

OnominO: Natural Architecture

By Christopher Hale

I remember first seeing those famous Mandelbrot set diagrams. The infinitely repeating appearance of that strange celestial shape, the whirls of stunning detail in magnification. It felt like the revelation of some invisible code of nature – impossible complexity arising as simple mathematical rules express and express, cumulate and cumulate. The architecture of the universe.

Experiencing OnominO, the new sound and video collaboration between improvising drummer Niko Schauble and artist Jon Tarry, feels this way too. The music and vision of OnominO is architectural, but its complex order is that of nature – revealed more than wrought; grown more than assembled. It's a natural architecture, like a biological system, or the fractal patterns of snowflakes. It's flocking birds, swarming bees. The labyrinth of an ant colony or the spontaneous magnetic moment of swirling electrons.

OnominO is a suite of improvised duets: Tarry's live electronics with Schauble's drum set. A fascinating methodology is at work in their partnership: each improvises alone at opposite edges of a continent, sharing the files to which the other responds. Though born in studios, and marshalling various production techniques, the music creation is immediate and intuitive, each player committed to following the first improvisational impulse.

It seems to me that central to this flow is that both players are fully embodied in their creation of sound, albeit at different scales. Schauble is moving at the drums, in whole body gestures. Tarry, by contrast, is literally drawing his sound with fingertips. Tarry's instrument is a complex of microphone sensors triggering synthesised sound modules by the friction of a drawing pen on surfaces. Tarry calls this original technique "sonic drawing." Each player is in motion, responding with their bodies to the sound in any moment, as beings in space, situated at their instruments.

These two bodies-in-motion and their shared strategy fixes the difference of OnominO from other electro-acoustic projects. Tarry's sound world is guided by the flowing spirals of his sound-triggering pen, giving the synthesised ambience a free-rhythm and dynamism distinct from the familiar behaviours of ordinary synth oscillations. Tarry's sound world is a multidimensional existence, in constant flux. Ambient drones churn around the stereo field, folding into speeding pulsations or orchestral layers; consonance and fragile tonality is shadowed by noise and dissonance. Volcanic bass menaces out of the sub synth modulations, or delays layer a Gregorian solemnity in cathedral reverb. Optimism in a pinging major triad can be subsumed by a malevolent purring of feedback. It is sophisticated synth practice. Noise, ambient pads, fluttering rhythm and sweeping space merge and flow.

Schauble at the drums is equally present and wayfinding. A master improviser and contemporary composer, Schauble has a swagger on the drum set which combines looseness with crisp articulation. His drumming here is fulsome in the moment, improvising form and structure as much as individual gesture. Loping trip-hop drum loops squeeze through filters, their jangling beats creating instant polyrhythms on contact Tarry's synth

pulsations. Abstracted rhythms scatter between the headphones. Big brush-stroke gestures alternate with free-time jungle breaks of crispy snares, dubbed out toms and chattering high hats. Groove is never far below the surface of Schauble's commentary, between the sparsest utterances a hidden rhythmic purpose drives the timeline on.

Schauble describes the OnominO process in the duo's first experiment, a brooding and kinetic piece called *Barkla*: "There are no edits. The drums are the first take. This was so satisfying for both of us and set the tone, spirit and methodology for the entire project." *Barkla* smears Tarry's finely controlled feedback like the Milky Way, while Schauble transmits ritual-like drumming messages across the expanse. The electronics are warm, nuanced, willing to become emotional. Sci-fi filters and polyrhythmic pulsations answer Schauble's drum chants from the deep. After *Barkla*, the way forward was clear. "We kept sending tracks backwards and forwards," says Schauble, "Jon adding electronics to drums tracks, and me adding drums to his tracks. If we arrived at a stage where it took more than 2 reviews, we discarded that track, as it drove us away from the improvisational nature of the project, to which we wanted to adhere and which forms part of the excitement."

Tarry calls the rhythmic energy between the players an "armature of temporality": a power-generating component in an electric machine, this one counting time as rhythm from two polarities. Indeed, rhythm is a key fascination in OnominO. Tarry's drones beat with low-frequency oscillations, layering in complex relationships. Schauble's drum provides frames, each gesture throwing the rhythmic fabric into new contexts. Tarry calls these rhythmic feelings "scaffolds . . . musical architecture." The architecture of an organism, a root system growing into the environment in all directions.

The duo moved fast, recording the album over three months. As the pieces developed, Tarry's visual mind began to "see" the sound. The artist began creating video works in response to the music, creating a series of vignettes which journey from vast digital spacescapes to simple, touching cinematography. Tarry describes rendering his vision as "film sequences generated from computational sources complemented with expanded cinematic references." An early manifestation was a video accompanying *Barkla*. "In this filmic take," explains Tarry, "a continuum reveals the visual dimension of the track as a data culture inspired score."

OnominO is a complex, emotional and unique experience. Tarry and Schauble's commitment to improvisation, bodily movement and intuition gives their electronic universe a different kind of life, a cosmic architecture. It is man and machine absorbed in each other's operations, appearing as a model of the human integrated in a digital environment without angst or conflict; only joy, experimentation, art and sound.