

Mari Kimura

VOYAGE APOLLONIAN



WB

Mari Kimura: Violin, Interactive Computer

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- 2 Mari Kimura
JanMaricana
(for Subharmonics) 4:48
- 3 Egberto Gismonti
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- 6 João Bosco
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- 8 Hermeto Pascoal
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My introduction to Mari Kimura came as an invitation to participate in a recording instigated by improvising guitarist and composer Henry Kaiser alongside saxophonist and composer and plunderphonics mastermind John Oswald. It was decided to be an all acoustic session of improvising, and I was amazed at the agility and nimbleness not only of Kimura's playing, but the way she processed the information being thrown at her, creating almost simultaneous counterpoint, accompaniment, or a full-on offensive. At the time of the session, I at first assumed she was an improvising violinist of incredible skill, never thinking she was in fact a thoroughly trained violinist of new music who also could improvise on a high level and without the "music school" patterns most classical musicians use in improvised settings. I don't mean this as a criticism, there is a real difference in the way musicians think, respond, and act that is truly shaped by their backgrounds both in life and in the relationship of their instrument. It speaks volumes of Kimura's brilliance that I was looking at the equation the other way. This encounter was about 25 or so years ago, and in that time Kimura has not only become a guiding beacon in the creation of interactive computer music for violin, she discovered and developed her remarkable subharmonic bowing technique, which is highlighted in many of the compositions on this album.

This collection truly showcases not only her

continuing growth as a composer and arranger, but can be seen as a new turning point, where all elements of her musical knowledge come to bear: compositions that incorporate fully into the fabric of the works themselves, the possibilities of improvisation in marriage with traditional written composition, and the time-bending possibilities of digital processing. The compositions themselves, both in their construction and in the execution, express a continuous flux of the vertical and horizontal axes of music. Compositional ideas of time, density, harmony and their relationships with the past and future are difficult in many ways with instrumental music. A melodic phrase, a harmonic shift can be repeated or referred to down the line in order to draw a bridge to the past, but it isn't as visceral as an image, or the sound of a car door slamming. Kimura's works have found ingenious and elegant methods to overcome these obstacles. French electroacoustic composer Bernard Parmegiani once created a fine work called "L'Œil Écoute" (The Eye Hears) and I would propose a subtitle for this collection, "The Ear Sees".

Mari Kimura's "Voyage Apollonian" gives an excellent opportunity to listen in to the thought process of computer-assisted compositions. From the opening moments we can hear the logic of Kimura's mapping of both horizontal and vertical aspects of composition. Various forms of

call and response, themes and variations, which are usually created internally by a composer or by interplay with improvisers, here are heard as existing simultaneously. Even in the opening minute we can hear a wide array of possibilities of push and pull between a “set” idea and the nuance of live performance. The opening sforzando strokes are chosen to be sampled, either through the actual sound material or through their amplitude envelopes, and are repeated allowing Kimura to comment on them both harmonically and rhythmically. Without having a closer look at the software part of the score, the specifics are of course up in the air to us, but the strengths of this piece lie in its forceful yet measured expression of the idea of these possibilities.

In “Canon Elastique” we can hear the unique way computer-assisted music can treat time differently than was possible in mechanically assisted music. What we think of as time to the computer is of course just information and is defined by its place and context, so while in past music that used delay systems, be they tape-loop oriented works by Terry Riley, Ingram Marshall, Brian Eno, etc., or “I am Sitting in a Room” by Alvin Lucier – which uses the continuous superimposition of the progressive recordings to obliterate the original material leaving only the resonances of the room reacting to it – Kimura’s work takes advantage of digital recording’s ability to move material instantly and in response to outside in-

fluence. In some ways it is akin to a score of the same music copied over many staves which can be moved horizontally independently of each other, using the vertical matrix to look for correlations or any other musical idea that can come to mind. This flexible amorphous time-domain is then under the control of Kimura’s interactions with the music and the past, while planning and moulding a future-past to some.

