Matt Lord And Mike McInerney
Descending The Bone Staircase
Setola Di Maiale CD (2011)

I came across Mike McInerney playing a version of “Tamuke” in December, at the 2011 Spitalfields Festival in London. He was part of an unusual event (devised by composer Duncan Chapman) that also featured a primary school orchestra of ambient laptops. Later in the concert “Tamuke” was remixed into a group piece, informally known as “Spooky Tamuke”. Afterwards McInerney gave me a copy of his new CD, on an Italian label which translates as ‘Bristle Of Pork’.

Descending The Bone Staircase is a set of improvised duets for shakuhachi and Matt Lord’s acoustic guitar. The playing throughout is gentle and delicate, creating a generally melodic, ambient environment and occasionally launching out into more noise-based atmospherics. Twice McInerney puts down his flute and takes up stones, struck or rubbed together. The recording is clear, but the space around the musicians sounds small and dry, not offering the atmospheric support that you find, for example, in a church in Spitalfields.

This type of duo improvising is not easy to bring off. You want the music to conjure magic, to generate something more than the sum of its parts, and for me this happens intermittently. Both players are strongly drawn to the key of E minor, an obvious comfort zone for guitar, less so for the shakuhachi, which seems constrained. Blues idiom is touched upon but not really explored. But more excitement arrives at moments when tentative melodic exchanges are abandoned and the pair start playing with sound itself.

McInerney studied shakuhachi with Yoshikazu Iwamoto when the latter was living in York, and composition with Frank Denyer at Dartington College. He now teaches at the University Of Plymouth. Another release due in early 2012 is Membranes by Poems In Stone: this is a noise/drone quartet run by guitarist Lord, with McInerney again, plus trombone (Alice Kemp) and the late Joey Chainsaw on noise guitar. I get the impression that this is more familiar territory for Lord, who releases south-west UK ecstatic no-fi projects on his Omcore label. McInerney also has his own interesting excursions into electronics, employing various devices to process his shakuhachi playing: The Extended Shakuhachi can be heard here: zlatko.hu/music.html

Clive Bell 2012