



Ellen Fullman

**Ellen Fullman/The Hilliard Ensemble/
Niils Henrik Asheim**

Tou Scene, Stavanger, Norway
Accustomed as they are to performing in cathedrals and venerable classical concert halls, The Hilliard Ensemble were a tad confused once dropped outside Stavanger's Tou Scene on a Sunday afternoon. The graffitied former brewery-turned-art centre, located outside the compact city centre, contains a warren of dank cathedral-like industrial spaces which, it turned out, provided a perfect resonance for these Early Music specialists. They performed the world premiere of a new piece (written by this year's International Chamber Music Festival resident composer Niils Henrik Asheim), *The Bloom Is Not A Bloom*, based on a mystical and romantic ninth century Chinese poem. The expressive, multiphonic piece was performed in silhouette behind a white drape, adding to the already crepuscular atmosphere in the darkened building.

The first part of the afternoon was a nomadic experience. The audience, instructed to follow the sound, shuffled around as silently as possible, encountering rather than statically observing the scattered performances. Øystein Birkeland performed a beautiful solo cello piece (again by Asheim) closely followed by improvisations, in a different room, by Hans-Kristian Kjos Sørensen on percussion. Using a forehead-mounted miner's lamp, Sørensen

cut a dramatic figure in the pitch black room. A mighty, rumbling drone arose from simply rubbing his thumb on a bass drum skin; an Aladdin summoning theophanous genies. The Hilliards followed, this time in full view. Suited and ranged side by side, they resembled Kraftwerk impersonators performing a graceful rendition of Pérotin's 12th century chant, *Viderunt Omnes*.

The sit-down part of this concert had Ellen Fullman perform a solo piece on her Long String Instrument – a giant fretboard of 2017-metre tuned strings stretched across a narrow room, and fastened to resonant wooden boxes on either side. The walkway between the two groups of strings allowed the composer, hands slathered in resin, to traverse up and down the space, stroking the strings lengthways, creating a suspended, harmonic drone. Positioned on the floor, Fullman's graphic scores – containing abstract glyphs and infinity symbols, and scribbled memos such as "lift off", "wiper blade rotation", "swim around", "cliche masquerade", "clouds", and at the end, simply "POOF!" – were intriguing, mysterious indications of her methods. Although produced acoustically, the sound was intensely dense, loud and orchestral. An improvisation between Fullman and Asheim on organ followed, Asheim's high pitched, flickering tones dancing around Fullman's full-bodied drone giving the performance a cheery lift off as it wound down.

Anne Hilde Neset



Pentangle

Pentangle

Lyceum Theatre, London, UK
When Pentangle formed in early 1967, the group members were already established in their own fields: there were the two hotshot 'baroque folk' guitarists, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn; pure-toned traditional singer Jacqui McShee; and a formidable rhythm section of double bass player Danny Thompson and Terry Cox, who had been a fixture at Ronnie Scott's. Their original modus operandi was simple in that no one was to tell anyone else what to play. What emerged was a groundbreaking hybrid of jazz, folk, blues and Early Music. Now, four decades later, this reformation was not to be a cosy, nostalgic reminder of past glories. According to Thompson, it was to allow them to "get stuck in" to the music once more.

Tonight it took the group a couple of songs to get really stuck in, but thereafter they played with a dazzling, spontaneous facility. McShee actually sounds better now, her voice acquiring a greater depth and character through the years, while still able to reach the top notes. The all-acoustic guitar interplay between Jansch and Renbourn – the former's complex, articulated picking with its characteristic snap, and the latter's counterpoint chordings and silvery lead lines – was glorious throughout. When they first cut loose it was breathtaking.

For a supposed folk-jazz group, and with some bona fide jazzers on board, Pentangle remain remarkably unjazzy – even on a cover

of Charles Mingus's "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat". In fact, they seem to refer to the inner stresses of the tune rather than properly swinging. Similarly, they play to the rhythm of the vocals on the traditional material, mercifully bypassing the clumping beats that have so bedevilled folk rock.

Pentangle never wholly convinced when attempting Country music, but a highlight tonight was "The House Carpenter", prior to which Renbourn demonstrated the only effects of ageing on these sixtiesomethings, by taking a while to lower his considerable frame to the floor. Once there he was handed a sitar on which he duetted with Jansch's banjo for the group's audacious reworking of the Appalachian tune. Remaining seated until the break between sets, he continued playing the instrument on "Cruel Sister" – with Jansch switching back to guitar. Although Pentangle have been criticised for being cerebral at times, it is actually one of their strengths. This chilling tale of fratricide, with Cox's subtle patterns played with beaters, has a regal, stately quality to it, as has the exquisite lament "Once I Had A Sweetheart". In a similar vein, "Hunting Song", with Cox on glockenspiel, was expanded to include a four-voice chorale.

Seeing Pentangle play live, it was hard to think of any of the myriad groups they have influenced getting close to their level of empathy. Even now their near telepathic and remarkably ego-free flow sounds quite unlike anything else.

Mike Barnes

Nikolaj Lund (Fullman); Anais Butt (Pentangle)