

WIREF

Soundcheck A–Z

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By Louise Gray

Shaking Studies

Blank Forms DL/LP

Music for Cello and Humming

Blank Forms CD/FL

Peaks

Black Truffle DL/LP

The Australian cellist and composer Judith Hamann works with music and sound in a way that is so expansive that many elements usually incidental to music-making are brought into the frame of auditory reference. Listening to these three immensely rewarding albums thus becomes not simply a listening to the recordings of events, but a witnessing to incidental noises – thoughts, false starts, the movement of the cello itself. In this way, Hamann destroys the fiction of the musician who exists and works outside conventional parameters and puts in its place a series of compositions that are fundamentally humane.

The four separate pieces that make up *Shaking Studies*, for cello and limited electronics, are a case in point. Hamann uses a series of repetitive movements to determine a pulse of sorts to the body of the cello; using a knowledge of resonance techniques, she coaxes rhythms, squeaks, wolf tones, trails of sound. As befits a former pupil of (and now collaborator with) Charles Curtis, there are sounds utilised here that are on the edge of the audible. In taking resonance and vibration as twin themes, shaking is intricately related to sounding. There's a section when "Shaking Studies I" takes on the pulse of a train – a way, perhaps, of making a small electroacoustic nod towards the concrete experiments of Pierre Schaeffer here – but the heft is towards the experience of hearing the cello's sound (in all its possibilities) in the here and now, and Hamann does this with grace and generosity.

Sounding, and its implications, is expanded into political positions on *Music For Cello And Humming*. An album that, like *Shaking Studies*, places the musician and her instrument at centre stage, this album puts gender into the frame on the form of "Loss" and "Down To Dust" – superb works from, respectively, Sarah Hennies and Anthony Pateras. "Loss" invites Hamann to reconsider her sense of vocal timbre as that which presents as female, while "Dust" situates humming and cello as close to a sinewave. Compositions by Hamann herself – *Humming Suite* and *Study For Cello And Humming* – complement this collection of sonic subtleties, while an invigorating essay by Nora Fulton that accompanies the album raises important issues of presence and performance.

Peaks, a two-part work, represents Hamann's debut electroacoustic album, in which she relinquishes her cello as central instrument to pick up on the found sounds of life in Austria and southern California. Both "signal/centinela" and "under/over" are delicate compositions, underlaid often by hovering drones and accentuated resonances. Recognisable sounds – piano, water, far-off voices music in the street – are employed but given an edge of dissolution, as if to accentuate a central ephemerality that characterises both the listener and what we listen to. The texture of the floating sound clouds and the echoes that Hamann gives us are richly reverberant.