well as sustained notes with flute, oboe/English horn, clarinet and bassoon. Conducted by Mariano Chiacchiarini, the group creates a haunting ambience. *L'Île Sonnante* (The Ringing Island; 1989) features a duo between percussion and guitar. A Chinese gong provides metallic ascending slides, concurrent with distorted low-register guitar attacks. The vibraphone, this time with the motor off, provides slow counterpoint to the guitar. Vibrato bar on the guitar blurs the pitch, and volume swells by suspended cymbals create an ominous distressedness. After the other instruments drop out, the gong's sliding tone returns.

*L'Atelier rouge d'après Matisse* (2020) brightly depicts the reds of Matisse's painting, with an introduction by Nickel Ensemble employing pitched percussion, piano and bass register drone, which are soon supplanted by multiphonics on saxophone and raucous guitar lines with sustained overtones in the midst of feedback. Metrically articulated cymbals join vibraphone and echoing guitar lines. Piano attacks soon accompany the cymbals and repeated guitar notes that once again devolve into distorted octaves. Ascending gestures using the vibrato bar are accompanied by aggressive percussion attacks. Short melodic tags and distorted howls add overtones to the proceedings, connecting the piece with others by Dufourt. Swaths of repeated notes are accompanied by multiphonics on the saxophone and percussion alternating between chimes and triangles. A soft return finds the guitar distortion subdued in favour of

clean-toned dissonant harmonies. The guitar then performs a cadenza of repeated notes, wild chordal attacks, glissandi and harmonics. The saxophone abets it with repeating trills, followed by the piano playing rangy arpeggiations. The guitar's final cadenza is filled with swells and distorted lines, accompanied by percussion.

The notion of a French spectralist rocking out might seem incongruous, but the final work, *L'Enclume du rêve d'après Chillida* (*The Anvil of Dreams after Chillida*; 2022), moves from pianissimo passages that tested the engineers' capacities and fortissimo ones that resemble high decibel rock. A concerto, Deutsch is joined by WDR, conducted by Sylvain Cambreling. The last section is filled with guitar slides and emphatic riffing. It builds to a roaring cadence, only, as Harry Vogt writes in his programme note, 'Dufourt abruptly pulls the plug at the end.'

The record package is generous, including essays by Martin Kaltinecker, Harry Vogt and Sebastian Solte, an interview between Dufourt and Solte and replications of draft score excerpts. Dufourt has been well served by bastille musique, and by all of the interpreters recorded here.

Christian Carey

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Kenneth Kirschner, *three cellos*. Christopher Gross. greyfade, 007.

In 2019 the producer, recording engineer and composer Joseph Branciforte founded the greyfade record label. Its basic premise was, in the words of the label's website, 'the idea of a music release as a complete conceptual universe, integrating sound, compositional architecture, visual design, and text into a single object worthy of sustained engagement'. To this end, its first few releases (of music by Branciforte, Theo Bleckmann, Greg Davis, Phillip Golub, Kenneth Kirschner and Christopher Otto) took the form of tastefully coloured vinyl LPs in beautifully designed minimalistic sleeves. But while such a philosophy is intended to resist the aesthetically deadening (and financially crippling) effects of virtualisation on the business of making and selling records of experimental music, Branciforte is no Luddite. All greyfade releases are also available digitally (in better-than-CD quality), and the label's design aesthetic (of bar codes, data visualisation and waveforms) is clearly embedded in the digital world.

Indeed, the tension between the digital and the physical might be greyfade's real guiding principle. Which brings me to Kirschner's *three cellos*. This is the label's first release in its FOLIO series and takes the form not of an LP, CD or even cassette, but of that most old-fashioned medium, a 100-page, linen-bound book. The book contains three essays, of varying lengths, by Kirschner, Branciforte and cellist Christopher Gross, plus photos and scores of two movements of Kirschner's piece – and, on the first page, a QR code and password to download or stream the music itself. Whatever else one makes of this, it places one's experience in a dualistic tactile space that feels very contemporary. A hardback and a QR code: one chunky in your hands, its heavy paper stock pushing back at your fingers, the other requiring almost no tactile engagement at all.

This isn't window dressing: it gets to something essential about the music itself. Since the 1980s, Kirschner has composed digitally, working straight into synthesisers and sequencers (and, later, DAWs). Although he often uses the sampled sounds of acoustic instruments, he doesn't write for them. In fact, he doesn't notate at all. But in 2015 Branciforte proposed making transcriptions of some of these electronic works for acoustic instruments; the first results of this appeared on the 2021 greyfade release *from the machine, vol. 1*, featuring performances by members of Flux Quartet and ICE. *three cellos* pursues the idea further, with Branciforte transcribing Kirschner's *July 7, 2017* (all Kirschner's works are titled according to the day on which they were begun) for two or three cellos, which was then multitrack recorded by Gross (a founding member of Talea Ensemble). Gross' contribution towards the final work is substantial. Besides the challenge of coordinating three layers of essentially atemporal music, it was he who suggested adding vibrato to his playing – a decision Kirschner initially resisted, but which he came to embrace as the final step that birthed the music into the physical world.

The two essays by Kirschner and Branciforte describe the composition, transcription and recording processes in detail – the challenges of rendering Kirschner's non-metrical rhythms in legible notation, the emergence and treatment of unintended digital artefacts, the transformational impact of an acoustic instrument on a digitally conceived concept and the composer's conflicting sensations of loss and surprise that are bound up with all this. These parts of the text are particularly revealing: digital to acoustic transcription is a common technique today (that dualistic tactile space again), used

by composers from Ablinger to Alessandrini, but rarely have I seen its practical working-out explained quite so clearly.

The music itself follows Kirschner's recent compositional practice of stretching, transposing and layering loops of melodic material based on sets of four adjacent semitones. Once he has generated a lot of material this way, he auditions and edits his way towards the final music. 'Think of the material that's come out of your system as a piece of wood to be carved,' he writes. 'You have to follow the wood, to find the traits latent within in, rather than impose your own.'<sup>1</sup> In this way, *three cellos* is essentially a collection of ten short fugues, all on the same subject but each with different characters based on the different harmonic and temporal parameters imposed from the start. There's an early-twentieth-century air to the result that is unexpected but not unwelcome. I found myself thinking of Schoenberg but without the expressionistic anxiety. But, then, Kirschner is writing for an age in which it is not necessary to justify this or that technical decision, merely to explore it for what it is. In that respect, it looks back further still, to Bach, or even Tye. It is somewhat severe music, but endlessly engaging nevertheless.

In fact, I enjoyed this on every level: it's a great idea immaculately realised, and a perfect encapsulation of greyfade's founding ethos. The second FOLIO release, Taylor Deupree's *sti.ll* – another reimagining of an electronic work for acoustic instruments – was issued as I was preparing this review. I look forward to hearing, seeing and feeling how the series develops.

Tim Rutherford-Johnson

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Martin Arnold, *Flax* (for Philip Thomas, 2021). Kerry Yong. another timbre, at221.

Martin Arnold's album *Flax* is a sparse 80-minute piano monologue. Performed by Kerry Yong and recorded by Simon Reynell of the record label *another timbre*, the piece was premiered and documented at the University of Huddersfield in October 2022. My advice: listen to *Flax* with a friend, for the conversation that the music will spark, and the mutual accountability to finish listening to the album in its entirety.

<sup>1</sup> In its balance of automation and editing, Kirschner's practice resembles that of the British composer Richard Emsley; see my article in *Tempo* 76, no. 302 (October 2022).