

Makrokosmos *Magical Worlds of Sounds* (hat [now] ART)

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Makrokosmos is an unusually constituted ensemble, made up of two pianos (Ufuk & Bahar Dorduncü) and two percussionists (François Volpe and Sébastien Cordier). That combination serves them well with the music of George Crumb and, indeed, their name is derived from his well known composition. The disc leads off with "Makrokosmos III" for two amplified pianos and percussion (1974) a work which epitomizes Crumb's musical concerns from the late 60s through the 70s, inhabiting a kind of pastoral fantasy world of not inconsiderable charm. The third of five segments, "The Advent", juxtaposes the soft, tonal strumming of piano keys and tolling of bells with the occasional flash of alarm, a brief lightning strike indicative perhaps of the unsettled, threatening exterior world. Crumb's music in this vein can get a little woozy for some listeners so a rigorous execution is mandatory and Makrokosmos comes through on that score, keeping things ultra-crisp and steadily paced, finding exactly the right balance to keep matters from receding into blandness.

Stefano Gervasoni's "Sviete Tihi" (2006) was written for the Makrokosmos Quartet and attempts to deal, obliquely, with events in Kosovo over the past 20 years, its title referring to a certain intense light of sunset in the area. Additionally, as the members of the group comprise two Turks and two Europeans, there are resonances within the ensemble re: the conflicts between Islamic and Christian parties in the regional disturbances. The piece is very "Crumb-esque" in a sense, with wafting piano chords and gentle percussion, but it also possess a harsher aspect than normally heard in Crumb, a bitterness appropriate to its theme. Structurally, it wanders a bit, lacking perhaps the coherence imbued by Crumb's pantheist proclivities, but it's spectacularly coloristic, Gervasoni wringing an impressively wide and luscious range of timbres, tones and frequencies out of the four sets of instruments.

The disc concludes with Georg Friedrich Haas' "...schatten...durch unausdenkliche wälder" (1992). A set of three pieces, each half the duration of its predecessor and the material in each, subsequently, that much more compressed. There are echoes of Crumb here as well, as in the initial tinkling percussion work but as it progresses, one hears more in the way of Xenakis as the pianos become increasingly staccato and the percussion turns toward rapid fire wood blocks. The second section effectively sets ethereal piano chords against jarring percussive intrusions before settling into a queasy, off-kilter portion, the keyboards and mallet instruments sliding against each other as though attempting to reach a rhythmic unison but failing to gain traction. The work closes in a cannonade of struck blocks and piano housings, an abrupt slap that's all the more forceful given the somewhat dreamy nature of what had preceded.

Magical Worlds of Sound may sport an iffy title, but it's a rigorously performed set and will appeal to fans of Crumb or those who followed, however meanderingly, in his footsteps.

- Brian Olewnick