

Phosphor II, reviews

Du Pierre Henry des années 1950 ? Non, simplement les premières notes du second album de Phosphor, toujours sur Potlatch, quelques premières notes qui ne donnent en rien une direction à suivre, tout juste sont-elles là pour vous interpeller.

Burkhard Beins (percussion, objets, etc.), Axel Dörner (trompette, electronics), Robin Hayward (tuba), Annette Krebs (guitare, objets divers), Andrea Neumann (intérieur de piano, table de mixage), Michael Renkel (guitare, ordinateur) et Ignaz Schick (tourne-disque, objets et archets) s'en donnent à cœur joie sur les six pièces (de P7 à P12) qui composent ce Phosphor II. Pour la petite histoire, les pièces P1 à P6 figurent sur le précédent album du collectif, Phosphor, logique non !

Nos Berlinois adeptes de l'improvisation électroacoustique, comme peuvent l'être les membres du collectif M.I.M.E.O., n'ont cessé de se perdre dans une quête effrénée de son inouï, d'abstractions obliques ; avides de faire saigner, éructer, vrombir leurs instruments dans la recherche obsessionnelle d'une adhésion, d'un point d'orgue où pourrait s'agripper le collectif, tout comme l'auditeur. Si l'écoute d'un tel disque demande une concentration certaine, attention à ne pas vous perdre dans une addiction sans retour.

Encore, encore, encore, entend-on là-bas au loin, dans la pénombre d'une salle quasi vide !
Sonhors | Octobre 2009

Seul Robin Hayward ne s'aventure pas à la gestion mixte de l'électronique et de l'acoustique, se concentrant sur le respectable tuba. Les autres membres de PHOSPHOR utilisent tous des systèmes rendant impossible (à l'écoute) l'identification des sources et objets utilisés. Peu importe. PHOSPHOR est un groupe proposant un voyage à caractère psychédélique de très bonne tenue.

Les musiciens paraissent avoir abandonné la problématique réductionniste, semblant retrouver une capacité à aborder divers registres dynamiques. La position radicale dite du « non son » qui, reconnaissons-le, pouvait provoquer parfois un certain ennui, dans les scènes de Londres ou Berlin il y a quelques années, ayant atteint ses limites. Se pose encore pour moi la question de la nécessité (éthique ?) pour nombre d'artistes contemporains de faire disparaître leur corps lors du jeu (en opposition, par exemple aux membres de Qwat Neum Sixx), et de placer la machine (ou l'intention) en avant. Il me semble que le mouvement ne saurait nuire à la concentration...

Quoi qu'il en soit, l'œuvre proposée est parfaitement maîtrisée (esthétique, rapport au temps) et nous entraîne dans un univers complexe et passionnant; l'orchestre est donc bien vivant, sachant réveiller notre plaisir de l'écoute. Une bonne entrée en matière pour quiconque découvrirait la scène berlinoise actuelle avec cet enregistrement qui réunit quelques-unes des fortes personnalités de cette ville.

Dino | Revue & Corrigée | Septembre 2009

Au début de ce siècle, un sextette allemand du nom de Phosphor, emmené par le trompettiste Axel Dörner et le percussionniste Burkhard Beins, sortait en France son premier disque : une musique électroacoustique improvisée et d'une densité rare y était consignée. La suite de la démonstration, d'être éditée ces jours-ci sous le nom de Phosphor II. Retournés à leurs expérimentations, les musiciens y enfilent des plages d'abstractions sonores parfois tentées par le silence, rehaussées ailleurs par des interventions instrumentales provocantes (grésillements d'une guitare, râles d'un piano, parasites de machines ou souffles retenus à l'intérieur d'instruments à vent). Crescendo, un univers s'éveille alors, au son d'une musique expérimentale, certes, mais accueillante aussi. Les plaintes d'un bestiaire inédit le prouvent, qui s'y précipitent maintenant et seront assemblées en fin de course pour permettre à Phosphor de toucher au but ultime, jusque-là inavoué : la mise sur pied d'un monstre épais, dont l'homme actionne l'étrange mécanique, et qui n'en finit plus de se faire entendre, de crier son insatiable appétit de sons extraordinaires.

