

the squid's ear: Kapital Band 1 Playing By Numbers

(Mosz)

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"Playing by obfuscation" might be more like it. Kapital Band 1 — containing the duo of name-checked improviser Martin Brandlmayr and Nicholas Bussmann — toss preconceptions about post-modernist electroacoustic composition to the four winds, confounding technique and the places where process becomes intuition guided by moxie rather than reactionism.

On the Playing By Numbers EP, the duo's follow-up to their self-titled 2003 inaugural outing, classical instrumentation — that is, the oxidizing sinew of symphonic instruments left for carrion on the sonic landscape — gets repurposed into an unbridled context of calibrated electronic texture maps. The title track's humping brass is rescued from categorical rigor mortis thanks to a cinematic rush of twinkling chimeras and processed tympani, edging tentatively forward much like a tiger stalking prey. Disarming yet alluring, this sets the stage for some dark orchestral maneuvers, which stealthily emerge on "Playing the Night in Vienna." Trombones once again usher in what looks to become a Wagnerian summit, but — crafty gents that Brandlmayr and Bussmann are — instead brass devolves into a flurry of nocturnal drones that respiate with an air of disassociative menace. Taut as razor-wire, as its length stretches you can almost feel the air congeal around winter's breath — pretty galvanizing stuff, more tragic as it hovers between twin poles of abstraction and actualization. The closer "Counting the Waves," which the pair dedicates to Nam June Paik and Vashti Bunyan, removes the Kapital Band from anything resembling avant-jazz-ish tendencies. Rather, atop softly-spoken late-night lullaby vocals the duo rest a squab of thrummed bells and ambient software wash, leaving it to gradually decay into the nightstream. In its low-key manner, and befitting its unusually economical running time, Playing By Numbers is nothing less than spellbinding.

- Darren Bergstein