

FEVER

Five Songs from a Percussionist

"Listen, this is for you" [hurdy-gurdy, 2 small bowed Korean gongs, 1 small bowed Japanese temple bell, voice] (2000)

"Listen, this is for You" for a speaking and laughing hurdy-gurdy player is dedicated to Malcolm Goldstein, the unlikely Vermont and Quebec sage of scratchy fiddle visions and sub-continental indigenous maelstroms of autochthonous populations of the planet, spreading the Hopi prophecies of wrong livelihood like latter-day mene mene tekels all over the industrial horizons, where smokestacks line up like repeated stabs, malevolently aimed at the heart of Mother Earth and our holy sustenance.

Matthias Kaul, sorcerer of auditory benevolence, sends this piece as good medicine for Malcolm Goldstein, in analogy with the intercession of Christianity.

The entrance is softly unexpected, as Kaul speaks directly to the dedicatee, getting his attention by pronouncing: "Listen, this is for you!", after which follows a series of examples of different ways of conjuring up the spirits out of the hurdy-gurdy, one short example after the other separated by Kaul's laconic "and.", adding up to seven styles of hurdy-gurdy-charming. Kaul got the idea for the "ands" from Jack Bruce's old album "Songs for a Tailor", where Bruce uses the same method in a piece called "To Isengard", in a text by Pete Brown.

Eventually a story written by the American Indian child Doreen Day rises out of the music; a tale about a drum told from the perspective of the drum itself; again a shamanistic gesture!

Kaul's music moves in a thin, persistent, jagged line; a merciless early morn with itchy eyes and stiff joints and bread crumbs on the table: the whining and squeaking of the hurdy-gurdy approaching like a Hungarian ox-cart across the puszta! On the other end of the Atlantic Ocean: Malcolm Goldstein holding his fiddle as a crozier, chuckling at this good medicine; a silver thread across the waters and tickling tympanic membranes - a Chagall painting!

Suddenly a crack opens in matter; a glacier crevasse shoots lightning-fast across the treacherous surface, having one and all scramble for salvation - and a 3'36" furious forced thoughts start banging in fierce claustrophobia on the hurdy-gurdy, preparing for a conversation which obviously is going on in the confinement of a skull, the right cerebral hemisphere addressing the left one in the manner described in Julian Jaynes' "The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind", which convincingly explains the origin of God-thought and hallucinations, and Matthias Kaul decisively conveys the feeling of hallucinatory, swaying voice towers, like dancing pillars of whirlwinds across West Texan expanses in the devastating heat; the hurdy-gurdy flowering in a meandering mimicry of Goldsteinean fiddling, evoking reminiscences of the violinist's early vinyls: "Soundings" and "Vision Soundings"; the piece "from Center of Rainbow, Sounding" attaching a motto from an Eskimo vision event: "Go to a lonely place and rub a stone in a circle on a rock for hours and days on end."

Kaul and Goldstein are kindred spirits who have collaborated very successfully, and I can feel good medicine flowing back and forth between the two in these scratchy, shamanistic threads of gluey *Viscária Vulgáris* stems sprouting magically out of Kaul's hurdy-gurdy, wizardly set in vibrant motion, as much by his spiritual, concentrated intent as with the physical artisanship of the human-bodied musician of this material world.

The final minutes descend into the wheezing and buzzing of alien insect domains, deep down in secret entomologic worlds, and the final crackling seconds of the work wind down in a flour-mill, as age and amnesia closes the lids of rock-consciousness on the mill-stone, which comes to a halt in the dormant rest of its own heavy weight.

