

NSI - NSI Plays Non Standards

Sahko

CD // £11.99



A new release on Finland's Sahko imprint is something of an event, and this issue from the excellent NSI (Non Standard Institute) is one of the nicest surprises on the label to date. We've had a fair few experimentations with the humble piano in the last five years, some artists leaving out electronics

altogether (Goldmund, Gonzalez) and some making sure that the electronic elements were just as important as the piano itself (Carsten Nicolai, Akira Rabelais, The Boats) but rarely have I heard anything produced with the care and attention to academic detail as 'NSI Plays Non Standards'. Maybe that's down to the duo's pedigree, with Max Loderbauer having cut his teeth servicing Fairlight samplers back in the day before touring the world under the Sun Electric moniker, and Tobias Freund spending much of his life working as a sound engineer and producer - but these recordings have a masterful touch, much like their label-mates Pan Sonic. Where Carsten Nicolai would take cues from Ryuichi Sakamoto's pianowork and allow that to dictate his electronic rhythms and textures, there is a feeling that Freund has taken Loderbauer's piano and processed it in a much more long-form manner, forcing harmonies out of the reverberations and adding light electronic processes to create floods of dense electronic sound. Never though does the treatment feel excessive or anything other than subtle, rather Freund's treatments err on the side of caution, always respectful to the delicate sounds of the piano strings, bringing characteristics to the surface you never realised were there. Possibly the best comparison would be to Akira Rabelais' incredible (and long out of print) Ritornell album 'Eisoptrophobia' which took 'standards' from composers such as Bartok and Satie and processed them in ways that previously hadn't been explored. NSI's treatments feel similarly forward thinking and rooted in solo piano tradition, and shockingly the recordings were all improvised, both the piano and the treatment with the mistakes 'left in' as the press release informs us. Although the album might revolve around the most traditional of instruments there is a feeling that within 'NSI Plays Non Standards' is the future of electronic music. Beautiful and quite awe-inspiring...