

# The Boomerang

New reissues rated on the rebound

## Moniek Darge

### *Sounds Of Sacred Places*

Kye CD

Belgian sound artist Moniek Darge wasn't exactly languishing in obscurity before the Kye imprint started its series documenting her work. She had been active in any number of collaborations, and she also co-directed the Logos Foundation, which staged concerts and festivals. But she had certainly dropped off the radar. Logos Duo, her long-running pairing with Godfried-Willem Raes, seemed to have gone dormant, and she hadn't released a new solo album for many years.

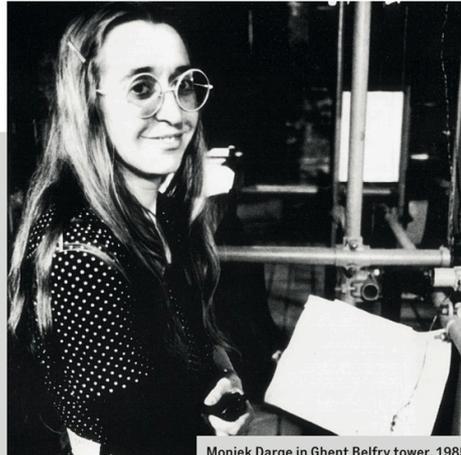
Kye opened their Darge series in 2009 with *Soundies: Selected Work 1980–2001*, a diverse, fascinating selection that serves as a useful introduction to the breadth of her art. Darge applies a range of techniques – improvisation, electroacoustic composition, concrète-style tape-splicing – to a variety of sound sources, conflating them into often dramatic collages. The less convincing *Crete Soundies* followed in 2010, comprising contemporary field recording compositions created during residencies on the island. This third instalment is a remastered reissue of Darge's 1987 album *Sounds Of Sacred Places*, with no extra material but with sleeve notes and artwork faithfully reproduced. It uses a comparable approach to *Crete Soundies*, but to more powerful effect. Where the three pieces on *Crete Soundies* were overlong and prone to bluster and portent, these sound sharp and self-aware.

Darge's work with field recordings is indebted to Luc Ferrari's ground-breaking early 1970s *Presque Rien* series, whose clever editing and temporal sensitivity brought out the social and psychological

as well as the sonic and physical qualities of particular places. Darge's emphasis on location also has something in common with the 'sound maps' of Annea Lockwood, about whom she has published in her day job as an academic. Rather than straight documentary of a given location or a surface level examination of its purely sonic properties, Darge's compositions take a ruminative, essay-like approach, drawing on in-depth research and time spent in an environment to craft a narrative interpretation of lived experience, human or otherwise.

On first inspection, the title of *Sounds Of Sacred Places* seems disingenuous. Aside from *Abbey-Sounds*, recorded in the refectory of a former abbey, none of the locations it investigates is sacred in a traditional or religious sense. In her sleeve notes, Darge lists as an example of a sacred place Ayers Rock in Australia, a holy ground to the Aboriginal people, who believe they can hear the voices of their ancestors in the sound of the wind moving through its holes and crevices. Darge goes on to define *Sounds Of Sacred Places* as an attempt to find similar qualities in various areas of Ghent, all of which have accrued unusual sonic characteristics and cultural resonances through accumulated history.

Ghent is no one's idea of a consecrated ground, however, and there's nothing worshipful or reverential about any of the album's five compositions. Her chosen locations perhaps took on quasi-sacred qualities for Darge during the course of her research, which often lasts several weeks or months. But its superb first two tracks function more effectively as exercises in demystification than in sanctification. Each is a complex site-specific disquisition, exploring the myriad associations of a



Moniek Darge in Ghent Belfry tower, 1985

particular locale, as well as analysing the ways in which they came to be constructed.

*Turkish Square* was recorded in and around a square adjacent to a power plant, an area inhabited by Turkish 'guest workers'. Children chatter, birds whistle and adults converse and argue over a backdrop of the plant's humming and reverberating machinery. The industrial drone sounds both bland and ominous, its ever-present churning foregrounding the piece's significant dramatic event, in which a succession of voices call out a child's name – conveying either affection for his presence or alarm at his absence. The piece concludes with a woman, presumably Darge herself, describing an encounter with a Turkish family, at once highlighting the artifice of the exercise and imbuing it with authenticity.

