

The Caustic Ballads

Michael Foster/Leila Bordreuil (Relative Pitch)
by John Sharpe

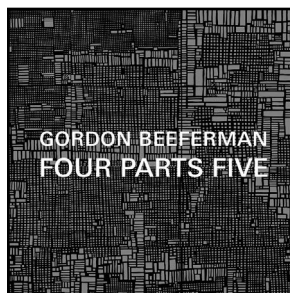
You can tell straight away from the cover, with its bondage and S&M related imagery, and the song titles (sample: "The Whip and the Body") that you are in for some anguish from *The Caustic Ballads*. And so it proves as the Brooklyn-based duo of French cellist Leila Bordreuil and saxophonist Michael Foster make extensive use of preparations and close amplification. Consequently, their respective instruments serve as platforms for sound generation rather than conventional performance. On the sleeve, Foster is credited with saxophone, without any further qualifier, and that's about right as register is largely irrelevant, though his vocalized shrieks take on a disturbing tinge in light of the packaging, especially the panting and repeated rhythmic figures, which summon something unpleasantly visceral.

The overriding impression from the opening "Born of its Own Asphyxiation" is of an exchange of extreme textures where instrumental boundaries are scarcely discernible. The pair boast a strong conception pursued with great focus and ego subservient to the overall effect. But within their radical soundworld they take care to ensure variation, not only across the

program, but also within some of the longer tracks. "Wherever the Organism Discharges its Internal Rottenness", in particular, goes through many shifts in timbres and dynamics, regularly alternating primal passages with quieter stretches, like those when saxophone groans like an uneasy dreamer while cello evokes the maddening whine of a kitchen appliance.

Drones feature heavily in the shared vocabulary. They form part of the circular trajectory of the title track, as it moves from barely audible beginning to emerging instrumental characters portraying something more human and almost lyrical in this context, only to retreat towards silence once more by the end. Drones also comprise the bedrock of "Into the Peristyle of Love's Temple" before distant ululations swell to create a chorus of furies and also contribute to the steady insectoid hum and industrial malfunction recalled by "Pleasure and Cruelty". But if you were to consider the title of that piece as a statement of intent, you might conclude that while a fair amount of cruelty is in evidence, the pleasure is not for everyone.

For more information, visit relativepitchrecords.com. This project is at Gallery 456 May 22nd. See Calendar.



Four Parts Five
Gordon Beferman (Innova)
by Ken Waxman

Gordon Beferman's music reverberates with assertive crispness. In fact, the four tracks which make up the 30-minute suite on *Four Parts Five* keep churning with so many sharp digressions, cleverly avoided dead-ends and staccato openness that the pulse-quickening result is like following a car race with only your ears.

Beferman, who plays piano and organ here, also incorporates a variant of brittle formalism in his lines, no surprise for someone whose compositions have been commissioned by the likes of the Minnesota Orchestra, Albany Symphony and the American Brass Quintet. Although some of the themes and most of the transitions appear through-composed, the quality of the arrangements and skill of the musicians—reedplayer Peter Hess, guitarist Anders Nilsson, bassist James Ilgenfritz and drummer Adam Gold—prevent the music from sounding like watered-down jazzy classicism or coldly serious pseudo-jazz. Like a work crew building from the technical strictures in an architect's drawing, the musicians ensure that each rivet is positioned properly to actualize the structure.

For instance, while the sewing-machine-like rhythm that stitches together "Part 3" is animated via piano, guitar and double bass linkage, magpie-like reed peeps pull the resulting line more tautly so that by the concluding "Part 4" it can break free into bracing call-and-response patterns that appear virtually endless. On earlier tracks the white noise emanating from Beferman's tentative Hammond B3 tremors owes more to canonical accompaniment than organ-grinder swing but those sounds fit appropriately with Nilsson's chiming runs, releasing any overbearing pressure to herald the next section.

Those who admire the perfectly aligned skill that goes into creating a refined and contemporary structure—or composition—will be well satisfied with this album.

For more information, visit innova.mu. Beferman is at Big Secret Theatre May 21st. See Calendar.

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