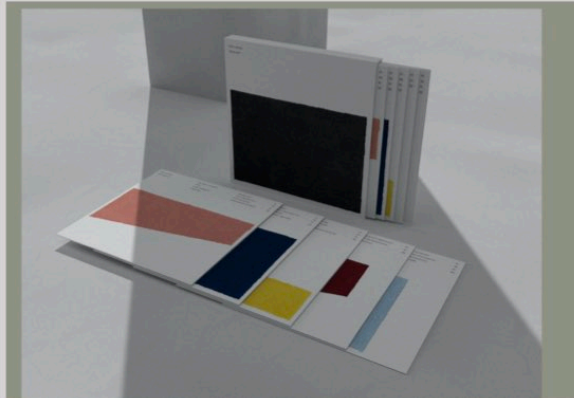


ELECTRONIC SOUND

February 2021



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Berlin Atonal: More Light

BERLIN ATONAL

Lavish treatment for left-field electronics

Back in the 1980s, the Berlin Atonal festival, then housed at the SO2 venue, was an appreciated and appreciative refuge for sonic explorers like Cabaret Voltaire and Psychic TV. The festival went into a hiatus from 1990, until reviving in 2013 for a new generation of adventurous musicians and fans.

Now, the annual jamboree of left field electronic and experimental music and visual art fills Berlin's massive Kraftwerk venue with refreshing noise and visuals every year... until 2020 came along and fucked everything up. Instead, they have produced this five 12-inch boxset, as the centrepiece of a kind of replacement activity that sees the festival also putting out a limited edition series of art prints and getting involved in a clothing collaboration with hipster fashion outfit Perks And Mini.

A huge haul of experimental music might seem like a daunting prospect, but in fact much of the music from the 19 artists represented here steers away from the austere and into a rather lush and melodic geodome of earthy warmth. Lafawndah's 'A Walk Beside The Beast' for example, employs ringing bells and her hypnotic vocalisations to evoke its stealthy mood. Violinist Galya Bisengalieva, who has collaborated with Steve Reich and Suzanne Ciani and plays on Radiohead's 'A Moon Shaped Pool', contributes 'Aralkum', a gentle and muted ambience, itchy with barely audible rhythmic ticks, which evolves into a rich bed of strings and dream state melody.

Things start getting a little more clanky with Alessandro Adriani and his dark interlude, 'I Wish I Could Save You', and Nkisi, whose 'La Parole' features a rapid-fire distorted kick drum as a swirling cloud of muted ambience is punctured by a distant voice dripping in delay and an explosive percussion workout during its eight-minute voodoo trance. More abrasive still is Finland's Vladislav Delay, with his texture-mangling 'Isonainen'.

There are too many great tracks to mention here, though my personal favourite is probably Pablo's Eye's 'A Way You'll Never Be', which fuses spoken word with a ravishing sound world. As a primer for the Berlin Atonal aesthetic, 'More Light' is perfect, a blending of art and sound that can have a profound, cumulative effect.

MARK ROLAND