Guillaume Belhomme | Les Inrockuptibles | Septembre 2009

Figure majeure de la free music européenne, Axel Dörner mêle ses sonorités détournées à celles de six autres improvisateurs manipulateurs d'instruments de musique, d'objets divers et d'électronique. Improvisation totale dont la diversité de couleur et de granulation en appelle au sens visuel et au toucher. Inouï.

Franck Bergerot | Jazz Magazine | Septembre 2009

Après un premier disque remarqué (chez Potlatch, déjà), le collectif berlinois Phosphor reprend très exactement les choses où il les avait laissées huit ans plus tôt, proposant six nouvelles pièces : P7 à P12, suite logique des P1 à P6 de l'époque. Les développements actuels de l'improvisation électroacoustique semblent laisser peu de place aux larges ensembles comme celui-ci, la multiplicité des participants étant souvent préjudiciable à la clarté des choix en temps réel et à la précision extrême de chaque action sonore. Ainsi, avec M.I.M.E.O. et, dans une moindre mesure, l'Electro-Acoustic Ensemble d'Evan Parker, le groupe est l'un des rares à évoluer dans ce registre, surtout à un tel niveau de cohésion. En équilibre sur un fil ténu, les sept musiciens font preuve d'un sens de la pondération et de l'ajustement suffisamment prodigieux pour se maintenir à des hauteurs peu fréquentées. Des cordes, celles des guitares modifiées d'Annette Krebs et de Michael Renkel ou provenant de l'intérieur du piano manipulé par Andrea Neumann, se frottent aux cuivres d'Axel Dörner (trompette) et de Robin Hayward (tuba), s'entrechoquent avec les percussions de Burkhard Beins ou les platines d'Ignaz Schick. Cet attirail ne saurait être complet sans les nombreux dispositifs électroniques et autres objets non identifiés qui participent à la richesse des timbres et des matières. On peine à décrire ce foisonnement de mutations permanentes : lents étirements délicats, tintements microscopiques, papillonnements qui tiennent autant de l'animal que du végétal, respirations adéquates et illusions auditives. D'ailleurs, lister des ingrédients ou évoquer des saveurs ne peut donner qu'une idée lointaine de l'alchimie résultante et, comme il n'y a pas ici de recette, le mieux est encore de goûter soi-même à la sophistication de Phosphor.

Jean-Claude Gevrey | Octopus | Juillet 2009

Avec ce second album de Phosphor, le label Potlatch donne une nouvelle marque du suivi qu'il exerce fidèlement auprès de « ses » artistes – il faut dire également que la première galette (P501, 2002) du groupe berlinois pâtissait d'un son terne et que le présent enregistrement répare cet inconvénient : Burkhard Beins (percussion, objets, etc.), Axel Dörner (trompette, electronics), Robin Hayward (tuba), Annette Krebs (guitare, objets, etc.), Andrea Neumann (intérieur de piano, table de mixage), Michael Renkel (guitare, ordinateur) et Ignaz Schick (tourne-disque, objets, archets) ont gravé ces six pièces (qui prennent la suite des six mouvements du précédent opus) dans d'excellentes conditions.

Et cela concourt beaucoup à l'adhésion de l'auditeur : l'espace d'écoute se voit redimensionné par les structures portantes soufflées, grenues, lissées ou pulvérulentes qui émanent de l'instrumentarium du groupe ; mécaniques ou organiques, électriques ou acoustiques, les sonorités, dans leur « jeu », déploient des mondes poétiques, déposent des mégalithes complexes – et quelques vignettes dont les riches textures et dynamiques sont assez éloignées de l'emprise urbaine du primo-réductionnisme.

Guillaume Tarchel | Le son du grisli | Juin 2009

Nine years after Phosphor's Potlatch debut, we finally have II (recorded over three nights in September 2006) from this Berlin-based troupe: Burkhard Beins (percussion, objects, zither, and "small electrics"), Axel Dörner (trumpet and electronics), Robin Hayward (tuba), Annette Krebs (guitar, objects, electronics, and tape), Andrea Neumann (inside piano and mixing board), Michael Renkel (prepared guitar via computer) and Ignaz Schick (turntable, objects, and bows). Even after multiple listens it still sounds surprising to me – given the refinements in this general area of music over the last half-decade (a cumulative effect that has led some fans to suggest that its high water mark is several years in the past), these half dozen tracks, titled numerically (P7 to P12) to suggest a continuation from the previous recording, are more raw, more unstable, and even more resistant to gesture than the six on the debut album.

