DYNAMICS OF THE IMPROMPTU

Derek Bailey
(Acoustic & Electric stereo Guitars)

Trevor Watts
(Soprano sax)

John Stevens
(Drums & Cornet)

1. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 1 (9.10)
   Recorded on 12.11.73

2. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 2 (16.22)
   Recorded on 18.12.73

3. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 3 (8.05)
   Recorded on 18.12.73

4. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 4 (14.42)
   Recorded on 17.1.74

5. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 5 (9.51)
   Recorded on 17.1.74

6. IMPROMPTU DYNAMICS 6 (12.33)
   Recorded on 17.1.74

Total playing time: 71.04
The winter of 1973/74 was as bitter as they bloody well come. I can still remember it like one great sharp cold icicle around my brain. In those days I did not make it up to London very often. It’s true, I was aware of what was going on Garrick Yard at the Little Theatre Club. In the 70’s Melody Maker still covered left field projects in truth. I never went to the Little Theatre Club, and in truth, if even half the people who say they went, went, the place would have regularly been full. It wasn’t. The legend that has become the Spontaneous Music Ensemble in their home base off St. Martin’s Lane is the stuff of dedicated recording (both in terms of written text and musical tape) by a relatively small band of cognoscenti. Martin Davidson should get a mention in this context, not just because he has done so much to promote this music through his own Emanem label, but also because he was there in the first place and had the forethought to tape what was going on.

“Dynamics of the Impromptu” is a good place to start investigating mid-period SME. Although Entropy do not use the title “Spontaneous Music Ensemble”, in fact that is what this recording is about. It was recorded by the Ensemble always had a bit of a revolving door in terms of membership, and Mr. Bailey was certainly someone who regularly mixed it up. The sound on “Dynamics of the Impromptu” may not be absolutely digital mint but, it is almost gold star quality with more separation between the three protagonists if what is happening happens at all. I want to hear this here. Where exactly? This is hard music played in hard times by musicians who were themselves hard up and getting harder. Anyone in the least bit interested in the development of improv in England and its future direction will find this music worth hearing. This is hard music made in hard times by musicians who were themselves hard up and getting harder.

By 74 this particular scene had already been operational for eight years. What we get on this CD is the recorded evidence of a cauldron of experimentation that had been on the boil for some time. Both John Stevens and Trevor Watts had already formed independent bands (“Away” and “Amalgam” respectively) which were acting to a broader brief than that of SME. The effect on the continuing improv studies was to create a densely integrated music that constantly operated on a microtonal tryst. A click of sticks. The soprano sax played so the notes splay out like an aural fan. Derek Bailey’s electric guitar still hitting tone and volume coming out to be one slash of colour, selected out into stub- born little ringing pieces. This is the sound of a secret place; there is an opportunity to share it.

Earlier this year I went to hear Trevor Watts’ Moire Music Quartet at Dartington. A fine gig with everyone on the case; fusing a rush of rhythms and improvisation inside a set of written pieces which were coming out to be recorded. Okay, so the More Music rational is a long way from the “Dynamics of the Impromptu.” 25 years if anyone is counting but, in the end, it is not possible to compartmentalise a life. Somewhere in the joyous hoolahoop of Moire Music is the same soprano saxophone that is investigating a total impromptu musical enquiry. It may not be obvious; it needs a little effort to hear it. Why bother with a two decade old set of total improvisations? If we don’t hear history, how do we know whether the present is not merely a reinvention of the past? The only reason to keep adding up the same sum, is that something is going to be done with it. This Derek Bailey, John Stevens, Trevor Watts session is some serious multiplication. Don’t re-invent the wheel, ride it.