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Harmonic Space Orchestra

Sunday 24 November 2024
4pm, Huddersfield Town Hall

Harmonic Space Orchestra:

M.O. Abbott bass trombone

Ellen Arkbro trumpet

Judith Hamann cello

Jonathan Heilbron contrabass

Rebecca Lane quarter tone flutes

Thomas Nicholson viola

Michiko Ogawa bass clarinet

Lucy Railton cello

Elsie Hamilton (Australia, 1880–1965), arr. Rebecca Lane and Thomas Nicholson

Poor little human being. Little child of Time! (from *Sensa*)
(1917) 15'

“Two potential streams of sound, the one descending, the other ascending, born ever anew from each other, interweaving and working together.”

- *The Return of the Planetary Modes* (1923), Kathleen Schlesinger

Australian composer Elsie Hamilton's (1880-1965) incidental music for the play *Sensa* (composed in 1917; performed three times in London in 1919) is an early example of Hamilton bringing British musical archeologist Kathleen Schlesinger's (1862-1953) speculative music theory into practice. Schlesinger's system of 7 planetary modes, generated using the harmonic series in both its ascending and descending forms, attempted to trace the origin of the ancient greek modes in the undertone or subharmonic series.

In *Poor little human being. Little child of Time!* – a short chordal interlude from *Sensa* – we hear the particular “Ethos” or character

of the venus mode being systematically unfolded. After meeting in 1916, Hamilton and Schlesinger collaborated for over three decades, moving largely in international esoteric networks, sharing, training and educating professional musicians, amateurs and audiences in their radical “new language of music, infinitely rich in harmonic combinations, subtle, elastic and suggestive of illimitable possibilities.” © Rebecca Lane

James Tenney (USA, 1934–2006) interp. by Harmonic Space Orchestra

For Percussion Perhaps, Or...(night) (From Postal Pieces) (1971) 15'

Apparently, James Tenney (1934–2006) disliked writing letters. However, he did have a fondness and special ability for inventing concise, almost theorem-like musical ideas. He found an intersection of these two facts in the early 1970s through his *Postal Pieces* – just under a dozen musical concepts that fit on postcards written to friends. His postcard from 6 August 1971, *For Percussion Perhaps, Or....(night)*, written for composer Harold Budd is a restrained and poetic text score, compactly suggesting “very soft”, “very long”, “almost white”. Harmonic Space Orchestra’s reading is focused on texture and fleeting harmonic fusion, and seriously considers Tenney’s option of “Or....” in the title. © Thomas Nicholson

INTERVAL

Ellen Arkbö (Sweden, 1990)

Night and Day (2023) 25' **UK Premiere**

Composed in 2023 by Swedish composer and sound artist Ellen Arkbö, *Night and Day* is an extension of Arkbö’s previous work with sustained harmonic sound in minimalist just intonation. Moment by moment proceeding through shifting degrees of textural density and harmonic character, *Night and Day* suggests a listening which itself takes on the textures of tuning as it extends in space. Moving from large-scale chords to single-toned structures, and back again, the piece explores those dimensions of sound which challenge the conventional mapping of one/many to simplicity/complexity, simultaneously giving rise to and resting in a dynamic field of harmonicity.

Thomas Nicholson (Canada, 1995)

Minimal surface (2023) 20' **UK Premiere**

If you initiate a particular path in Harmonic Space for a group of musicians to follow, you might inspire certain formations of maximum harmonic coherence: fusion. In a similar way, if you connect a thin wire into any shape and dip it in soapy water to form a film, this surface will have the smallest possible area (and, in some sense, maximum coherence) for that given frame boundary; often the soap film is not a simple flat plane, taking surprising shapes. Just as the soap film surface tenses and contracts as you move it through the soapy solution, only to reveal its true coherence – the minimal surface – after it has fully emerged, harmonic sound

also passes through various degrees of coherence and non-coherence over the course of our collective search for fusion.
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