In some ways the earlier record, fine as it was, sounded heavily invested in certain kinds of technique – not in terms of flash (and certainly not in terms of conventional expression) but in terms of "this is what Dörner can do, this is Krebs" and so on. Here it's all muted, sublimated. The wood, bows, metal and other basic properties seem like they're captured between states, some massive geologic morphing or weird echo of background radiation played by automated sound-makers. Renkel and Krebs are absolutely essential to this effect (the latter much more restrained than in her Kravis Rhonn duo with Rhodri Davies, though I hear an actual effusive chord here and there). While you can certainly get a sense of the individuals regularly – Beins' whorl on his snare, the exhalations from Hayward's tuba – it's the expansive and heady collective effect that really comes across. Particularly impressive in this regard is the gentle whine of rubbed glass and windchimes on P9, a lullaby with electronic surveillance passing through occasional metallic clanks and waves which never seem to break until a wonderfully unsettling mewl of metal friction spills out of the music's guts. On P10, the assorted whines, zithers, and bows seem to take shape in a recurring interval that sounds like it's suspended in some sonic morass, a substance which over time gives the impression that it's eroding. The most distinctive track is P11, which in places sounds like a miniature concerto for Beins, who masterfully adjusts the tuning of his floor tom to catalyze electronic copter blades and band saws. A terrific record.

Jason Bivins | ParisTransatlantic | February 2010

Resolutely non-hierarchical as isolated basic tones abut cramped industrial grit, the unique textures spun out by Phosphor nearly hypnotize, but leave plenty of breathing room to shake up the six tracks with unanticipated timbral pirouettes.

Each of band's seven Berlin-based members is an acknowledged originator striving for unexpected sounds from his or her chosen instrument. Trumpeter Axel Dörner has done so in the company of others such as reedist John Butcher; tubaist Robin Hayward has evolved a personal method of twisting and muting valves; working alone or in tandem with partners such as clarinetist Kai Fagaschinski or Hayward, Annette Krebs and Michael Renkel mostly recalibrate expected guitar sounds; Andrea Neumann's mastery lies in exploiting prepared piano impulses; Burkhard Beins creates unusual percussion patterns solo or in groups with Neumann, Renkel and others; and Ignaz Schick's turntable evolutions attain resonance which allows him to regularly collaborate with mystic composer Charlemagne Palestine. Most importantly each of the players fastens onto the transformative abilities of computers and electronics as expertly as 18th Century dualists knew the capabilities of rapiers.

Nothing on Phosphor II is designed to be razor-sharp, although the cumulative interaction may be finely honed. Instead at points all sonic textures appear to be uncovered simultaneously, with raucous, spinning crackles, fluttering whooshes, swelling and diffusing air and jackhammer-like drilling, rubbing with fortissimo abrasions against one another. Other times engorged signal-processed drones subsume all else. Elsewhere individual node vibrations are heard and aurally defined as split-second guitar strumming, splayed percussion strokes, tongue stops or low-pitched breaths from the brass players.

Expanding connectively there are also sections where oscillated textures which sound like an accelerating cycle motors blur into computer-triggered clouds of drones and rebounds. Just as abruptly these sounds are replaced by trumpet spectrofluctuation as well as stops, slides and scrubs from piano, guitars and zither strings until an echoing tuba line appears then splinters into mercurial resonance and a final dislocated breath. Elsewhere flanged and backwards-running tapes share space with the launching of ramping signals until a finale of miniature percussion rattles and strokes plus atonal acoustic nylon-guitar runs.

Phosphor II's climax arrived earlier however on P11. As lowing brass timbres and sul ponticello strings are patched together, they also blend seamlessly with separate layers of signal-processed currents. After dissolving into silence, a subsequent variant stacks the sounds of cavernous bass drum resonance, twisted valve constriction and tremolo brass puffs atop vibrating string sets. A retching growl disrupts the concordance with further spinning as sonic sequences ebb southwards to surface rubs.

