

the state of music

reviews by chris rice except as noted

2.2.2.

What Next/Nonsequitur has been a major player in experimental/art music for some time now, with a trio of recent releases helping to emphasize that position. Teiji Ito is best known for his soundtracks to films by pioneering filmmaker Maya Deren, chiefly her most famous film "Meshes of the Afternoon," but until this CD no recordings of his music have been available. Ito's music, as displayed in the three compositions included on *Meshes*, is inspired chiefly by the music of cultures from around the world, most notably music that is created to accompany theatre and dance, which, along with film, is also Ito's favorite way to compose. The compositions found on *Meshes* are primarily self-performed, which helps to add a deeply personal air to the proceedings. The soundtrack to "Meshes of the Afternoon," composed and recorded in 1959, is reminiscent of Japanese music, particularly gagaku, and evokes a similar wistful, disembodied mood with its quivering flute, meditative, droning vocals, cello & mouth organ and insistent percussion. Another soundtrack, this time to Deren's "The Very Eye of Night," was the first collaborative effort between Ito and Deren, a pairing which eventually led to their marriage, and works as a perfect companion to "Meshes of the Afternoon." But rather than gagaku, the inspiration this time is Indonesian gamelan and as a result the composition is more deeply rooted in rhythm, though the emphasis still falls equally on flute and clarinet as melodic elements to compliment the cadence of the metallophones and drums. The final piece on the CD, "Axis Mundi," which was composed to accompany a theatre piece by Christopher Hampton called "Savages," was recorded in 1982, the same year as Ito's death. This is the only track that features performers in addition to Ito, with the trio employing a whole host of percussive and wind instruments and once again drawing from his background in and admiration for traditional music to present a beautifully absorbing 30-minute tour of Ito's own take on musics of the world.

Annea Lockwood's *The Glass World* is a fairly exhaustive study of the sounds that are possible from one source—glass. The CD itself is organized almost like a volume in a library of sound effects, each of the 23 tracks named for the type of object used—glass rod, gong, bulb, jars, etc.—and often the action being done to the glass—shaken, vibrating, spinning, etc.—but the results are much more than a dry cataloguing of Lockwood's experiments. As can be imagined, the wealth of sound here is quite diverse and offers a fascinating glimpse into Lockwood's obsession with "the complexity of the single sound."

The final release of the trio is *AC-DC-VC* from Jeffrey Krieger, who uses electronic cello, along with a handful of effects such as an Alesis Quadraverb and a Digitech Harmonizer, to bring out some of the harder to hear qualities of sound, such as the subtleties of overtones and microtonalities. Krieger performs pieces from five different composers, showing off five different approaches to difficult music for solo cello. The highlights of the CD include Sarah Hopkins' "Cello Chi," which begins the program and presents a beautiful study of the overtones possible from the combination of cello and voice in a thickly reverberant space. With "Indian Summer" Alvin Lucier is up to his old tricks, namely his long-standing concern with the physical nature of sound. The piece is a study of the beating patterns and other aural craziness that arise from the bowing of two closely tuned strings, the resulting tones swirl around your listening space like so many wonderfully maddening insects. And finally, N. Sean William's "Come Window Gold Coming" provides a glimpse into a tranquil world of floating, sustained tones that emerge from silence to completely envelop the listener.

Jeffrey Krieger: AC-DC-VC (What Next?, Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) Space-scapes beamed along precise light lines as Krieger bows his special-made electronic violon-cello (VC) for 5 works by modern composers. Sound is full, complex not just from instrument tone, but also processing, & there are many moods, from rollicking digiridoo like stuff (Hopkins piece) to whispered introspections (William piece) to shrieking difficult music (Halier piece). Classical skronk is a refreshing godsend for thirsty ears needing sonic counterculture.

RECORDINGS REVIEWS

By Warren Burt, Bart Hopkin, Dean Suzuki and René van Peer

JEFFREY KREIGER: *ACDCVC*

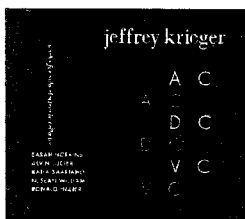
¿What Next? Recordings WN0022, now available from O.O. Discs, 261 Grovers Ave., Black Rock, CT 06605-3452; e-mail: cellioo5@aol.com PO Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103

One of the reasons why I have a passion for contemporary music is that it can change the role of instruments from being objects that serve to uphold a musical structure to being the subject on which compositions focus. The development of extended techniques and of sound-processing technology has given (and still gives) musicians ample opportunity to explore the sonic range of their instruments, and calls on their own imagination to put these explorations to musical use. On the other hand this has also grown from a changed conception by composers of what constitutes music — moving away from structures based on melody, chord progressions and fixed time signatures towards a sound-oriented approach.

