



Polwechsel
Archives Of The North

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Beauty and the perfect imitations of failure

As a composer/performer ensemble Polwechsel has forged a unique production ethos represented in a serial body of work in which *Archives Of The North* is the 4th chapter. This is the first recording to represent the work of composers Werner Dafeldecker (bass) and Michael Moser (cello, computer) with John Butcher (saxophones), Martin Brandlmayr and Burkhard Beins (both drums and percussion).

Over the past two decades Polwechsel's output has thrived on a democratic process of specifically composing for the abilities and techniques of its cast with each member possessing a unique and developed voice in instrumental performance. During this period Polwechsel has produced divisive compositions, structured improvisation and electro-acoustic works which have all spoken intricately and explicitly on the organization of noise, the locus of technique, and the dynamism of the *ensemble*.

The Polwechsel project has been exponential in defining new approaches to the composition/improvisation paradigm and in doing so have created a music that defined, examined and radically re-assessed its own genre. Each phase of Polwechsel has been marked by a defining document and the releases of their recordings have frequently book-ended trends and movements in improvisational and experimental music – Polwechsel has had a direct and profound influence on the agenda of a genre coined "electro-acoustic improvisation" for example. Each consecutive release has revealed itself as both an entirely unique exposition of their own craft

and a dramatic reconfiguration of the individuals' approaches. They consistently present work of striking integrity which strives upon the terms of re-invention and transformation.

On the recording *Archives Of The North*, Polwechsel has switched again. The unit has transformed itself by adding the two percussionists, and these works all deal the application of percussion as centrifuge. This is a generative music which stems and blooms from a controlled and deliberate structural center. This work ascends from common notions of musicality and sound production, where obliteration, feedback and the extraneous are emancipated into a fully blown dialect which could be defined as *expanded technique*.

Polwechsel work with a stringently refined vocabulary of techniques in sound production and sonic choreography. Their works often patiently study and extract beauty from the bare elemental juxtaposition of techniques. They explore strategies where form and function are radically and frequently challenged – the start-point is an expanded musical discipline which deals with the mechanics of beauty in her many perspective distortions and variations. It renders poetry through process, is littered with perfect imitations of failure and aleatory justifications that occur with stunning clarity of gesture and purpose.

What defines a Polwechsel piece is singular approach to the textural and temporal. This is work which speaks volumes on its medium by revealing the details of its architecture, each piece splays from a keystone which will define its internal workings for the duration – which sets this work apart from free improvisation – is that it works within a framework which balances *outré* exploration with highly considered logic. The work could be described as a stayed and conscientious debasement of the notions of conventional musical form. The work can at times be excruciatingly delicate, yet it contains an anger and directness that demands consideration of its magnificence, of its explicitness, which insights a drastic re-consideration of the state of music as material – every note resounds with a question of its own integrity.

A key influence on Polwechsel would have to be Helmut Lachenmann's work – which strived to simultaneously create and destroy genre by examining the inherent

governed his works to desire failure and through examining that polemic brought about unprecedented challenges to the ethics of technique. Helmut Lachenmann saw the resonating body as the embodiment of convention – what Lachenmann called extended technique or an “*instrumental musique concrète*” came as loaded with notions of deconstruction as it did claims to aesthetic pregnancy – a calculated resistance to convention which Lachenmann maintained, presented “an offer of uncompromising beauty.” While he was determined by the subversion of conventional notions of beauty, he geared his work rather toward a “beauty of possibility.” Quite possibly, his notion went against out-and-out subversion – it was not *noise* as resistance to convention, but a sincere and directive approach toward a new western musical notion “after” avant-garde. A catalogue of distressed and damaged aesthetics, his music was a language forged from extraneous noise and un-orthodox performance techniques – every fraction a highly considered question of form. These were his perfect imitations of failure.

Polwechsel is a group accustomed to such non-idiomatic approaches – that is to say their work is indebted to Lachenmann for it expands upon that approach – extended or *expanded technique* is a dialect in which they are exceedingly well versed. In Polwechsel the notion of desire, realization and discovery of beauty is hinged tightly to the process of improvisational play. A beauty which blossoming depends upon varying degrees of abrasion, much like a jeweler shaping a crude object with saws, files, sandpaper, hair, silk, fluid, and finally their breath which blows the last piece of dust off the jewel. Not to mention that the element may have been hacked from a much larger stone.

Polwechsel’s work is not as much about aesthetically defining narrative musical events and achievements as it is focused on the exposition of process, “in the jeweler’s studio” he is making process explicit, the notion of process becomes integral to each of these compositions, which all differently, and radically explore – a self-reflexive process.

The unthinkable and the already thought to death

In music, the notion of “new” has quite unpredictably manifested in a non-committal and often light interpretation of an “avant-garde” – the aesthetics of which has filtered through into idioms defined as “ambient,” “electro-acoustic,” “improvisation,” “IDM,” “post rock” and so on, which are areas rife with minor challenges and suggestions of an “avant-garde” form re-evaluation. These tokens run rife through the popular music spectrum, making evident objections to meaning and shunning the notion of an integrated responsibility of action – propagated by a vagueness and lackadaisical regard for content, and frequent shying from statement of purpose. That said, this era may be remembered as one in which – with relative ease – practitioners can adopt the stance of being *punk*, the frivolousness with which “experimental” music practice is defined, not to mention the self-appointment of moral guardians and fetishists who publicize genres from the sub-surface of the music industry and its marketing prowess, which has the last call of defining the new.

