

Deep within every solo performer a whirly-gig of Goldbergian intricacy spins. This is how I imagine it: with every revolution, it faces alternately inward toward oneself, then outward to the world. As it whirs and twirls, it inscribes the recurring tension between inner and outer, between singular and plural, between one's world and the world. Each cycle traces the dual obligations of a solo artist: to herself, to her instrument and art; then to her listeners and community, to the earth.

Spinning fast enough, and in the hands (and lips, breath, voice and body) of an artist of the magnitude of Claire Chase, we glimpse a rare synergy where seemingly oppositional perspectives become fused as one. The singular of a solo performance becomes the plural of a shared experience. This is the eloquent grammar of the solo artist. I am/we are...I am/we are. I am/ we are . . . I am/we are. Neither is sufficient; both necessary. This simple conjugation has guided Claire Chase's remarkable life as a flutist and has blossomed specially in her *Density 2036* project.

The goal of *Density 2036* is to create within repertoire born in the early 21st century and commissioned by Chase a response to *Density 21.5*, Edgard Varèse's extraordinary 1936 solo piece for virtuoso flutist. *Density 2036* is both a nod to Varèse and, in true Chase fashion, a gift of repertoire to a generation of young flutists. Varèse's title refers not only to the 21.5 grams per cubic centimeter of Georges Barrère's platinum flute, for which it was composed, but also to a compositional strategy that converted the mid-20th century pell-mell of disorderly modernist impulses into a densely packed and stacked four-minute cri de coeur. For Varèse, "density" was more than a title; it was a credo. He sought discontinuity and then fused his disparate sonic and cultural materials into a hymn of yearning and becoming. Anyone taking its lesson will need to start in a place where multiplicity is welcome and where contradictions are not to be feared. Enter Claire Chase, for whom density is also the preferred ecology of creation. And enter also the second recording of *Density 2036* commissions. I offer brief reactions below, mere impressions really, incomplete and undoubtedly unworthy of the extraordinary music to which they refer. But with each piece I tried to hear the echo of density, as credo, where any given moment might be simultaneously idealistic and personal; aspirational and elegiac. Present and past.

In *Lila*, Chase cascades along Dai Fujikura's slalom run of rapid-fire, breathy articulations in very low-registers, only to interrupt the S-curves long enough to luxuriate in lambent and long-limbed melodies as only Fujikura would write them. *Lila* may be the Sanskrit world for "play," but there is nothing light-hearted here. This is the divine play of creation and destruction, offering guidelines, in essence, for how we are to steward awareness within the dynamic connections of our lives.

Francesca Verunelli writes about reconciling the corporeal and the incorporeal; biological time and machine time in her *The Famous Box Trick*. By robbing us of the usual markers of sound production, we often cannot tell which sounds are produced by the flutist and which by the magic boxes of music technology. The irony is that many of the seemingly disembodied sounds come from the live musician, and the reverse. *The Famous Box*

*Trick* is proof that music may be both dense and light. Through layers of sound we seek a rising light. Finally, bathed in glowing auras, we understand that we have been lifted.

Both Nathan Davis and Jason Eckardt explore the fragility of a sound struggling to be heard. In Davis's piece *Limn*, the most poetic music is nearly inaudible. The flute tones themselves sometimes seem less important than the wispy cirrostratus of whispers, breathy gasps, and key clicks that surrounds them. A luminous halo of intimate human noise. In *The Silenced*, Eckardt starts by showing us the opposing sides of a chasm across which utterances of breath and voice face off against virtuoso instrumental playing. With high-wire daring, he tries bridge the divide. That he ultimately cannot is the central metaphor of the piece and a poignant tribute to those among us who struggle to be heard.

Nowhere is the catalytic force of density more apparent than in Pauline Oliveros's *Grace Chase*, inspired by a text written by Claire Chase's grandmother, Grace. Here Claire is held aloft by the titanic spirits of two extraordinary women of another age. Buoyed by their quintessence, she rides the updrafts, whirling and spinning; facing inward toward herself, then outward in invitation to us. I am/We are...I am/We are. We join her for twenty weightless minutes, tumbling through the clouds with her, riding the whirly-gig of Goldbergian intricacy that allows us to see complexities and contradictions as wholeness. And when we come to earth, finally resting on a bed of breathy contrabass flute exhalations, we are moved by the generosity of this music and by its beauty. And we are grateful.

—STEVEN SCHICK