

Hoodwink Duo & Kelley Sheehan, *new ears*. Carrier Records.

A beautiful, monstrous hybrid of flesh and machines, the album *new ears* stems from a collaborative partnership dedicated to curiosity, provocation and collective modes of making. Two substantial new works by composer Kelley Sheehan, together with the multifaceted Hoodwink Duo (Kevin Toksöz Fairbairn and Winnie Huang), arose from a residency at the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) in Troy, New York. Both works on the album are represented by audio as well as video media: a necessary format for music conjured by magical and material sleights-of-hand, and in which senses are magnified and perspectives disoriented.

The Transfer opens with wild timbral calls of what I imagine to be a herd of cyborg elephants. Amplified violin, augmented trombone and live electronics immediately harness the listener's attention by balancing unpredictability with precision. Delicate violin glissandi and the churning groans of the augmented trombone are framed by electronics brooding from a wavefield array. Charged static interrupts, an intense ringing in the ear. An insistent conversation of pitch extremities follows: frenetic, urgent, intensely guttural, voices on the precipice converging and dissolving. After several minutes of immersion in this deliciously brutal sound world, it calmly opens outward. In this spaciousness, new sounds ping from its outer reaches. The brassy trombone calls return, now fragmented and more delicate. The brittle grains of percussive scrapes, brushes and taps echolocate around the space, distorting

and intertwining with the roaring trombone and electronics into a restless, straining creature. At some point—so gradually that I didn't even know it had started—all of this decays, and we are left with a tender chime which sways for a long while until its energy scatters and it's no longer there.



The video footage reveals the decapitated bell of the trombone, overturned on a cymbal resting on a snare drum. Secured inside the bell is plastic tubing; the camera follows the length of the tube to Toksöz Fairbairn, whose breath activates this tube and its offshoots snaking into yet more ingenious sound-makers. A bird's-eye view presents the full extent of this magnificent creature, its tentacular tubes branching off towards scattered snares, cymbals and gongs whose sympathetic resonances Sheehan manipulates with live electronics. All three artists are entangled within these tubes and wires, encircled by a membrane of blinding fluorescent tubes like some sort of cellular organism. Huang, her violin and bow augmented with contact microphones, roves around the cell, probing and prodding sounds out of the limbs of this sprawling instrument. In both its audio and video

renderings, this complex and captivating convergence of sound renews my curiosity each time I return to it.

The second piece, and the title track, sustains the same vibrancy and unpredictability but its delicacy demands a shift in our listening and attentiveness. Here, Sheehan's 'speaker-microphones'—exposed speaker cones rewired to function as dynamic microphones—are activated with an assortment of objects, manifesting tactility into sound. Scraping, tapping and rubbing probe the infinities within tiny notches and points of contact. On first listen, it's hard to determine what object is creating each rustle and buzz, or how they caress the speaker cone. But it is clear that each object is carefully chosen, and the auditory exploration is guided by utmost focus, purpose and intention.

The mystery of these sounds' gestural origin is revealed in the video. Hoodwink Duo are seated facing each other across a table. A soundboard sits within easy reach. In front of each of them is a speaker-microphone: stout conical objects, bells pointing upwards and open, awaiting activation by each performer's collection of fabric, foam, metal tubes and drumsticks. Fabric swatches slowly swirl inside the speaker bell; more insistent squelches and churns seep from the grooves of a metal rod drawn against the lip of the bell. The twin speakers are connected by a taut twine, sometimes bowed like a violin. The videography gently shifts us between scales: overhead shots reveal the spare and orderly table set-up, while intimate close-ups of the duo's hands betray the acute focus of their musical conversation.

All these ephemeral sounds diffuse into a remarkably complex and encompassing sense of space. At times, it feels like there is a rustling coming from deep within my ear. Other times, it is as though there is a sculptor scraping and carving in the next room. I would very happily linger

here for much longer than the track runs, experiencing the whole world of gestures shifting and morphing around me.

Ihlara McIndoe

Xenia Pestova Bennett, Anne Lockwood: *The Piano Works*. Unsounds Records, 88U.

Annea Lockwood is known for setting pianos ablaze or leaving them to the elements. Some retain charred keys amid ashes and kindling; others house flora and fauna or have been left on beaches. These desiccated instruments are then subsequently used in performances and recordings. Consider them extremely prepared pianos. (Take that, John Cage.) Xenia Pestova Bennett is a longtime collaborator of Lockwood's, and has played a number of the composer's works for these beleaguered instruments. She adds to this collection with her latest release, plainly titled *Annea Lockwood: The Piano Works*. In the making of this record, no pianos were harmed—even though preparations and amplification are essential to their sonic characteristics.

Ear Walking Woman (1996) features a number of such preparations: coins, bubble wrap, wire insulation sheathing, rubber and wooden balls, stones, mallets, a bowl gong and a water glass. Lockwood inscribes the score 'for prepared piano and exploring pianist': each section prescribes particular arrangements of objects, but the performer is always encouraged to be led by their ears. (Hence the piece's title which, too, makes reference to Lockwood's