While concentration may be required to fully appreciate Phosphor II, the participants validate the premise that first-class electro-acoustic improvisation isn't limited to small combos.
Ken Waxman | Jazzword | December 2009

Call it Electro-Acoustic Improvisation or German Reductionism, II is Berlin septet Phosphor's second CD release. Though the semi-interesting debate on what to properly call this type of musical expression will surely continue, on this recording the usual EAI signifiers are evident—texture, space, silence, liminal tiptoe, etc. In addition to standards like trumpet, tuba, and guitar Burkhard Beins, Axel Dörner, Robin Hayward, Annette Krebs, Andrea Neumann, Michael Renkel, and Ignaz Schick play electronics, objects, mixing board, and “prepared acoustic nylon string guitar via computer.”

For the number of performers and instruments involved there's still plenty of space and silence to enjoy. Due to electronic treatment, matching specific instruments to the unfolding sounds is a bit like researching what brand of paint Rothko used. It's surely difficult and seems almost unnecessary. The sound is what's important. At the foundation is a low rumbling. In the midrange are string swipes that catch and tug like fishhooks. At the top of the spectrum are tendrils of ridiculously high pitched feedback; dog whistle at the tip of Everest kind of stuff. Fortunately the tones don't split your head, being more like the momentary pinch/warm numbness of a bee sting.

The most interesting characteristic of II is how volume-dependent it is. Turn it up and an innocent hum reveals subtle bleeping and auditory textures that sputter and uncoil. Data mining the volume alters the sound so profoundly that you quickly go from listener to participant. Like most EAI this is patient, cerebral sound art that demands attention and patience from the listener. This leads to a mild complaint: at over an hour in length, only a stoic few will be able to actively close-listen from start to finish. But in spite of (or maybe thanks to) its demands, II offers many lessons on how auditory space, interplay, pacing, and textures are shaped and perceived.

Mike Pursley | Foxy Digitalis | October 2009

After years of EAI heavily characterized by various gradations of toneless farting, saliva-drenched manifestations and ever-the-same microsounds, a few snoopers – including this writer – have grown to be highly suspicious, arriving to the point of considering certain releases as unmentionable in regard to a presumed artistic relevance, even when the original intentions were innocent. There's only so much that can be exploited in a genre prior to the clichés, and this particular area is a difficult place for being trustful nowadays. Desperate for keeping the flame flickering, fans of emptiness aliment debates that revolve exactly around that very nothingness in virtual absence of implications. Contemplative inactivity during a performance is by now fashionable, echoes from the external world doing the work in lieu of the “artist”. Had John Cage envisioned the potential damage of all that silence-related chattering, we wouldn't be here wasting hours of our precious time for individuals who can't play, muddling through the remnants of what was once called music to make a nice living and collect accolades.

That's why a CD such as this, second outing on Potlatch after the debut release in 2002, comes especially welcome: Phosphor are interested in making things sound in quietness rather than sitting with frowning eyebrows, thinking about the next meditative stance. The septet – a genuine super group formed by Burkhard Beins, Axel Dörner, Robin Hayward, Annette Krebs, Andrea Neumann, Michael Renkel and Ignaz Schick – found a way of rendering an obvious electroacoustic heterogeneity relatively smooth, organizing a well-nourished array of standard (!) instruments and apparatuses like a distinguished orchestra capable of highlighting (and, when needed, altering) the different nuances of timbre.

The improvisations in II are categorized by the persuasive power of selected instrumental voices placed under the focus until one gets acquainted with their fundamental nature, the participants delineating a sort of pictorial background that facilitates the individuation of a general scheme. These settings don't last for the entirety of a piece: the scenario is constantly modified. The musicians are willing to produce clearly demarcated frameworks in which the sequences of events and the distinct atmospheres – percussively dominant, cyclically squealing, electronically cold, nebulously contaminated – are exalted at first, then completely discarded in favour of a growth or, more frequently, an utter revolution, often at the cost of

