CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Boogie Nights: Joe Cutler, Danserye: Michael Wolters, Kathrine and Peter Play the Recorder: Michael Wolters [CD Review].
Authors	Graham, Stephen
Publication date	2015-04
Original Citation	Graham, S 2015, 'Boogie Nights: Joe Cutler, Danserye: Michael Wolters, Kathrine and Peter Play the Recorder: Michael Wolters [CD Review].' Tempo (United Kingdom), vol. 69, no. 272, pp. 80-83.
Type of publication	Contribution to newspaper/magazine
Link to publisher's version	https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298214001156
Rights	© 2015, Cambridge University Press. Published as: Graham S. (2015) 'Michael Wolters, et al. - 'DANSERYE': MICHAEL WOLTERS. Danserye. Michelle Holloway (recs), Jack McNeill (cl. & bass cl.), Paul Norman (guit.), Simon Goff (vln, vla). BRC001 - 'KATHRYN AND PETER PLAY THE RECORDER': MICHAEL WOLTERS. The Voyage1; She stays2; My own step-song3; Seven Shakespeare Songs4; German Folk Tunes5; Antarctica duet: Kathryn und Peter durchqueren die Antarktis (Kathryn and Peter cross the Antarctic)6. 1-6Kathryn Bennetts & Peter Bowman (recs), 1,3,4Suzie Purkis (voice), 1,3,4,5Decibel. BRC002 - 'BOOGIE NIGHTS': JOE CUTLER. Boogie Nights1; Slippery Music2; Comfortable Music3; Extended Play4; Music for Parakeets5; Folk Music6. 1Orkest de Ereprijs, 2Schubert Ensemble, 3Darragh Morgan & Mary Dullea, 4Decibel, 5Nigel Clayton & Lionel Handy, 6Coull Quartet. BRC003', Tempo, 69(272), pp. 80-83. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298214001156 - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-10-12 06:19:20
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/18545

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

'BOOGIE NIGHTS': JOE CUTLER. *Boogie Nights*[1]; *Slippery Music*[2]; *Comfortable Music*[3]; *Extended Play*[4]; *Music for Parakeets*[5]; *Folk Music*[6]. [1]Orkest de Ereprijs, [2]Schubert Ensemble, [3]Darragh Morgan & Mary Dullea, [4]Decibel, [5]Nigel Clayton & Lionel Handy, [6]Coull Quartet. BRC 3

'DANSERYE': MICHAEL WOLTERS. *Danserye*. Michelle Holloway (recs), Jack McNeill (cl. & bass cl.), Paul Norman (guit.), Simon Goff (vln, vla). BRC 1

'KATHRYN AND PETER PLAY THE RECORDER': MICHAEL WOLTERS. *The Voyage*[1]; *She stays*[2]; *My own step-song*[3]; *Seven Shakespeare Songs*[4]; *German Folk Tunes*[5]; *Antarctica duet: Kathryn und Peter durchqueren die Antarktis* (Kathryn and Peter cross the Antarctic)[6]. [1-6]Kathryn Bennetts & Peter Bowman (recs), [1,3,4]Suzie Purkis (voice), [1,3,4,5]Decibel. BRC 2

The Birmingham Record Company (BRC) was set up in 2013 as a not-for-profit label that would release music by composers based at the Birmingham Conservatoire – Howard Skempton, Seán Clancy, Ed Bennett, Michael Wolters and Joe Cutler – as well as 'other like-minded left-field composers operating in the UK and further afield.'

Enjoying a degree of support from the Conservatoire but being run somewhat independently by the composers Clancy and the others, the label is a nice example of the kind of semi-independent, semi-institutional venture that the neoliberal internet age, with its shrinking public sector and its immaterial, devalued music, both allows and requires of the contemporary classical field. Or at least of the 'alt' end of it where this stuff might be said to exist, alongside other British ventures like Nonclassical and Kammer Klang.

