

bright, chiming tones of the chahartar lute, a version of the Persian tar, lead to a husky 'voice down a flute' piece by a nomad on a pilgrimage to a Sufi shrine. The late Zainab Hairawi, Herat's top woman singer, teaches Doubleday a lullaby for her as yet unborn child. And singer Mohammed Sadeq revels in his nickname Bolbol-e Hairawi, the Herat Nightingale, as he launches into bird imitations between verses of a Herati love song.

Instrumental content of this CD is mainly lutes and drums, and there are no accordions at all, just a harmonium on one track. Hidden away from the Taliban authorities, that Kabul accordian has its own story, which unfolds long after these recordings were made.

**VARIOUS
ZEITENWECHSEL:
35 JAHRE BERLINER
KÜNSTLERPROGRAMM**
DAAD ED. RZ PARALLELE 20001 2XCD
BY TOM PERCHARD

Every year, the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst's Artists In Berlin programme brings to the German capital young musicians, artists and writers. Celebrating the programme's 35th anniversary, this double CD features music by composers and performers who have worked under the scheme.

The first disc features a 1991 performance of John Cage's *Sonatas And Interludes* by the pianist Mario Bertoncini. The hour-long piece, completed in 1948, formed Cage's fullest single exploration of the prepared piano. The preparations — household objects placed under the piano's strings — often produce beautiful, gamelan-type sonorities, and the pianist's accompanying sleeve-note goes into detail about the inconsistency, variation and chance that such preparations produce. Bertoncini also rhapsodises about the freedoms and radical aesthetic departures to which such indeterminacy must lead — yet he still situates Cage in the tradition of the Romantic genius, where the composer is a "master" and pieces "pour forth out of his pen". This point isn't just academic. The same problematic appreciation of Cage's legacy forms Bertoncini's playing of *Sonatas And Interludes*, an interpretation trapped in the expressive rhetoric of Romanticism. Bertoncini's rubato-laden phraseology turns each strain of music into a caricature of itself.

The second disc contains music by six different composers, all of whom have been associated with the Berlin programme over the last 15 years. By far the most satisfying piece here is Ellen Fullman's *Transmission Particle 1*, a ten minute stretch of sound for the American composer's homemade 'long string instrument' and Eliza Slavet's oboe. Fullman's instrument apparently fills a room, and the sound it makes is like a massive, metallic hurdy-gurdy. The richness of the overtones it produces allows notes and chords to roll into each other almost imperceptibly, while Slavet's skilfully controlled multiphonics bob in and out of the texture. The music is placid, but it floats forwards, sometimes recalling an ethereal soundworld of Renaissance viols and cornetts.

Much of the rest of the CD is rather less accomplished. The English born, American based composer Fast Forward contributes two pieces, one of his own and one in collaboration with the

veteran Japanese improviser/composer Takehisa Kosugi, founder of Taj Mahal Travellers. Their duo piece, *Parabola*, is a self-conscious 12 minute dialogue between Fast Forward's percussion and Kosugi's violin and electronics. Of the several electronic pieces on the CD, Mario Verandi's *Plastic Water* is the most enjoyable. The title is a pun of sorts — the piece's soundscape is a water bottle, and the array of material that Verandi derives from his recordings moves between the plastic and something more fluid and abstract.

Olga Neuwirth's profile is at last rising outside of mainland Europe. One of her earlier pieces, 1996's *Pallas/Construction*, is featured here. Taking as its starting point a complex of scientific laws from Einstein, Hawking and Heisenberg, Neuwirth's compositional strategies mimic some of these physicists' theories of time and space. To reflect her spatial concern, Neuwirth positions three percussion set-ups around the performance space, processing the percussionists, music and relaying it from speakers placed in the balconies. An enormous fabric of electronics hums underneath the percussion's shimmering and combustible material, but Neuwirth's process — moving towards infinity rather than conclusion — works against any narrative drama. Nor is the piece's sound interesting enough to continually involve over its 27 minutes, particularly with a recording is as flattened and compacted as this one.

