

**Jürg Frey**

*String Quartet No 3/Unhörbare Zeit*

Edition Wandelweiser CD

**Eva-Maria Houben**

*Aus Den Fliegenden Blättern Eines*

*Fahrenden Waldhornisten*

Edition Wandelweiser CD

**Marianne Schuppe**

*Slow Songs*

Edition Wandelweiser CD

In one view, silence is the dark matter of modern music, or better still, its antimatter: alien, elusive, destructive of any definition dependent on formed sound and specified attack. In another, silence is simply part of music's architecture in the way that space, as yet empty, is the value that is described and enclosed by the built structure. No individual or group has explored this friction of ideas more thoroughly than the Wandelweiser composers.

Frey and Houben are familiar enough names. Schuppe is an experienced interpreter of Feldman, Scelsi and others, using lute and E-bows as well as voice. Together, or at least in this release package, they offer a fresh iteration of one of the most intriguing group aesthetics of recent times. Frey is the architect of the group, his string quartet a brilliantly sustained exercise in architectural drawing, creating sonic blueprints for a structure that seems to need no cladding or internal staircases. Its drones and beautifully symmetrical but non-contiguous phrasing evoke a Middle Eastern quality, oddly reminiscent of Minoru Yamasaki's Islamic tridents around the bottom of the Twin Towers. This must be accidental – who remembers that association now? – but arrives unbidden and strongly. The Bozzinis (my favourite quartet) play beautifully. They're joined by two percussionists for the other piece, which more directly explores the empty volumes – "inaudible times" – in the music. They're placed out of chronological sequence on the disc, which is odd, leaving a sense that Frey has defaulted to a more doctrinaire interpretation of Wandelweiser composition.

Houben is an exceptional composer and a thoroughgoing humanist. Her piano music elsewhere always sounds as if it was written with a 2H pencil, its purity cut across by interruptions from real life. Here she offers a piece that sounds as though the horn calls and hunting cries had been edited out of 15 symphonies, concerti and operas and simply handed to a skilled interpreter. Wilfried Krüger plucks these sounds out of the silence and throws them into the air. His F horn has weight, delicacy and a delicious shiver of overtones. Schuppe's strange songs seem to come out of an old and half-

remembered tradition, hinting at Dowland's melancholy strangeness, but also at folk forms on the verge of linguistic extinction; here and there, maybe primed by a recent *Wire* feature, she resembles Annette Peacock. It's beautiful and eerie.

Recently, a number of visual artists have independently stated a belief that the stylistic innovations of 20th century art – Cubism and Abstract Expressionism are the most frequently cited movements – are still nowhere near exhausted. The Wandelweiser composers presumably feel the same about Cage. And they're right.

Brian Morton