

EAGLE KEYS - Eagle Keys (Even Stilte)

TOUCHING EXTREMES

Eagle Keys are Francisco Meirino (aka Phroq) on computer and "acoustics", and Tim Olive on electric bass. While I'm familiar enough with the latter's work and enjoyed his Supernatural Hot Rug And Not Used records with Nisikawa Bunsho quite a lot, this is my first approach to Meirino - unbelievably, one would say, since he's released over 30 albums in various formats, working "on the tension between programmed and accidental results". Introduced by the fabulous artwork of Marc Bell, the CD is riveting all the way, presenting loads of miasmatic drones and knotted contortions that spell "freedom" without the need of a programmatic manifesto. For large portions of the first track, Olive seems to be the motor after a series of impenetrable hums - often graduating to "impressive rumbles" - that create substrata over which Meirino clatters, chatters, wheels and deals, his riposte to his companion's calmness an ever-dangerous, lucid destruction of conventional codes that maintains a firm stranglehold on our aesthetic desires. At the same time, we're left contemplating finely chiseled sonic tissue and sparkling details, a testimony to the extreme care put by these musicians in their cultivated articulations; the jangling low-resonance string layers in the final section are a thing of beauty, propagations recalling motor airplanes in the sky before a massacre of Merzbow-like noise discharges. The same hypnotic mantle wraps the beginning of the second part, deranged music boxes and bell clocks lodged in what sounds like distorted shortwave to determine once and for all our extraneousness in a conversation that is as subliminal as bodily. Piercing high frequencies and half-discreet interference put a worn-out cloth on a subterranean pulse, then we're back to desolation all over again, the final ten minutes of the album reminding of how charming ugliness can be, if only observed by a different perspective.

(Review by Massimo Ricci, July 2007)

BAGATELLEN

Super-crunch with honey drones.

Tim Olive, last seen with Supernatural Hot Rugs and Not Used, is credited only with electric bass here though I'm challenged to hear anything remotely resembling even extended technique output on such. But I'll take his word for it. Francisco Meirino (aka Phroq), seems to have taken Olive's sounds, transmogrified them via insidious means and egested two tracks worth of blustery, difficult, clangorous, wheezing and altogether obstreperous noise.

It's pretty good.

There are elements, if you take your life into your hands and lean close to the speakers (on a few occasions, enormous enough sounds emerge, capable of cracking nearby thin glass—beware) which you can actually pick out that may have had their origins in strumming, though it's in the manner you might expect to hear from Frith's great-great-grandchildren. But who cares? This is one of those recordings where the result seems so far removed from issues of touch that you simply either wallow in the rough 'n' tumble or don't. If I find the longer track somewhat more engaging than the shorter, it may only be because it raised more bruises. One intriguing aspect is how strong the drones, which one might initially relegate to background status, become on subsequent listens. There's more than enough going on to reward many return listens. Just remember to bring those safety glasses.

(Review by Brian Olewnick, 15 May 2007)

THE SOUND PROJECTOR

More tempting morsels from Japan, this time from a label called Evenstilte which was founded in 2002 by Stéphane Perrin in Tokyo. Only 7 releases to date; his new project is the 'Even Statics' series which seems to involve various underground stars remixing each other (not really in my line), but I see his first release was by Guilty Connector, one of my favourite incoherent Japanese noise cassette-beasts. In my hands I hold two discs...Eagle Keys (ES105) by our old friend Tim Olive (the Canadian improviser who lives in Osaka), here playing with Francisco Meirino, on a record wrapped in a smashing sleeve drawn by Marc Bell. The other one is No Noise (ES104), a various artists comp from 2006 with Reynolds, Dustbreeders and Junko, Guilty Connector, Birchville Cat Motel and others. This might turn out OK, but it feels a shade 'retro' and the grisly sleeve art by Rudolf Eb.er doesn't bode well.

(Review by Ed Pinsent, 07 March 2007)

PARS TRANSATLANTIC

Lausanne-based Francisco Meirino, aka Phroq, returned home from his recent Japanese tour with a recording of a solo electric bass by Tim Olive (currently studying traditional Japanese fast food in Osaka, if his recent emails are anything to go by), added computer and electronics and ended up with these two extended tracks – total duration just under 50 minutes – of splendid soft noise EAI. Quite how the pair of them make the sounds they do is a wonderful mystery – there's very little on here that remotely resembles what I can recognise as the sound of an electric bass, but, carefully swaddled in Phroq's discreet drones and blankets of hiss and hum, there are plenty of elusive crackles and crunches. Perhaps if you hid a couple of contact mics in your kid's toybox, surreptitiously recorded the sounds of various plastic, metal and wooden small objects being assembled and dismantled by tiny inquisitive hands, took the resulting tape and hid it somewhere in your air conditioning system it might sound something like this. Olive's last outing with Bunsho Nisikawa, the intriguingly-titled Supernatural Hot Rug And Not Used, was mysterious and compelling; Eagle Keys – not sure that's just the name of the album or has become the name of the duo by default as is often the case with these collaborative ventures – is even better. It's superbly paced, carefully constructed and above all sounds terrific. Check it out.

