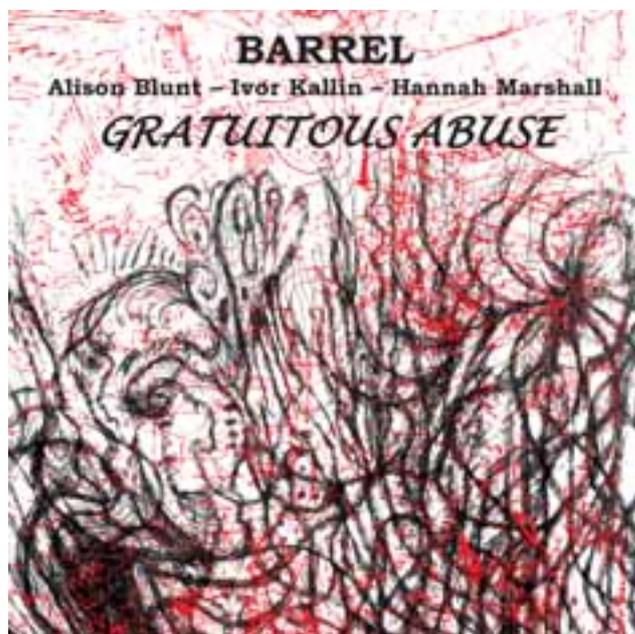


# Fouter & Swick

sound art and new music

## **Barrel – Gratuitous Abuse**

**24/11/2011**



[Barrel](#), so called because they scrape, are as follows:-

Alison Blunt – violin

Ivor Kallin – violin and viola

Hannah Marshall – cello

The tracklist gives us some clues about what to expect in the music:-

- 1 - RIGWIDDIE SNAUCHLE STRIKES AGAIN IN STYLE - 22:21
- 2 - SOFT PORN & HARD CHEESE - 1:49
- 3 - SKLATCH: unseemly semi-liquid mess - 22:29
- 4 - MOTHS & FEATHERS - 32:17

I'll begin with a preamble.

Free improvisation has become very trendy of late. This is not surprising in view of some of the disappointments of post dance derivatives and unfathomable noise art. In particular the more reductive trends seem to be finding the most favour with reviewers and other doxosophers, folks who tell us the way things are.

It helps to move things along if the artists associate with other artists of the same ilk, hunting in packs if you like, or if they associate with untouchable 'masters' in the field, or if one conjurs up a name for the 'school' (useful for the media to scoop up) such as the new pan-European texturalists or similar.

In fact it's reached the stage that some artists could record themselves shitting into a bucket and the specialist reviewers would say, 'well, I don't understand it, (s)he might be taking the piss (excuse the scatological references) and I don't know if I really like it at all, but (after some devious literary manipulations) it just has to be good because it's by x, y or z. We're talking here of course about taste, more or less informed.

What I can say about Barrel is that their music doesn't fit into any of the current categories, schools, sects or cliques that clutter the free improvisation stage. Although it's not my regular 'cup of tea', the music has made a strong and positive impression on me, I like it a lot and I'll listen to it time and time again. It's what I would call very good music, that judgement contingent of course on my more or less informed taste.

We have four pieces, two digital home recordings and two recordings of live performances. How can I begin to talk about the music? Well, imagine three first class musicians locked up in a time capsule, having associated with various shamans, drunk Romanian fiddlers, Yiddish chant leaders, the serialists, especially Webern. Then folks like Ligeti, Satie, and various Dadaists pop their head round the door from time to time to put in their tuppenceworth. After a few months you let them loose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to pick up on the very new. That would be Barrel.

I remember talking to a musician who had just been to a concert of Schoenberg's string quartets. Her conclusion was that it all sounded so normal nowadays. Perhaps it's hard to make strings sound too atonal, given that the bowed string has such a low inharmonicity. I don't know for sure but possibly because of the strings we have here this very listenable trio, playing of course in a very modern, even modernist, idiom. Then you begin to notice the folk influences, the strange groaning, coughing, snippets of (mock?) Yiddish chant and other incomprehensible utterances from Ivor Kallin. I could go on to talk about the musical and artistic implications of Ivor Kallin's half-Jewish and half-Scottish roots, but the potential for political incorrectness prevents me.

Add to the aforementioned elements the extended techniques, emerging 'legitimately' (ie beautifully and seamlessly integrated into the flow of the music) and finally the inexplicable 'tightness', inventiveness, complexity and meaningfulness of the musical conversation between the three. Throw in their understanding of each other and finally what I would call 'human-ness' in the ebb and flow or rhythms of the pace of the music. Like bio-rhythms. On top of all that, and at the risk of sounding contradictory, I still can't believe that most of this isn't scored music, not least because of the elegant balance between the higher strings and the strong foundation of the cello.

Focusing on the verbal intrusions, I'd point you directly to [213TV](#), Ivor's collaborative video project with John Bisset. Need I say more? What struck me in their work is how, in both form and content and by means of glossolalia, mock violence, postures and gestures, the pair manage to hover around the cusp that separates seriousness from humour, most evident in [Smoo](#). Sometimes I'm not sure how to react, a feeling I experienced in French theatre after seeing a lot of plays by Ionesco, Beckett and Genet. At times in listening to Barrel's music I find this to be a strength, a tap into the very strongest forms of 19<sup>th</sup> century European art.

All in all, because Barrel have such a firm, sure and confident grasp of life and music their work succeeds at all levels in enriching my own musical life. I happen to believe that their music will do the same for many others.