depriving the listeners of a pleasant state of mind achieved with difficulty. They do just fine in concealing the authentic traits of the machines, and I didn't find a valid reason for guessing them and what they were tampering with. The whole sounds cooperatively rational and mainly convincing. Who cares of what is what and who is who; it's the overall outcome that counts, and in this case the resultant sonorities are particularly interesting to say the least. Some of these scenes are extremely effective, P10 standing among the best tracks in that sense, a thoroughly intelligible investigation of the surrounding space - via sparse accumulations and symbiotic purrs - that nevertheless presents moments of veritable mystery, becoming nearly unfathomable at the end. Other selections are slightly less functional as far as private involvement is concerned, which is understandable given the index of possibilities in relation to the program's length. The variegated palette - which includes colours as diverse as percussion, guitar, electronics, inside piano, tuba, trumpet, zither, turntables and objects - is definitely a winning choice: emotionally captured or not, we never thought of being listening to something thrown out exclusively for the sake of releasing material. Every detail appears carefully considered, all moves precisely circumstantiated. A compositional design is recurrently in evidence, transforming mere examinations into accomplished pieces, each new listen confirming a value that in the beginning could merely be guessed, or hoped for. At the end of the day this is a noteworthy, if uneasy work which requires numerous attempts in order for us to come to terms with its actual consequence. It will surely result useless for the not conversant but is an accurately detailed, open-to-observation recording for connoisseurs, provided that the right level of concentration is there: if mentally tired, save it for later. It does not deserve a distracted or, worse yet, nervous approach, instead rewarding the persistence of those who are still hoping for a pinch of intelligence in an arena where sounding as a nincompoo while "experimenting" is a concrete possibility.

Massimo Ricci | Touching Extremes | October 2009

Phosphor II is a follow-up to the group's eponymous debut released back in 2001. Burkhard Beins, Axel Dörner, Robin Hayward, Annette Krebs, Andrea Neumann, Michael Renkel, and Ignaz Schick have played together in a variety of contexts over the last decade, defining a specific language of meticulously constructed textural group interaction. While each of the six pieces on this release develop their own sense of arc and form, they also function as a suite of sorts. Those expecting a study in reductionist reserve will be in for a surprise. The music is built from the fricative sputters, plosive grit, and sibilant hisses of extended technique. But the seven musicians use these elements to orchestrate an active collective language. They nimbly interweave the timbres of string overtones, tuned percussion, and pinched and overblown brass with rustling static and piercing sine waves. The members of this septet are keen listeners and they develop pieces full of inner drama through an animated balance of density and dynamics. As good as their initial release was, this one shows a clear progression.

Michael Rosenstein | Signal to Noise | September 2009

My abiding memory of Phosphor in concert at the Instants Chavirés outside Paris in May 2002 is the image of the musicians huddled together afterwards in earnest post-gig post mortem. Less-is-more Improv was a serious business, and the eight members of the Berlin based collective - Burkhard Beins (percussion/zither), Alessandro Bosetti (saxophone), Axel Dörner (trumpet/electronics), Robin Hayward (tuba), Annette Krebs (guitar/tapes), Andrea Neumann (inside piano/mixing board), Michael Renkel (guitar/computer) and Ignaz Schick (turntable) - were its leading exponents back then. Seven years later, this follow-up to Phosphor's 2001 debut is a good opportunity to assess how the same musicians - without Bosetti, who has since left Berlin - have evolved in the intervening years. While some improvisors of the Malfatti/Sugimoto persuasion have continued down the quiet path, playing even less and allowing silence to play an ever greater role, Phosphor - the group, rather than the individual musicians playing solo - have opted to play more, using a wider range of sounds, all the while miraculously retaining the leisurely pace and textural clarity of their earlier music. The only thing austere and minimal about these six tracks is the generic album and track titling; the music is as colourful and crystalline as the photograph that adorns

the cover (not phosphorus, but ascorbic acid). Barely a minute into P7, Renkel's nylon string guitar is scribbling all over a sonic space bustling with activity. Dörner's pitchless machine gun splatter, Hayward's rubbery flapping, Krebs's scrumpled steel wool and the hiss of Beins's drums swept by polystyrene blocks are all instantly recognisable, but there's a real sense of teamwork here, a rare and welcome example of seven improvisors playing together without trampling each other to death. The pacing and precision is impeccable; this is music making of the highest order, marking not a break with but an extension of a rich tradition of European free improvisation.