"Amadeu Antonio Kiowa"(2000) [snare drum, frame drum, voice, superball on frame drum, Tibetan temple bell, kalimba from the Shona people of Zimbabwe, a homemade Brazilian bowed cuica, a Tanzanian lute, Japanese temple bells, a tabla from South India, a bowed gopichand from India, a mouth-bow from the Shona people of Zimbabwe]

The Angolan worker and immigrant Amadeu Antonio Kiowa was murdered on the night of 24th - 25th November 1990 by fifty Nazi skinheads as three policemen watched from a distance without taking due action. He was the first fatally wounded victim of racist violence in Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Matthias Kaul does not consider his piece political in a general sense, but his motivation for the concept of the work has been a political one; a moral one, an empathic one, an altruistic one, and also an antipode to the music of Nazi bands, which heats the blood of potentially racially aggressive youths. Kaul attributes metamorphic properties to the piece that bears the murdered Angolan's name.

The proceeds of the piece are pledged to the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Berlin, which has been established with the purpose of assisting the victims of xenophobic and neo-Nazi terror. Visit the foundation's website at www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de. The Amadeu concept has been sent to all percussionists that the composer is aware of in Germany, and several performers are playing it for the benefit of the foundation. At occasions several percussionists have performed different versions of the piece at the same concert.

The composer's score and performance instructions are detailed and specific, albeit with a good measure of inherent freedom of choice for the interpreters, in this way resembling some of the creative ideas of Karlheinz Stockhausen. The piece is to commence with "at least" 50 very hard and loud beats on a snare drum or a military drum (MM. 112); the "at least" allowing for some interpretational freedom, until initially soft sounds of unspecified ethnic instruments are to be introduced, eventually to influence the noise of the snare strings, causing them to produce a continuous buzzing, without any discernable rhythmic properties or breaks. (The recording on this CD extends 98 beats before the ethnic sounds arise). Should a break appear, the process has to start from scratch again with the hard and loud beats, but restricted to a recurrence of less than 50 beats. All sounds emerging in the ethnic instruments are derived from the sound and rhythm of the name Amadeu Antonio Kiowa. Kaul also states that the length of a performance and its general character are up to the performers. Kaul gives a hint of his performing ideas, offering the performers some creative possibilities: "The rhythm of the name (11 beats) could be counter-pointed with the rhythm of the consonants, and from the vowels you can find overtone melodies. It is possible to play the snare drum with a superball or sticks to achieve the continuous buzzing, but in the course of the piece one has to find communicating vibrations or resonance between the ethnic instruments and the military drum. A poli-tempo version is possible; MM. 112 against . One can use a pedal for the initial beats to have the hands free for a roll."

A crazed and Pinocchio-jerky crowd of orderly sleepwalkers with skulls filled with angry death appears suddenly as it rounds a corner and enters the town square. The hysterical beating on the snare drum reveals an almost sexual preoccupation with the ethnic cleansing of the environment, like a person afflicted with a psychiatric disorder that makes him wash his hands over and over until he bleeds into the washbowl - and a lurking image of Herr Hitler hovers over the mechanically advancing herd, as I recall the fascinating accounts of Brigitte Hamann's book "Hitler's Vienna; a Dictator's Apprenticeship" (1999), which has got to be the most detailed and in depth investigation into the dictator's early years and the society that nourished him.

The soft and rounded, almost fondling sounds of the ethnic instrument rise in stark contrast to the hysterical beating of the locked minds of the racist mob, opening up a much greater space, and I can feel the moist heat of African forests rising towards me, as I sense a whole continent of dark figures, strong bonds of village solidarities and exotic fragrances of spices in market places ringing with the lively colors of tribal cloths.

The bursts of ethnicity commence in a vision of hard-trekking northern rock deserts below the glaciers of the autochthonous Saami territory of Sapmi, spread out across the northernmost districts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, oblivious of state borders, in a concept of a nation not unlike the Kurdish situation where the conceptual nation of Kurdistan covers an area where Armenia, Turkey, Iraq and Iran connect. Only the Palestinians are lonelier.

A soft vocal humming paints a meek purplish color of inward thoughts along the progression of musical events, and as the ethnicity increases, a whole menagerie of sounds develops. A distinct, metallic plucking reminds me of Ghana lamellaphones in a misty, meditative soundscape, as the music blends out in the purity of line and dots; extended linear sounds and sprays of timbrally colored dots, appearing with sparse irregularity, like spontaneous silvery precipitation out of the ether. The way thoughts rise out of the unconscious and color our worlds in archetypical nuances.

