

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

GROUP INNOVATION

Liam Cagney examines the different approaches of composers and ensembles in championing new musical explorations



The Australian Elision Ensemble push instrumental boundaries in search of visceral musical experiences

Discussions of music since 1900 tend to be too composer-centric. Recently musicologists have pushed back against this tendency and sought to give due credit to the musicians and institutions. This Collector looks at trends in recent music through some of today's top ensembles.

Cologne-based **Ensemble Musikfabrik** has a refreshingly unashamed focus on innovation. 'Fall' collects three works based on falling. Ferneyhough's *La chute d'Icare* (previously recorded by Elision – Kairos, 7/10) is inspired by Bruegel's famous painting, which inspired Auden's famous poem. The music begins as an ultra-complex, texturally dense polyphony and ever so gradually thins out to reveal instrumental filigree. Musikfabrik's performance is wonderfully stylish, and Carl Rosman's virtuosity on clarinet – trills, multiphonics, registral jumps – is mind-boggling (though given he is also the soloist on the Kairos recording, it might have been interesting to hear a new take). From the sublime to

the ridiculous: Stephan Winkler's *Von der Gewissensnot der Insekten* ('On the moral dilemma of the insects') concerns a drunk poet falling from a fourth floor window while singing Mozart (Winkler adapts a poem by Traugott Neimann). *Von der Gewissensnot* derives musical material from a phonetic reading of the story. Over insect-like percussion scrapes, drunken woozy wind lines and brass punches are enacted with aplomb. Closing the disc, Oscar Bettison's *Livre des Sauvages* (2012) is a remarkable work. Based on a bizarre hoax manuscript which, in the 19th century, a French Abbé put forward as a sort of American Rosetta Stone, Bettison's three-movement work updates Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* for the present day: thrilling, wry, alternately rhythmically driven and sedate, and vividly performed. As a bonus, the CD booklet folds out into a poster of a Gerhard Richter abstract painting.

Champion of the so-called New Complexity, the Australian **Elision Ensemble** has for three decades

challenged the boundaries of what's playable, working closely with composers such as Liza Lim and Richard Barrett. Written for Tristram Williams, Lim's *Roda – The Living Circle* for trumpet solo alternates declamatory rasp, muted noise and mellifluous lyricism to create a compelling soliloquy. Over its half-hour duration, Barrett's *world-line* explores lap steel guitar against different combinations of piccolo trumpet/quartertone flugelhorn, percussion and electronics. As ever with Barrett, the results are at different times violent, delirious and gentle, but always rich. Lap steel soloist Daryl Buckley plays fearlessly, as he does on Siemens Award-winner Timothy McCormack's *subsidence* for four-hand slide guitar, wherein the amplified instrument is as a stethoscope revealing the microsonorities hiding within ostensible noise. Throughout the disc, Elision's prodigious virtuosity pushes beyond itself to what lies on the other side: queer, strange, insatiable vitality.

Dither are an electric guitar quartet based in New York City. Their third album, 'Potential Differences', collects 12 pieces, most of them from the past 15 years and attesting to how younger composers, weaned on alternative rock and electronica as well as classical styles, are melding these influences. Many of these pieces have an admirable clarity that, as well as attesting to Dither's fine playing, one can't but link in stylistic character to the positive influence of experimental rock. Gyan Riley's *The Tar of Gyu* nods to 1970s rock in its harmonised lines. Eve Beglarian's *The Garden of Cyrus* uses repeated staccato pulses to generate a coasting polyphony. The centrepiece is Jascha Narveson's *Ones* in four movements ('The Wah One', 'The Driving One') – no dry study but a wide-ranging workout bubbling with ideas. As a closer, Dither realise James Tenney's *Swell Piece* (1967) with e-bow sustained tones, lush and beautiful. Dither's performances are full of personality, their 'chops' impeccable.

Another electric guitar quartet, Sweden's **Krock**, commissioned one of the most affecting Irish works of recent years. Seán Clancy's quartet *Forty-Five Minutes of Music on the Subject of Football* is modelled on a signal moment in Irish cultural memory: the first half of the match between the Republic of Ireland and Italy at the 1994 World Cup in the USA. Clancy maps the game's events (who has the ball at a given time, Ray Houghton's goal, etc) on to the musical material and time scheme. Performed with pathos by Krock, the result