

Judith Wegmann

Le Souffle Du Temps: X (Rétro-)

Perspectives

hatART CD

The career of Swiss pianist Judith Wegmann illustrates the Anglo/Continental cultural divide: there's almost no information in English about her thriving career in the German speaking musical world, from performing Schubert or African-American composer Julius Eastman, to free improvisation. She studied at the Jazz Schools of Lucerne and Bern, but also studied classical music. Based in the Berne canton, she performed live, convinced she didn't need to record. But then in 2016, illness forced her to abstain from the piano for four months.

That was when she began constructing this album for prepared piano, which is unusual in drawing seamlessly on both composed and improvised practice. In addition to the technical grounding, classical training gave her a sensibility for breathing, slurs and a feeling for phrases. In turn, jazz and free improvised music has given her more freedom as an interpreter of classical music. For Wegmann, these contrasting ways of music-making, that until fairly recently suffered from mutual incomprehension, make a unified whole. *Le Souffle Du Temps (The Breath Of Time)* comprises ten conceptual pieces that, as Wegmann puts it, search for the sound of time, and the time of sound. She prepared seven tones on the piano – these bell-like sounds are leitmotif in otherwise contrasting pieces, recorded across two months. The elderly Yamaha grand piano in her studio had been left untuned, creating a sound that's not quite pure and clear.

The result is an aesthetic of imperfection across different dimensions – in sound and in preparation (in all senses) – whose delicate, fragile qualities are totally beguiling. The album begins rather sparse and tentative, before "III" sets up a ghostly mechanical chattering that forms a kind of polyrhythm with slower sounds; "VII" is similarly restless. Effects include rustling paper (I assume), objects (marbles? metal discs?) rubbed or scraped together, and breath sounds.

The haunting, evocative soundworld reminds me a little of George Crumb's *Makrokosmos*, though techniques and inspiration are quite different. Cage's mantra "Let the sounds be themselves" comes to mind – Judith Wegmann's quiet, understated art gently nudges them into patterns that compel the listener's attention.

Andy Hamilton