The lamellaphone pluckings appear in a music box guise, tenderly tingling, opening up a scenery of a small child's room in late 19th Century Central Europe; the little child sitting cross-legged on the floor in the security and warmth of her bourgeoisie home in the absentmindedness of complete concentration on the tones rising out of the magic box, as time passes on beyond her timeless sphere of total attention, in the ageing world outside, in snow-covered streets and mid-winter town squares.

The music is gradually growing more inward, resembling Japanese koto playing, the way the tones are interspersed; the pauses full of mental build-up, like in the roaring silence of a raked rock garden. and the wheezing of my coffee pot on the stove blends in so perfectly with this high altitude Japanese morning mist that I at first think it's part of the recording!

Shrill, high pitches, like the jingle-jangle of a Bardo Thödol Tambourine Man in between lives, carry thoughts and visions in grinding friction through Tibetan mountain passes, morning sunlight setting snowy summits ablaze while prayer streamers flap hard in the chilly wind.

The sounds of silence are broken by a sudden, evoking hand drum, fast and intense, in the shaman traditions of the North American Indian medicine man or the Saami noai'di, until the character of the drumming shifts a little, revealing its kinship with the tabla playing of India, again opening up new visions, saturated with sandal wood incense and the secret whispers of holy bearded men with long, tangled hair along the Ganges in Varanasi. until the properties of the drumming shifts again, descending me on a Brazilian carnival procession, moving feverishly through crowded streets in a meaty, erotic catharsis of temporarily lifted rules, regulations and taboos.

Alien glissandi move like pre-lingual, mime-like efforts of communication, in helpless gestures of unintelligible speech, casting garlands of steel-springy morphemes all around our perception, until a short intermission of Goldsteinean scratchings demonstrate the practicality of friction, before the persistent glissandi again arise, passing like speeding motor-bikes in slashing Doppler effects across the deserts.

As a soaring, misty grayness lays the foundation for what is to come, watery, bulging, bubbling sounds, resembling a Jew's harp and the varying resonance of the oral cavity of the performer, are introduced, only to recede into rich metallic timbres of gamelan characteristics, prying open the jungles of Indonesia, where this magic globetrotter composition winds down into the golden silence of temples in the wilderness.

"Bachmann" [a glass harp (Glasharfe), voice] (1991)

The intense vulnerability of shrill glass, like in Meredith Monk's "Our Lady of Late", Annea Lockwood's "Glass World" or Denis Dufour's "Bocalises" shine in eerie transparency in Matthias Kaul's "Bachmann", which was conceived as a sound portrait of poet Ingeborg Bachmann. Malcolm Goldstein's "Sounding the Fragility of Line" also comes to mind, even though the fiddler's fragility is glassless.

The simultaneous ringing of more than one glass bends and pries the high pitches in and out of phase, in treacherous audio, bordering on insanity as it inches its way through all the little cracks and imperfections of existence; the high tension ring seeping through tiny abrasions of the skin, entering your anatomy directly, with no unnecessary detour through your auditory meatuses.

The wavy garlands of intrusive shrills get more complex, shiny and gleaming with innumerable overtones in glistening, over-powering timbres.

Layer upon layer of glass glide in and out above and beneath each other, like thin sheets of ice, semi-transparent, letting light of day through, and you detect shadowy moving figures through the surfaces, shifting kaleidoscopically.

Mumbling vocals fumble through the icy layers, and after a gaping silence deeper, more distinct glass timbres arise, taking on the guise of pillars of air out of vibrating church organ pipes.

The magnificence of auditory art appears in full-fledged glass hallucinations of a Giacinto Scelsi string quartet, in a dense, wriggly, wrangling attack, while monkey-talk mixes with human mumbling.

