

Surface tension: Kit Downes & Lucy Railton



Lucy Railton & Kit Downes

Subaerial

SN Variations CD/DL/LP

Lucy Railton & Yair Elazar Glotman

False Positive OST

Lakeshore DL

Lucy Railton is one of today's most spellbinding cellists, and her prolific string of releases throughout the past few years is ample evidence to convince any newcomer. Her work is mesmerizingly sculptural: there's a tactile violence to every stroke and pluck, but her every motion is in service of a vision for the overarching shape and mood of the resulting piece.

So often music of Railton's sort, the kind that broods and overwhelms, can be lazily haphazard or meandering in its sinister ambience. Railton avoids such pitfalls because in her pieces' austerity – in the exacting musicianship and careful arranging – is a sense of respect and fascination for sonic possibilities. You can envision Railton being in awe, too, and her excavation of music's limits proves delightfully magnetic every time. Consider her choice of Pauline Oliveros's *Ghostdance for The Wire* 440's The Inner Sleeve – in the extremity of Railton's music is a similar exploration of maximal electroacoustics but likewise grounded in something human. It's also a reminder that deep listening isn't synonymous with comfortable or easy listening, but one that's active and receptive. While the disingenuous may categorise

Railton's music as nothing more than edgy, those who burrow deep into her works understand the magnitudes of emotion she and her collaborators wring out of their instruments.

Two recent collaborative albums showcase this well. *Subaerial*, the first LP from Railton and longtime collaborator Kit Downes, was recorded in Iceland's Skáholt Cathedral. Opening track "Down To The Plains" sets the stage with an elegant pas de deux. The two initially play their instruments as if in search of something: the cello swells but then contemplatively sways back and forth, while Downes's chirping organ reins in Railton's plucks. About halfway through, the two burst into an emotive lightshow – piercing, loud, and strikingly gorgeous. It's like witnessing the grandeur of the aurora borealis.

Railton and Downes's strength comes in their careful teasing of tension. This is no bait and switch trickery; there's a real patience present that forces one to steadily take in every moment as if it's part of a larger narrative. On the 11 minute "Torch Duet", the longest track here, there's a constant revving up in intensity. It doesn't feel so linear, though, as the two trade off foregrounding roles and ensure different textures of their instruments are explored. When the piece climaxes into grandiose organ madness, there's an introspectiveness to it, as though depicting catharsis in what's externally visible and what's

internally present – all the thoughts and feelings running through one's mind.

Shorter songs feel just as weighty, with "Partitions" proving hypnotic in its constant carnivalesque twirling, and "Of Becoming And Dying" serving as a fitting closing track. It's prickly and pretty enough to read as sombre and contemplative in equal measure. "Lazuli", with its prominent cloudy organ presence, stands out for seamlessly navigating between moments of graceful uplift, queasy melancholy and anxious uncertainty. Like the rest of the album, it effortlessly captures a wide range of human experience.

Railton also provides beautiful works with Yair Elazar Glotman on their soundtrack for John Lee's psychological thriller *False Positive*. "Cityscapes" is a lush 45 second drone that ebbs and flows with comforting warmth, while "Insemination" avoids trite use of a baby voice by allowing its hallucinatory echoes to straddle the line between hopeful and ominous moods. Given how these tracks are atmospheric vignettes, there's often little to hold onto, so the most satisfying moments are those where you can feel the instruments at full force: "Hidden Belief" is terrifying for its creeping thuds and screeching, "Blow" is a wind tunnel drone that ends abruptly, and "Baby Shower" is immersive and impressively grand. While not one of the most memorable releases from either artist, *False Positive* does attest to their ability to enrapture.

Joshua Minsoo Kim

has a complex theme arising out of urgent, staccato stabs and sliding into a muscular Latin vamp with bullish chord changes – a sophisticated arrangement that tips its hat to the formal innovations pursued by Blue Note artists such as Wayne Shorter and Andrew Hill in the mid-1960s. Similarly, McBee's "Cat's Out Of The Bag" convincingly picks up on the insouciant, nocturnal swing of Shorter's 1964 jam *Speak No Evil*. Harper's early 90s composition "Somalia" is a big, brooding rumble with Afrocentric vocal chant and

Harper contributing a low-slung tenor solo while Hart's polyrhythmic drums crest in powerful surges. And Cables's "Traveling Lady" is a spry jazz waltz with prancing piano and luxuriant horn charts in the style of Duke Pearson's "The Fakir".

The fact that all of this comes across as a living music, more than a mere exercise in nostalgia, speaks volumes about The Cookers' considerable chops as both composers and performers of bona fide deep jazz.

Daniel Spicer

Andrew Cyrille Quartet

The News

ECM CD/DL/LP

Andrew Cyrille is the last survivor of the first wave of free jazz drummers. Along with Rashied Ali, Milford Graves and Sunny Murray, he broke the bounds of time, leaving the four-count behind in favour of a pulsing, more organic approach to percussion that granted the player more expressive potential, placing the drums on an equal plane with every other instrument. In the late 1960s and early

70s, Cyrille collaborated with Graves on all-percussion performances, one of which was recorded for the 1974 album *Dialogue Of The Drums*.

Of the four, Cyrille's style has always been the most disciplined and even minimalist. The time he spent in drum corps as a youth gives his playing a precision and a centredness that makes it an ideal foundation for improvisors of a florid and expressionist bent like Cecil Taylor, with whom he played for over a decade, or David S Ware, who was a