



Piotr Kurek

Biography

Polish composer and performer working in a field of live electronics and analog modular synthesis. Leading creative force behind the ever-evolving instrumental music of [Piętnastka](#). Since starting his solo activity in 2006 he has collaborated with a long list of contemporary dance companies and various artists in Poland and abroad .

Kurek creates densely-woven tapestries of sound. His layered melodic patterns are constructed from and influenced by sounds ranging from contemporary abstractions to the melismatic ululations of primeval chants. As a performer, he often makes use of amplified organs, electric accordions, and many other unusual instruments.

Piotr Kurek has participated in numerous music and theatre festivals, including: Transmediale (Berlin), Elevate (Graz), UH Fest (Budapest), Baltic Festival (Brugge), Traverses (Nancy), Malta International Theatre Festival (Poznań), Gdansk Dance Festival (Gdańsk), Underground Theatre Festival (Aarad), Cornelius Cardew and the Art of Listening (Porto), International Festival of Modern Dance (Kovno), etc. He is co-author of “Urban Afterimage,” a finalist at the Malta International Theatre Festival (2009), and the author of music for “NN. Tribute to Vaclav Nijinsky,” a Lublin Dance Theatre production that was nominated, in 2008, for best contemporary dance performance in Poland.

www.piotrkurek.com





Releases/projects

Heat

Piotr Kurek's "Heat" was originally released in December 2011 as a limited edition cassette by Digitalis LTD. Sold out shortly after the original release date, Crónica is proud to release it in digital format. Most of the sounds in "Heat" originate from various exotic records, from documentary movies or archives, or were recorded in studio using vintage organs, electric piano and synthesizers. Starting from an original idea of creating a specific music concrète album deeply rooted in archival nature, "Heat" emerged as a rich organ-infused tropicalia where everything was blurred in greenish-brown and sultry air.



Video presentation:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2CFdSGDPWI>

More information about the album:

<http://www.cronicaelectronica.org/?p=068>

Reviews

No Fear of Pop

Warsaw-based composer Piotr Kurek has just released his full-length *Heat*, an eight-track work that spans roughly over 37 minutes and that features some of the most curiously captivating, deeply arresting sounds I've heard so far in 2012. This is all pretty psychedelic and experimental, yet in a completely different manner from the vast majority of the current output in this field of music. Kurek weaves intricate, utterly complex arrangements by utilizing organs, Rhodes, modular synth, his own voice, and "found sounds", that all remain fascinatingly clear and bright, compellingly avoiding the murk of indifferent drone soundscaping that can be found all too often in contemporary psychedelia. On *Heat*, every measure sets a new task for the listener's sensory organs, constituting a demanding aural experience throughout, but with its light, tropical feel, at the same time also a very rewarding one. Highly recommended.

Weed Temple

The newest tape by Warsaw's sample wizard Piotr Kurek brings the whimsical, folktronic compositions of *Dalia* (released under the moniker Piętnastka) to the next, more intricate and psychedelic level. The music here is slower and more "adult", the childish playfulness of the *Sangoplasmo* cassette is gone. The sounds on *Heat* bring the memories of Amon Tobin's samplescapes, but without the focus on IDM/breakcore element of the equation. Kurek sculpts droning, sometimes even downright noisy collages, amorphous proto-jazz compositions falling into shamanic trance. The tape itself is described as "organ-infused tropicalia and archive amazonian recordings", which can bring the likes of Sun Araw and Gala Drop to mind. The comparison is not as far-fetched as it might appear at first, and Piotr Kurek appears to be more than happy to quench our thirst for exotic instrumentation. I'm certain the cassette must've been quite a surprise to the people familiar with the output of Digitalis Limited, a label known for its take on rather minimalistic analog synth dronescapes, various Kosmische Musik worships and stipped down guitar based raga folk ballads. Because *Heat* is pretty much unlike anything released by Digi Ltd before: a collection of highly rhythmical, high fidelity soundtracks to oriental spy movies filled with instrumental clutter and vintage electric organ lines. Every little sound, every little beat, every littlest instrument and sample is on fire. The tracks are incredibly diverse too: the still mischevious "Heat", which sounds like a more mature and a more aware take on Piętnastka's "School Boy", dark and foreboding "Time Takes What It Wants" and the massively droning "Organs Slide", where the numerous, overlapping organ dialogues sound like dubless Sun Araw. Until his expansion to the cassette labels like *Sangoplasmo* or *Digitalis Ltd*, Piotr Kurek was known only to a close-knit circle of EAI, experimental and ambient music aficionados in Poland (and probably a few abroad). The refinement of his sound and the exposure to a new crowd of fans (both because of the labels and because of websites and blogs picking up [and digging] the sound) may hopefully bring him to the spotlight, and motivate him to record more beauty in the near future. Highly recommended.

