

## *Almost Touching* CD Reviews

*Almost Touching*  
People Places, 2022

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Take Effect – [takeeffectreviews.com](http://takeeffectreviews.com)  
8/10

A very compelling artist armed with strong guitar skills and a mysterious voice, An Laurence takes some subtle help from electronics on this very atypical listen of solo guitar interpretations of works by Amy Brandon, Kim Farris-Manning, Elisch Kaminer, Shelley Marwood, Arthur Keegan-Bole and Sofia Gubaidulina.

“Artificial Light” starts the listen with much atmosphere, as twinkling guitar is met with sci-fi like background ambience, and the title track follows with a minute of near silent breath before a haunting intimacy enters with soft, poetic singing.

In the middle, “Chants D’amour” is an hour long and spread across 11 tracks of whispered moments, gorgeous guitar, and bouts of sparse dissonance, while “Reconciling Duality” balances intensity and serenity with colorful gestures of beauty and restraint. “Nocturne” exits the listen, kind of, with a dreamy blur of guitar and electronics, though there’s a hidden track worth sticking around for, too.

Laurence has made quite an impression in the area of new/experimental sounds and performance/multimedia areas, and *Almost Touching* certainly embraces those strengths in her inimitable brand of song craft.

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Pan M 360 – [panm360.com](http://panm360.com)  
by Frédéric Cardin

An Laurence is a Chinese-Quebecer guitarist and artist well-versed in the world of experimental and avant-garde music. *Almost Touching* presents works for guitar, voice, and electronics, not always all three at the same time, by contemporary composers, many of them Canadian. A *Serenata* for solo guitar by Sofia Gubaidulina, written in 1969, is considered a traditional classic in this program. That gives you an idea! We are somewhere between Berio, Jerusalem in My Heart, spoken word, indie rock, and John Cage.

Amy Brandon's *Artificial Light* is a delicate piece, a diaphanous veil made of a delicate cushion of electronic sounds over which the guitar strings out notes that settle on the ethereal soundscape. Kim Farris-Manning's *Almost Touching (asymptote)* unfolds a text by Joël Pourbaix with diaphanous colors and effects. The piece begins with a minute of barely audible sighs that give way, after a sudden strong inspiration, to the text itself accompanied by An Laurence's Weberian guitar. The music becomes more expressive for a short time near the middle of the work, but the whole remains restrained. The effect is that of a waking dream, surreal.

Elischa Kaminer's *Chants d'amour* is almost a work for solo voice, so minimal is the instrumentation. An Laurence recites the texts in a relatively monotone voice (was that the intention?) for an effect of almost emotional detachment. Shelley Marwood's *Reconciling Duality* is a study in tremolos. They are used in a thousand ways: from the most untimely attacks to barely whispered touches. A whole dialectic unfolds in this way, from the most scattered evocations to dense and agitated contractions. In concert, the effect must be impressive.

Arthur Keegan-Bole's *Nocturne*, for guitar and electronics, offers the soloist the role of Ariadne's thread in the labyrinth of electronic textures that go from sampled strings to the sound signal of Greenwich Time in a dreamlike march that seems to take place in an exoplanetary landscape.

Sofia Gubaidulina's *Serenata* completes this fascinating journey in a way that could not be more acoustic and traditional, frankly soothing and reassuring, so exceptional and out of the ordinary was the journey to which we were just invited.

Here is music that you won't hear from most of the broadcasters, and that will certainly not be talked about in the usual media, almost all of them in fact. And yet, we should, because it is of great importance in today's music landscape.

[peopleplacesrecords.bandcamp.com](http://peopleplacesrecords.bandcamp.com)

Album released May 20, 2022

by Nick Storring

It's easy to forget just how permeable the boundary between complete vulnerability and unbridled power is. The fact that it's so seldom that we witness the transition between these two states is part of what makes the debut recording of multifaceted Tiohtià:ke/ Montréal-based-performer An Laurence so compelling. Much of *Almost Touching's* generous duration is spent exploring that very border and its adjacent sonic territory through solo works for guitar, voice, and electronics by a diverse array of living composers.

The album opens with the opaque hush of *Artificial Light*, by Nova Scotian composer and fellow guitarist Amy Brandon whose work has been described as '... mesmerizing' (*Musicworks Magazine*), "otherworldly and meditative ... [a] clashing of bleakness with beauty ..." (*Minor Seventh*) and '.. an intricate dance of ancient and futuristic sounds' by acclaimed jazz guitarist Miles Okazaki. Atop an elusive backing of electronically-smearred guitar sound, Brandon superimposes an arpeggiated flutter of activity that An Laurence executes with warmth and precision.

Kim Farris-Manning, the composer of the album's titular work, is a close collaborator of the guitarist. The two of them work together as *Paramorph Collective* creating category-defying interdisciplinary pieces that employ sound, poetry, performance and various visual components. The eerie intimacy *Almost Touching (asymptote)* was a precursor to *Paramorph* and foreshadows the multifarious approach of their later joint output. Beginning with over a minute of near-silent variations on breath, An Laurence's sudden gasps signal the entry of the guitar and slow, sung text from poet Joël Pourbaix. While much of the piece retains this quiet sparsity, it is punctuated with unexpected bursts of raucous urgency.

Where Farris-Manning maps a volatile, sensitive landscape through carefully placed contrasts and a disarming and elemental use of the voice, Elischa Kaminer's puzzling, hour-long *Chants d'amour* makes audacious leaps between disparate sonic worlds. The work willfully inhabits the fragility and discomfort of these naked juxtapositions (and their potential to mystify listeners), all the steering clear of conventional "confrontational" tropes. Over the span of its varied eleven movements, intricate braids of notes give way to extended whispered recitations, that are disrupted by bald synthetic dissonances. Elsewhere, interlocking microtonal gestures sit next to an abstract vision of 'shoegaze' yet with each of its successive discontinuities the work increases in poignancy and idiosyncratic personal depth.

Shelley Marwood's *Reconciling Duality* marks a return to a more familiar terrain, but is no less potent. Marwood's unravelling guitar tremolos of various intensities and shades—from strident shouts to dim murmurs—serve as a running gestural theme throughout the work's fractured, colourful, lyricism. An Laurence's performance seizes the evocative potential of every moment, whether it's a surging contrapuntal line, pregnant pause, or isolated delicate sonority.

Nocturne by UK composer Arthur Keegan-Bole constructs a surreal, dream-like space through its peculiar guitar and electronics exchanges. While the electronic part drifts between references—sweeping Technicolor strings, the sine tone pips of the Greenwich Time Signal—the guitar seems to act as a mysterious narrator that leads the listener throughout speaking a language only it understands.