

The boundaries of a "world" can be defined in a multitude of ways: space, time, or—as in the case of the musical worlds presented on this album—worlds defined by people as reflected through their personal musical interests. A world is a fluid entity; constantly changing; constantly shifting. However, these fluid boundaries are not necessarily apparent until one sees how a set of worlds connect, intersect, and collide when overlaid and / or juxtaposed.

In Norse mythology, the Yggdrasil is a mighty tree that connects individual worlds of a spiritual cosmos. For the *Yggdrasil-Soli*, Ulrich Krieger has used this metaphor to express a musical cosmos that he is a part of. One that is largely defined by people with whom he is connected. He invited 7 other musicians to compose pieces with the instruction: "that the pieces have to be 30 minutes long or playable within 30 minutes, and that they have to be playable simultaneously with the other pieces." The project was premiered in Los Angeles at the *wulf*., a sort of music world unto itself, on December 10, 2010.

This project reflects Krieger's nature. A person reverent to those with whom he is connected; non-imposing; and with an understanding that if you give people the freedom to express themselves, the resulting harmony of their worlds will reflect a diverse cosmos unified by individual expression.

Both the personalities of the invited composers and the musical pieces of this project are quite varied. The invocation of such an elaborate and expansive mythology leaves an incredible amount to the imagination, especially if you know these people personally. As such, I will attempt to briefly describe the pieces sonically; grouping them into the three strata of the mythological cosmos itself—heaven, earth, and underworld—while allowing the listeners themselves to draw connections among the people, the music, and the myth that frames the project as a whole.

Worlds of the gods

The first piece, *Drei Nornen*, is by Krieger himself and draws from the myth for the material of the piece. The Norns are female oracles of sorts that control the destiny of gods and men (implicitly including the world of the gods assigned to this piece, Vanaheimr). Musically, Krieger defines three sounds; each a multiphonic on the saxophone corresponding to one of the Norns: Urd, Verandi, and Skud. What is most striking about the recording is how precisely Krieger articulates the sounds. This is something that is equally awe-inspiring when Krieger plays live. You almost get the sensation that such precision cannot be made by a human and that some of the tones are synthesized, but indeed they are acoustic. Through such intense focus, an expansive universe is revealed. In *Drei Nornen*, Krieger creates a meta-world that reflects the cosmos of the mythology as a whole. Where individual entities with core characteristics reveal themselves through minor variations.

Malfatti's *unagiya* is similarly minimal; consisting of a limited pitch gamut played on bass harmonica. Throughout the piece, low, long tones are interleaved with long silences. At any given time: one tone, one pitch, or silence. The instrument contributes to the overall nature of the piece. Each tone has a rich harmonic spectrum that varies ever so slightly throughout the course of its articulation. Though subtle, the beginning of each tone also varies as it takes a critical mass of air before a tone is actuated.

As the thread of musical material separated by silence reinforces itself, so does the characteristics of the sounds themselves and the individual musical proclivities of each composer: Krieger's dyadic multiphonics with variations; Malfatti's single-pitched bass tones; and in Beuger's *un feu qui n'est pas celui du soleil*, melodies (10 to be precise). Beuger's piece is further distinguishable in that each melody is played once and only once, starting every 3 minutes.

Worlds of humans and giants

Though Krieger attributed Michael Pisaro-Liu's piece *branch melody* to the world of humans, in a way, it is the most ethereal of all the pieces in the set. It acts as a sonic bridge between the worlds of the gods to the worlds of the humans. The tones are all produced on an electric guitar, often using an e-bow. The musical events are also less punctuated by silences than the pieces representing the worlds of the gods.

Similar to the opening track by Krieger, Aniela Perry's contribution uses the Nordic myth as a metaphor for the piece itself, which is titled *Dáinn, Dvalinn, Duneyrr, Duraprór* after four of the giants of Jotunn. The piece consists of a set of 23 musical "events" (as Perry describes them in the score). The material is more expansive in this world than that of Krieger's in the opening track, but they do relate and connect. Much of the musical material is dyadic and the spread of the dyads on the cello often resembles a multiphonic on the saxophone. A subtle element that gives character to the piece as a whole is that the bow is prepared with leaves.

The compositions of the worlds of the humans and giants are the most varied of the three strata. The last of which, Carter Williams piece '*Wieder ward Milch und Zucker vermischt...*', is also the most varied within itself. Similar to Perry's piece, there is a preparation that gives character to the sound world. This time with clothesline clips on the strings of the violin. While this contributes to the sound throughout, the piece is primarily defined by the diversity of musical materials and gestures: ranging from long harmonics to repeated rhythmic gestures. As such, this musical world has a wider boundary and somehow more overtly intersects / overlaps sonically with all the other pieces of the project.

Underworld

The pieces of the underworld resulted in stark contrast from the worlds of the gods, humans, and giants. All pieces of the underworld seem to connect by the nature of the recordings. For example, even though not explicated in the scores, both Holter's *Drop and Bell Song* and So's *underworld* feel more like field recordings than the rest of the pieces.

Holter's score is the most minimal of all the set with one concise instruction: "Play bells in unison with water drops". But it is the quality of the recording that suggests the underworld. The sonic texture and character of the bells and water drops almost feel as if she recorded everything while navigating some dark, damp cave. So's piece follows quite naturally. It consists of nine musical parts: one silent, one with one tone, with two, three, four, etc. To be played in any order. Like Holter's piece, the quality of the recording gives character and feel to the piece just as much as the musical material. As if the sound source and the recording apparatus are divided. As if listening to the other worlds filtered through the confines of the underworld.

The final piece, *Von den letzten Dingen* (from the last thing), is again by Krieger. Like the starting piece that binds the other end of the set, this piece is also an encapsulation of the cosmos as a whole. This time from the underworld as opposed to the heavens. Just as there are three sets of worlds, Krieger's score specifies 3 types of sounds: 3 pure waveforms, 3 colored / filtered noises, and 3 concrete sounds. Each of the 9 sounds are played 3 times throughout the piece. That is, they are equally represented. No one being more present or emphasized than the others.

Simultaneous

If the listener so chooses, they may overlay various subsets of the pieces exploring different scopes of the Yggdrasil. The final track on this album is the sounding of all 9 compositions simultaneously. What is dispersed in time throughout the previous nine tracks, culminates in a single overlay that reveals how the individual worlds naturally connect and overlap. The cosmos becomes elucidated. A synergy of individual worlds creates something that is both somehow greater than the sum of its parts yet which maintains, and is only made possible by, the uniqueness and individuality of each world.

- Michael Winter