Lectures

“Lectures” was initially composed in 2007 for a live performance in Warsaw, during a Cornelius Cardew music festival that was part of the series of events “Zakrzywienia Igły”, organized by Michał Libera. The original idea was to perform Cardew’s pieces but this later evolved towards an improvisation based on sounds appropriated from various Cardew recordings, complemented by additional instruments. With the help from Walter Cardew, the composer’s son, Kurek was also able to use unreleased recordings from lectures, performances and rehearsals conducted by Cardew, and recorded for private use. This release presents a further development of the pieces composed for the live performance, inspired by Cornelius Cardew and his lectures.

Project was released as CD album by Portuguese label Crónica Electronica in 2009.



Video presentation:

<http://vimeo.com/25047961>

More information about the album:

<http://www.cronicaelectronica.org/?p=042>

Reviews

The Wire

After an opening passage of music, the unmistakable voice of Cornelius Cardew is heard, refined and almost prissy in lecture mode: "I don't know how many of you are musically educated..." before going on to explain how indeterminacy might be applied in a performance situation, material specified or elided, rules to be followed, broken or ignored. Later instructions are more specific, but increasingly woven into a rich, almost lilting electroacoustic background that marks something of a departure from Warsaw based Piotr Kurek's more familiar breakcore mode as Slepicy. Lectures was originally written for a Cardew event organised under the heading Zakrzywienia Igly in October 2007. The original aim was to perform a number of Cardew pieces, but it was decided instead to use material from his recordings as a basis for improvisation, with additional (unspecified) instruments in the mix. Kurek secured the help of the composer's son Walter Cardew to gain access to unreleased lecture and rehearsal material, some of which is incorporated here. What's intriguing about Lectures is precisely the impossibility of telling what is Cardew and what not, and to what extent the music heard relates to, deviates from or ignores the verbal instructions that break through the surface. It's an unsettling process, akin to watching someone make pancakes while a voiceover describes how to transect a duodenal ulcer.

Or maybe pot-throwing would be a better example, for Cornelius's father was a fine potter and it was said of a Cardew cup — as John Tilbury relates — that unlike most fine craft it seemed unaffected by damage, dirt or fragmentation, remaining a 'Cardew cup' no matter what. So with the son's music. Ordinarily, a project like this would be drab palimpsest, imposing borrowed authority in place of attained form. Remarkably, Cardew's spirit shines through at every turn, his 'authority' a subversion of authority, the actual sounds all the more effective a collaboration because they in no way resemble anything Cardew might have done, even if he were responsible for much of the sonic material here. This isn't a complacent irony, but testimony to the abiding strength of The Great Learning.

Tokafi

Evenly jazzy and experimental: A musical monument in honour of Cornelius Cardew.

Piotr Kurek wrote the music and composed the structure of his work 'Lectures' like a surrealistic novel. And most of the time a novel has a hero. In this case that hero is the late Cornelius Cardew. Being a scholar and gifted contributor to the world famous Karl-Heinz Stockhausen, with whom he collaborated for a good three years, Cardew also laid hands on the piece Carre as a composer under the supervision of the master himself. Not merely satisfied with that he engaged in several musical adventures, frequently changing his compositional structures and developing into one of the most experienced free style adventurers, influencing a legion of experimental musicians in the process. One of his works, The Great Learning, must have been at least one of the major reasons why Piotr Kurek created this album. With the aid of Cardew's son Walter, who contributed some tapes of his father's lectures, this musical experimental novel came to life. While Cardew's voice, for most of the time, sounds as though it were being emitted by a partially defunct radio, it is intermixed with what seem to be live-instruments, which drift along in a free style that indeed doesn't know any limits. Although sometimes harmonic sound parts appear, they are blown away like whirling autumn winds blow apart a bunch of fallen

leaves. Driven into corners of wild ineptitude, they are pulled together as if drawn by a mighty magnet again and again, while in the background, the master lectures... The complete absence of any notion of rhythm, despite the presence of percussive instruments, is another major feature of this album. Rudimentary elements of structure are exclusively provided by the instruments involved. Some electronically produced material can be detected but they seamlessly join force with those instruments. Wavelike sounds wash ashore of the endless musical groundswell that keeps coming and going... maybe one of the basic lessons we are about to learn. On track 5, 'Cardboard Cups', we hear Cardew talk about the differences between jazz performances by the same artist on an album and in a live performance leading some listeners to be disappointed by the very different effects. This is also in some ways a turning point in Kurek's music. While still experimental, we now hear free jazz elements join in with their typical improvisational elements. Flowing into each other the two genres create a new and surely exiting one, spiced with evenly jazzy and experimentally mixed comments of the celebrated master Cardew.

Overall, this album is something like a musical monument erected in honour of one of the great pioneers of modern music. And I dare say that it could hardly have been built any better than what Piotr Kurek has done here - his music is a genuine testimony of what the masters lectures were all about.

