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HORVITZ at 55: Music and Dance in Concrete [TrackList follows]– Yukio Suzuki (choreography and dance), Yohei Saito (video artist) [!] and Tucker Martine (producer / engineer). (MP3 files for download or as LP at http://www.waynehorvitz.net/merchandise.html**) – Other Room Music 001, 1:15:52 (8/26/14) *****:**

And now for something completely different. Too bad the phrase was grabbed by Monty Python (nigh forty-five years ago), because it could apply to Wayne Horvitz's *55: Music and Dance in Concrete*. First reason: it may be completely different from what you've ever heard. The phrase "Musique concrète" only *begins* to describe it. While it does feature sounds of musical instruments, voice, synthesizers and computer-based digital signal processing, the piece is just too variable and unpredictable to fit into that category alone. Second reason: the segments that make up this work (26 in the MP3 release, 13 in the LP reviewed herein) are so distinct from each other that the listener feels she is in an aural candy shop with multicolored confections stuffed in each aisle. [In the live performances there are 55 composed and 55 improvised segments…Ed.]

Perhaps it's best to call it post-modernist music and let it go at that. It's certainly got doses of irony, as in the taunting (and unusually persistent) brass ostinato in 55(3). After less than a minute, it departs the scene like an obstreperous drunk at a party going to use the facilities. Another gentler ostinato takes over, comprised electronically; then the brass wanders back and the two themes "argue" until four minutes are up. The more I think of it, these repeated motifs are more akin to jazz riffs than to classical ostinatos; they're the kind of hypnotic fixation to which Charlie Mingus would have nodded his head in approval.

But occasionally *55: Music and Dance in Concrete* does drape itself in past musical styles, such as the string segments in 55(10), which sound like they're staggering out of an 8 AM class at the Second Viennese School. Is that the ghost of Arnold Schoenberg I see shimmering behind the blackboard? Parts of 55(29) sound like a pre-symphony tune up, but only for a few bars at the opening. The old expression about New England weather apples to each fragment: If you don't like it, wait a minute (literally). According to the composer, one does not even need to listen to the pieces in any particular order. It may be even be a stretch to call the work a composition in the standard sense. There are just so many distinct thematic explorations. It may be more descriptive to call it a musical theme generation experience. Recorded in the "phenomenally diverse acoustics" of the bunkers and cistern of Fort Worden (Port Townsend, WA), the pieces sound spooky at times, probably nudged along somewhat by the echoey venue. There are nods to minimalist styles in 55 (15), and hypnotic repetition of tone clusters that Morton Feldman would have thumbed-up throughout. Supporting voices to the main themes change intriguingly and you never hear the same ones from cut to cut. The music is not jarring,

and I find most of it pleasant to listen to. But you really have to listen closely, particularly the first few times. Much like Bartok, this is not background music for soufflé mixing. What's most important to realize is that it's completely original, even in its tributes to music of the past. To paraphrase Kaspar Gutman's salute to Sam Spade: Wayne Horvitz is a fellow worth knowing, a real character. There's never any telling what he'll do next, except that it's bound to be something astonishing.

Note: Those who purchase the LP also receive a card with download instructions for MP3 versions.

TrackList:

1. 55 (1)
2. 55 (15)
3. 55 (29)
4. 55 (10)
5. 55 (16)
6. 55 (26)
7. 55 (3)
8. 55 (5)
9. 55 (21)
10. 55 (18)
11. 55 (12)
12. 55 (9)
13. 55 (20)
14. 55 (34)
15. 55 (17)
16. 55 (25)
17. 55 (22)
18. 55 (2)
19. 55 (23)
20. 55 (11)
21. 55 (32)
22. 55 (13)
23. 55 (7)
24. 55 (4)
25. 55 (14)
26. 55 (33)—Peter Bates

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