The first three releases on BRC come from German composer Michael Wolters, whose *Danserye* and the double-disc *Kathryn and Peter Play the Recorder* were released in December 2013, and Joe Cutler, whose *Boogie Nights* came out in May 2014. They offer vivid illustration of the kind of work being produced by the 'Birmingham Five' who make up the roster of the label as it currently stands – snappy, witty, spiky and colourful, marked in Cutler's case by propulsive swung rhythms and bright Hollywood harmonies gone just wrong enough, and by rich and sweetly conceived folk-infused dances and microtonal colours in the case of much of the Wolters offering.

Boogie Nights collects together six Cutler pieces for a variety of different groupings,written between 2007and 2013. The key thing with Cutler's music, I think – at least for a certain kind of listener – is to navigate behind or through its surfaces, which can sometimes feel more glitzy than gripping. For example the thrusting brass, charging triangles and drums, and restless, rising unison motifs of the disc's title piece itself, written for Orkest de Ereprijs in combination with a 1920s mechanical dancehall organ, might seem like so much film music-like filler on first blush. But listened to more closely, there's much more than Bernstein sheen going on. 'Movement 1', for example, speeds through so much criss-crossing, snakes-and-ladders fun before reaching its oom-pah, stop-start climax, that you can't help but appreciate detail and surprise where you might have only heard boom and crash. 'Interlude', with its sprightly and strange piccolo, and 'Movement 2', with its stumbling five-beat pattern that keeps picking up and dropping beats as the music takes an elastic tour around the winds, tuned

percussion and brass of the ensemble, show similar alacrity; in other work coloured with such seemingly broad tonal and rhythmic strokes you might only get routine.

These surfaces are kaleidoscopic rather than matt. Though we get slowly evolving, rhythmically driving ostinatos across many of these pieces, they rarely feel homogenous in form or technique. The sound world and emotional tenor of the music is varied enough to create a sense of movement and range across the disc.

Where *Boogie Nights* is thrusting, effusive and melodically conjunct, *Slippery Music* tends towards restrained, scaly, even enigmatic chromaticism (when it's not jiving through prime number funk motifs, that is). Contrasts such as this abound. *Music for Parakeets* has cellist Lionel Handy and pianist Nigel Clayton in careful dialogue slowly negotiating a line through panelled material built on grounding repeated motifs, exploding here and there and expanding all the way along. Fidelio Trio members Darragh Morgan and Mary Dullea (on violin and piano respectively), on the other hand, expertly tally expressive, sighing material on the one hand and dancing, skulking Roadhouse music on the other across the three movements of *Comfortable Music*.

Similarly, where *Extended Play* sees Decibel ensemble charging nimbly through a post-minimalist party (infused by everything from four-to-the-floor folk foot-stomping and circus-like barndancing to cheeky parping winds, electric guitar wind-bagging to a turned-inside-out bebop conclusion), *Folk Music* deconstructs Polish Goralski music with a skittering intensity. Built on a number of repeating high pedal points in steady quavers and minims from the high strings of a super-charged Coull Quartet, around which 4:3 polyrhythms and scrawled chromatic flourishes create tension much in the manner of the bifurcated conflicts of the other works, *Folk Music* brings things to a close with rip-roaring momentum.

All of it adds up to a flavoursome mix that gestures at pastiche without ever having tongue anywhere near, let alone in, cheek. As with Ed Bennett, Cutler is a composer whose music is gestural, referential and familiar, but never fawning.

Michael Wolters operates in something of a different register.

Danserye, the first of Wolters' two discs I'll be discussing, plays on one level like a postmodern satire of renaissance and early baroque consort suites. Based on Thielmann Susato's collection of dances of the same name from 1550 and written to accompany choreography by Sebastian Matthias, the suite in fact steers surprisingly close to the Susato, both in rhythms and melodies and in spirit. In satire's place is an elegance of counterpoint and line, and a balance of textures and colours, that sucks in the ear and even gets the foot tapping.

Gently tumbling guitar, clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), violin (doubling viola) and recorder converse, parry and agree through a range of cheerful dances here. *Herkulestanz, Hillary's Basse Danse*, an allemande and a couple of galliards spin out propulsive imitative counterpoint with a fresh engagement of musical history and what that history might mean in 2014.

