

Berlin - archipel construit sur les ruines de l'Histoire - les frontières entre l'Est et l'Ouest ont été déplacées, sans avoir été réellement effacées, on en voit encore les traces sur le visage des résidents des quartiers de l'ancien Est. Berlin est une ville en reconstruction, chantier permanent, dans l'attente d'une nouvelle architecture commerçante et bureaucratique plus performante. Nous ne jouerons plus dans cette ville. Lang, Rossellini et Godard sont oubliés, Brecht et Benn oubliés, entrés dans une époque d'accélération du mouvement des choses, surexposés, sans mémoire. Berlin a été un temps occupée par des squats alternatifs, îlots d'insurrections aux normes sociales, de collectifs d'artistes qui avaient pour projet d'expérimenter la vie et de porter la critique contre la culture de l'*American way of life* (et son pendant stalinien), des groupuscules de musiciens détournaient les rebuts de la société industrielle pour produire des émeutes soniques et puis silence radio, le mur tombait sous les *break beat* techno et le violoncelle de Rostropovitch. Aucune nostalgie, des faits.

Phosphor apparaît dans cette topographie urbaine comme un territoire accidenté, un pli dans l'Histoire révisée, ouvrant sur des chemins de traverse oubliés, pratique collective du son, non pas comme la reproduction des *Company Weeks*, mais comme partage et ouverture de cette aire de jeux à l'hétérogène, aux dissonances de l'époque. Travaillant à leur tour dans une économie de crise, une limitation des moyens. "Bruit" — il nous faut bien passer par une définition de cette musique — comme l'instant critique de ce que l'on nous vend habituellement comme musical; à l'oreille de faire tout le travail, d'entendre ce qui agit là. Non pas l'addition d'individualités (pourtant remarquables), mais leur soustraction dans un son atopique (métallique), coupe transversale d'une courte unité de temps gagnée par la théorie du chaos, la beauté du désordre (quand l'essentiel de la musique est acquise au séquençage policier du temps) .

Certaines parties renvoient à la musique industrielle des années 70/80, quand le champ social (les bruits du travail) s'immisçait dans le champ de l'art (et souffler dans un tuba ou une trompette est corps au travail, une mastication du son en bouche). "Musique" faite de vibrations, de *clicks and cuts*, de textures abrasives, de résonances acoustiques, l'instrument reste ce corps infini, comme une limite à déplacer, il est encore question de frontières ici (non pas à rétablir mais à abolir). L'aventure sur ce terrain bruissant met l'écoute à rude épreuve, par l'effondrement des repères dont on use habituellement : notes, harmonie, psychologisme, métrique, l'identification de la source, rien ne sert. Ce qui prévaut à l'écoute de cet enregistrement, c'est la complexité du son, mixage des sources dans une indétermination de principe, où par morale, arhythmie jouée contre le principe de cause à effet, ceci est une guitare, rien n'est moins sûr. La musique de Phosphor est poreuse aux bruits de la ville, elle les transforme et les déplace, recompose notre mémoire du son sur d'autres bases. Huit musiciens assemblés pour reconstruire un archipel sonore abstrait, les sons pris dans le concret de l'instrument, détournant quelques circuits intégrés aussi; pour autant il n'y a pas une masse compacte à laquelle on se heurterait, il y a des moments où les sons se rétrécissent, se creusent, disparaissent, des plans qui se déplacent, du micro au macro, tachisme sonore, sculpture de volumes. Des moments de presque silence, il n'est jamais total dans une ville, il y a toujours une vague rumeur en fond.

L'improvisation s'est déplacée dans le champ électronique, jouant de cette belle confusion entre l'acoustique et le son des circuits imprimés, des néons et des autoroutes, poésie d'un temps fuyant dans un hors champ, dans ces non-lieux de notre modernité, lieux de passage, de vitesses et de lenteurs. Cette écoute devra être vécue comme une dérive dans l'histoire de la musique, de John Cage à Einsturzende Neubauten. Peut-être faut-il se poser la question de ce qu'il y aurait de nouveau ici, depuis le *Machine Gun* de Brötzmann, de nouveau encore après toute cette "improvisation libre" qui a construit ses propres idiomes depuis, répétitions innombrables de ces collectifs d'improvisateurs, répétiteurs d'une liberté donnée comme principe, factuelle. Et si la question du nouveau était une mauvaise question, qu'il s'agissait moins d'inventer que de détourner, d'oublier les techniques apprises, de mettre la musique (celle qu'on pratique dans les salles de concert) au niveau de la vie sociale et de son bruit, de sa poésie brute. Nul doute que certains vont grincer des dents comme les sons ici grincent

entre eux, se frottant l'un sur l'autre, qu'il y aura un effort à faire pour comprendre les forces magnétiques qui œuvrent là. Nul doute que ce bruit soit la musique de ce siècle commençant, pour qui veut entendre.

