

Annette Krebs - Six sonic movements through amplified metal pieces, paper noises, strings, sine waves, plastic animals, objects, voice, a quietly beeping heating system and street noises (Graphit, 2022)

The most recent solo releases by Annette Krebs have been a treat to hear, each offering a new glimpse into a meticulously refined and impressively distinct aesthetic. Through years of experience and experimentation with elaborate electroacoustic systems she has managed to hone her sound with microscopic precision without detracting any of the improvised music's instantaneous, spontaneous beauty. The sounds still all feel linked to gestures, and the gestures still all feel linked to an intent. What comes with this maturity is that that intent is not just that of a performer's impulses and whims, it follows a plan, a process, a sophisticated intuition to arrive at its peculiar style and to paint its environment. The sterile, pristine, monochromatic atmosphere allows me to imagine that process as a dynamic medical operation in a science fiction hospital.

The sparse clanging, pops and fumbles that open the first movement remind me of equipment being set up and prepared. Ambiguous devices cling together as they're dropped onto metal trays, cables and tools are organized, obscure equipment is turned on, initialized and tested, awkward pauses occur between each step. It feels anxious, uncomfortable, confusing, almost threatening. Metallic swipes and crunching textures enter from silence and leave reversed echoes, immediately deforming time in their absence, helping conjure an atmosphere of immaculate, high-tech surrealism.

The second movement is exquisitely soft. Faint, reassuring, non-threatening textures hang in the air and depart. Perhaps at this point an anaesthetic has kicked in. The unknown machines and gadgets still exist but are clouded by gentle static blurs, obscuring their nature and sanding off the sharp edges. The gestures sound professional now, rehearsed and precise. The elements stack into a decisive, blissful ambience that alleviates all tension and lures the patient into a controlled slumber.

In the third movement, the operation is finally underway. Sustained and repeated notes bleed over from the last movement's therapeutic daydream fuzz and drill into my subconscious. At first its peaceful and comforting, the tones feel discreet and decisive enough to reach the cause of my anguish and pure and potent enough to cleanse it. The patient tones exchange between a human, emotional warmth and a mechanical, scientific cold, making for a realistic aura of healing. But as sounds repeat, cut out and restart, grow dissonant and distort, it starts to feel like this aura might not be working. It tries, it tries again, but it's just not working, and what was once confident and alluring begins to feel feeble and ugly.

An aggressive thud ushers in the fourth movement, which plays out as a

second, more aggressive operation. Metallic scrapes, smacks and cracks again invoke the preparation of unknown equipment, but a hurried pace plus a lack of compression cause the section to double down on the anxious, threatening vibe from before. The second operation begins with obscure electronics, clicking gadgets, a plethora of small, abstract sounds. This time it feels like several procedures at once, all with their own independent tools, procedures, objectives and sounds. It's subtly overbearing. Layered, repeated sounds scrape and warp the brain, eroding anguish alongside all else and leaving an absolute mental null in its moments of silence.

The fifth movement is a recovery. After this rough, second operation, the soft tones from the first have returned, and are perhaps more sincerely comforting now than they were then. The initial section is drenched in dreamy surrealism, with rotating tones and processed voices that surround the listener and inaudibly deep bass that suspends them. Perhaps another anaesthetic has been administered. It's a gentle world of rehabilitation, rest and observation. Slowly the hypnagogic atmosphere lets up and the listener awakens into a world of concrete, squelching sounds and tangible textures.

The final movement could be a return home. It begins with a tonal, technical descent, mirroring a nostalgic return trip from a future operating table which drops the patient off into playful, abstract vocalizations. Deconstructed speech showcases an idiosyncratic, personal style of communication that expresses its beauty and restored health with pleasant hums. This could be the patient back home, healthy, enjoying life, talking to themselves, singing to themselves – it's a delightfully warm, human conclusion to a delightfully cold, alien performance.

I don't want to imply that Annette Krebs intended this album as an analogy for a science fiction hospital visit. I think that is almost certainly not the case. I bring it up to demonstrate what I find so exciting about the abstract, sonic storytelling that can be found in this music. It follows emotional, thematic and sonic currents without ever suggesting a proper way to read them. It calls forth feelings and signals ideas that transcend easy explanations. It leaves me with thoughts and sensations that I can best understand with elaborate fantasies and unspeakable sentiments.

- Connor Kurtz

<https://harmonicseries.substack.com/p/116?s=r>