**IANNIS XENAKIS
MUSIQUE ELECTRO-
ACOUSTIQUE**
FRACTAL 015 CD
BY MATT FFYTCHÉ

This rather general title conceals two pieces from the 80s, both using the UPIC computer system developed by Xenakis, which turns drawings into compositions. As Xenakis comments, it "can be used by composers, children... and even people who know neither about music nor computers". Unfortunately, none of the graphic pages is given.

The longer of the two, *Pour La Paix* (1981), centres on texts written by Françoise Xenakis, the composer's wife. Her disjointed hallucinatory diary or symbolist memoir concerns a soldier's search for a childhood friend in an unnamed war zone. Twinning intimacy with Goya-style horror, a woman washes her dead child and a bayoneted man recollects a nighttime outing to a lake. The text is narrated conversationally in French by four voices, including the author's, with occasional UPIC interjections which sound markedly futuristic by contrast. Whining electronic tracers, coarse electronic doodles and scrawling spiderlines of sound bundle into sudden blots. At set intervals the text breaks off to allow for a series of musical interludes in which an eerie, ethereal choir of eight mixed voices rises, falls and smears around, like the wind blowing through a cracked head. The result is a strangely divided drama in which the music — hyper-gestural, sometimes cartoon-like — cannot fit the wholly unmannered rendition of the words, which might as well be recalling a childhood holiday. Perhaps everything the voice rejects in its intimacy returns as a sonic repressed? A musical coda sounding like a mixture of air raid sirens or screaming planes slowly works up into a crescendo that provokes a final giddy intensity from the choir's tragic

chorus. But still I felt my attention splitting.

Voyage Absolu Des Unari Vers Anromède (1989), commissioned for the inauguration of an international exposition of paper kites by the director of the Goethe Institute in Japan, splices the childlike with a galactic immensity. Take-off whooshes and hollow swirls of filtered noise mix with a queasy slithering and zooming of grey tones. Space-time is dipping and diving as if someone was slowly kneading and stretching it like gum, before coagulating into a freezing dust cloud. Isolated whirrs sound like accelerating forcefields, but keep the toy-like, tiny quality of synthetically produced tones. Is that the combined fleet of Thunderbirds or the rusted strings of an abandoned piano in a wind tunnel? I imagine children with their kites running screaming out of the Goethe institute.

**XINLISUPREME
TOMORROW NEVER COMES**
FAT CAT SPLINTER SERIES FATSP03 CD
BY JOHN MULVEY

When The Jesus And Mary Chain released their debut album *Psychocandy* in 1985, they hinted at a future where the mainstream could be defiled and distorted, tested to its extremes but still just about hold its shape. For all its promise, however, the obliteration of pop by noise never quite happened. Within a few years, The Mary Chain had reneged on their own deal and peeled back the feedback, leaving My Bloody Valentine as the one prominent group precariously balanced between order and chaos.

The influence of these two groups on the independent sector was sizeable, of course, but for the most part their disciples had an oddly genteel take on noise. Latest in a long line are Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, who have been feted for their utterly emasculated take on the formula. They've got the twisted iconographic posturing, but none of the wayward, oceanic depth. In the context of that group's disheartening success, the emergence of Xiniisupreme is all the more gratifying. Yasumi Okano and Takayuki Shouji come from Oita in southwest Japan and have, on this exceptional debut album, taken The Mary Chain's template back to a more extreme place.

Parts of *Tomorrow Never Comes* are reminiscent of Merzbow planting a melodic timebomb at the heart of his noisefields. It's hardly sophisticated music: these juxtapositions of wild guitar/effects clashes, smudged vocals and machine beats have far more of a punk imperative than an avant garde one. But what makes Xiniisupreme's music truly exciting is the sense that something extraordinary is being made in an unfettered and unpretentious way. And unpredictable. Just when you're becoming accustomed to the overloaded machinery and rough, keening guitar textures, they'll suddenly start hammering a piano on "Under A Clown" or turn the pedals down to reveal the flickering sequenced meditation of "Amarylilis".

This is fearlessly intense music. In the clangorous dirge anthems of "All You Need Is Love Was Not True" (what a magnificent title) and "Fatal Sisters Opened Umbrella", Okano and Shouji posit a possible escape route for alternative rock: one fed by rudimentary electronics and avant noise but with a grasp of conventional dynamics that, in such blasted surroundings, sounds positively innovative. □

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