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Amanda Handel/GL Seiler
Ghosts and Angels
Feral Media FM25

reviewed by Michael Hannan

Amanda Handel's collaboration with Greg Seiler is a good example of the exciting creative fusions that can result from artists with different stylistic backgrounds working together. Handel is a contemporary classical composer and pianist with an interest in soundscapes, whereas Seiler is an electronic dance music composer and sound designer. Both operate at the experimental ends of their disciplines.

The project is based on a collection of field recordings that Handel made while studying flamenco in Spain. These are collaged with piano, prepared piano and electronic sounds. The seemingly improvised solo acoustic piano segments appearing in a number of the soundscapes (for example in "Bewitchment", "The Lure" and Tierra De Luz") are possibly the product of Handel's flamenco studies as they all have a strong phrygian quality. However they are lacking melodic and harmonic interest and, to my ears, they are the least effective ingredient of the overall mix.

That said, *Ghosts and Angels* is an engaging and evocative creation. In "Bewitchment" after the opening piano solo we are immediately plunged into a complex collaged soundscape of water-based sound effects, Spanish poetry, chordal drones, church bell samples, distorted saxophone sounds, and washes of piano interior clusters. Handel's interesting and diverse sound sources are brilliantly processed and blended by her creative collaborator, Greg Seiler.

One strategy used on this CD is to construct imaginary narratives through the blending together of music and other sound elements created by people. "The Passing" combines a drone and quasi-oriental melody with sound samples of military drumming, crowd noises and out-of-tune brass instruments. It's an evocative combination open to multiple narrative interpretations. Similarly "The Haunting" is a collage of musical, human and animal noises, combining piano string glissandi. processed piano, collaged Spanish poetry, sustained electronic chords, deeply resonant bell-like sounds, crowd and other background noises, and inhuman growling, whimpering and screaming sounds. The family dog, Max, gets a credit on this track.

Another strategy is to build up complex grooves from sampled elements and musical instruments. "iGAUPO!" combines layers of industrial-sounding percussive rhythms with slap bass guitar and sustained electronic elements. It ends surprisingly with the rustic sound of horse and cart with jingling bells. "Dust and Silver" is a groove of metallic percussion made from processed prepared piano samples. It develops by accretion and employs complex stereo panning ideas.

Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the CD is the exploration of timbre and timbre evolution in multi-layered textures. "Earthly Remains" begins with a rich slowly-

changing chordal texture of overtone singing. The complex timbres of the voices are then subject to electronic processing giving them a disembodied quality, The piece develops into a resonant cathedral collage of murmuring, bells and low pipe organ lines. “Minstrels” also explored a richly textured layering of voices and other sustained sounds.

Ghosts and Angels demonstrates high levels of invention in the areas of sound collage, sound creation, sound manipulation and audio production. Highly recommended.