

The music on this CD came to light when, during preparations for the reissue of Derek Bailey's *Lot 74 - Solo Improvisations* (Incus CD57), Karen Brookman discovered two reel-to-reel tapes stored along with the original album masters. They turned out to contain previously unreleased recordings, apparently from around the same time as the sessions for *Lot 74*. That album has a particular significance for me, as it was the first music by Derek Bailey I ever heard. At the time I was discovering American free jazz and the AACM, and as I searched for information on the likes of Anthony Braxton, George Lewis and Steve Lacy, Derek's name kept cropping up. So when I found a somewhat battered vinyl copy of *Lot 74* in Nottingham Library, I took it home, eager to hear the guitarist held in such high esteem by these musicians I found so exciting. It left me completely baffled. Hoping that his playing would make more sense to me in combination with people I already knew and appreciated, I looked for his recordings with the aforementioned Americans, but as it turned out, the next instance of his playing I was able to hear was a solo acoustic radio broadcast. This, by contrast to the LP, I found immediately clear and appealing, and I listened to it over and over again. Shortly thereafter, I had the chance to see him play and also to play very briefly with him, by which time I realised that he had become one of my favourite musicians and was always going to remain so, even though I did not yet know what an important personal presence in my life he would also turn out to be. So the next time I was in Nottingham I went straight to the library, hoping the album I'd been so nonplussed by was still there. It was.

As I expected and hoped, the music was transformed – a familiarity with Derek's techniques on his instrument and his musical language allowed me to hear the extraordinary content of the playing, rather than merely its (initially confusing) surface sound. But there was still no mistaking the fact that something was going on in this record that needed to be grappled with on its own terms. And as I became familiar with a far wider range of Derek's music and encountered the variety of approaches he'd taken, both to playing in general and to the specific challenges of solo improvising in particular, it became clear that *Lot 74's* side-long title piece especially featured a type of playing which appeared not to have been captured elsewhere – quite different from what he was doing on, for example, *Solo Guitar Volume 1* from 3 years earlier, or even on the *Incus Taps* from only one year before. But now, with the release of the newly unearthed recordings on this CD, we suddenly have a further hour of music, distinct and captivating in all its details, yet unmistakably cut from the same unique and rarefied cloth as that remarkable 22-minute solo.

What is it about this phase of Derek's playing that initially proved so challenging for me? Probably one key factor is that his use of a twin volume-pedal stereo setup here reached its peak of complexity. Particularly when younger, my "way in" to a piece of music tended to be via its pitch organisation – and Derek's music is as stimulating and original in that domain as anything else produced in the last 50 years at least. But he often used timbral differentiation to undermine any impression that his music was primarily structured by pitch relationships, and this tendency is at its most radical in his stereo guitar playing. Dead notes at a much higher volume interrupt successions of standard pitches, a note's attack gets separated from its subsequent decay by stereo placement, and harmonics and behind-the-bridge sounds are encouraged to ring out to the point of feedback while fretted notes bubble subliminally beneath. To perceive the linear succession of intervals seems at first to require a constant effort to ignore the dislocations that are being perpetrated on the sound itself. In fact, en route to learning to hear the music both ways at once, one

might more profitably approach the playing as one would that of certain improvising percussionists, with their array of implements covering the whole sonic spectrum, and patterns which derive their motion from the simultaneous manipulation of the various layers of sound.

Another pertinent feature of this music is that, even more than usual with Derek, it requires from the listener total moment-to-moment concentration. He once made an observation that as musicians "develop", their playing often gets faster, but the music gets slower. 1974 was clearly a point in Derek's life where both the playing and the music were racing toward maximum speed. In this respect, the recordings on this CD are if anything even more extreme than those on the original album. A feature of much of Derek's solo playing is a process where stretches of playing of a generally all-inclusive type (by which I mean that the music tends to occupy the guitar's various registers simultaneously, and there appears to be a conscious effort to incorporate many or all of his different types of attack on a continual basis) lead to passages where a particular harmonic or textural detail that has emerged is isolated and dwelt upon (whether statically or developmentally) before the former mode is resumed. These recordings are notable, not only for the exceptional speed and density of much of the general playing, but for the extreme concision of most of the focussed interludes. They frequently seem to occupy the bare minimum time necessary in order to register as a self-contained idea - sometimes it's a matter of 2 or 3 repetitions, elsewhere the mere prolongation of an unexpected chord followed by a brief silence is all that's required. Occasionally a single technique or motif might form the basis for 20 seconds or so, but nowhere do such passages stretch into minutes - as would happen in other phases of Derek's playing, and even in the 16th minute of "Lot 74" itself, the piece having prior to that point maintained the restless pace that characterises the music on this CD.

Even for a man who always said that he preferred music in a state of flux, these performances' refusal of any of the traditional means a musician might use to pin down the material he's working with is truly astonishing. The commitment to an approach where, at every moment, any element of the performer's vocabulary could be brought into play places the highest demands on the player's inventiveness and his capacity to construct phrases with distinct individual characters and proportions. (I've concentrated here on what I perceive to be the distinguishing features of this period of playing, rather than describing what happens in the individual pieces, which in liner notes seems to me an intrusion upon listeners' rights to find out for themselves - but suffice to say that in every single track there are myriad unique qualities to unravel.) As someone born in the year these recordings were made, I can't say, even in joke, that I remember the early seventies - but the knowledge that something like this was possible then is one of those constant beacons in the search to work out what one could or should be doing now.

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