A deep ring, welling forth in waves, press on your eardrums with a feeling similar to the sensation of traveling a fast train through a tunnel; the walls of the tunnel flashing by and the compressed air making you swallow hard to even out internal and external pressure.

The pitch gets higher and purer, or maybe all but the high pitches simply recede, as a beautiful, high shrill scratches your neck and skull in a fondling nose-tip hypnosis.

Mellower, hesitating low sounds of incredible palpability enter crypts and hidden catacombs, where the air is damp and cold and age-old thoughts are chained down in murky corners, helplessly out of existential context.

Incredibly, Kaul manages to call up a whole unidentifiable ensemble out of his Glasharfe; whether brass or strings or both is hard to determine, but it's even harder to understand how all these sounds arise out of glass only!

I recently read a book about the Saami people's many names for snow - about 300 all in all (Yngve Ryd: "Snö" [2001]) - and this part of Kaul's piece "Bachmann" sounds as if he is playing "njalle"; the thinnest possible ice layer on snow, almost impossible to see, but easily detectable with your fingertips. This is elusive, brittle, vulnerable ice music under the stars - and I readily see the northern lights in these nuances of glass or ice too; flaming curtains of electro-magnetic particles from the sun caught in the grip of the magnetic fields of the Earth.

Matthias Kaul's Glasharfe has lead me to the northern lights and an almost physical sense of the Universe; a cold breath of the dark void and its incomprehensible distances.

"Fever"(1999) [small organ pipe, microphones rubbed on drum skins, a castanet, drum skins beaten with a soft mallet, microphones attached to the wrists of the performer, a very big temple bell being rubbed, wooden sticks played on the frames of the drums, long rolls on a frame drum, very big bass drums, lions' roars]

Starting in a Stockhausenesque "Telemusik" vein, with a high pitch, slightly wobbly, a sound similar to that caused by a pick-up needle bouncing time and again in the innermost revolution of a vinyl groove is introduced, like in Kent Tankred's recording of the collected final revolutions of several LPs on his CD "Ordinary Things". The "Telemusik" whining is gradually taking on the sonic appearance of a coffee pot steam whistle of the 1960s, when coffee - in Scandinavia at least - wasn't brewed, but boiled.

It is very fitting to get these associations to vinyls and 1960s household paraphernalia, since the title of this piece in part is referring to Elvis Presley and his expressive eroticisms.

Kaul says that the first music he recalls hearing was Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Little Richard and so forth, which his elder brother behind the wall played on the radio.

A castanet provides a ticking metronome sound (actually referring to Presley's snapping of his fingers in his "Fever"!) beating the passage of time, and the whistle continues, like a shrill drone, or like the rope of a tightrope walker through the soundscape. and an extremely deep, loudspeaker-threatening bass fills the room in a buoyant compression, setting windows and tympanic membranes in infra vibration.

A strange property of these percussion combinations is their estrangement from traditional percussion sounds, opening up worlds of non-percussive impressions of electroacoustic music or ensemble chamber music etcetera, revealing Kaul's brilliant musical imagination and expertise artisanship, in which he takes his instruments and have them sort of turn inside out, revealing their hidden and hitherto unknown possibilities!

A live performance of "Fever" is a strange show, and difficult to play, since the performer has to have three energy streams going simultaneously through his body; the drum part, the high whistle with an even breath and the metronome-like castanet with one foot.

Short, sharp ticks are added, combining with the continuous castanet beat, as Kaul hits the rims of drums with a stick, cutting the fluency into small bits of contoured information which phase in and out minimalistically, stretching space and time and our perception in elasticity and tension, like a child using rubber bands and pencils, or like the vulnerable but weighty sight of a big soap bubble shaking and wobbling in the wind as it drifts towards its assured popping destruction!

The soundscape is one of spruce needles in an early morn; the continuous whistle a streak of the rising sun in a winter's forest.

The rhythm acquires more body as a bigger drum is adopted. A roll on a frame drum lets a tubular kind of audio loose, sounding like Phonia Domestica wizard Sune Karlsson playing a vacuum cleaner hose. It's soft, rounded, fast; a rhythm that is transformed into pitch.

