Wayne Horvitz - 55: Music and Dance in Concrete (Songlines, 2014) ****

By Paul Acquaro – Thursday December 18, 2014

When you pick up the LP of Wayne Horvitz's *55: Music and Dance in Concrete* you may be struck by its austere beauty. The image, the booklet, the sound, all work to re-create the location of the visual and acoustic properties of a circa-1900 Fort Worden in Port Townsend, Washington, nestled amongst the temperate rain forests, jagged Olympic peaks and cool waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The album cover depicts concrete like the bunkers of the fort, and the LP size insert booklet sports a cover of a dancer, bathed in blues, reds and greens. The printed booklet captures a bit of the multi-media project it represents.

The music is modern classical and "modular", composed out of short tracks that when downloaded from the internet (the LP contains a sampling, the download card several more) run from a minute to no more than four. According to the liner notes, Horvtiz composed 55 short pieces, and then additionally recorded 55 improvisations with a chamber group at the fort, and from these 110 pieces constructed the music that would then be later performed to dance choreographed by Yukio Suzuki.

The music is impressionistic and evocative, and it is no stranger to dissonance and uncomfortable contrasts. The tracks unfold slowly, some pieces are soundscapes and others unfold with more insistent tempos and structured melodies. There is a lot of darkness and minimalism in the grooves, as classical instrumentation, free improvisation, and a great deal of reconfiguration in the laboratory are stirred together. The resulting pieces are distinct and fascinating miniatures that are like small crystal sculptures - delicate and sharp, beautiful and just a little, satisfyingly bit, terrifying.

On the LP - or digital download - the sum of the parts is a rather a compelling soundtrack that can stand well on its own, but at the same time hints at the visuals.

The music is performed by many of the musicians that work with Horvitz in the Royal Room Collective Music Esemble. The whole group is: Steven O'Brien, trumpet; Naomi Siegel,

trombone; Kate Olson, soprano sax; Beth Fleenor, clarinet/bass carinet; Briggan Krauss, alto sax; Maria Mannisto, voice; Victoria Parker, violin; Eyvind Kang and Heather Bentley, violas and Roweena Hammil, cello. Composed and mixed by Wayne Horvitz.

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