Michel Henritzi

La première écoute de ce disque vous laisse sur un sentiment d'évidence, comme si la musique qu'il propose coulait naturellement des doigts et des lèvres des musiciens. Le groupe se compose de huit musiciens : Burkhard Beins, percussion; Alessandro Bosetti, saxophone soprano; Axel Dörner, trompette, électronique; Robin Hayward, tuba; Annette Krebs, guitare électro-acoustique; Andrea Neumann, intérieur de piano; Michael Renkel, guitare acoustique et Ignaz Schick, électronique. Une telle musique, où les instrumentistes interviennent par sous-groupes, libérant de micro suites bruitistes parfois en prolongation les unes des autres, d'autres fois en contrepoin, nécessite un énorme travail de préparation et de pratique commune. L'écoute concentrée est évidente, à aucun moment les participants ne cèdent ni à une trajectoire égotique ni à ces affrontements de puissance que l'on peut croiser dans l'improvisation. Cette musique puiserait-elle dans la part féminine inhérente à tout être humain? On peut rester à l'écoute de celle-ci, pourtant improvisée, sur une impression de composition. D'aucuns la trouverons froide, mais, comme le cristal de glace qui forme la neige, elle a cette multitude de facettes qui fait sa richesse et, pour l'auditeur, un sentiment final de chaleur confortable, presque de brûlure que l'on ressent après avoir plongé, en hiver, ses mains dans la neige.

Patrick Bœuf | Peace Warriors | Juillet 2002

Cela s'avance à pas de loup. Fragile et sourd comme une rumeur hésitante, un raclement indistinct. Des formes se rapprochent, se cherchent, s'appellent sans se répondre trop vite. Ce sont des signes imprécis qui s'esquissent sur fond de nuit. La musique de Phosphor naît avec précaution, comme une matière brute mais précieuse que l'on façonnerait à plusieurs, une pâte aléatoire qui a besoin pour lever d'une conjugaison d'énergies. Cet ensemble de huit musiciens issus de la scène berlinoise travaille la plastique sonore avec une grande délicatesse. On peut s'en faire une très bonne idée en écoutant leur album Phosphor, paru sur l'excellent label Potlatch.

Hugues Le Tanneur | Aden | 22 mai 2002

Phosphor is a Berliner octet dealing in the smallest of improvisation. A mix of acoustic and electronic instruments, the group specializes in sparse improvisation consisting of sudden noises and quiet textures. Their self-titled debut, nearly an hour in length, finds the group mining relatively the same territory over the disc's duration, with mixed results.

It's not always easy to discern which member of Phosphor is responsible for the sounds being made, but each contributes equally, and what results is an ensemble whose chemistry and unspoken communication are well refined. The silences that span large gaps within the group's performance are wrought with both a feeling of tension and that of unpredictable potential, as the seemingly democratic work of Phosphor guarantees that sound could emanate from any one of the group's musicians at any time. Rarely do the members of Phosphor coerce traditional sounds from their instruments. Soprano saxophonist Alessandro Bosetti and trumpeter Axel Dörner produce long, wavering tones or hushed breaths of air from the bells of their instruments with little or none of the tone expected from them, while Annette Krebs' and Michael Renkel's guitars provide more texture and ambient background than explicitly strummed notes. Andrea Neumann's work inside the piano results in much of the same. Burkhard Beins handles the percussion, which is made up of the small, almost incidental sounds of bells and the sounds of a drumstick being rubbed on a drum head, rim, or cymbal. Dörner,

Neumann, and Ignaz Schick also provide various forms of electronics, the most apparent of which are the often obtrusive bursts of static which Schick calls forth periodically. These shocks of sound, though they sometimes offer some body to the spare menagerie of sounds that his bandmates create, seem to go against the groups modus operandi, and, within the context of Phosphor's work, can soak up too much of a listener's attention by clouding over the other sounds present at any given time. It's true, however, that Phosphor sometimes need a spark, as many of the discs less abundant (and audible) moments wander for too long in near-silence without a sense of direction, however scattered, that binds the better work on the disc. Yet, it is the tracks with the smallest amounts of electronic output that prove to be the album's best. The beginning of P1 along with P6 offer glimpses of the group at their sparse, surprising best. Staccato, percussive attacks punctuate the air, as more controlled ambience drifts underneath. In a recording that depends so much on the volume of the sounds it contains, Phosphor find the most success when equilibrium of volume and intensity is forged, but in this outing, the group don't always find a delicate balance.