(Review by Dan Warburton, May 2007)

NOISEWEEK

Since I last spewed about Tim Olive, he's put together the great Supernatural Hot Rug And Not Used (and a great self-titled album) with Nisikawa Buhnsho, which I implore you to seek out if you haven't. This is his new project with computer/acoustics artist Francisco Meirino (aka "Phroq"?), and it's the standard kind of high-level, attentive improv that Olive has trademarked. Lots of minimal, reductionist bites of noise - rattling static, small whines, crunching blips - mixed with solid columns of heavy sound. As with SHRANU, I'm not sure who's doing what here, but I am sure that Olive knows how to coax smart shit out of his equipment and his colleagues, and Eagle Keys is perhaps the best example of one of his most unique talents - the ability to mix and match sounds so that nothing ever sticks around too long, but no contrivances or artificial shifts ever emerge.

(Review by MM, April 2007)

VITAL WEEKLY

Grazing contact microphones raise their heads as the passing linesman for the county hums, - but not a tune to be heard across the 50hz field, along the shore line feeding pnp transistors dart in and out of the pink sea which is about to set. Crabs of corrugated mental crawl over rocks which do not rock, silica seaweed twitches, the sun comes up like thunder over a vibraphone escarpment which might be fusing the lights... this is the music of A Thousand Years 1990 Steel, glass, flies, maggots, MDF, insect-ocutor, cow's head, sugar, water.... This is the music of Francisco Meirino (Computer & Acoustics) who has collaborated with artists such as Dave Phillips, Brent Gutzzeit, Tim Olive (of course), Sickness, Guilty Connector, Cindy Van Acker, Manon Bellet, Filippo Leonardi, Takashi Tsuda, Kasper T. Toeplitz ... (That's 12?) and many more. And performed in Cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Tokyo, Kobe, Osaka, Geneva, Zurich, Barcelona, Valencia, Rotterdam, Den Haag, Paris, Marseille, and many more - and - Tim Olive - Electric Bass .. who has made recordings with Phroq, (of course) Supernatural Hot Rug And Not Used (Nisikawa Bunsho), Jeff Allport, Fritz Welch, Nimrod, Soap-Jo Henshi. (is this 6?) and live action in Europe, Japan, North America with the Phroq(!) and Otomo Yoshihide, Martin Tetreault and many others. On the other CD we have even more friends - as it's a compilation! -10 tracks of various artists who collectively spiral around more electronic noodlings with 'surprising' ingredients, like Myspace pages which are all different, and surprising, yet all feel the same, animated gifs and smart stuff, yo's and respects from friends (again!), like the MacList menu which itemizes differences which are safely all the same, ultimate choice, ultimate selection, and ultimate security in the universality of life... Even Stilte's Friend Space Even Stilte has 65 friends.. Gangpol & Mit . norman bambi.. Dave Phillips, Dustbreeders, Junko et al all have 1,789 thousand friends.

(Review by jliat, April 2007)

HEATHEN HARVEST

Three continents get representation on this disc of two intriguing tracks. Francisco Meirino is based in France and may be better known to some by his project moniker Phroq, under which he has been recording since 1994. Quite active as a soloist and collaborator with the likes of Guilty Connector, Sickness and Cindy Van Acker, here is is credited with 'computer and acoustics' and seems to be the architect of the resulting sonics. Electric bassist Tim Olive is a Canadian-born/ Japan-based experimentalist who made a splash in recent times with the Supernatural Hot Rug And Not Used project (with Nisikawa Bunsho) and has also collaborated with Nimrod and Fritz Welch of New York's inimitable Peeesseye.

It's hard to discern if this is a live/real-time collaboration or if Meirino is simply reworking the pre-recorded sounds of Olive's bass, but that's really neither here nor there. Olive's table-top approach to the bass as an amplified sound source renders his instrument's trademark sound all but obsolete. At times idiosyncratic characteristics of the bass are clearly audible but are subject to such a colorful array of treatments and juxtapositions that this could easily be mistaken as purely electronic music.

The first track clocks in at over 34 minutes and is a fine example of concrete music in the digital age. Sounds scrape, crackle, bump and roll across the stereo spectrum like a sampler engaged in a game of gravity-defying ping-pong after having a contact microphone rubbed along every surface of your home. It's these types of sounds and recurring drones that comprise the material for this piece and give it cohesion. The drones sound as if they could be amplified electrical grounding hums or perhaps some ambient room feedback. Dramatic effect is achieved by sudden bursts of silence and something akin to Olive's bass being run over by a truck. One particularly fine moment occurs about three-quarters in when a gentle loop of static is introduced with the drone over which some natural overtones swirl in

contrast to the string scraping of the source material. This passage serves to tie everything together until the track reaches its dynamic climax and concludes with a sedate coda. It's not easy listening by a long shot, but never ceases to engage this listener in wondering what will come next. Pierres Henry and Schaeffer would be proud of their countryman Meirino.

It's on the second track where Meirino's credited 'acoustics' become evident. Small bell-like sounds give way to piercing high frequency tones that dance over some rustling fuzz. This sets the stage for a very pleasant 15 minute electro-acoustic workout. It's hard to tell at times whether we're hearing a mbira, some wooden mallet instrument or prepared bass. Either way it's processed tastefully and ultimately has more of an improvised feel than the first piece. This one's constant stream of sound contrasts nicely with the angular edits of Part One.

There's a lot to be explored with both Meirino and Olive and 'Eagle Keys' is as good a place to start as any. Considerable mention should be given to the visual artist Marc Bell of Canada for his original, if whimsical, artwork. His ambiguous severed objects and cartoon-like illustrations suit the music well, for they both have a mischievous and mysterious quality. Bell's contribution seems more collaborative than decorative in his four panels.

Perhaps overall a bit obtuse, but still recommended for those who might fancy another Frith/Ostertag collaboration. Limited edition of 500.

(Review by Michael Thomas Jackson, July 2007)