The roar and thunder of mighty bass drums bring in some severe weather - and the organ pipe coffee pot whistle and the metronome castanet keep on keeping on throughout all this!

The might of the bass drums resemble the holy roll of Sven-David Sandström's piece "Drums", which extends thunderous dark clouds eternally.

"Listen, this is for you" (II) (2001) [triangles on long wires led through hollow styrofoam balls, bass drum, hurdy-gurdy, a small wood block, a child's toy made out of a small tin can with four strings inside and a handle on the outside, overtone vocals, metal wires of a bowed toy piano, an electric tooth brush pressed against a bass drum skin, mouth organ, John Lennon singing "Oh Yoko" (!) backwards and slowed-down, a kanjira, 2 gopichands]

Kaul conceived this innovative music in the atmosphere of texts written by Japanese author Yoko Taweda, and the piece is dedicated to her with much affection. She has resided in Hamburg more than two decades, and masters German as well as Japanese, but throughout her exile she has retained her Japanese eyes of calligraphic precision of observation, making her writings unique in their close and surprising scrutiny of our Western world, in the rare style of an intuitive scientist - and I dare say she treats everyday European events like Matthias Kaul treats his instruments, turning them around and inside out, having them give off expressions and reveal properties hitherto unknown. so in this aspect Taweda and Kaul are soul-mates!

Among the numerous sources of sound applied by Matthias Kaul is a specially

constructed set of triangles hanging from long wires running through styrofoam spheres cut in half, for the benefit of amplification of the brittle vibration of the triangles.

Inspired by a recent book by Yoko Taweda - "Opium for Ovid" - Kaul aimed at achieving a purely acoustical equivalent to the effects of drugs like opium, and he admits that he really did get addicted to the endless singing of the triangles, which he at times kept playing for hours.

Another austere and elusive addiction may well arise out of the hurdy-gurdy, which in this case is treated in a manner that lets the wheel just barely touch the strings, resulting in an array of overtones shining like starlight across midwinter snow. Kaul takes my appreciation of his ingenuity even a step further with pressing an electric toothbrush against a bass skin drum while executing Tuvianian or Mongolian khoomei singing!

A soft explosion, as if dreamt in the relative and theoretical safety of your sleep, immediately gains a hinky timbre, as the gates of past and future creak open, revealing no answers, but only more questions. The little tin can toy is a magician's vision-grinder with a coffee scent. Matthias Kaul turns its star-crushing handle, and worlds far beyond recognition are ground down to zero, as a result of the non-local connections of space and its elementary particles (Fritjof Capra: "The Tao of Physics").

Wild-eyed scarecrows of intra-lives domains shriek at you in trembling shrills as worlds waste away in a distant tin can obscurity.

Our bodies feel like sarcasms or bitter jokes across the surface of this sphere, as khoomei singing and toothbrush pressure merge in an alliance of crowding thoughts inside a sudden breakdown into hebephrenic schizophrenia.

A zigzagging crack opens in a destitute mind, from above to below, sounding just like a thunder zipper being unzipped through the ominous, dark cloudscape.

A Navajo clan is gathering around the beat of a mighty drum, peyote ravaging collective visions. or maybe I just perceive the comfortable engine of a fisherman's vessel passing through the Baltic archipelago, the diesel fumes rising, blowing downwind. but then, as I detect the harmonica, joyously but inwardly blown, I realize I'm in Tove Jansson's Finnish Moomin Valley world of tales, and I hear Snufkin returning from his wanderings in spring! He's the one playing the harmonica as he approaches through the Moomin Valley! Ah; I recognize this peculiar mixture of safe, cozy hominess and bohemian and adventurous oddity! Certainly Matthias Kaul fits in well with Moominpapa, Moominmama, the Moomintroll, Sniff, Snufkin, The Hemulen, The Snork Maiden, The Fillyjonk, self-assured Little My and the electrifying Hattifatteners!

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