



# asleep, street, pipes, tones CD

MICHAEL PISARO: asleep, street, pipes, tones for bass clarinet, electric guitar and tape (2009)

**Håkon Stene · Kristine Tjøgersen**

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**Imagine a breath that goes on forever; where everything is different yet everything the same. 'asleep, street, pipes, tones' is a remarkably beautiful electro-acoustic work by the eminent composer Michael Pisaro (born 1961, Buffalo, New York), whose seventeen short movements – organised according to the four groupings indicated by the title – last in total for just over one hour. Interpreted in this recording with great precision and delicacy by Håkon Stene and Kristine Tjøgersen, it presents us with a partially frozen sound world where small, even infinitesimal shifts of emphasis in an otherwise glacial rate of change appear to take on the dramatic status of major events. Observing the oscillations of sound waves as the piece's file plays out, one might see a long flat plain suddenly interrupted by vertiginous skyscraper peaks before the shimmer of reverberation decays and we're flat out on the plateau again, as if a mysterious metropolis of mile-high buildings intersected a vast expanse of sea-level swamp.**

The intensity of these sudden, transfiguring peaks – like a brief glimpse of colour or figuration seen against an abstract monochrome ground – is strikingly apparent, and one learns to regard them as a kind of gift from the composer to the listener, although there's a different type of pleasure to be had from the steady, sustaining drones that form the figure's ground. As the critic Ben Ratcliff wrote in The New York Times: "Michael Pisaro likes his music to develop as a slow-motion force, with adjustments of tone and pitch and instrumentation so long-brewing that you lose your awareness of the player's hand and the composer's will." Once we grow accustomed to the slow duration and rate of change, our ears begin to notice more and more detail, like eyes growing used to the dark and discovering new constellations in the night sky. And as the music begins to work on us, we in turn start to work on it, decoding more and more information as each listening-minute passes, or the experience is repeated by playing the piece again, and the associations we bring to it continue to deepen. In simpler words, it's trippy.

## What would it mean to experience the world primarily through listening?

In time, as with prolonged exposure to the comparable, process-based works of artists James Turrell or Bill Viola, who also deal with both the minutiae of subjective perception and the big stuff of existential questions in their practice, we might think that all of human life is here: birth, existence, death, even the mystic stew of gases cooling to form the universe itself. This enlarged sense that one is engaging with something really profound is reinforced by the links between Michael Pisaro's particular interests in the organisation of sound and what we might know about the music and philosophy of other cultures, especially the transcendent sense of time we encounter through the role of the tamboura drone in classical Indian music.

By placing the listener at the very centre of his work ("What would it mean to experience the world primarily through listening?", he writes in the notes to accompany this recording), Michael Pisaro is making the processes of how we receive and apprehend sound and music, his effective subject. Similarly, his interpreters in 'Asleep, Street, Pipes, Tones' are given a degree of freedom that goes far beyond the normal boundaries separating composer and performer, becoming co-creators of what he describes as "a new realisation of the piece made for and with Håkon."

### Håkon Stene

This also reflects a special interest of Håkon Stene (born 1977, Fredrikstad): what he has described as "the expanded role of the performer in experimental music", a topic he explored in the research project 'This is Not a Drum – Towards a Post-Instrumental Practice', undertaken at the Norwegian Academy of Music.

### Kristine Tjøgersen

Kristine Tjøgersen (born 1982), who also composes, works with Ensemble neoN and also with asamisimasa. Her contributions to 'Asleep, Street, Pipes, Tones' are absolutely key to the development of the work, providing the long transfiguring breaths that characterise its elastic sense of time, and giving voice to the siren-songs of its dream-like atmosphere, where everything is

different yet everything the same.

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