Dan Warburton | The Wire | August 2009

Hiss. Scratch. Drag of needle on vinyl, click, buzz, blowing breath. P7 sounds in some way industrial. Activity might be too strong a word for it; it's more like the technological apparatus in David Lynch's 'Eraserhead', always threatening some action (maybe even catastrophic) but never quite breaking out into that, locked in constant tension. Later in the track, one jazz guitar chord. It sounds wonderful, isolated in this context. No need to follow it up. Just another sound, not even a consciously deployed generic element, no need for that sort of thing. The structure is extremely well-managed, small examples throwing into sudden clarity just how much control the musicians have in their freedom: the same mouthpiece blow with which Dorner opened the record sounds again after a longish silence half-way through, almost like a return to a theme. Again, this need not and does not translate into a pattern or precedent: it's just there as itself, in the moment it takes to sound out, and then something else has taken its place.

Similarly, on P11, when Dorner actually blows a couple of recognisable, conventional trumpet notes on the fifth track, the shock (or the catch in the throat) thus provoked is not dwelt on. The atmosphere is almost melancholic, a singing bell sounds, a triangle taps, lonely in isolation. It's not sustained: radiator hiss, swishing metal pan, harrumphing – another zone entered, quietly left before it establishes itself too comfortably.

P8: at first, sustained, quiet but piercing sine tones dominate. Hayward's tuba is thus far playing the 'conventional instrument' role the most out of anyone's, although mostly that just means single notes as one small element in the overall hissing texture. A few minutes in, it issues what develops into a drone-like section, not 'atmospherics' in the vein the word 'drone' might imply, but still, as close to atmospherics as this disc gets, and lovely for it. A really sharp and loud scratching sound rips the veil without completely shredding it asunder, allows nothing to be too serenely unquiet.

P9: musical boxes, little pinging metal tones, guitar strums, Weberian uncertainty, barely. Buzzes. Things building, then Dorner's loud aeroplane take-off imitation (as on the first piece of his mesmerising solo album, 'Trumpet'), far from the near-serene delicacies with which the track began. High, bird-tweet rhythmic patterns: like lots of the sounds here, these sound as if they've emerged from small machines set in motion, re-constructed loops, a workshop of mechanical miniatures.

The group that made this album is fairly large, and the restraint displayed throughout is impeccable. Even those sections (not so much 'climaxes') loud enough to be particularly intense and near-devastating in impact (when heard on headphones) are often initiated and sustained by just one person, most often Dorner. Transitions are so delicate that one wonders whether they can really be called 'transitions' at all; full attention is therefore needed to appreciate the full range of sonic events, and the relations between them. Yet when such close concentration is applied, it becomes clear that this music does not risk loss; rather, it is blessed with absolute clarity, its textures often a challenge – as they must be, in order to avoid too much ready comfort – but always a real pleasure.

David Grundy | Eartrip | August 2009

Phosphor are Burkhard Beins on percussion, Axel Dörner on trumpet, Robin Hayward on tuba, Annette Krebs on guitar, Andrea Neumann on inside piano, Michael Renkel on guitars, and Ignaz Schick on turntables. If there's ever an official history of improvised music since 1995, many of these names will appear prominently. In particular, Dörner and Hayward were key architects of the movement known as Berlin Reductionism, which introduced long silences,

reduced volume and electronics into the world of improv. The interactions and cross fertilisations between Berlin Reductionism, New London Silence and Japanese onkyo were crucial to the development of electro-acoustic improvisation (eai) which grew up, centred on labels such as Erstwhile, For 4 Ears and Absinth. Beins has been its archetypal percussionist in groups such as Perlone (with Schick), Activity Centre (with Renkel), the Sealed Knot, Trio Sowari, and his duo with Neumann.

The other members of Phosphor have played key roles as well, but enough with the history lesson. Phosphor II displays all the characteristics of classic eai. The volume is subdued and the music is punctuated by silences. There are few recognisable solo passages; much of the time the ensemble play together with individual sounds coming into the foreground and then subsiding again. All the players employ electronics in some form, and their sounds color the overall soundscape. Occasionally, particular instruments are recognizable, but more often they are treated, hence indistinguishable from the electronics.