The subharmonics that Kimura can produce on her instrument are highlighted in a particularly musical fashion in “JanMaricana for Subharmonics”. At many points when the note jumps from its fundamental to its subharmonic, it brings to mind the equivalent that has been possible in electronic music and through electronic amplification of acoustic instruments. What is remarkable, and mystifying, about Kimura’s techniques is that she is doing this acoustically, with immediate control. As the subharmonic physically divides the ratio of the vibrating string, it creates an apt visual analogy to the way the notes move from traditional bowing to Kimura’s discoveries, not unlike watching a rock climber jump up a cliff and back down with ease, as if gravity held no sway over them. “JanMaricana” is both an elegant implication of the technique and a resonant framework to highlight its otherworldly nature.

Having been a true admirer and fan of Egberto Gismonti for 35 years, I was pleasantly sur-

prised to see the inclusion of his signature composition “Frevo” in this collection. Having heard every recorded version from his EMI Odeon days through ECM and onwards, as well as countless live performances in varying combinations, I was truly surprised at Mari Kimura’s approach to “Frevo”. The opening interplay between the virtual piano and altissimo violin have a plasticity that easily brought to mind Gismonti’s interplay with his longtime musical partner Naná Vasconcelos. But as the song-like refrain begins in earnest, Kimura’s unique rhythmic approach to the material becomes apparent. The second section, which in many of Gismonti’s arrangements has a drive not unlike a steam-engine train is here more like a whirling dervish that throws us to a soft landing atop the absolutely gorgeous rotating like harmonies of the third section which Kimura plays with a gusto that is reminiscent of Bernard Parmegiani’s “La Roue Ferris” as arranged for a calliope. The arrangement of Hermeto Pascoal’s “Bebê” also brings a fresh perspective in Kimura’s approach to the “comping”, or accompaniment during her solo improvised sections. While most musicians would create a buoyant but tight mesh for the soloist, while still pushing and pulling at the tides, in Kimura’s version the piano stalls and starts, creating the tiniest pockets of space only to rush forward as if wanting to meld with the note ahead. When the subharmonics come into play in her solo, you almost expect the piano to drop an

octave as well.

Along with the other works in this collection, we can take away a focal point that draws us in, holding our gaze/ear. Unbeknownst to us, the stage has turned 180°, and we now find ourselves staring out not through the other end but at the receiving point of thousands of confluences, only to turn again and shoot out in manyfold paths of possibilities.

— Jim O’Rourke
August, 2016 Tokyo



Photo: Noah Fowler

This album is a compilation of my recent works for violin and interactive computer. I included one solo violin piece without electronics, “Jan-Maricana for Subharmonics” which highlights the use of the extended bowing technique I developed, playing various pitches below the fundamental tones without changing the tuning. This album also features transcriptions of three Brazil-

ian composers: Egberto Gismonti, Hermeto Pascoal and João Bosco. For years, I have attempted to transcribe exactly what these composers are playing in their recordings. The pieces included in this album are just a few of those transcription attempts from my collection. After my residency at IRCAM in 2010, I started to incorporate motion sensor technology; the pieces on this album use IRCAM's "MO" (Modular Musical Objects), a motion sensor designed to extract musical expressions. In 2016, I converted these pieces for my own Arduino prototype sensor "μgic" (pronounced 'mu-zhik').

Originally conceived as an audio visual piece, "Voyage Apollonian" is inspired by an "Apollonian Gasket" fractal animation created by Ken Perlin, an Oscar-winning computer graphics artist. The motion sensor detects gestures such as 'pizzicato' and controls the realtime signal processing.

