
Kapital Band 1

2CD
Mosz
2004
C+



Austrian percussionist Martin Brandlmayr has been virtually unavoidable lately: whether it's as the rhythmic base behind the post-rock-friendly improvising ensembles Trapist and Radian, or as a multi-talented foil to fellow Viennese guitarist Martin Siewert on their gorgeous Erstwhile release *Too Beautiful to Burn*, Brandlmayr has been just one of the most visible presences coming out of this active scene. And with all these projects, as well as his newest output in collaboration with electronics whiz Nicholas Bussman in Kapital Band 1, Brandlmayr has been at the vanguard of the Vienna improvisers' interesting progression into relatively accessible pop-influenced improv.

Not that Kapital Band 1, which some would have you believe is a full-on funk outfit, is all that distant from the more esoteric but similarly minded music mined in the past by Vienna compatriots like Polwechsel or Fennesz. The title aside, *2CD* consists of one CD of music, and a second blank CD-R to burn anything—although the inclusion of two booklets joined together with an instruction to “cut here” suggests duplication as one possibility.

The concept is cute, but it's the music on the first CD that's truly intriguing. The album shuffles along in a haze of glistening electronics and Brandlmayr's broad palette of beats and beat-avoiding percussion touches. “Yes” and “This Is What We Want” are similarly strong examples of the duo's stripped-down aesthetic. At times, they could be the able rhythm section for a rock n' roll band, while Bussman's electronics can also jostle the music out of its groove into subtly darker waters. Occasionally, the music is tempered by an earthy hum or a passage of gritty, textured electronics that keep the music grounded and—in contrast to the sleek surface of Trapist's recent *Ballroom*—prevent the album from sliding by unnoticed. Still, this is the most blatantly accessible and song-oriented effort Brandlmayr's been

involved in yet. In his previous improv work, he's been adept at suggesting and insinuating a pulse rather than actually playing a beat, but here Brandlmayr sticks mainly in the background, keeping a steady (and often simple) beat as a backdrop to Bussman's combination of melodic and meandering electronic noise.

Occasionally, this limitation makes for some rather unexceptional music, especially when Bussman's not doing much in the foreground. "Length Width Height Margin" starts promisingly, with sinewy scraps of muted static buzzing back and forth atop Brandlmayr's tinkling drums and cymbals; it sounds like it's building to something, but it never does, instead settling into a mid-tempo stream of rather tame, a-melodic noise that never goes anywhere. Elsewhere, though, the new accessible direction works definitively in the band's favor. The all-too-brief "The New Car" features a jazzy, increasingly energetic workout from Brandlmayr on a rather hollow-sounding kit, as Bussman unleashes a swarm of static and buzzing noises. It's the funkier the duo gets on here, but it's so enjoyable because they play around the funk, suggesting it instead of just stomping away at it. The following track, "Moonlight Bay," also under two minutes long, is similarly strong, revisiting the same ideas in a more understated way.

But the best track, which these two interludes were clearly building towards, is unquestionably "Survival Kit." Here, Brandlmayr finally grabs center stage away from his collaborator, thrusting his array of innovative moves out in front of Bussman's buzzes and peeps. The drumming here is an engaging combination of avant-garde and accessible, Brandlmayr starting with scrapes and brushed swishes before introducing a nimble beat, then integrating the two into a complex web of improvisation and time-keeping. Bussman matches his partner's pace with a fast-moving stream of blips and melodic fragments. It's the first time on the album that the duo truly seems to be engaged in an improvisational conversation; perhaps the heavy amount of post-production favored by the Viennese scene of late cleansed that element from the rest of *2CD*.

As a whole, Kapital Band 1's debut is another absorbing, if not entirely successful, posting from Vienna. The production leaves something to be desired, as with few exceptions it mostly relegates Brandlmayr's usually stellar percussive work to a dull throb in the background, and the integration of pop with improv can hardly be considered complete when so much of this disc leans so far in one direction. Still, there's plenty of good, pleasant music here, and the duo straddles the fence between genres ambiguously enough to keep everyone guessing.

Reviewed by: Ed Howard
Reviewed on: 2004-04-09