Adam Strohm | [Fakejazz](#) | December 2002

One of the woes of so-called "supergroup" sessions - occasional encounters between musicians who, while individually talented, have rarely worked together - is that too many languages are being spoken at the expense of substantive communication. Those familiar with the burgeoning genre of electro-acoustic improvisation might take one look at Phosphor's lineup and, salivating slightly, note the makings of a post-AMM all-star band (okay, so Mimeo might also take that title but). In fact, many of these players are long-time associates from the Berlin improvisational scene - young talents like Axel Dörner, Burkhard Beins, Annette Krebs, and Andrea Neumann are joined by lesser-known folks like Alessandro Bosetti, Michael Renkel (who has duetted with Beins on the 2:13 label), Robin Hayward, and Ignaz Schick (part of the fine group Perlonex). Many different alliances and configurations of these musicians have existed in the past and, unlike the concocted supergroup sessions of the major labels, this ensemble seemed somewhat inevitable. And thankfully, the sound is focused and integrated as well. The disc (which always seems like something of a suite to me) begins in a somewhat austere fashion, silences punctuated by very curt slashes and scraping noises that can be quite jarring. Slowly over the next two parts, the sounds circle each other and begin their interaction, coalescing into a constant gurgle of sound (most audibly **Dörner's** trumpet but certainly also more than that) that, by the time the disc reaches its penultimate track, has become lyrically bubbly, almost effervescent. The suspense and the drama in this music comes, of course, from the silence, the minimalism, the attention to almost microscopic details of sound rather than grand emotive gestures. Listeners to eai will be familiar with these general parameters. But what's different about Phosphor is how they actually pull off such a unique group language, distinguishing themselves in the still-young genre. Hayward on tuba is often indistinguishable from the rubbed skins of Beins' kit, the rumble of Neumann's innenklavier, or the low farting of Dörner's trumpet. Bosetti's sax meshes with Krebs' or Renkel's scraping guitar. The sounds themselves define the piece, the environment, the expectations. Not that the music is entirely self-contained or self-referential; it communicates, albeit in obscure ways (like trying to listen to smoke signals, if that makes any sense). These later generations of improvisers continue to show that, if resisting convention is the mark of creative improvisation, they are much closer to the mark than the latest energy jazz group.

Jason Bivins | **One Final Note** | summer / fall 2002

The eight-piece ensemble called Phosphor is something of a supergroup of Berlin-based improvisors of a generation born circa 1965. AMM is a likely reference-point, but I'm mostly struck by the contrasts between their aesthetics: Phosphor's concentration on sound-as-event and on noise eliminates the processual, poetic

quality of an AMM performance, in favour of a bleak and arbitrary soundworld largely defined by the shifting balance of static, held sounds and arbitrary, puncturing interventions. Even by the trompe l'oeil standards of free-improv, it's remarkably hard to tell at any given moment how many people are playing and what instruments they're using. Trumpeter Axel Dörner is already legendary for this kind of sonic extremism, and indeed there's not a single sound on the album I can assign to him with any certainty. Presumably, like soprano saxophonist Alessandro Bosetti and tuba-player Robin Hayward, he is responsible for the stretches that sound like a gas leak or the workings of a furnace or boiler-room. (The other players are: Burkhard Beins, percussion; Annette Krebs and Michael Renkel, guitars; Andrea Neumann, "inside-piano, mixing desk" – the former, I gather, is the disassembled innards of a piano; and Ignaz Schick, electronics.) The opening track here is as abrupt, loud and annoying as John Zorn could wish, but the album thereafter moves increasingly to the quiet end of the scale; by the end, one is left with a muted backdrop of stroked metal and steady breathing just barely stippled by the other players. I find it easier to be impressed by the album than wholly satisfied by it; nonetheless, aficionados of the more rarefied end of improv will want to check it out.

[Nate Dorward](#) | Coda | July 2002

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 Dörner'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 | [All About Jazz](#) | April 2002

If I were clinically insane, I would articulate my beliefs in the profound significance of the post-minimal abstract sounds created by this creative collaboration. The mostly whispered interplay of these musicians spark thought and reflection from parts of the mind's eye (or ear) that is beyond rational thought and common practice.

