

Catherine Lamb - Point-Wave (2019)



1. *Point-Wave* 37:01 Cristián Alvear - Guitar, Electronics

An indication of Catherine Lamb's versatility is that her last Another Timbre appearance was on Viola Torros (2018) in the company of fellow violist Johnny Chang, the two playing music by and for the eponymous enigmatic female musician who was born sometime in the late Vedic period, somewhere in the Indus valley region.

In contrast, Lamb's 2015 composition "Point/Wave" is described as being for guitar and environmental chord cycle (with live microphones/super collider code.) Here, it is played by Chilean guitarist Cristián Alvear, who approached Lamb in 2013-14 to write a guitar piece for a project he was doing in Chile. Although Lamb had composed for guitar as a teenager, had previously composed pieces for pedal steel guitar, and included re-tuned electric guitars with e-bows in various pieces, as a more mature composer "Point/Wave" was her first piece specifically written for acoustic guitar. While she thought it could benefit from the extra sonority, decay and harmonic clarity of steel strings, it works perfectly well on Alvear's nylon-strung classical guitar.

Alvear is credited with playing guitar and electronics, the latter referring to the "environmental chord cycle" mentioned above, which consists of an infinite cycle of four chords which overlap with one another; Lamb says "there is always the potential to correspond with the happening chord in the guitar part, but sometimes it needs to continue to cycle before you have the sympathetic correlation in a given moment." (Some of which may relate to what Alvear is doing with his feet in the YouTube clip below...) The chords are ever-present as a backdrop, but the guitar is indubitably the main focus of the piece with the chords playing a subsidiary role which is supportive without being accompaniment as such.

The disc opens to the sound of a sustained chord, soon joined by Alvear playing single notes which are given enough space to be heard individually as they decay away. Gradually and unhurriedly, the notes become more frequent but remain distinct, with Alvear sounding in control throughout. Just occasionally it seems as if he is waiting for just the right moment to play a note, in order for it to fit in with the background chord. While there are repetitions in the note played, the music always feels as if it is moving forward and subtly evolving. Although this recording clocks in at just thirty-seven minutes, while it is playing "Point/Wave" feels boundless, as if one were listening to a small portion of a far greater—potentially infinite—continuum. As a whole, it makes a tranquil, relaxing experience which stands up very well to frequent listening. A triumph for both the composer and the performer. ---John Eyles, allaboutjazz.com

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