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Invited by VARIA/Lisa L Petersson to, from personal perspective, write about one Duet Performance evening during VARIA festival period.

SEEING THE MUSIC, HEARING THE MOVES

By Robert Lyons, spectator/listener at VARIA2018 performance on Friday, 19 October at 7:00 PM.

THE SPACE: (Room & light by Lisa Larsdotter Petersson, video-light installation by Christina Hallström)

An extremely, clinically white room, deep but narrow, a funnel tapering furthest in, exceedingly high-ceilinged over the central performance space. High up and far away skylight windows, black in the chilly autumn evening, a few single strings of small white lights, accent-lines along a floor here, the upper edge of a wall there, a dominant staircase along the right-hand wall leads up to a broad and deep balcony with a waist-high, white-covered railing and with its own single string of lights and a single floor lamp. A silent film, a projection of wave-like, water-like strokes in motion, plays, loops continuously throughout the evening on the upper half of the left-hand wall, creating counter-rhythms to the physical/tonal performances below and beside it. The floor is covered with a dance mat of peacock blue, proudly lit by a floodlight on the floor to the right. The audience of about seventy crowded along two walls, on low benches, chairs, on the floor. Ready, expectant.

1. VOICE UTTER(D)ANCES

By Irena Z. Tomažin and Alessio Castellacci (A)

A woman, standing, in black, a man, sitting beside her on the mat in black trousers and red tank top. Both facing front. They make slight and occasional hissing and popping sounds. A conversation develops with these sounds and finger movements. Shifting into kissing sounds. Young sounds that generate larger, laid-back moves. He almost speaks. Still facing outwards. She pulls. He almost speaks Danish. She rips and shrugs. He strokes the floor. She reaches upwards. He sings tones and stands up. And picks up on her breathing sounds. Her sounds become hoarse. He follows the guttural sounds with his arms, then articulating his own singing sounds with precise, spaced moves. Now she's backing up into the deeply funneled space to her own slight, singing tones, while he has a dialogue with himself in his own space. His dialogue shifts into a sound resembling a rusty door hinge. Her voice picks it up, shadows it, generating swinging movements. The hinge sounds develop and fill the space with overtones, undertones. Her music is now that of the pumping up of bicycle tires.

A sudden stop, a sudden silence. For the first time they look at each other.

He watches as she walks away with her back to him, now she stands close to the wall on the left, facing a corner, sounding like a drill. He sighs. She moves to another position in the room. He crosses to the corner where she stood. He chants to the wall. Her voice drills into another wall. They move, extremely slowly now. "Moy, moy" she chants with her shoulders against the wall. He moves back around a corner out of my sight, although visible to other audience members. He moves back into the central space. Now they watch each other. A clear movement conversation. But then she again turns her back on him, producing popping sounds with increasing volume. And now a closer connection between them as they, although not facing each other, do a series of similar hand gestures while she sounds like a metal winch or a small mammal.

He returns to his starting position, seated on the mat in the central space. Although at a distance, and close to a wall, she doubles his position on the mat. Now they produce long, open tones, in harmony or at octaves. And now physically and musically close, with closed mouths they sing in unison, heads close together. At last.

I have witnessed a subtle opera. An improvisation about hesitancy while exhibiting no hesitancy at all in the give and take of physical and auditive artistic communication. A shifting relationship between two people avoiding, inviting, ignoring, receiving, expelling...and, finally, almost embracing.

2. *STILL BREATHING*

By Hui-Chun Lin (H-C, with cello) and Lisa Larsdotter Petersson (L)

L, in loose, black clothes, makes whispery, gossipy clowning, close and affectionate contact with the audience. H-C enters the central space with her cello. Stands with it. Sits with it. Throughout the piece L displays her kinship with Jacques Tati, Charlie Chaplin and, at one point, the ape-like performance in Ruben Östlund's film *The Square*. H-C wanders with her cello, shows it off, plucking a tone here and there. L "shocks" with sudden noises and moves. H-C scratches, blank-faced, while L tumbles, grotesques to the cello tones, also scratches, mimics speech, walks on her toes, and her breathing grimaces while H-C pizzicatos far back in the room and sings short noises/tones while L, now on H-C's chair, performs worn-out, nervous, alone, scratching, unsure. She shakes to H-C's verbal and plucked tonal comments. Now H-C harasses L with quick furious bowing, breathless, exquisite technique, chasing her off the chair. L on the staircase. They call to each other. When L almost breaks the bannister they speak some English. L: "What's said in this room – stays in this room!" Deep voice. Moving like a drunken person with a low voice, she disappears (for me) up the staircase to the balcony, high above, while H-C plays hurdy-gurdy high tones as she walks around slowly on the mat down here. I see the audience watching L's moves on the balcony. I hear her buzzing sounds. H-C now playing cello on one knee, calling cat-like and water-like "Heather! Heather!". I hear L from above: "There is a heather fly up here." "Heather flies flying around. You should be very careful what you say and do. They don't keep any secrets at all. They creep into every corner of your body." In a low voice: "They steal all your secrets."

