

Judith Wegmann
Jens Ruland
Robert Torche
Kon.Takte
First Visit

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Judith Wegmann + Jens Ruland + Robert Torche

Kon.Takte

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Pianist Judith Wegmann, percussionist Jens Ruland, and sound designer/electronics performer Robert Torche developed the project *New3Art* to investigate the repertoire of compositional work of the 1960s, improvisation, and commissions of work by Swiss composers, delving into “an engagement with space and time [which] has been a central aspect of our individual musical language for years. The exploration of extremes in terms of tension, slowness, and duration.” Their first document of this project, *Kon.Takte*, provides a superlative introduction to their approach, with performances of “Spiegelung (improvisation by all three musicians),” Karlheinz Stockhausen’s electroacoustic piece “Kontakte (For Electronic Sounds, Piano and Percussion),” and “Geschichten der Gewalt,” a piece by Swiss composer, saxophonist, and sound artist Antoine Chessex. Each explores sound worlds which fuse the acoustic resonances of piano and percussion with electronics and processing for sonically distinctive results.

“Spiegelung” opens the album with the rumbling musings of pattering percussion, low-end piano string scrapes, and resounding piano frame creaks and jolts. Gradually, electronic processing of the acoustic instruments is introduced, and the sounds accrue into a slowly evolving tapestry. Once the sound space is established, details of struck prepared piano, stummed strings, hanging notes and ringing chords, wooden percussive clatter, metallic sonorities of chimes and gongs, and rubbed drum heads emerge from layered, dark-hued, reverberant electronics. There is a patience to the way the three interact, always attentive to the collective proceedings. The mix adeptly balances the inherent qualities of the acoustic instruments with the unfolding real-time electronic processing into a multifaceted amalgamation of painstakingly placed events.

The central piece of the recording is a reading of “Kontakte.” Stockhausen originally created the work as a four-channel tape piece, recording percussion instruments and methodically looping them and modulating the tape speeds to transform pulses into tones which were then further treated with filters and feedback. The composer explained that the title “refers both to contacts between instrumental and electronic sound groups and to contacts between self-sufficient, strongly characterized moments. In the case of four-channel loudspeaker reproduction, it also refers to contacts between various forms of spatial movement.” After its initial creation, the composer expanded the work with the addition of notated piano and percussion parts first performed in 1960 by percussionist Christoph Caskel and pianist David Tudor. The tape was designed as the sequencing of independent “Moments” with varying densities and dynamics and the challenge of realizing the piece is to meld the acoustic actions of piano and percussion with the electronics.

Wegmann, Ruland, and Torche fully embraces those challenges, steadfastly charting the trajectory of the piece as the sounds constantly shift across the stereo plane. The interaction of flurried and hammered piano motifs, refracted patterns of struck percussion, and the darting electronics are woven together with striking exactitude, and sterling stamina. Their keen attention to their respective parts and the mercurially shifting electronics is in evidence throughout. The three fully immerse themselves in the kaleidoscopic, engulfing 35-minute soundscape which the recording captures with masterful clarity, demanding repeated listens to absorb the structural depth of the piece.

Chessex’s “Geschichten der Gewalt” closes the album, providing an effective pairing with the other two pieces. The composer specifies that the pianist play the repeated figures of their part as fast as possible while the percussionist is asked to slow or accelerate the agitated simmer of their part played on three large ride cymbals whose resonances are each matched to specific “frequency zones.” Electronic frequency glissandos are played through two speakers placed behind the piano and cymbals, “gluing the instruments together.” While the piano and percussion parts are in constant motion, the respective slowly transforming ebb and flow of velocity creates a unifying thread to the massing of the three sound sources, developing a unifying flow to the piece. The resolute trajectory of the piece, from intersecting discrete piano and percussion to enveloping cumulative orchestration is performed with rapt confidence. Programmed together, the release is a notable introduction to this project while also providing an incisive reading of “Kontakte.”

–Michael Rosenstein