
Sō Percussion

Selected Reviews

Let the Soil Play Its Simple Part (UK premiere) Norfolk & Norwich Festival, May 2022

“Let the Soil Play Its Simple Part pits [Shaw's] clear, radiant and impeccably tuned voice against four percussionists: the Brooklyn-based So Percussion, who play a lot more than conventional drums and marimbas. The album's ten songs deploy flowerpots, steel pans and sirens, as well as electronics that sometimes turn Shaw's voice into an echoing polyphony... Using reflective texts from the poet Anne Carson and the Bible as well as her own words, Shaw conjures a song cycle that is mostly poignant and often spiritually transcendental. Indeed, her vocal lines often seem to hark back to folksong and ancient church music, most strikingly in her sparse, heartbreaking deconstruction of Abba's Lay All Your Love on Me...I was hooked.” – **Richard Morrison, *The Times* ******

Let the Soil Play Its Simple Part Nonesuch Records, June 2021

“Pulitzer Prize-winner Caroline Shaw joins the New York percussion quartet for a suite of songs melding folk elements with modern composition...There's no shortage of artists pulling together the worlds of folk influenced songs and modern composition, but the way lyrics and instruments work together to tease at the literal on *Let The Soil Play Its Simple Part* marks it out. Shaw and Sō Percussion's songs seem like contraptions pushing at the boundaries of what can easily be conveyed through words and music. These ten tracks delving deep into the beauty of ambiguity and dancing on the periphery of the graspable.”

– **Daryl Worthington, *The Quietus***

“This latest venture with So Percussion is every bit as vivid and colourful as the acclaimed *Narrow Sea* released earlier this year. While *Let The Soil Play its Simple Part* is in one sense a 'solo album' (Shaw's radiant vocals are heard throughout), it is also an experiment in deep collaboration...The result is a glorious, genre-defying disc by turns poignant, celebratory, complex and direct. The disc draws on a deliciously eclectic range of sounds, including marimba, steel drum, looped vocals, electronics and (seemingly) cascades of small glass bottles...the disc deftly shifts between rhythmic punch and delicate introspection: *To The Sky* finds the voice enfolded in intricate polyrhythms, while *Lay All Your Love On Me* reimagines ABBA's classic as a sparse, melancholic Bach chorale. Beautifully performed and expertly produced, this is music making at its most vital, expressive and imaginative.”

– **Kate Wakeling, *BBC Music Magazine*, performance ***** , recording *******

“Caroline Shaw is a genre-bending modern classicist who has also worked with Kanye West, Nas, The National and others. Sō Percussion are a New York quartet who embrace the widest possibilities of their style of instrumentation, usually with a vanguard classical slant. Together, they create an approachable music that owes a debt to serialist composition, topped with Shaw's singing. It's original and thought-provoking, if also sometimes challenging.” – **The Arts Desk**

“*To the Sky* quietly awakens with gentle humming and a softly rumbling marimba. Gradually the song blooms, and near the end Caroline Shaw's voice bursts open in pure radiant sunshine...*Let the Soil Play Its Simple Part* is a joint effort with the band Sō Percussion and it showcases Shaw's flexible voice – clear as a mountain stream, flowing with expression in many directions.”

– **Tom Huizenga, *NPR Music***

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Caroline Shaw: *Narrow Sea; Taxidermy* Nonesuch Records, Jan 2021

“A distinctly American variation of retro-minimalism is *Narrow Sea*...which takes folksy, 19th-century Sacred Harp hymns and places them in a disorientating environment.” – **John Lewis, *The Guardian***

“Imaginative and expressive works that glide effortlessly between genres... [the] exquisite disc showcases Shaw’s 2017 *Narrow Sea*, recorded by its outstanding original performers: Sō Percussion, soprano Dawn Upshaw and pianist Gilbert Kalish.”