Krebs mixed the vibrant opening track P7, Beins the next two, Renkel the next two, and Dörner the last P12. Their different approaches to mixing give the album a variety of sound and texture. So P9 mixed by Beins, gradually builds to a climax that is surprisingly rhythmic by eai standards. The two tracks mixed by Renkel are protracted and mellow, slowly unfolding. P12 mixed by Dörner, is episodic with plenty of silence.

Given the array of players producing it, the most distinctive feature of Phosphor's music is its absence of competing egos. The empathy of the players and the communication between them is impressive. No one player dominates, and they never get in each other's way. They all time their responses well, with no obvious pressure to respond. When silence is appropriate, it happens.

John Eyles | Dusted | July 2009

Phosphor, whose self-titled album came out in 2001, waited nearly five years to record its follow-up with Phosphor II. With editing, mixing and manufacturing, it has taken nearly eight years for the session to reach the marketplace.

With all that time that has passed, it is interesting to hear that the original super group, minus Alessandro Bosetti, can easily pick up right where it left off. These Berlin-based musicians practice the microtonal art of minimalist improvisation, yet their sound constructions are easily transferable to disc.

In fact, not having the visual component to their performance pushes the focus onto the sound, not which performer is making what sound—not always any easy thing to achieve.

The music here is, as Miles Davis once described it, about "the silence in between the notes." These eight compositions take that concept to the nth degree. Switches switch, air passes through instruments without notes, static takes the same place as rhythms, and electric charges fuel the tension that gives way to a cosmic release.

The sounds—noise, perhaps—are strangely inviting creatures whose vocabulary is one of a decayed future that meshes the human touch with computer and mechanical sounds that have slipped the moorings of beat and meter.

Mark Corroto | All About Jazz | July 2009

Waves of crunchy goodness. I saw Phosphor in Nancy, in 2002 (I guess just after their first recording?) and the performance has stuck with me; the largish ensemble with an unusual combination of sounds, balancing the electric and acoustic in a unique way, and tending to straddle the edge of the audible. So I was somewhat surprised at how...rambunctious this release is and, initially, may even have been a bit put off. Silly me. It's knotted, abrasive and gnarly all right and all the better for it as the palette has substantially widened and the concerned with improvised structure is thereby foregrounded. That palette is interestingly recognizable—I think I'd pick this band out in a blindfold test, something about the combination of the grainier (Beins, Krebs) with the harshly airy (Dörner, Hayward) and the relatively smooth (Renkel, Schick), with Neumann as a wild card, combined with the clearly high level of musicianship, sets this group apart.

So even while the character of the tracks varies widely, and it does with respect to volume,

density, fluidity, the overarching tone says Phosphor. That previously mentioned structure is felt throughout; there's a real built aspect to the music, a fine plasticity. A kind of gracile blockiness emerges, a stumbling forward that's balletic. New angles protrude consistently, right up to the last cut with its plangent plucked strings.

One of the stronger releases I've heard this year; get it.

Brian Olewnick | Just outside | June 2009

(...) This new album (imaginatively named Phosphor II) is really great though. There are six tracks, each involving (I think) all of the group, but the task of mixing the tracks down was split up between the musicians, with Beins and Krebs mixing two tracks each, and Krebs and Dorner handling the other two. It may be coincidence, or it may be that tracks that best suited the characteristics of particular musicians were given to them to work with, but it feels as if the character of the musicians mixing the tracks really shines through. For instance the opening piece, named P7 (picking up from where the first album left off) is an exciting, fast moving series of jerky cuts between one musician to the next. That one was mixed by Annette Krebs. The next two are slower, quieter affairs with a stronger sense of texture and gradual growth ahead of surprising juxtaposition. Those two were the work of Burkhard Beins. Renkel mixes the next two tracks, which fall somewhere between the other approaches, a blend of patient, understated sounds with sudden shifts in gear just before anything can get boring. The last track, with Dorner at the mixing desk contains a lot of his trumpet combined with just one or two other instruments at any one time in little episodic sections spaced apart by little moments of calm, or often complete silence.