EarLab

Cornelius Cardew was a musician who had his feet in avant-garde music. He worked as assistant of Karlheinz Stockhausen, was member of free improvisation group AMM and at the end of the sixties formed the group Scratch Orchestra. While in this orchestra he build up a huge aversion against avant-garde music and the elitist nature of this music. At the same time he turned his career in the direction of politics supporting marxist-maoist organizations. Musically a swing to more traditional folklore music was taken at the same time. For various popular causes he developed musical pieces together with his old AMM colleague Keith Rowe. Until his death in 1981 he stayed active as member of communist parties in the British politics.

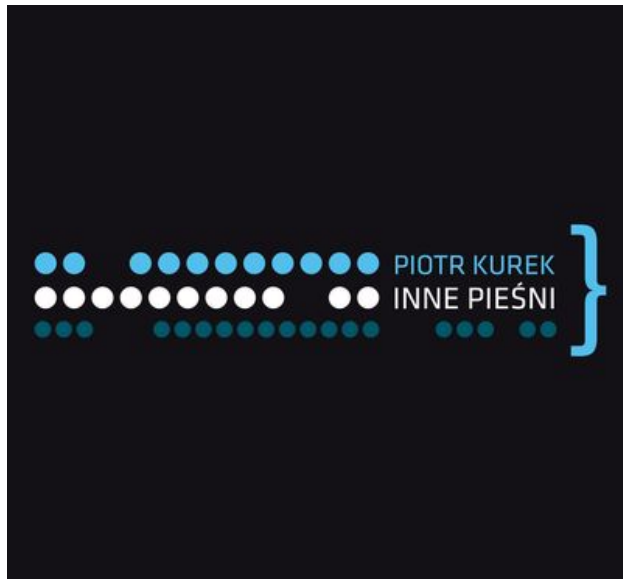
The musical career of Cardew has been an influence to several musicians even leading to several festivals, like the Zakrzyienia Igly festival in Warsaw, Poland in 2007. For this festival Polish musician and composer Piotr Kurek composed several pieces to be played. As a starting point several recordings from Cardew were used, while the musicians improvised with additional instruments. With these live pieces as starting point Kurek composed the music we find on the album Lectures. While the original setting for the festival was improvised, here things are worked out into the smallest detail. The 10 pieces are based around lectures and piano play by Cardew and around these recordings we hear clarinets, percussion and subtle computer generated sounds (among other instruments). What comes to mind is the music by the Berlin based duo Dictaphone, but in a more abstract version. The electro-acoustic music has similarities to modern free-jazz compositions, but as easily can be fitted in with modern avant-garde classical music.

Lectures is a strong release which shows great tribute to one of the innovators of avant-garde music, although Cardew might turn in his grave if someone would say this too loud.

Highly recommended release.

Inne Pieśni

Piotr Kurek used fragments of music recorded at the Studio of Radio Lublin of the concert „Songs of The Balkans” which took place on the 26th of November 2008. The music is based on fragments of Walachian, Serbian and Albanian songs performed by Slobodan Markovic from Slatina, the ensemble “Srbska Arhaika” from Belgrad and “Argjiro” The Ensemble of Polyphonic Singing from Gjirokastra. The premiere of the material took place at The Festival of Traditional and Avant-garde Music "Codes" in Lublin on the 23rd of May 2009. Project was released as CD album by polish Crossroads institution in 2010 and was nominated for the polish Folk Phonogram of the Year award.



Video presentation:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kfc0HF2_7l8

More information about the album:

<http://www.piotrkurek.com/>

Reviews

PopUp Magazine

W czasach kiedy folk kojarzy się z akustycznymi gitarami i długowłosymi brodacami zza oceanu, a muzyka ludowa to niemal cepeliada, Piotr Kurek dokonuje niebanalnej reinterpretacji jeśli nie nawet recydingu muzyki z Bałkanów, w której wyławia najciekawsze wątki, aranżując je w nowy, bardziej aktualny i świeższy sposób.

„Inne Pieśni” to fragmenty pieśni włoskich, serbskich i albańskich w wykonaniu Slobodana Markovića ze Slatiny, zespołu „Srbska Arhaika” z Belgradu oraz Zespołu Śpiewu Polifonicznego „Argjiro” z Gjirokastry, że pozwolę sobie zacytować informację prasową. Kurek wybiera najciekawsze momenty i dokonuje ich swoistego przetworzenia – zapętla, powiela, nakłada na siebie kilka warstw, czasem kierując na stricte nietypowe dronowe tory, a kiedy indziej nadając kompozycjom zwiewnego i swobodnego charakteru. Samodzielnie nagrywa też kolejne partie instrumentów - na wibrafonie, gitarach, skrzypcach czy melodyce. Wszystko to spaja i przetapia w nową jakość, która nie tylko brzmi świeżo, ale dzięki dobrej konstrukcji i umiejętnie budowanej narracji, pochłania uwagę momentalnie, uwypuklając masę interesujących brzmień, wzbogaconych o nowe pomysły, dzięki którym zapomniane melodie nabierają współczesnego, fascynującego charakteru. Efekt jest rewelacyjny.