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Paul Doornbusch- corrosion: music for instruments, computers and electronics

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Paul Doornbusch- *corrosion: music for instruments, computers and electronics*. Various performers. EMF CD 043

Reviewed by Michael Hannan

Paul Doornbusch is a Melbourne-based composer and sonologist who works with algorithmic processes. This CD presents five challenging works all of which involve electronic music. Four of the pieces also involve performers.

continuity 3 (for percussion and computer) employs a china cymbal, a metal plate and a tam tam to explore timbres and rhythms that are processed in real time. Throughout the work we hear the sounds played by the percussionist simultaneously with electronic sounds that are transformations of the music played. A range of modification techniques are used including spectral resynthesis, pitch shifting, ring modulation and spatialisation. Often the electronic transformations continue long after the percussionist stops playing a particular phrase. The resulting music, although rich in timbre variation, results in a fragmented structure.

continuity 2 (for recorder quartet and electronics) begins with some disturbingly high-pitched sustained tones that are transformations of a mid-range recorder tone. The piece is characterised by dense textures of fragmentary recorder gestures accompanied by noisy electronic background sounds. There are some unusual sounds employed such as a phasing effect produced by the four instruments playing the same long-held tone with slight pitch differences. Effective textures are also created using glissando techniques.

act 5 (for bassoon and electronics) involves theatrical staging whereby the bassoonist periodically leaves his/her post and runs to a different stage position to release some suspended percussion instruments that violently drop to the floor. None the less it is by far the most conventionally sounding work on the CD (albeit from a modernist perspective). A feature of the performance is the grunting noises of the bassoonist, ostensibly intended to give the impression that the act of playing the work is very strenuous. One needs to be there in the theatre to fully appreciate this one.

Using stochastic techniques developed by electronic music pioneer, Iannis Xenakis, *g4* (for computer) is a collage of layered electronic noises. Listening to it is like being in a room surrounded by a collection of badly malfunctioning audio appliances. Because of the machine-based algorithmic processes at work, the experience will be unsatisfying if you are expecting a (humanly) systematic compositional exploration of specific musical materials.

The most ambitious work on the recording is *strepidus somnus* (for voices and electronics). Employing texts from four languages, it uses a process of moving from one kind of vocalisation to another. Phonetic components of words are built up into words and sentences; the sounds of conversation become orgasmic noises; crying merges into singing; single notes move towards melodic utterances; vocal noises become conversations; and whispering and laughter progress towards nonsense English. The

various processes of becoming provide a structural framework for the piece that arguably makes it a more engaging work than the others on the CD. Underlying the vocal narratives is an effective electronic soundtrack made up of short-wave radio noises.

Doornbusch's music is not for every listener. It's confronting and edgy. It forces one to rise to the challenge of interpreting a very individual world of disturbing noises combined with unusual musical sounds and sound structures.