The folks at the French label Potlatch continue to deliver stellar improvisational music. Phosphor is a cooperative effort of musicians living in Berlin, plus Italian saxophonist Alessandro Bosetti. Axel Dörner who has collaborated with the likes of Alexander von Schlippenbach, Chris Burn, Mats Gustafsson and Butch Morris processes his trumpet through a machine until any resemblance of its' sound to that of a trumpet is the stuff of a forensic investigation. Likewise, Bosetti and Robin Hayward's horns surface only in a fleeting glimpse as ghosts, or better yet memories. Their 'music' isn't music as much as acoustic and electronic manipulations of sound. Sure that is also what music is, but these artists choose disquiet over harmony, not through clamor or cacophony. Andrea Neumann's piano-insides are the stripped bared guts which once more are filtered through a computer. What is delivered and processed by Ignaz Schick is a machine-logic, the

stuff of spacecrafts silently running in the absolute quiet of deep-space. The sounds and reverberations created here are the switching on and off of machines, the hum of generators, and the pulse of a post-2001 landscape. It all means nothing, yet it touches on our precarious human condition.

Mark Corroto | [All About Jazz](#) | March 2002

In the late '90s, free improvisation took an unexpected turn toward the extremely quiet, replacing stamina and endurance with attention to textures and microscopic details. Even though AMM pioneered the idea as early as the late '60s, the merit of developing it into an articulated form of avant-garde expression must be awarded to the Germans. Recorded in April 2001 and released just before the year came to an end, Phosphor introduces what could be almost considered a "microsound supergroup." Trumpeter Axel Dörner had become a champion of the genre by this time. Burkhard Beins (percussion) had recorded with Michael Renkel (acoustic guitar) and formed two-thirds of the trio Perlonex with Ignaz Schick (live electronics). The latter also recorded with Andrea Neumann (inside-piano) who, in turn, released a CD with Annette Krebs (guitar). Tuba player Robin Hayward had been developing his own idiosyncratic micro-language for years. This German septet was joined by Italian saxophonist Alessandro Bosetti for this two-day recording session. The eight players make very little noise, a music based on silence and tiny sounds we would consider accidental in other contexts. It requires enormous amounts of attention from the listener and surely is an acquired taste, but the rewards are plenty. Ideas bounce everywhere, caught by the other players, even though on first listen nothing seems to be really happening -- and that's what is so exciting about this music. Beins and Dörner are particularly resourceful, but most of the time the musicians' contributions defy individualization, forming one organic entity. Phosphor is bound to become a landmark CD in avant-garde music. Strongly recommended, although only for the most open-minded listeners.

François Couture | [All Music Guide](#) | March 2002

A clearly focused project from Berlin, Phosphor is an eight piece improvising group, including trumpeter Axel Dörner, percussionist Burkhard Beins and Andrea Neumann (inside-piano, mixing desk). By no means a wacky free for all, this is a honed down, disciplined music, a carefully constructed group sound in which individual contributions rarely poke out. The album's opening moments are its most extrovert - with blasts of steam and grinding metal, it's as if we are touring a steelworks. Later the group settles into creating sonic environments with an industrial flavour. What intrigues me is how the music aspires to the status of non-musical landscapes. It doesn't sound like a lake full of geese, but it evokes that kind of non-human organisation of sound. Recently Peter Cusack's recordings of London and the Lea Valley have had us listening to an overhead cable fizzing above a disabled electric train, tadpoles trying to eat an underwater microphone, or the clanging made by Deptford market traders dismantling their stalls. Phosphor deploy their tuba, saxophone and electronics in the hope of sounding as good, as inevitable if you like, as those tadpoles. There's also influence from contemporary composition on the organisation of the group, if not the sound. One of composed music's secrets is that musicians sit for large amounts of time playing nothing, contributing at key moments. For an eight piece Improv group to adopt this tactic has a major refining effect. Still, I confess I found the album interesting rather than exciting. Much of it is restrained and low key, and, missing the theatre of seeing the octet perform live, my attention drifted. Amid the hisses and textures, there's little feeling of anyone playing an instrument, or performing, or being concerned with beauty. Only an acoustic guitarist (Annette Krebs or Michael Renkel ?) offers moments of individual musical statement. But there's no doubt that, in reacting against musical bluster and expressiveness, Phosphor have produced some remarkable ensemble sound.

Clive Bell | [The Wire](#) | February 2002