

LOT 74 Derek Bailey solo guitar

Thinking about Lot 74 brought back lots of memories, which I decided to write down.

Martin Davidson (2008)

In 1974, when Derek Bailey was planning his second solo LP on Incus, he decided to include a side-long solo using his stereo electro-acoustic set-up. Unfortunately, he never seemed to have a 20-minute stretch of time free of interruptions in his home, so he asked if he could record it at my place. After a fairly lengthy drive across London on the arranged date, he discovered that he had brought all his gear except the actual guitar. So he had a cup of tea and a chat, then drove home again.

He came again about a week later, on May 13th, this time with everything. I set the level too high for the first two takes, not quite allowing for his enormous dynamic range (which really was not suitable for analogue recording and reproduction equipment). The result was too much distortion for his liking. The level was corrected for the third take which was the one used as the title track on the LP, even though he preferred the music on the earlier takes.

All but one of the short pieces on the second side of the LP were recorded by Bob Woolford around the same time, probably at Derek's home.. [The exception, "Improvisation 104(b)", was recorded the previous year and originally released on one of the Incus TAPs - mini reel-to-reel tapes that were an attempt to bypass the technical problems of going from tape to vinyl. They were reissued by Organ of Corti]. "Pain in the Chest" and "In Joke (Take 2)" feature the unamplified 19-string (approx) guitar, which was probably the only instrument that Derek modified – he otherwise used standard guitars.

There was a shortage of good vinyl at the time, making it difficult to get decent pressings. (The original pressing of the solo Steve Lacy Emanem LP sounded as though it had been recorded in a hail-storm.) We were recommended to go to a pressing plant that specialised in 'classical' music. (At the same time that Derek was trying to get " Lot 74" pressed, I was also working on his duo album with Anthony Braxton.)

The first test pressing of " Lot 74" was very muffled, and we discovered that the cutting engineer had played the tape up-side-down, so that the music had been filtered through the tape backing (used on professional tapes to reduce print-through). The cutting was subsequently redone correctly, resulting in an acceptable test pressing. However, the plant manager was completely incredulous and perplexed, as he was used to checking pressings using his library of scores of Beethoven sonatas and the like. How could he tell if the vocal and feedback howls at the start of side two ("Together") were correct?

Over thirty years later, advances in technology have eliminated most of the technical problems we had then, so that this magnificent music can be heard sounding better than ever. Every so often, I get someone asking me to issue things on vinyl – my response is usually not very polite.

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