

JAZZ word

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Reviews that mention Christophe Havard

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AMM/FORMANEX

Treatise
Fibr 006

Not for the dilettante nor the electro-acoustic faint-of-heart, this nearly 46 minute slab of semi-improvisation can be an unsettling experience if you come to it with explicit jazz, classical or even free music expectations.

Based around a 193-page graphic score of numbers, shapes and symbols of exquisite intricacy by British composer Cornelius Cardew, (1936-1981), *Treatise*, developed between 1963 and 1967, contains no explicit instructions about how to perform the work. Every performance can be different, though it's possible that some who have heard it other times may not be prepared for the unyielding electronic tones that arise during this performance. Most upsetting are the harsh, ear-splitting textures that arise from either electric guitar or electronic distortion and reverberate for up to 40 seconds at a time.

Treatise's chameleon-like character obviously continues to fascinate musicians like this mixed French-English crew that recorded this in Nancy, France on the 20th anniversary of Cardew's death. Front and centre are the three British members of AMM, who not only recorded a version of the piece in 1984, but who all played with Cardew. The composer once wrote that "joining AMM was the turning point, both in the compositions of *Treatise* and in everything I have thought about music up to now". But the CD is more than AMM writ large

Formanex, the French quartet has already recorded two earlier versions of *Treatise*. Here the band is seconded by Laurent Dailleau, best known as a member of the Art Zoyd ensemble, who probably plays theremin, vintage analog synthesizer and PowerBook -- no instruments are listed anywhere. AMM brought along John White, another experimental composer, who can play bass trombone and piano.

This time out, the compositional beginning features prolonged rugged drumming and those shrill high-pitched oscillations at points. But most of the timbres, near silent drones and bumps could arise from half a dozen sound sources. Soon you hear what sounds like the eerie middle passage of Sgt. Pepper's "A Day In The Life" mixed backwards.

Eventually a single piano chord and answering drum rumble appear, soon answered by grating, electronic buzzes and shakes, superseded by what could be the wiggling landing sound of a UFO, the squeaking hinge on the door of the Adams Family's mansion and the lowing of cattle. To get excessive atonal distortion, someone seems to be randomly turning the volume pedal of a guitar and fiddling with its delay pedal.

Following the steady beat on a ride cymbal and the manipulation of a single piano key, chain-shaking, cymbal moving and bell pealing tones cut through the drone along with the curlicue rasp of what could be a slide whistle, but is probably a saxophone. A doorstopper appears to ricochet right in the centre of an oversized, horizontal bass drum, while drumstick scrapes resound across the top of a ride cymbal. Reverberating, contorted guitar echoes meet frightening sine-wave squeaks and underwater bubbling until an undulating, pedal point, organ-like chord introduces an even more piercing rumble.

Sheep baas mix with an explosion of ascending then descending distorted computer riffs, as a solitary drum beat introduces a single guitar pluck and a rhythmic growl that could come from tape running backwards and surmounts spinning top sounds, more chain shakes and identical conveyor belt moves. In the distance is the faint sound of right-handed piano octaves as the rumble of moving implements gradually supersedes all other noises. Then a near-Impressionistic piano fantasia is heard among a solid noise block made up in

equal parts of amplifier distortions, truck motors and a sidewalk street drill.

Following what could be the pressure of a blunt object applied to the keyboard and the sudden sharp tug of an electric bass string -- conveyed with a echo pedal for maximum impact -- a short burst of radio music appears then fades away. So does the shrill of a bird-calling whistle. As indeterminate sonic rumbles and bumps reconstitute themselves into a sort of extraterrestrial Morse code, the diminuendo features pulsating static until the entire performance evaporates into dead silence.

To reiterate: this is not an easy listen, nor one for everyone, especially those with an aversion to piercing tones. But still, electro-acoustic veterans, plus the followers of AMM, Formaex and Cardew will find much to appreciate here.

-- Ken Waxman

Track Listing: 1. Treatise

Personnel: AMM: [Keith Rowe (guitar, electronics); John Tilbury (piano) and Eddie Prévost (percussion)]; Formaex: [Christophe Havard (soprano and tenor saxophones, amplified objects); Anthony Taillard (guitar and bass); Emmanuel Leduc (electronics); Julien Ottavi (percussion and electronics)]; plus John White (bass trombone, piano); Laurent Dailleau (theremin, aks, PowerBook)

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