These seven musicians know each other very well and over the last decade have played together often in one group or another, but not as one complete unit. The skill and experience of the musicians really shines through though. The timing of the music, and the placement of sounds by the musicians is fantastic, so it never feels like seven musicians are fighting to be heard. It feels like just the right sound appears at just the right time by one musician or another just when it is needed, but at no point do two arrive when they both weren't needed, and no one seems to be trying to bring the music in one direction as someone else pulls the opposite way. The end result is a sparky, alive, but also finely crafted and well executed album that allows the different voices of the musicians to come to the fore in turn, but without feeling forced at all.

This may be a little insulting to the Berliners that made this album, but listening to Phosphor II I am repeatedly reminded of the current London improv community, a collection of individual, disparate musicians and sounds that can come together and work together in a manner that does not stifle individual expression and works towards creating a focussed, single piece of music when called upon to do so. Phosphor II is more than the sum of its parts. Throughout the myriad of little moments and scenarios within the album it always kept me completely engaged, often surprised and always happy. Another success from the extremely reliable Potlatch imprint.

Richard Pinnell | The Watchful Ear | June 2009

This outing features a consortium of Berlin, Germany-based musicians who tend to explore the outer limits of abstraction via live electronics, acoustic instruments, and subversive dialogue. Less in your face than similar productions of this ilk, the instrumentalists create an air of suspense amid subdued moments and sparse frameworks. Andrea Neumann utilizes her stripped-down piano parts (strings, resonance board, metal frame & EFX) to counteract tubaist Robin Hayward, percussionist Burkhard Beins, and others for a set teeming with sparsely concocted themes. The octet provides a series of illusory effects in concert with moments of tension and surprise, due to its shrewd amalgamation of peculiar backdrops and concisely executed improvisational episodes. On Part 3 (no song titles), you will hear low-pitched gurgling noises and plucked strings. However, trumpeter Axel Dorner's atonal hissing sounds cast a strangely exotic spell throughout many of these sequences. Not casual listening, but fascinatingly interesting - the music or noise, depending on which way you perceive it, rings

forth like some sort of impressionistic souvenir. Sure, some of us may not include this release among the ongoing rotation. The content might parallel something akin to an avant-garde sculpture or oil painting: thus an artistic entity that deserves to be revisited from time to time.
Glenn Astarita

PHOSPHORs II (P109) ist ein, um mit der Tür ins Haus zu fallen, starker Auftritt dieser Berlin Allstars, auch wenn bei ihrem elektroakustischen Improbruitismus die Brösel manchmal etwas diffus streuen. Das ist dieser Ästhetik inherent, mit ihren tönenden Welle-Teilchen-Geheimnissen. Da knirschen und reiben Klangblöcke aneinander wie C. D. Friedrichs Eisschollen, und sind doch nur elektronenmikroskopierte Kristallschuppen. Dass dabei ununterscheidbar wird, was von Percussion, Objects, Zither (Burkhard Beins) herrührt oder von Turntable, Objects, Bows (sein Perlonex-Partner Ignaz Schick), was die elektrifizierte Trompete (Axel Dörner) oder die Tuba (Robin Hayward) dazwischen fauchen und ploppen, gehört absolut zum Reiz dieses selbstbewusst schäbigen Klimbim. Dazu greift Andrea Neumann noch ins Inside Piano und Annette Krebs und Michael Renkel picken unorthodox an Gitarrensaiten. Was zählt und was den spezifischen Phosphor-Zauber ausmacht, ist jedoch der Zusammenklang, die wechselnde Dichte, Bewegtheit und Konsistenz der Klänge. Dafür wären gewaltige Wortfelder nötig, um das Wechselspiel von stechend, glatt, stumpf, rau, spitz, gedämpft, schimmernd, körnig, verwischt, transparent, metalloïd, luftig, gepunktet, zuckend, löchrig, statisch etc. auch nur anzudeuten. Vieles tritt plastisch als Styropor, Zahnrad, als holzig, drahtig, blechern, als Hand- oder Mundwerk oder elektrophon hervor, ebenso Vieles bleibt anonym. Beides vertraut nicht ganz zu Unrecht auf seine synästhetische Potenz, eine Empfänglichkeit für den spröden Charme der Bruits Secrets vorausgesetzt. Bei entsprechender Andacht bekommt man sogar zu Gesicht, wie die Englein auf der Nadelspitze tanzen.

Text : Von Stockhausen bis Phosphor by Gisela Nauck (German language only)