

TOMAS KORBER / KONUS QUARTETT - MUSIK FÜR EIN FELD

♥ 1

CD

Cubus

One of the things I hear musicians in this field say more than anything, is that they intend to release less CDs- pare things back and have more control over the work that finds its way to a wider audience, letting only the best work seep out. More often than not, this noble intent doesn't come to fruition. In Tomas Korber's case however, it certainly has, and after an influx of releases in the earlier part of his career, releases from Korber are few and far between, with this new work being his first in three years. What is more, he has managed to keep the quality control really tight. This return to published activity is a real gem.

Musik für ein Feld is a work composed by Korber that is performed by the Konus Quartett, an all-saxophone group alongside Korber, who utilises electronics and sinewaves as well as processes the saxophones of the quartet. From what I can tell, the saxes were recorded performing Korber's instructions, and Korber treated and arranged the resulting recordings and added his own parts at a later date, though this is far from certain. Although there are clear sections, or movements to the piece, they are included here as a single track. The opening is a series of hushed, noteless hisses that may be untouched recordings but also possibly have been altered very slightly to give a more clean, precise feel. These gradually start to overlap and layer, building slowly until they coalesce into a hurricanesque roar that suddenly cuts off dead to leave a stream of glowing, undulating tones that sound electronic and yet also rich and gravelly in timbre, so giving away that maybe they originated from the brass ensemble before undergoing a fair amount of transformation. The velvety tones build until they in turn stop, this time very abruptly, and more shimmering tones, some pure and electronically born, others crafted from the saxophones come and go, always retaining a fragile sense of tense, carefully arranged structure. Things continue like this. There are long silences, or possibly sections when tones go so low they disappear from human recognition. There are loud passages that have you reaching for the volume dial as sinetones and densely layered saxophones apply pressure to the ear and there are sudden explosions of activity, such as when one two minute long void is suddenly disrupted with a series of rattling attacks, like a deeply bronchial man constantly gasping for air, only for those again to be subsumed under a tidal wave of tumultuous, crackling and seething noise Elsewhere the processing is more obvious as the saxophones are reduced to spiralling digital scribbles that suddenly make me reassess who was responsible for the wilder processing on Korber's brilliant duo album with Ralf Wehowsky. There is an intense passage of layered sine waves that gets so heavy that even played at low volumes it has a claustrophobic, crushing feel to it, and further sections of neatly placed silence and a range of other, mostly quite austere saxophone mutations, but really nothing here sounds like a traditional sax.

Korber's composition offers no concession to easy listening. His arrangement of the sounds he has crafted doesn't allow for flow or listener comfort. Long silences could equally be broken by gradually seeping, barely audible whispers or by sudden attacks that really jar the senses. If a long silence is broken then that doesn't mean that it will be followed by a long passage of activity. The norms of electroacoustic composition don't seem to be being followed. The music throughout has a feel of uncertainty, of surprise and of a left of centre approach to composition. The sounds are neatly, carefully and lovingly crafted from the original saxophone recordings and the album is mastered brilliantly (interestingly by one of the saxophone quartet) but it feels wilfully awkward, almost as if the music itself is rejecting the beauty of so many of the sounds it contains and instead forcing them into weird shapes as though to keep you from enjoying them on a purely aesthetic level. I have listened to *Musik für ein Feld* about a dozen times now and still it doesn't feel comfortable or familiar. This isn't music that has been rattled off over a few days before turning to the next project. Instead it feels like it has been fretted over, worked upon, fought with for a long period of time, as Mahler would with a symphony, seeking the best solutions, pushing sounds around rather than letting them lie wherever they may fall. If this degree of effort, of compositional mastery, of menacing refinement is what happens when you don't release anything for a few years then more power to Tomas Korber, and I have no problem waiting that long for the next one.