There are some modern touches here. The driving, insistent *Quartet* invents completely new material, incorporating repetition and dissonance in unexpected ways. Others, like

De Post, contain the odd 'wrong' note in the Stravinskyan neo-classical style or, as in *Gaillarde No. 7*, utilise unexpected arrangements and polymetres; in that case with a scratched violin and a parping bass clarinet seeing and sawing for a fun 80 seconds. For the most part though, *Hoboeckentanz*, *Ronde Loop*, *Mille Regretz* and the rest use balanced binary and ternary forms, clarion melodies and routinised rhythms in a delightfully straightforward way. Intriguing stuff altogether.

Kathryn and Peter Play the Recorder offers a lovely soundworld to get lost in. Written for the recorder duo Kathryn Bennetts and Peter Bowman, with whom Wolters has enjoyed a long relationship stretching back to 1997, the first disc of this utterly beguiling release places the recorders in a variety of contexts, joined by bass and intoning voice (Suzie Burkis) in *The Voyage*, voice and harpsichord for *7 Shakespeare Songs* and *My own step-song*, and amplified ensemble for *German Folk Tunes* (Ed Bennett's ensemble Decibel providing the able supporting cast).

Wolters talks in the sleeve notes about wanting to use the particular mechanics of recorders – fingers flexibly controlling pitch – to explore microtonality in the context of 'pop harmony.' This is just one of the many admixtures and reference points called up by these teasing, characterful works.

The recorder and ground bass in *The Voyage* bring us back into the soundworld of the quasi-Renaissance explored on *Danserye*, though the declamatory voice here connects more with contemporary monodrama. The aforementioned 'pop harmony,' meanwhile, is heard in *The Voyage* in things like a repeated F-G-Am sequence and a whole passage that hovers loosely around Gm. This kind of harmonic language is qualified by the roving microtones of the recorders, though, which scribble colour on top of the blunt diatonic motions of the plucked bass.

The shorter *She Stays* is a kaleidoscopic *pas de deux*, the two recorders curling around each other serpent-like, whilst *My own step-song* is a tense, expostulatory recital spotlighting Burkis that uses harpsichord and recorders, again exploiting the fruitful contrast of diatonic sequences and curving, sighing microtones above them, to frame and qualify the singer's anxious verses. *Seven Shakespeare Songs*, which include brief settings of familiar lyrics from plays such as *King Lear*, *Measure for Measure* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is maybe not as distinctive as the other pieces on the disc, hewing closely as it does to sometimes routine voice-led text setting. But the clarity and poise of the songs are appreciated nonetheless. *German Folk Tunes*, the final piece on the first disc, is a skip through a bouquet of folk-like tunes, scored in a blistering way that to me maybe suggests satire more than homage. This means that in the end, despite the fun and flavour of the achievement, this set grabs my attention less than the more enigmatic earlier pieces.

The second disc of *Play the Recorder* consists solely of a forty-minute narrative tone poem, *Kathryn und Peter durchqueren die Antarktis* (Kathryn and Peter cross the Antarctic). Where pieces like *German Folk Tunes* and some of the numbers from *Danserye* are fun and demonstrative, the Antarctic piece is austere and still; but it is no less enticing for all its concentration. The piece formed the basis of a radio play and a stage show, both produced in collaboration with theatre artist Marcus Droß. Heard here we only have the two recorders' hypnotic unisoning and tilting conversation, a duet of constant steady motion in which one recorder seemingly describes the surface of the ice

whilst the other speculates about the bedrock below. Tiny little extensions, isolated trills and meek curlicues around eighth-tone microtonal melodies make up the matter of this piece, which draws one's attention in and holds it for long durations through subtle arcs of dynamic swells, psychoacoustic projection and registral ballet. Bennett and Bowman's playing is delicate and mesmerising throughout.

With these Wolters and Cutler portraits the Birmingham Record Company has got off to a flying start. Further releases, including Seán Clancy's guitar quartet, *Forty-Five Minutes of Music on the Subject of Football*, performed by Ensemble KROCK, and a portrait disc of Ed Bennett with Decibel, show a catalogue – and maybe even a music scene – in rude health.

Stephen Graham