*Abbey-Sounds* is an outlandish work interweaving and clashing together a number of vocal threads: Dutch and French voices narrate encounters with the space, as English voices (David Moss and Charlie Morrow among them) playfully and sternly

enunciate a stream of phrases; doves flit about and a nearby bell rings, adding to the echo-laden cacophony. *Rain* is equally provocative, superimposing recordings of rainfall with what initially sounds like a frog croaking, but it is soon revealed to be a woman groaning, apparently in the throes of orgasmic ecstasy. The contrast between the two sounds – both, I suppose, elemental in their way – might have been daring at the time, but it sounds a bit corny 25 years on.

Thereafter Darge wisely reverts to a less dramatic register, the remaining two pieces offering more conventional pleasures. Both use as their sound source bells in a Ghent belfry. *Solstice Sun* splits itself evenly, its first half assembling murky rhythms, which rebound and shift in and out of synch with each other, connoting arcane, atavistic rituals. The second half sustains and blurs small percussive strikes into mellifluous, overlapping drones. As does the concluding *Three Sunbeams*, which extracts pleasant harmonics and sonorities from subtle bell strikes.

Nick Cain

## Can

### *Tago Mago*

#### 40th Anniversary Edition

Mute CD

When a relationship has lasted more than 40 years it can sometimes seem as if marking the anniversary is only thing left. Released in 1971 at the end of an intense three-month period of studio experimentation, Can's *Tago Mago* comes to the party tricked out in the sleeve art for its original UK release, an additional disc of live material, plus an imposing reputation as a groundbreaking and genre-defying work whose influence and integrity are beyond question.

After four decades, the album's concentrated blend of brutalism and intricacy, fluidity and fracture, sounds as uncompromising as ever; it is only when confronted with previously unreleased live versions of the tracks "Mushroom" and "Halleluwah", recorded in 1972, that

the shadow of a very different *Tago Mago* suddenly emerges. The spiky communality that brought Irwin Schmidt's keyboards, Holger Czukay's bass and Michael Karoli's guitar into creative conflict suddenly falls away, as do some of the more experimental aspects of the composition's instrumentation. What remains expresses much more closely the group's affinities with heavy rock.

Their contributions slightly curtailed by the bootleg quality of these recordings, Schmidt, Czukay and Karoli form a slightly indistinct yet tuneful blur that ends up highlighting the work of *Tago Mago*'s other two key contributors: drummer Jaki Liebezeit and vocalist Damo Suzuki, the latter a recent addition to the line-up just prior to commencing the album. Liebezeit's sharp tempi and tightly repetitive figures work against Suzuki's loosely inflected delivery to provide the insistent freeform drive that holds the whole project together.

This is particularly evident on the extended live exploration of "Spoon" that closes this collection: taken from *Ege Bamyasi*, the album which followed *Tago Mago*, it was also the closest thing Can had to a chart hit in their day. This serpentine reworking, filled with changes of pace and wilful reversals of form, hints at what to expect from *The Lost Tapes*, a box set of previously unreleased material due out next year. That should banish all thoughts of anniversaries for a while.

Ken Hollings

## Pheeroan akLaff

### *House Of Spirit: Mirth*

Universal Sound/Soul Jazz CD/LP

Recorded in New York at the height of the loft jazz scene, Detroit born drummer Pheeroan akLaff's *House Of Spirit: Mirth* is, as its title suggests, a record that aspires to be joyful and transcendent. Originally released in 1979 on Oliver Lake's

independent Passin' Thru label, Universal Sound's lovingly detailed reissue of the radical drummer's rarely sighted debut album includes an accompanying booklet where he explains its conception and the inspirational forces that power his music. African influences pound through in the music, a hypnotic medley of tribal beats, spread over a canopy of urban snare snaps and rippling free jazz patterns that are occasionally interrupted with a snatch of ghostly gospel singing or a disembodied rant.

Left alone for too long, however, and akLaff lapses into directionless drum solos that sound more like exercises than fully thought out pieces. The sepia cover photograph of an angelic little black girl dressed in white and shaking a tambourine looks fantastic, but the music alone quite live up to the alluring promise of the album's art work or title.

Edwin Pouncey