Liner notes for Electric

Electric is a unique collection of works for cello and electronics. Electronics in music have been around for a very long time (the theremin is a century old), but the genre of works for instrument and electronics became more popular in the 1980s around the time when Jonathan Harvey wrote Ricercare una Melodia, the oldest piece on the album. A pupil of his, Oded Ben-Tal has written the newest piece - Present, Perfect - here in its world premiere recording.

The album opens with a piece written in 2012 when I commissioned Jan Bang, Norwegian composer, DJ and master of sound design, to create music for me to improvise with – the result was Noticing Things. Jan writes:

“I was introduced to Dai Fujikura through working on David Sylvian´s album, Manafon. So when the invitation came from Matthew Barley to rework Dai´s commissioning piece I was pleased to say yes. "Noticing Things" evolved into a reinvention of Dai´s originals using the Aria, Awakening and Floating movements as starting point for these three small pieces:

In **Implanted Memories** I wanted to make something that had a reference to Dai´s "Floating" and still had reminiscences of both pieces I´d put together and of Dai´s work as a whole. The drone is being treated only by the use of pitch/eq giving it a sense of clarity both technically with more space for Matthew´s cello improvisations, but also offering the listener a possible room for his own imagination.”

All the cello parts for Noticing Things are improvised - a creative task I enjoyed chewing upon, listening repeatedly to the tracks Jan had made to familiarise myself with their content and shape.

I commissioned John Metcalfe’s **Constant Filter** in 2006 and have played it more than any other piece with electronics. John wrote it around the time his mother passed away and he was fascinated by the idea, supported by science, that hearing is the last sense to go before you die – it elicited in him the question: what would you say in those last seconds when only the hearing remained? The piece was his response.

The more I play it, the more I like it, getting to know every electronic nook and cranny, reacting with tiny changes in vibrato or bow pressure. Audiences love the music - it speaks to people in an immediate way, the disembodied electronics and the human sound of the cello forming a striking partnership.

One of the enjoyable parts of collating this album was finding all the different reverbs that make the different pieces come alive. In Constant Filter John designated a reverb created from the Gol Gumpaz tomb in India that has a reverb of 22 seconds – the quality is timeless and still, as befits a noble place of rest.

Anna Meredith is a powerful voice in the new music world and I find her music so easy to get on with – it all just works so well. The first of her three pieces on this album is moonmoons, a simple singing cello part over increasingly frenetic electronic backing leading to a magnificent climax. Anna’s electronics are always refined and effective, and I enjoy the feeling of being submerged by the track towards at its loudest point.

Joby Talbot’s **Falling** starts with a series of wide leaping intervals, played with a huge glassy reverb that creates the illusion of great arching chords – really satisfying to play – and incredibly hard as any fault of intonation lingers so long. I chose not to autotune the really hard bits as I don’t like its synthetic perfection, so there are a few human moments!

Joby is known, amongst many other things, for The Path of Miracles, one of the most successful and powerful choral commissions of recent times. **Motion Detector** begins with a sample of the recording of that remarkable piece and so I’m accompanied along my journey in this piece by the voices of Tenebrae. Motion Detector’s cello part begins with a series of loops set up in different time signatures before the main voice comes in with a spiky theme at 1:40. It’s the only piece on the album to explore this very staccato edgy sounds of the cello. The piece comes to a magnificent climax as the choir sample ends and the cello continues wailing for a while before slowly descending to the bottom of the instrument in a series of delays.

The next movement of Jan Bang’s *Noticing Things*, **Replica**, “uses a beautiful melody from Dai Fujikura’s *Aria*, but with different blocks of sound to give it another view from a different angle.” (Jan Bang)

**Blackfriars** by Anna Meredith is a deeply felt series of chords, almost chorale like, with subtle changes in movement (0:45) in individual lines that stop the music sounding too blocklike. It starts with just the melody and there are four verses, each adding a new line until the final one where I tune the C string down to a very tasty bottom G#.

Jonathan Harvey who died in 2012 is the only composer represented here to be no longer with us. He composed **Ricercare una Melodia** in 1984 and as such it must be one of the earliest pieces ever composed for cello and electronics (originally for trumpet, he made the arrangement himself). Harvey was championed by Britten and Boulez, amongst other composers and this piece represents him well, with its impeccably imagined lines for cello and quadraphonic delay system. The delays create a perfect harmonic foil for the active and dramatic instrumental lines.

In Anna Meredith’s **Honeyed Words** simple melodic ideas and wonderfully mechanical slides are treated to unusual colours from both cello and electronics, the piece explores some of the less pleasant sounds from a cello which I like – it doesn’t always have to be sweet…

About Jan Bang’s third movement, **Flooded Corridors** he writes: “There is a little pizzicato part in "Dai Fujikura’s *Awakening*" that brought my attention as glaringly special. I took that as a starting point for this non-metrical piece that I somehow think of as a calligraphic drawing of irregular beats and parallel colours. There are small occurring incidents created in my studio in Kristiansand using my hardware Akai sampler.”

Dr Oded Ben-Tal, composer of **Present, Perfect**, writes: “Present Perfect is the result of Matt Barley’s long-standing desire to be able to improvise with an electronic partner. For a number of years, I have been applying ideas from Artificial Intelligence to develop systems that can act as semi-autonomous musical agents in dialogue with human performers. I utilise advances in machine listening research to programme the computer to ‘listen’ to the human musician and try to make some musical inferences about the incoming signal. This machine listening is still very far from the human kind but does open new possibilities for interaction between the human and computer. Another important component in creating a sense of musical dialogue is the use of decision making in the computer code. The machine uses the information it analyses from the performer to change how it responds. This creates a dynamic counterpart which is capable of surprising the human performer on occasion. Like other situations of performing with other musicians, each performance is slightly different encouraging the cellist to creatively explore the shared musical space.” And a huge thank you to Oded who hosted the album sessions at Kingston University’s Visconti Studios – I couldn’t have done it without this generosity, and Rob Plummer’s excellent engineering.

Japanese composer Karen Tanaka on her exquisite piece, **The Song of Songs**: “The title comes from the Song of Solomon of the Old Testament, which is a beautiful song of love. It begins as follows:  
*The song of songs, which is Solomon's.  
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.  
Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth,  
therefore do the virgins love thee.*  
I have attempted to project this sensual song of love onto the sound of cello and computer. My intention was to weave color and scent into the sound while blending the ancient story and today's technology. The sound of cello is consistently gentle and tender.”

**Light is Calling** by Michael Gordon is “A meditation on the random and fleeting nature of life and love, as seen through the roiling emulsion of an ancient film”. If you google the track title and the name Bill Morrison you will find a beautiful film created to go with this piece. While recording it I wanted to find a really different sound for the cello so we applied a few effects which I then played with on the sound desk…I tried to make it more other-worldly and dreamy.

The album ends with an alternative take of Jan Bang’s third movement, **Flooded Corridors**. It’s been a great journey of musical discovery putting all this together – I really hope you enjoy it.