Polwechsel have actively re-contextualized aesthetics common to all of these defined genres, which would suggest that without claims to revolutionize the eclectic epoch, the work is conscientious of the suggestion that we are in the midst of a pregnancy for a music-ethical transformation. In this difficult, saturated realm of *post-modernism* or eclecticism, *Archives Of The North* address a necessity of re-thinking the system and purpose of the perpetual montage of the “avant-garde” signifier, that is, the *extended technique*.

Polwechsel’s music pertains an attitude toward this, its stance is an expression

of confidence, self-awareness and humility achieved through dedicated practice and mastery of technique and form. An airing of Powehschel music has political undercurrents evocative of a general aspiration for a justified newness in that it sets up a territorial scenario which accommodates *tradition* and *avant* very tenuously, and by doing so provokes reconsideration of the function of the ensemble.

As Lachenmann, Globokar, Dumetrescu, Kagel, AMM, Gruppo Di Improvvisazione Nuovo Consonanza *et al.* have challenged the performative construct, a Polwechsel performance can gouge at the parameters of the performance/recital construct – acoustically and physically – but especially when we consider this music as a post-digital art-form, and arena where recital itself is automatically situated in a struggle with the expectations of the entertainment question. And one can't help but sense a kind of controlled anger in which a stand-off with convention is conducted, all the while revealing the interiority of the performance, knowingly, this is their most potent signifier of resistance.

The contextualization of this music finds no easy realm. Like Borbetomagus – who perform aggressive obliterations of form brilliantly titled “Snuff Jazz,” Mattin, who has harassed the idiom systematically to the point of illuminating its implicit failures, and Satchiko M, who has approached abject and instable territory through microscopic transformations by cracking into the genealogy of the device. What they have in common is that at some point or other had either defiantly or difficulty had their music contextualized within realms of jazz, free music, electro-acoustic or contemporary composition – no term throws the literal weight to effectively codify this movement, which is one not simply occupied with challenging the interpretive construct but is actually using the detritus of these constructs in a state of disintegration as its raw material.

In *Archives Of The North* Polwechsel has harnessed the aesthetics of a free-noise as sound liberated from genre. They have distilled the potency of the signifiers of oppositional free music, they have set about ordering, pacing, arranging this repertory with the compositional stringency and calculation of *avant-garde composition* – which is where they

will most frequently and effectively borrow. Which is to say that *Archives Of The North* employs the full spectrum sonic potential of a jazz band, composed with the austerity and calculation of *musique concrète* – and duly asserts itself as neither. Indeed it is the play-out of this work that states where and how its context is invented in the *room of the magnificent*, where details are brought forth under excruciating light.

Appropriately the opening piece “Datum Cut” has derived its process in part from Alvin Lucier’s “I Am Sitting In A Room,” which is a striking reminder that the exquisitely simple and effective piece has had an undeniably resonant influence in electro-acoustic techniques, while having another life as a poem on the subsuming and disappearance of the performer through permutation. As an expanded approach to ensemble performance, this appropriation of technique best describes how Polwechsel explores self-reflexivity. Elaborating upon themselves and their place within an architecture. This piece goes on to reveal its process in a structural manner, its workings seem to uncoil like a wind-up clock being taken apart.

British filmmaker William Raban has created a work entitled “Take Measure” in 1973. He stated his intention to “*mirror the processes of production constructing the reflexive space in which the audience can be directly engaged.*” The projection of this film demonstrates the space between the projector and screen by unraveling meters of film through the aisles of the cinema. As this piece of film plays it recoils onto the spool, the film snakes backwards through the audience as is consumed by the projector. By transforming the screening event into an action the work becomes about its space, materials and duration. Much like Lucier’s “I Am Sitting In A Room” and a Polwechsel concert, the author and observer, the room, the media and the mechanics are all illuminated through a slight re-consideration of role. One can walk away from that with their perceptions of a medium heightened.

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Dean M. Roberts

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Burkhard Beins *drums, percussion*

Martin Brandlmayr *drums, percussion*

John Butcher *tenor & soprano saxophone*

Werner Dafeldecker *double bass*

Michael Moser *cello & computer*

Recorded on May 14th and 15th 2005 at Studio p4 Nalepastrasse Berlin; Recording engineer Thorsten Weigelt; Software programming for *Datum Cut* and *Core Cut* by Wolfgang Musil; the recordings have been made during our Berlin residency at TESLA in May 2005. Mixed by Werner Dafeldecker and Michael Moser; Mastered by Christoph Amann; CD master by Peter Pfister; Liner notes by Dean M. Roberts. Cover photo by Michael Moser; Graphic concept by fuhrer Vienna; Produced by Polwechsel; Executive production by Werner X. Uehlinger.

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|----------------------------------|--|-------|
| 1 | Datum Cut
<i>by Michael Moser</i>
CH 131.0600767 | 15:29 |
| 2 | Mirror
<i>by Werner Dafeldecker</i>
CH 131.0600768 | 10:58 |
| 3 | Core Cut
<i>by Michael Moser</i>
CH 131.0600769 | 4:25 |
| 4 | Magnetic North
<i>by Polwechsel</i>
CH 131.0600770 | 6:34 |
| 5 | Site And Setting
<i>by Michael Moser</i>
CH 131.0600771 | 13:43 |
| Total Time DDD ²⁴ Bit | | 51:35 |

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David Liebman
Elery Eskelin
Different But The Same
hatOLOGY 615

Theo Jörgensmann
Fellowship
hatOLOGY 616

Albert Ayler
Stockholm, Berlin 1966
hatOLOGY 617

Manuel Mengis Gruppe 6
Into The Barn
hatOLOGY 627

David Liebman
The Distance Runner
hatOLOGY 628



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