"JanMaricana for Subharmonics" introduces "Subharmonic 5th", playing a fifth below the fundamental tone. After mastering Subharmonic intervals such as octave, 2nd and 3rd, the 5th remaining elusive for years; I finally had a breakthrough and was able to produce it reliably. "JanMaricana" is dedicated to Jan and Marica Vilcek of the Vilcek Foundation, who recognized and supported my work; Vilcek Foundation is the champion of immigrant artists and scientists in the USA. Some of the musical materials evoke

Bohemian flavor such as music of Smetana and Dvořák, from the country of origin of the Vilceks.

Gismonti's "Frevo", to me, epitomizes what it means to be a classically trained virtuoso performer/composer. After hearing practically all recordings, watching all live footages I could find and attending his live performances, I saw that he never seems to play it the same way twice. Frevo performed by others is not nearly as complex compared to Gismonti's own playing. Very few use his brilliant and deceptive offbeat accents that throws off a more traditional European sense of rhythm. So I decided to transcribe note by note from his 1979 recording "Solo" (ECM) to create the arrangement for the violin, and the piano part with the dynamics and timings I wanted.

"Eigenspace" was originally an audiovisual project in collaboration with Japanese visual artist Tomoyuki Kato, composed shortly after the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, one of the worst man-made environmental catastrophe in human history which is still not contained today. "Eigenspace" ("own" space) is about our love and prayer for our Earth. The title is also taken from "eigenvalue," a mathematical concept used in analyzing bowing movement. "Eigenspace" was commissioned by Harvestworks in NYC through the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA).

I wrote “Canon Élastique” during my residency at IRCAM in Paris, where I was introduced to the idea of “ring buffer”, a recorder that constantly records a certain amount of the “past” then “rolls off”. I created this “canon”, in which the “2nd voice” or the “past” can be modified in timing by how I play the “1st voice”, through the motion sensor analyzing my bowing. I really loved the idea of “changing my past” in real time. The form of this piece is A-B-A where the ‘B’ section is an interlude using “pitch synchronous harmonizer” called “psychoirtrist”, developed by Norbert Schnell at IRCAM.

I transcribed “Coisa Feita” (Done Deal) by João Bosco from TV footage made probably in the ‘80s, adding some lines of my own. Having overdubbed myself for many years since the days of cassette tapes in my youth, I’m playing all the parts on my own adding some electronic rhythmic reinforcements. My personal challenge – and joy – were how to apply such a rhythmical piece for the intrinsically lyrical violin.

“Breuer Vivant” was written and recorded in a house designed by architect/designer Marcel Breuer, at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund at Pocantico Center. I stayed at the Breuer House as a Composers Now artist in residence, and being surrounded by the furniture designed by Breuer inspired me to write and dedicate “Breuer Vivant” to the ‘living’ art that is the Breuer House. The form of this piece is a ‘Passacaglia’ using

the harmonizer called “psychoirtrist”. The same chord progression programmed in the harmonizer repeats eight times under violin variations. From the section with pizzicato, the motion sensor is detecting my movements and interacting with real time processing.

I heard “Bebê” by Hermeto Pascoal for the first time in the recording for two guitars by brothers Sergio and Odair Assad. I decided to transcribe this version from live footage by Pascoal at the piano, attempting to capturing his vast rhythmic variety. I perform “Bebê” interactively by making the ‘comping’ or improvisation section flexible in length, using the motion sensor to cue the ‘pianist’.

“Kaze” (The Wind) in Japanese suggests “unpredictable” or “unstoppable”, trend, or force. In this piece, I’m using texts from the 11th century Japanese female author Sei Shonagon who famously wrote, “Wind is Storm” (“Kaze-wa Arashi”), and other poems describing winds in medieval Japanese literature. Kaze is the first piece created with my original motion sensor “μgic”, commissioned by Harvestworks funded by NYSCA; μgic project has been funded by itac.org, NYSCA, Governor Cuomo and the NY State Legislature, The Rockefeller Foundation’s NYC Cultural Innovation Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts.

— Mari Kimura

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Egberto Gismonti and Mari Kimura
Photo: Hervé Brönnimann

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