

Nouveautés en bref

Gordon Williamson

Volume 29, Number 3, 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066492ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066492ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Circuit, musiques contemporaines

ISSN

1183-1693 (print)

1488-9692 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Williamson, G. (2019). Review of [Nouveautés en bref]. *Circuit*, 29(3), 102–103.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1066492ar>

Nouveautés en bref

Gordon Williamson

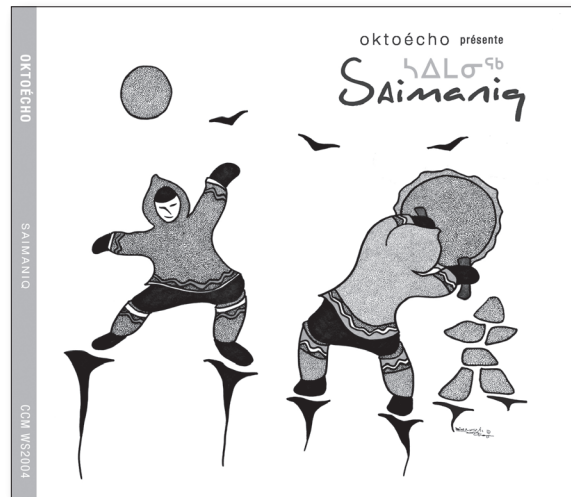
Oktoécho, Katia Makdissi-Warren (composition, electronics, and artistic direction), Nina Segalowitz and Lydia Etok (Inuit throat singing), Hélène Martel (jazz singing and experimental throat singing), Michel Dubeau (flutes), Carla Antoun (cello), Bertil Schulrabe (percussions), Eryk Warren (electronics)

Saimaniq

Cross Current Music, CCM WS2004, 2017.

Katia Makdissi-Warren has long been interested in fusing styles in her compositions: her works combine musical elements from the Middle East, jazz, classical, indigenous, electronic and contemporary music. In addition to her training in composition in Quebec and Germany, she has also studied Arabic and Syrian music in Beirut, including the oud, which she plays in many of her pieces. In her 2017 album *Saimaniq*, Makdissi-Warren turns her creative attention to *katajjak* (Inuit throat singing), exploring the possibilities of mixing throat singing with Arabic rhythms, flutes from Japan and Scandinavia, as well as electronics. She has worked closely with Montreal-based Inuit throat singers Nina Segalowitz and Lydia Etok,¹ who appear on each track in various combinations with voice, cello, flute, percussion, and electronics. The album recently won a 2018 Opus Prize in the category World Music and traditional Quebec Music.

We are living in a particularly sensitive moment for intercultural collaboration. Western artists and presenters are asked by funders to “incorporate diver-



sity” into their creative thinking and programming, but issues of how to mix or integrate cultural influences (or even if one *may* mix other cultures in their work) are extremely complex. The history of cultural appropriation in the arts—where majority cultures all too often demeaned and stole the work of minority cultures—remains an open wound that our society is still struggling to deal with. Artists and presenters find themselves walking a fine line of acceptability, and the wrong approach can quickly lead to controversy: risking renewed detrimental treatment of minority cultures and also protests and cancelled productions.

Katia Makdissi-Warren’s approach to intercultural collaboration is exemplary. Her interest in pursuing such collaborations predates the current and sometimes divisive discussions on the topic, and her approach has always been open and respectful. Her training in Western and Arabic musical traditions also

reflects her personal background (born and raised in Quebec, her mother is from Lebanon), and her use of musical styles/traditions that are not her own are based on direct collaboration with musicians from the cultures they come from.

Saimaniq (“peaceful cohabitation,” in Inuktitut), explores various combinations of throat singing with beats, repetitive patterns, ballads, electronics, and archival recordings of Inuit songs from the Canadian Museum of History. Some throat songs appear traditionally on the CD, while others are slowed down or excerpted, solo or in combination with experimental singer H  l  ne Martel. Makkdissi-Warren’s handling of the throat singing interacting with other instruments and traditions is very musical and, on the whole, the CD presents a rich mix of tracks with contrasting approaches to fusing these styles. In pieces such as *Passage du Nord*, *Saimaniq*, or *Incantation*, the diverse voices in the ensemble seamlessly weave into one another to create fresh textures. In these tracks I found that I ceased to think about the individual component sounds, be they of Arabic, Western or Inuit origin, and heard a cohesive whole in which the component sounds are blended into a new and unique musical statement. These works achieve the ideal of such an intercultural collaboration: finding new forms of expression in the encounter of two or more artistic practices that offer the listener a fresh musical perspective. Less successful tracks are those that fall into “simpler” styles of music. *Helluland*, for example, is essentially an atmospheric ballad where the instruments seem to ignore their origins and take on more typical Western roles (e.g., oud as guitar). And *Memories* ends up too close to the *clich  d* use of minimalism that we encounter in screen music scoring. However, *Lune noire* brings throat singing to electronica, a refreshing perspective that deserves fur-

ther exploration. There are also two tracks that feature throat singing on its own (*Solo Lydia* and *Mosquito*) that provide a point of reference for listeners unfamiliar with the genre.

My highest praise for Katia Makkdissi-Warren’s work is for her courageous experimentation with fusions of musical cultures. Despite the aforementioned challenges in intercultural projects, it is extremely important for contemporary artists to engage with these ideas in order to move the dialogue forward. In *Saimaniq* Makkdissi-Warren embarks on an exploration with the musicians of diverse backgrounds to find an original point of intersection between cultural traditions. That the various tracks resulting from this experimentation are mixed is a desirable, even necessary, outcome. Not every experiment works, but those that do have the potential to open up a new genre of intercultural collaboration. Furthermore, the aspects of inclusivity in these projects, particularly when musicians of various traditions can be brought together to work as equals, are also not to be underestimated. Collaborating with other musical traditions is an important social and political statement that speaks to an fundamental challenge of globalization: all too often it seems that increased migration has led to a situation where we live alongside each other but fail to engage with one another in a deeper sense. The challenges inherent in this work are not a reason to avoid engaging with it. Rather, they are an opportunity for artists to create bridges to other cultures and peoples of our world in positive collaborations that move our understanding of humanity forward and that will result in the arts taking on a renewed relevance in the public sphere.

1. [Ed.:] During the production of this issue, Inuit singer Lydia Etok was officially appointed co-director of the Okto  cho Aboriginal project. Etok co-led the *Saimaniq* project discussed in this review.