



MAKAN 2¹. Zones d'accord². Target³. Resonance Alloy⁴ • ¹Either/Or; ²Alex Waterman (vc); ³Laurie Rubin (ms); California E.A.R Unit; ⁴David Shively (perc) • STARKLAND 217 (69:10)

Keeril Makan belongs to a generation of composers who are unafraid of noise. More specifically, his music conceives of sounds outside the usual pitch spectrum as a natural resource to be shaped expressively, like any other. This has been going on for some time in Europe, especially as personified by the work of Helmut Lachenmann, but it's become more prevalent in the U.S. only recently (at least in classical circles); in various subspecies of rock and experimental improvisation, it's been common for much longer.

I find Makan's music striking in its directness, and the subtle way that seemingly very raw materials are carefully shaped. Let me get rid of the only disappointment first: The opening piece, 2 for violin and percussion (1998), is one I feel I've heard often before. It's a series of steady-state textures, deliberately primal. It's little wonder that David Lang, who writes the introductory essay, should like this music, because this piece begins with a sound that is almost exactly "banging on a can"! (For the record, Either/Or is Jennifer Choi, violin and David Shively, percussion.) But the remainder of the program I find fresh and strong. *Zones d'accord* for solo cello (2002) creates near-overwhelming sounds from its retuned strings, moving from breathier harmonic sweeps to Hendrixian explosions. *Target* (2004) for mezzo and chamber ensemble is a terrifying work, combining poetry by Jena Osman with found texts associated with the Gulf Wars. It's a near-psychotic work, with swirling glissandi, stratospheric vocal writing, and moments of childlike black humor. A daring piece, and while so many moments could be clichés here, somehow Makan succeeds in making the gestures essential, as though we haven't encountered them before.

Finally, *Resonance Alloy* (2007) for solo percussion is the most original piece of all. Using only a gong and three suspended cymbals (some placed over drums as resonators), it creates an evolving world of sound that holds me over its half-hour span. It's quite astonishing how varied is its musical language, and one is constantly hearing more than seems first to meet the ear. In particular: how shifting pitches are constantly emerging and singing out from the noisy texture. I have a hunch that Makan researched this work quite rigorously, and it's one of the best pure-sound pieces I've heard in some time.

Makan has a voice, and in fact the chronological progression of these pieces shows consistent growth and often surprising development. All are exceptionally performed. **Robert Carl**

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