

on his lap, bringing in quiet creaking vocals with gentle rhythms and meticulously controlled, quiet feedback and snare noise. This pair worked so well together with their unique yet unified approaches that I preferred the sparser moments where the field recordings were not present.

The *Jitterbug* performance was followed by Viola Yip's *Liminal Lines II*. Yip is known for visceral performances where she attunes her body to the quirks of a particular piece of technology. *Liminal Lines II* was a gesture-driven noise set where she interacted with a plastic raincoat, lined with speaker cables, attached to a chain of effects pedals. The performance began with a tone slowly emerging, with slight movements, eventually leading to larger movements to touch different parts of the coat together, allowing noise and feedback patterns to gradually emerge. This then built into a full-bodied noise wall and an eventual scrunching up of the coat. The performance radiated tension with certain gestures not always rewarded, or at least not right away, allowing both artist and technology to become symbiotic agents in the work. Yip's set was complemented well that evening by a very differently approached noise set from Nacre (Marion Camy-Palou) working with a simple set-up of electric guitar, amp and effects pedals. The craft that went into this performance was incredible. Nacre's approach possessed a powerful rawness: relentless attacks on the guitar with sounds emerging that were so detailed it almost seemed like magic, given the set-up. The textural detail was particularly special: swiftly and fluidly morphing between and layering percussive tones, voice-like feedback, rich drones and noise walls.

I am always excited when contemporary music organisations make the effort to step out of the concert hall and cross over with popular music, jazz or the more DIY side of experimental music. I strongly believe that these communities should mix more and that they can inspire and learn from each other. This year's Electric Spring put on two acts that did this. Four-piece 'avant-pop experiment' Saenture worked well in this role with a set that moved between drum-machine dance tracks and ambient tracks with synth drones, field recordings and beautiful moments from a gently played processed psalter harp. Two of the members were responsible for a wonderfully organic approach to visuals, drawing and collaging images under a projector. The festival also put on post-rock band Adore//Repel, which frankly was mediocre with a stand-off laddishness that I prefer to avoid when I can. I would have been much more excited to hear a rock band that were more exploratory and

inclined to care about experimental music, of which there are plenty in the north of England.

Though Electric Spring, like any festival aiming to be varied, had points that were hit-or-miss, I truly believe it to be special in terms of programming exciting music, pushing boundaries and bringing together a curious community of listeners and practitioners.

Mia Windsor

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**Beibei Wang, *Wu Xing* (5 Elements), Tangram, LSO St Luke's, London, 28 January 2023.**

This slightly belated celebration of the Lunar New Year was hosted by the Tangram collective of young composers and performers of Chinese heritage, founded by composer Alex Ho and yangqin player/singer/songwriter Reylon Yount. Tangram gave their first concert at LSO St Luke's in 2019 and since then they have gone from strength to strength, recently being named Associate Artists of the venue and nominated for an RPS Award. Their world premiere performance of Beibei Wang's hour-long music theatre work *Wu Xing* (5 Elements) drew a capacity crowd that was unusually diverse and largely young.

As part of the international Chinese diaspora, Tangram are interested in contemporary, transnational and traditional Chinese culture. Their work brings together Chinese and Western instruments, ideas and concepts in a highly contemporary manner that acknowledges the complexity and multiplicity of identity. In a pre-concert conversation with Alex Ho, the composer and percussionist Beibei Wang stated that percussion is her 'playground', evoking memories of her childhood playing with stones. She discovered traditional Peking opera as a student in Beijing and explained that performers in this genre have a tone-rich language (far more so than in the contemporary spoken language) and that speech and gesture are as important as song.

Wang's *Wu Xing* is structured in five sections, which each focus on a single element, framed by a prelude and postlude. The performance area was set with a vast array of percussion instruments to the left and right and a row of four large transparent water-filled bowls to the centre. We started in darkness with light picking out the huge arched window frames of LSO St Luke's. Instrumental performers entered carrying singing bowls, circling the rim with a beater.

Peking Opera performer Songyuan He entered hobbling and wearing a very long white beard. Unexpectedly, He addressed the audience in English in Peking opera vocal style: 'Where am I?'

Wang led the percussion in the first movement 'Earth', in which Yuxiao Chen's superbly evocative xun played a folk tune; its fragile, shuddering, highly vocal sound, like a lower-pitched and more refined ocarina, was deeply touching. All members of the ensemble were required to be multi-instrumentalists, and led by Wang they shook stones and stomped in rhythm, a collective led by a virtuoso. How Wang makes stones sing is an unanswered question. Her solos and that of the xun player had an improvisatory feel, like jazz breaks. They created an animated ritual out of a work song.

The 'Wood' section opened with a playful woodblock dialogue between Wang and her fellow virtuoso percussionist Mike Skelton. He and Reylon Yount (billed as their alter ego Mantawoman; they might have been a silent movie star in another life) played a pair of cheeky monk characters who were inspired by young Buddhists studying scripture and martial arts. Two Chinese lutes (Skelton and Charlie Cawood) dialogued with piccolo (Daniel Shao), cello (Kate Shortt) and a rising tone gong in an effortless fusion of different musical styles.

Unsurprisingly, the 'Fire' section was the most dramatic of all. Emerging from stroked gongs, a scintillating drum duet was a drama without words, percussion as theatre. A vocalising Kate Shortt was transfigured, her evil cackling building up the excitement. Now sporting a red beard, He proved a virtuoso twirler of a long silver stick. This completely contrasted with the following 'Water' section, where the performers were bathed in blue light and circular stroking sounds marked a change of mood. The transparent water-filled bowls were the main focus of

attention here, and Shao exchanged his flutes for a plastic tube. Water was not only the topic but also the sound source, with Shao blowing bubbles and Wang dipping a gong in water.

Wang segued to the final section, metal, introducing a faster beat that was picked up by the others. Here, the background colour changed to terracotta and Songyuan He wore a red mask on the back of his head and performed mostly with his back to the audience. Quieter, mysterious interludes with scurrying vocals, cello harmonics and more cackling from Shortt ultimately dissolved into a frenetic climax with Shao circling around while playing piccolo. Gongs heralded silence, interrupted by audience applause; many thought the work ended there, but there was a brief conclusion with beautiful, fragile hand-held bells, and the final sound we heard was water.

*Wu Xing* surprised me. The concept was one I expected from an ensemble that draws on traditional and contemporary Chinese musical culture, and the deft combination of Western and Chinese instruments is something I have encountered in previous Tangram performances. But the powerfully theatrical performance and its emotional breath, from casual wit to calm meditation and everything in between, was unexpected and refreshing. The stunning lighting, designed by Charlie Foran in collaboration with Wang, turned the pillars and arches of LSO St Luke's into a mythical setting beyond time and place. Tangram are a multitalented ensemble willing to take risks and turn their hands to anything: they have already established themselves as an exciting and thought-provoking group on the London scene, and their imaginative musical interpretations of what it means to be Chinese today deserve a wide audience.

Caroline Potter

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