

An Extreme Minimalist in Three Phases

Michael Gordon, 2011

Thumbing through the bins at Tower Records on 4th Street in New York sometime in the mid-1980s I found an LP by Arnold Dreyblatt. It had been my habit to go into Tower regularly and buy 10 to 15 records of anything that looked interesting. I can't remember any of the other records I bought on that trip but I still have that Dreyblatt record, *Nodal Excitation*, which was released on the excellent India Navigation label. Dreyblatt's music consisted of performances with a group he called The Orchestra of Excited Strings. Excited they were, producing rich driving drones in tandem with a fireworks display of overtones. It was a kind of extreme minimalism that was so compelling that I became entranced.

The thing that grabbed me about that record is what Alec Bemis in his interview with Arnold is calling "the Dreyblatt sound." It's some magic combination of his tuning system and the way he gets instruments to resonate. The band starts up, an ecstatic ringing begins, and you can imagine a supra-human orchestra playing ceaselessly at the heavenly gates.

The phases of Dreyblatt's musical output might until now might be divided in three parts. The first is Dreyblatt playing his double bass, restrung with piano wire, solo. This where he started and if you're lucky you might on occasion find him pulling out the bass for a solo stint. The second part is Arnold's output with the Berlin-based incarnations of the Orchestra of Excited Strings. When I got to see the Orchestra live, in 1994, the band was perhaps on a farewell tour that it didn't know about. That's because sometime in the 1990s other musicians got interested in Arnold's music and he began writing music not for himself or his band but for other ensembles. Collaborating first with the Bang on a Can All-Stars in the creation of "Elevator," Dreyblatt has spent much of the last ten years writing for and collaborating with different groups of musicians from around the globe.

It is hard to fully comprehend the clash that occurred when Arnold first walks into a room of musicians that are not "his" band. Arnold is an artist who makes the world adapt to his vision. That vision includes reworking the Western tuning system and Western instruments to his needs. As an artist one can try to blend in with the world that surrounds them, or one can, with a great deal of energy and creativity, bend the world to adapt to you. This is the path Arnold takes, not only with energy but with humor. The result of these collaborations is the subject of this compilation. It is exciting music and it is relevant right now.

I, for one, hope that part four of Arnold's journey is right around the corner.