

## CDs AND DVDs

LAURENCE CRANE: 'SOUND OF HORSE'. *John White in Berlin; Old Life Was Rubbish; Riis; Events; Sound of Horse*. asamisimasa. Hubro HUBROCD2582

LAURENCE CRANE: '6 TRIOS, 2 SOLOS AND 1 QUINTET'. *Trio for Ros and Peter; Air; Processional; Len Valley Us; Piano Quintet; Hugo Pine; Jurgen Hip; 10,000 Green Bottles; Klavierstücke opus 84 or 85 'Keith Miller Project'*. Ives Ensemble. Nimbus NI6337

Laurence Crane: few composers can have acquired such a reputation on the basis of seemingly so little. A composer of triads, short scales, crotchets, minims and metered rhythms – and often very little else – he is one of new music's most admired figures. To know Crane is to be part of a club, a new music secret society. When his music is in the room, people smile. They usually do when he is in the room too.

Yet he remains a composer with the ability to surprise. On a micro-level, of course, his music is constructed entirely around tiny illuminations: the moment one minute into the short *Old Life Was Rubbish* when a second chord is added to the first; the insertion of a bamboo-dry acoustic guitar strum into the lush drones of *Sound of Horse*; the bizarre harmonic alternations between piano and strings at the start of the Piano Quintet. On a larger scale, however, his music also contains surprises for those – including me – who thought they had a grasp on his expressive field, on the basis of performances heard and some existing recordings, notably Michael Finnis's disc of solo piano pieces (Metier msv28506) and Apartment House's double CD of chamber works (another timbre at 74 × 2).

Both of those recordings aim at a more or less complete (or at least representative) picture of Crane's work in a given medium over a given span of time: 1985–1999 in the case of the Finnis recording; 1992–2009 in the case of the Apartment House. The discs under review expand those horizons at either end, featuring chamber works dating back to the mid-1980s and piano works composed as recently as 2014 and 2016. As a result, nearly everything here – apart from *Riis* for clarinet, cello and electric organ, and *John White in Berlin* for electric guitar, cello, percussion and piano, both on the

asamisimasa disc – is being presented on recording for the first time.

And there is much to delight those familiar with or entirely new to Crane's music. I confess I listened to the asamisimasa disc for the first time in a state of complete joy. The Norwegian group have long championed Crane's music (their percussionist Håkon Stene features several Crane pieces on his 2014 solo recording *Lush Laments for Lazy Mammal*, also on Hubro), and they have mastered his combination of human warmth and ironic glint – exemplified in the two-chord, two-minute bagatelle that is *Old Life Was Rubbish* and elevated to an entirely ecstatic level in their performance of *Riis*. Turning to the longer newly recorded pieces, *Events* for voice, three clarinets and vibraphone sets three lists combining nouns and numbers (public figures celebrating their birthday, with their ages; selected foreign exchange rates; and weather and temperature reports from around the UK) collected from the *Guardian* newspaper on 7 February 1997. Its gentle dedication to a single task recalls Tom Johnson, perhaps; even Arvo Pärt at his most ascetic. *Sound of Horse*, the most recent work here (composed in 2009), is also the most unexpected, however. It is composed of seven short movements (20 minutes in total), each of which presents a single, or very small collection of repeated gestures. They're each like small Crane pieces, in fact. But their cumulative effect is of a more complex idea about relationships and how things fit with and reflect upon each other. And when some of those things are loud, noisy or disruptive, as some of them are in this piece, they lead Crane's music somewhere quite different indeed.

When I think about Crane I often go back to martial arts metaphors, of bending reeds and pliant waters, forms that absorb and evade any attempt to rationalise and control them. His is, as I have noted elsewhere, some of the most *yin* music I know. Yet the Ives Ensemble draw out another side to his music, giving his unadorned repetitions an Ustvolskaya-like doggedness. This is most apparent in the later pieces (*Len Valley Us* and the Piano Quintet in particular), so may be the result of a recent stylistic turn – it is also there in *Sound of Horse* – but

its pre-echoes can be heard in much earlier pieces like *Trio for Ros and Peter*, and *Processional*.

Crane's influence is profound: many younger composers cite him as an inspiration. Yet commentators often have trouble placing him within the history of English experimental music; apart from Skempton he has few obvious forebears. What the Ives Ensemble have done is expand that horizon. By removing some of the obvious 'prettiness' of Crane's music, it becomes easier to locate him within an empirical experimental lineage concerned with process and material that encompasses Cage, Johnson and the English systems composers. There has always been an aphoristic lyricism within Crane's music; now, it seems, there is something else to it as well.

**Tim Rutherford-Johnson**

**10.1017/S0040298217000705**

---