

This brings us roundabout-ly, Dear Reader, to the latest recorded offering by composer/performer of electro-acoustic music Erdem Helvacioğlu. Born in Bursa, Turkey in 1978, Helvacioğlu is of the generation of musicians and composers who refuse to put their artistic eggs into one conceptual basket. Like many young whippersnappers born in the 1945-1988 epoch, Helvacioğlu got his basic training in rock music, as guitarist for Turkish prog-rockers Too Much. In recent years, he's known as a performer/creator of electronic music, his works featured at prestigious electronic music festivals round the globe: the San Francisco Tape Music Festival, Belfast's Sonorities Festival of Contemporary Music, Seoul International Computer Music Festival, and Portugal's Musica Viva Festival. Like other fallout from the post-Baby Boom explosion, Helvacioğlu's modus operandi finds the "divisions" between genres, composition, and improvisation blurred, obscured, and/or done away with. (Playing rock music will do that to a body...not that there's anything wrong with that. The respective grindings of Wire, Neil Young, La Monte Young, and Arnold Dreyblatt are not that far removed from each other...truly.)

Some of Helvacioğlu's previous recordings focused on his guitar playing and electro-acoustic methodology, while **Eleven Short Stories** is entirely a work of him playing prepared piano, both solo and multi-tracked. For those not familiar, "prepared piano" is an innovation wherein maverick composers—most famously John Cage and Henry Cowell, along with pioneering forebears including Erik Satie, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and Harry Partch—expanded the piano's sonic palette by inserting objects (pieces of paper, metal clips, etc.) onto/between the "strings" inside the keyboard. Even the Turkish prepared piano is not without precedent: Mozart placed paper on the piano strings to better mimic the sound of the Turkish drum in **Rondo Alla Turca, K. 531**. (Mozart and the embryonic concept of "world music"? Who'd've thought it?) Piano manufacturers circa 1800 added a Turkish (military or fantasia) stop pedal-operated for a similar effect. While Helvacioğlu maintains there is no direct correlation regarding the subject matter (films) and the keys, "only piano is capable of seven octaves from the very deep basses to the keening highs. To cover different emotions, I needed an instrument with that capability sonically and structurally," he says. "This piano was "augmented" by pencil, easers, paper, plastic and metal spoons, knives, forks, drumsticks, guitar plectrums and slides, e-bows, metal plates, claspings, and paperclips attached to the strings within. Just as a movie is its own (alternate?) reality, each individual piece has preparations exclusive to itself.

The placement of the recording microphones is vital to the overall character of **Stories**. "Five microphones [were used], with two condenser mics very close to the strings in a spaced stereo configuration," Helvacioğlu explains. "The other three afeet to the general, overall resonance of the instrument itself—this explains the spatially wide ambience and booming "low end" sonorousness of the album as a whole.

ERDEM HELVACIOĞLU



ELEVEN SHORT STORIES

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"Eleven Short Stories is inspired by the works of film directors Kim Ki-Duk, David Lynch, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Theodoros Angelopoulos, Jane Campion, Anthony Minghella, Ang Lee, Atom Egoyan, Darren Aronofsky, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu and Steven Soderbergh. This album is dedicated to them and to all the people who have worked on their movies."

1. THE BILLOWING CURTAIN 4:02
 2. BENCH AT THE PARK 3:15
 3. JITTERY CHASE 3:56
 4. SHATTERED SNOW GLOBE 5:08
 5. SIX CLOCKS IN THE DIM ROOM 3:46
 6. MIST ON THE WINDOWPANE 4:53
 7. BLOOD DROPS BY THE POOL 3:58
 8. HAVE NOT BEEN HERE IN FORTY YEARS 3:09
 9. TRAPPED IN THE LABYRINTH 5:42
 10. WILL I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN 6:30
 11. SHRINE IN RUINS 3:25
- 47:47

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Mixed by Erdem Helvacioğlu
Mastered by Peter Snapper, Babajim Istanbul Studios and Mastering
Photos by Emre Basak, assisted by Korhan Karayosal
Erdem Helvacioğlu: Prepared piano
Performed on a Yamaha CP P8 Grand Piano

— Mark Keresman

But why spoil the movie? Regardless of genre, mystery is an important aspect of movies, that gently (or agonizingly) nagging desire to learn what happens next. As weavers of dreams—be they films, television shows, print fiction, whatever—**Eleven Short Stories** also invites that very same desire. Each aural "story" is a sonic movie, complete unto itself, and "abstraction" is never as abstract as it seems. As with film, time is suspended while you make your way into...what? As with some films, you're not always certain where you stand, of which side of the looking glass you're on. I suspect many of us—Erdem Helvacioğlu especially—really wouldn't want it any other way.

The film directors influencing this music are: Kim Ki-Duk, David Lynch, Krzysztof Kieslowski, Theodoros Angelopoulos, Jane Campion, Anthony Minghella, Ang Lee, Atom Egoyan, Darren Aronofsky, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, and Steven Soderbergh—"Not speaking movies but rather their use of mood, color, their [individual] cinematic scenario. There's stark, pensive observation ("Have Not Been Here in Forty Years"), warmth of impending jeopardy ("Jittery Chase"), and rooting around in a Samuel Beckett-like Unknowable ("Trapped in the Labyrinth"). The notes from the piano pip gently like summer raindrops coloring the pavement and slash across a jugular vein, as need there be. These **Eleven** run the gamut and shades of emotions, the potential for horror and the need for hope.

"Writing about music is like dancing about architecture."

This quote has been attributed to a number of diverse sources: Frank Zappa, Martin Mull, Laurie Anderson, Elvis Costello, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alex Parks, Miles Davis, and Gertrude Stein, among others. But, whomever, with all respect, s/he is WRONG. People dance about architecture all the time—in a ballet, in a musical (the urban setting of **West Side Story**), in a museum or gallery installation, or in a film or movie (most notably **Singing in the Rain**). (All movies are films, but not all films are movies...but I digress.) Choreography, one of the communions of music and human motion, **is** dancing about architecture—the set pieces and background on a stage, for example. Just as architecture follows a design, blueprint, concept, whatever, so does music, dance, and film (even if there is improvisation). Providing yet another perspective on the interrelationship of sight and sound is **Eleven Short Stories**. This latest opus by Erdem Helvacioğlu is exactly that, eleven slices of sound leading the listener into a particular mindset or alternate reality. Yes, "reality"—not to be pretentious, but isn't that what a filmmaker does, construct a version of space and time, offering it to an audience, hoping/expecting they'll invest themselves therein, i.e., **believe in a particular "world"**? Directors do it with a collusion of sight and sound—Helvacioğlu evokes cinema in the zone just beyond the keys and your Eustachian tubes, after which part of **you** takes over.

Cinema and music have a long and complex shared history. Each has inspired and enriched the other from the beginning of film history. Sometimes the movie inspires the music that becomes the film's soundtrack, sometimes extant music is chosen for the movie—does it truly matter which came first? Some maintain that a film's soundtrack minus the visual "accompaniment" is only but a portion of the collective experience (imagine watching a ballet **minus** music), while others say the music/film "split"/dichotomy can be relished as a stand-alone experience (enjoying Stravinsky or Copland compositions for ballet without **ever** having seen the dancing). The great British cinematographer Jack Cardiff (**The Red Shoes, Black Narcissus**, and oddly enough, **Conan the Destroyer**) was tremendously inspired by Impressionist painters for his innovative work and millions of movie fans continue to marvel at it—some recognizing and relishing the impact of the Impressionists, some utterly oblivious to it.