H-C, crawling, measuring the floor with her bow. L, now sitting halfway down the staircase, singing in a slightly higher voice, chanting, describing the measuring. H-C: "I still miss this much space", showing the space between thumb and forefinger. She rubs her cello while L mumbles complaining sounds. H-C rubs and plays, now it's "music" and music as well which she also sings as long calls while L moves to, on, from, back to the chair with kicks, turns, pushes and shoves.

H-C stands still, posing with her cello beside her, her arm over its shoulder. Now the cello dips, H-C holding up her drunken friend. Now L joins them and they are three tipsy friends, straight-faced, trying unsuccessfully to maintain their dignity in a touching family portrait. And during their posing they're discussing the ending of the piece. Is it over now or not? And then it is.

And the piece was a joyous audience teaser and pleaser. A female Laurel and Hardy expanded by a third comic talent – H-C's cello - in which L's Hardy figure constantly breaks out of the frame.

3. *TIES & BONDS*. Susanne Martin and Alex Nowitz

The man sits on his knees, immobile, silent, in the center of the peacock blue central space. Silence. He then whistles two tones simultaneously, an octave apart. Two octaves? He adds a deep-throated drone. Then he includes an arm. Another arm. Then without the arms. Total bird. A knocking sound. Then that sound combined with birdsong.

The woman descends the staircase, joins him in silence, standing against a wall. She: "Alex, that was a beautiful place you found there." He: "Sorry. We dropped...something." She creeps halfway up the staircase. He produces rhythmic knocking sounds, birdsongs, other open notes. Extremely rhythmic now, deep tones against the high whistles, his hands conducting the music. He stands, walks across the mat, up the staircase with his deep tones and overtones, past the woman to the balcony, disappearing, seated behind the railing. Silence. Stillness.

She descends, walks along the wall. She: "He took a really strong, beautiful decision there to take the middle of the stage. All about inclusion/exclusion – Right?".

She moves into the rear space, hidden from the balcony. “When I do my first beautiful down here, he can’t see – Right? And then I argued yesterday that this would have to be the place. And then there’s this corner – Right?” (She moves towards a corner on the left, still unseen from above). “So much power – It’s BLUE!” Now she moves slowly, close to the floor with grace, power, beauty – silence – then, as she reaches the center of the central space: “I’ll probably stay here as well.”

He watches from the staircase as she poses with/against gravity. Energizing the center and the corners. He descends and sits, his back to the audience in his chosen middle place. Low double tones, then smacking sounds, legs suddenly thrown over his head and then quickly back again. She watches in stillness. Then quietly moves. She: “I want to make another confession.” Silent moves. “I want to never ever improvise with musicians.” She moves close to the floor and to us as he, back still to the audience, sings contralto “opera” with great ranges of expressivity and volume, gesturing with hands and arms. He then turns around on his knees, now facing us.

They perform a silent love dance. She: “I only improvise with Alex because he knows where to place himself. He can even dance.” They dance a waltz. He opens a door in the rear space and finds a blue plastic bucket into which he sings his low double tones. She: “This was not our agreement and I feel a bit...”. She opens the same door and finds a long-handled sponge-mop which she places in his now-abandoned bucket. She performs a slow leap. He plays air guitar with the sponge-mop. He takes a plastic bottle from behind the door and beats it rhythmically against a wall, accompanying her percussive hits of sponge-mop and bucket. He adds Creole calls of *hay-o, hay-o* to the rattles and hits while she falls to her knees, now silently using her right shoulder to prop up the extended mop handle against the low inner ceiling. His song is now a deep-throated, troubled chant, as she gently strokes audience members with the mop handle. She: “It’s about touch. Being together in this thing here. About some kind of intimacy happening here – Right? It’s kind of scary maybe... So I go carefully – Right?”

Upstairs he slowly scrapes a wooden chair along the balcony floor producing a cello sound. Below, slowly dancing to his bowing of the chair, she traverses the blue mat, the blue bucket on her head. I’m thrown into the surreal. De Chirico? Dalí? Magritte!

He stops at the railing. She crawls along the mat, her head in the bucket. He expertly plays cups against the wall while descending the staircase. She screams, calls: “Alex?!”, finds him on the staircase and clings to his waist as they slowly move up the staircase. Once on the balcony, with her still holding on, he plays the cups/the wall with majestically sweeping arm movements.

They stand still together at the railing. She: “Take this thing off my head.” He does. They bow.

The amazing tonalities of this piece stretched their tentacles gloriously into all the arts.

NO NEED TO SUMMARIZE

- since the tentacles of this evening’s multitude of tonalities continue their stretching’s, not only backwards into ancient times when the arts refused to separate, not only into the rich and deep community of art experimenters and renewers in medieval pageants, renaissance explosions, dada devilries, heretic happenings, and riotous Russians,
- but also far beyond the arts into our longings, our concerns, our needs to break through the troubling border-building of these times on our globe.