

JEAN-CLAUDE ELOY - SHANTI (2CD by Hors Territoires)

JEAN-CLAUDE ELOY - GAKU-NO-MICHI (4CD by Hors Territoires)

Was I recently 'complaining' about 3CD sets with music of people I never heard of, I wasn't perhaps thinking of Jean-Claude Eloy. First time around the mailman decided to keep the CDs, but the second time delivered them duly. I hope he likes them as much as I do. I may have heard the name Eloy before, but not his music, or where to place him, these two sets, six discs in total will set the record straight (pun intended).

Eloy was born in 1938 and studied with Darius Milhaud. I believe he composes all sorts of work, but his main line of business is electronic music. I review them in order of composition. 'Shanti', which means 'peace', was composed after 'Kamakala' for three orchestra ensembles, five choir ensembles with three conductors, so it was perhaps 'necessary' to compose an electro-acoustic work at the WDR studios in Cologne, Germany. A work of meditation, or so Eloy tells us. Now this is not a work of pure and solitary drone music, as one would perhaps expect from 'meditative music'. They are here, that's for sure, but there is also an interview with Aurobindo and Mao, as well as a small piece called 'Soldats', with soldiers speaking and 'Vagues Lentes, Boucles De Feux', which takes their singing into an electronic landscape. This is of course an album about 'Peace', but rather than just produce a drone or two, Eloy brings in a political element, the soldiers. However the majority are those various drones, played on those ancient machines (great pictures in the booklet here), the mystical oscillators, wave generators and such like - which defy any laptop, I'd say. Excellent music, although not always exactly as meditative as promised, but that, I thought, was hardly a problem. Unsettling meditation, which is better than just go with the flow.

The second disc contains the entire piece is 'Gaku-No-Michi' - the tao of music or the way of music, and is like a fresco, 'a vast poem of sounds and noises, whose main purpose seems to have been the liberation of sound imagination, forever materialized Eloy's withdrawal from the structures and models that had carried him until then'. It was recorded in Tokyo in 1977-1978 and uses, I think, more field recordings than 'Shanti', which had a more pure electronic approach - well, mainly!, although there are large chunks in this almost four hour piece that are also electronic. Off and on I seem to be hearing sounds from Japan, like in the opening pieces 'Pachinko' and 'Tokyo', and voices here and there, bird sounds and street noise.

This is a massive sound, immersive all around, which is best enjoyed when played loud. Not because the music is loud, but there are various passages, which are loud and they sound great when the volume is all up, and the softer parts bring out hidden sonorous qualities. I am not qualified to say whether this goes beyond the idea of strict composing - somehow it seems so: an endless stream of sounds and textures, rich in a poetic way, placed along side each other, sometimes going on for quite a bit (the drone aspect I'd say), which might be against the golden rule book of composing, but who cares?

This 4CD can only be compared with, I think, with the re-issue of Roland Kayn's 'Tektra', also a 4CD set and also by somebody whom we almost forgotten about - and probably we did again? Let's hope we don't do that with Eloy and that more of such great music will be released. Devoting an entire day to one composer may seem luxury, but who am I to 'complain'?

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