



Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

Citation

Roberts, David. 1977-1978. 'Review of *Amnesia & Friends*, *Stereo Miru*, *Item 9*; *Crystal Palace: Inside, Outside*, *Eddie Prevost Band*; *Miru: Long & Short One*, *Robert Carter: Do Not Cover*, and *Chamberpot*'. **Contact**, 18. pp. 39-40. ISSN 0308-5066.

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

AMNESIA & FRIENDS

Blank Tapes No. 1 (C50 stereo+mono)

STEREO MIRU

Blank Tapes No. 2 (C50 stereo)

ITEM 9; CRYSTAL PALACE: INSIDE, OUTSIDE

Blank Tapes No. 3 (C70 stereo)

EDDIE PREVOST BAND; MIRU: LONG ONE & SHORT ONE

Blank Tapes No. 4 (C60 mono)

ROBERT CARTER: DO NOT COVER

Blank Tapes No. 5 (C30 stereo)

CHAMBERPOT

Blank Tapes No. 6 (C60 stereo)

Obtainable from Robert Carter, Flat 1, 55 Brooke Avenue, South Harrow, Middlesex — £1.25 each UK, £1.75 overseas (includes postage)

DAVID ROBERTS

Among the many changes that the advent of modern recording techniques effected upon music was a fundamental alteration in its existential status and hence in its commercial value. Paying for admission to a concert is not so much a case of *buying* a musical experience as *renting* one; all you have to show for your money afterwards is a ticket stub. To purchase a score (restricted in any case to the musically literate) is to obtain a mere simulacrum; a score is no more the music than a recipe book is a meal. What the gramophone record did was to reify music, to introduce to the world the emotional and *possessible* musical experience. Sell it, buy it (Mahler would tone in nicely with the curtains), keep it on the shelf, put it on the record deck as often as you like (you know what you like and you're getting it). The owner is sure in the knowledge of his ownership and his control of the situation. Security embodied in a few grams of plastic.

Western classical music, with both feet firmly fixed in the camp of Platonic idealism (individual realisations may differ but the work is immutable), can largely withstand such treatment. But for musics not predicated upon the dissociation of form and performance, recording can, and often does, spell the kiss of death. Improvised music is in a particularly vulnerable position. Malcolm Barry outlines some of the pitfalls with which it is faced in his review of the two Company records above. I, if anything, am even less sanguine about the successful outcome of recording improvisation. At all levels the medium will tend to misrepresent the activity.

The one sound excuse for recording and distributing improvised music (one-off recordings for the benefit of the musicians themselves are a separate issue) is that the genuine, live article is thereby advertised. In default of radio broadcasts (which would be the ideal solution, but we know that's another story) recording is an unwelcome expedient.

While they are not a remedy for this besetting ailment, Blank Tapes, produced under the auspices of the London Musicians' Collective, do at least alleviate some of the symptoms. The widespread availability of cassette recorders and the comparative ease and cheapness of reproducing recordings means that such an enterprise may

be run virtually as a home industry. Little capital outlay and no specialist technical knowledge is required. Packaging costs are minimal. Cassettes travel well through the post too. Hence the price is low and a lot of the commercialist rigmarole with its attendant commodityfetishism is cut out. But the most telling gesture that Blank Tapes make towards showing that their intention is dissemination of the music and not exploitation of it is the legend 'Copying of this material is recommended' on each cassette instead of the usual dire warnings about copyright infringement.

Five of these tapes are recordings of the work of a number of improvising ensembles. The sixth, Robert Carter's *Do not cover* (subtitled 'Aural ephemera manipulations') is, I guess, produced by tape manipulation, but who knows? Carter solos on 'tape recorders, elsit, claritubes and miscellaneous' to produce a series of 16 very short musical hors d'oeuvres, ranging from nine to 220 seconds. A nice conception, even if it's a bit samey in sound quality. Listening to the other tapes I wished more than once that bands would occasionally think in terms of a three minute improvisation rather than one of half an hour.

Carter also plays with Miru (other members Mick and Tony Fox, Andy Garnham, Stephen Luscombe and Brian Sklar) on Nos. 2 and 4. Their characteristic sound is predominantly homogenous. The first side of No. 2, *Spontimp*, is really rather dreary, but the second, *Imra*, has some striking and even exciting moments.

The fairly straight jazz idiom of Amnesia (Ye Min, Robert Smith) I found completely arid, though the Friends of No. 1 (Mick Fox, Stephen Luscombe, Robert Smith) had a little more to offer. The jazz roots of the Eddie Prevost Band (Gerry Gold, Jeff Hawkins, Marcio Mattos, Eddie Prevost) are equally obvious but the band sustains a far higher level of invention.

The playing of Item 9 (George Allum, William Embling, Chris Stubbs, Ann Wolff) is also extremely dull, but Crystal Palace (William Embling, Yuki Hormoto, Barry Leigh) with whom they share tape No. 3 do manage to get somewhere.

My own favourite from the batch is the recording of Chamberpot (Richard Beswick, Phillipp Wachsmann, Tony Wren) playing at the Cockpit Theatre. Their effervescent and often humorous style provides a healthy contrast to a lot of the leaden and po-faced playing of some of the other bands.¹

Of course, bearing in mind what I've written earlier, a caveat must be appended to all these subjective impressions of the playing on these tapes. Producing imperishable monuments is not what improvisation is all about. The only way to judge the work of these ensembles is to see and hear them in the act itself.

NOTE:

¹ For a further review of Chamberpot see David Roberts's discussion of their album on the Bead label (No. 2) in *Contact 15* (Winter 1976-77), p. 34. (Ed.)

[The right-hand page of the document contains extremely faint and illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.]