– **BBC Music Magazine - 'The best classical albums released in 2021 so far'**

“A glorious combination of faith-filled vocal recordings, traditional modal harmonies and strange percussive and electronic textures.” – **Elizabeth Alker, *BBC Radio 3 - Unclassified***

“Shaw composed the five-part *Narrow Sea* in 2017 for Sō Percussion, a New York-based quartet that deploys a deep kit of rhythmic tools. With an array of drums, blocks, marimbas, vibraphones, and shakers alongside repurposed cans and ceramic bowls, they approximate the sounds of maritime bells, prayer chimes, busy machinery, heartbeats, and distant drones. Even flowerpots are fair game, bringing a pleasant, plunking timbre to the project. The music feels fascinated with approximating the shape-shifting capabilities of water—notes ebb and flow, coursing forward or gently trickling over one another...Even when Sō and Kalish slide into a near-mechanical whir in *Narrow Sea*’s second part, humanity prevails when the percussionists start to sing, too. Their voices swell upward as sanguine layers of hums, sounds that can only be made by bodies pumping with blood and oxygen.” – **Pitchfork**

“Stylistic boundaries are twisted out of shape...A melodic setting of 19th century text *The Sacred Harp*, the five-suite title track embraces wayfaring folk, Dawn Upshaw's powerful voice surfing So Percussion's textures.” – **Mojo ******

“A superlative collaboration. A sonic and emotional journey that is fully immersive in its approach.”

– **BBC Radio Scotland - Classics Unwrapped 'Album of the Week'**

“Simply breathtaking [and] works on every conceivable level...So Percussion has an immense arsenal at its disposal...combining this deep reservoir of sonic possibilities with Upshaw’s stunning voice and Kalish’s versatile piano, *Narrow Sea* packs endlessly creative and deeply textured moments into the song cycle... The combination of sounds that initially seem very much out of place creates a unique patchwork that is almost like the invention of a brand-new style...Disarming and intoxicating. So Percussion, Upshaw and Kalish [are] at the absolute height of their powers.” – **PopMatters**

“An enchanting recording” – **Alex Burghoorn, *De Volkskrant***

'A Record Of' collaboration with Buke & Gase Brasslands Records, Feb 2021

“On this new collaborative set with So Percussion, Buke and Gase’s rhythmically surprising, grungy work occasionally takes on a newly warm tinge.... Dreamy vibraphone, mellow kalimba and pinging glockenspiel offer enchanting support for Dyer’s siren-song refrains on the first track, *Diazepam*... The result is a fusion that’s fluid instead of forced.” – **New York Times - '5 Classical Albums To Hear Right Now'**

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“A most magical pairing... A Record Of... is a superb collaboration, reconciling jarring contrasts without compromising either party's own character. It is the dynamic meeting point of pop and experimental, punk and classical minimalism, noisy and hushed, abrasive and smooth, delivered with stark clarity and precision.” – **The Quietus**

“Bristling with crazy-paving rhythms and wild melodic tangents, A Record Of... is the duo's most sonically and stylistically rich work to date.” – **Uncut Magazine**

“A stroke of genius... For Arone Dyer and Aron Sanchez, the two names behind Buke and Gase which are also well known for their prolific instrument crafting, joining forces with the percussive quartet has translated into an album that will surely remain as one of the most interesting proposals gracing 2021.” – **Sputnik Music**

Selected Reviews for Sō Percussion

“This group plays with an irresistible vitality.” – **The Washington Post**

“If percussionists are, as proclaimed elsewhere, the new princes of the realm of virtuosity, then these four young, steel-wristed, Brooklyn-based Yale graduates wear the crown with panache.” – **The Financial Times**

“a marvellous program...crisply sensitive performances...” – **San Francisco Chronicle**

“The range of colors and voices that So Percussion coaxes from its menagerie is astonishing and entrancing.”
– **Billboard Magazine**

“This ensemble has set the New York standard for percussion innovation.” – **The New Yorker**

“The weekend's electrifying percussion pieces deserve a cheer too. The So Percussion group were a knockout in Steve Reich's Mallet Quartet...” – **The Guardian UK**

“Sō Percussion have [Steve Reich's *Mallet Quartet*] nailed, finding both the inner glow and the outer edge, and never letting the tapestry lapse into the flat or routine.” – **BBC Music**

“The reason for their success is simple: staggering ensemble virtuosity, which allows them to exhale the most complex scores like a single, multi-malleted organism.” – **emusic.com**

“Through a mix of consummate skill and quirky charm, this mercurial quartet has helped to ignite an explosive new enthusiasm for percussion music old and new.” – **The New York Times**

“The evening was an exhilarating blend of precision and anarchy, rigor and bedlam...” – **The New Yorker**

“Watching the ensemble So Percussion brilliantly perform Steve Reich's “Music for Pieces of Wood” was like watching whirling dervishes enter an intensely focused, disciplined trance.” – **The New York Times**