The album *ACDCVC* of cello player Jeffrey Krieger testifies to the diversity, the intensity and the beauty achieved through that approach in compositions by Sarah Hopkins, Alvin Lucier, Kaija Saariaho, N. Sean William and Ronald Halier. The pieces make use of overtones, of heterodyning caused by microtonal variances between two strings, of the shrill tones occurring when the strings are played close to the bridge. The electronics highlight certain aspects of the resulting sound. In Hopkins' *Cello Chi* they amplify the lush and rich timbre to the point where you feel as if embraced by way of your ears. Although recording details of *Indian Summer* by Alvin Lucier are not given, I would be surprised if any electronic treatment was used other than a very judicious placement of the microphones — the beats and vibrations of the two strings just a few cycles apart are captured in all their throbbing and pulsating detail, as is the dark hiss of the hair on the bow grazing them ever so carefully.

Saariaho has Krieger play different gestures, from sustained to rapidly bowed notes, chords, overtones and riffs. But then she has him hover as if suspended in a strong magnetic field generated by different processing units, pulling the sound this way and that while it's being played.

Krieger's instrument was especially made by Tucker Barrett to be used as an interface between the musician and electronic controlling devices. As is stated in the text on the sleeve, however, its intrinsic character "is never erased by the technology. If anything, the electronics are used here to enhance those essential qualities, to draw us into the cello's sound world and allow us to experience it perhaps more as the cellist himself does — ears close to the source, attuned to every microscopic detail and nuance of timbre and pitch." Leaves nothing for me to add.



AC•DC•VC by Jeffrey Krieger. ¿What Next? Recordings, dist. by Nonsequitur, 505/224-9483. This is an excellent recording of works commissioned and performed by Krieger on the solo electronic cello. Different from an amplified acoustic cello, the electronic cello allows for direct interface with digital signal processors and computers. However, there is a very non-electronic sound to these pieces, which are experimentally challenging and interesting with immense range and suggestive tonalities. Sarah Hopkins, Alvin Lucier, Kaija Saariaho, N. Sean William, and Ronald Halier contribute compositions to Krieger's repertoire in which the electronics "serve to enhance the cello's inherent qualities." A re-issue of **The Glass World** by New Zealand-born composer Annea Lockwood reveals a world like "listening through a microscope," her documentation of sounds drawn from glass. **Meshes** by Teiji Ito is the debut (and, sadly, posthumous) release of both his original soundtracks to Maya Deren's classic experimental films and his own final, shamanic work. Composed exclusively for film, dance, and theater, the range of instrumentation and improvisation in these pieces is stunning. All of these discs are packaged in attractive sturdy cardboard with no breakable plastic parts!

-TB

BIBLE OF DREAMS by Juno Reactor. Wax Trax/TVT Records, 800/569-1888, www.tvtrerecords.com. This album blurs the distinction between art and music. In fact, I'm categorizing it as ambient for lack of a more defining genre. It is clearly informed by dance with its driving

Jeffrey Krieger

AC DC VC - works for solo electronic cello

WHAT NEXT? RECORDS WN022

IT MIGHT JUST BE ME BEING CRASS, BUT Australian composer Sarah Hopkin's *Cello Chi* sounds like the mutant offspring of cello and didgeridi disporting themselves merrily in a virtual cavern. All very fine and lovely, and perfect for those early morning aura enhancement sessions or late nights in with the bong, depending on what lights your incense. It's nicely blown out of the water by the wonderful Alvin Lucier, never a man to run in fear of a plangent microtonal triad or a process carried into the realms of perversity. Which, come to think of it, are apt descriptions of his composition, *Indian Summer*. Here the pitches of three unison strings are minutely changed, creating a constantly shifting environment of beating rhythms and other interesting effects. *Petals* by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho is a deeply scary piece of music, marrying frenetic tremolando with digital processing for that authentic the-daleks-are-coming-hide-behind-the-sofa feeling. It's actually very good. *Come Window Golds Coming* by N. Sean William is the stand out piece here. Magically effective given the simplicity of the materials employed, a very real sense of motion is produced from isolated note groupings.

All in all, a fine CD, largely thanks to the combination of Krieger's Tilbury-esque patience with the material and the unique, raw sound of his custom-built cello. The electronic processing is minimal; with the possible exception of Hopkin's gratuitous use of reverb, none of the composers succumb to the temptation to turn it into a tech-fest.

PETE FLOOD

Sonar Map

iss. 4 fall/winter

"all soundz created equal"

free

Jeffrey Krieger Works for Solo Electronic Cello CD. Krieger plays works by Sarah Hopkins, Alvin Lucier, Kaija Saariaho, N. Sean William, and Ronald Halier. These are all beautifully composed pieces and aside from "Petals", which is a bit more explosive (I loved it) I would think that they'd be great sonic fuel for the meditation people. Texturally dynamic sounds from the old school of experimental music. What Next Recordings, c/o Non-Sequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103, USA. [S. Mediaclast]

PHILLIP GEORGE

Jeffrey Krieger. "Night Chains" [Jonathan Berger. "The Lead Plates of the Rom Press" (1990). Henry Gwiazda. "themythofAcceptAnce" (1991). Ken Steen. "Shadows and Light" (1989). Douglas Knechans. "night chains" (1991). John Cage. "Ryoanji" (1983-85)]. Jeffrey Krieger, electronic cello. CRI.

Jeffrey Krieger. "AC DC VC" [Sarah Hopkins. "Cello Chi, for a Singing Cellist" (1986). Alvin Lucier. "Indian Summer" (1993). Kaija Saariaho. "Petals" (1988). N. Sean William. "Come Window Golds Coming" (1988). Ronald Halier. "UITT (Particolare)" (1980)]. Jeffrey Krieger, electronic cello. What Next Recordings c/o Nonesequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103.

Leave your Bach unaccompanied sonatas behind in these searing collections of Jeffrey Krieger's blitzkriegering electronic cello performances. Both albums are dynamic and demonstrative salvos into the sonic possibilities of the soloist, sometimes sounding like Tod Machover, other times closer to Jimi Hendrix.

Krieger's "Night Chains" album ably demonstrates the diversity, beginning with "The Lead Plates of the Rom Press," Jonathan Berger's haunting and moving paean to a publishing house (of Yiddish Poetry and Talmudic tracts) destroyed by the Nazis. The work touches on Glass's "Koyaanisqatsi" (a characteristic 3-2-1 descent), post-minimalist patterning, and vast, titanic, droning waves of oceanic outpourings.

Henry Gwiazda's "themythofAcceptAnce" is as theatrical, topical, and programmatic in its wide array of samples, ranging from electronic insects, microtonal electric horns, crowd sounds, motorcycles, faux-winds, explosions, piano, violin, electric bass, bowling, and thunder -- all triggered, one supposes, by the blitzing Krieger. A stunning work which calls to mind a thoughtful, solo take on the Beatles' "Number 9."

From the Holocaust and intimations of racism, to AIDS in the "Shadows and Light" of Ken Steen, a "night-music" which is perhaps the most traditional work on the album. This is linked to Douglas Knechans's titular "night chains" (1991), where glimpses of heavy metal electric virtuosity shine out against the microtonal murk of more traditional amplified-cello gravity. Least stimulating is the old master: John Cage in "Ryoanji" (1983-85), a work which, while making interesting rhythmic connections back to the composer's prepared piano works, has a non-narrative irritability that may be part of the point.

Also challenging are works on Krieger's cleverly-named "AC DC VC" collection. After the beautiful and hallowed harmonic stases of "Cello Chi," by Sarah Hopkins, Alvin Lucier's "Indian Summer" is perhaps too much along the same lines: guilt by association rather than design. Lucier's delicate, subtle beating patterns are immediately in the tradition of La Monte Young's "Composition 1960 No. 7" -- the open fifth "to be held for a long time" -- but here the conceit is microtonal differences from adjacent strings played in "unison" and the "long time" is 18'47".

Kaija Saariaho's "Petals" is along a much more demonstrative and -- almost by default -- traditional line in raging virtuosic patterns, featuring a wide range of dynamics, timbres, and gestures, with a respectful admixture of silence.

"Petals" forms the active center of a mostly drone arch that returns, quietly, in "Come Window Golds Coming," Sean Williams's spare essay to the simplicities of F# - ascending E - descending D and their hushed ilk. Ronald Halier's "UITT (Particolare)" could be desiccated outtakes from the "Night of the Electric Insects" section of the Crumb "Black Angels." The material is antiseptically dissected and distended over nine minutes.

In both albums, Krieger and his electronic cello prove capable of a multitude of possibilities. The CRI album offers the greater timbral variety as well as an interest in narrative scope.

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Jeffrey Krieger *AC/DC/VC* ¿WHAT NEXT? RECORDINGS WN0022 CD

Krieger is best known for his development of a repertoire for the electronic cello, interfacing with MIDI devices and often using the cello more as a sound controller than generator. *AC/DC/VC* instead uses electronics to enhance a more conventional cello sound. All five pieces are excellent, but the highlights are "Cello Chi" by Sarah Hopkins, a mystically sensitive exploration of overtone harmonics, and Kaija Saariaho's "Petals" which uses electronic filters to span cosmic thunder, jagged romanticism and something that sounds more like free jazz sax than a violin. It's an admirable album.