

# Phosphor

(German webzine)

*searching for the edges of progressive, experimental and electronic music.*

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## neil rolnick: shadow quartet CD

This stylistically diverse CD consists of six pieces with varying instrumentation, all involving electronic intervention (from Rolnick) of one sort or another. **Shadow Quartet** for string quartet, is an improbable combination of western swing, audio processing and Bartók, and yet it floats! It begins with a bluesy theme gradually unfurled over percussive instrument-body slaps and a processed pizzicato cello walking line. *Breathing Machine* (the second movement) is elegiac in mood, but closer to Bartók (particularly the Sixth String Quartet) than Samuel Barber. Some attractively processed high pizzicati fill out the electronic end of things here.

**Gate Beats** consists of Rolnick operating the controls of noise gates processing pre-recorded material of his band **Fish Love That** and a "We Will Rock You" type drum loop. It's fascinating how the processing makes the instruments (trumpet, tenor sax and violin) sound like Bon Temps organs just by interfering with their amplitude envelopes. Things gradually progress from 60s style minimalism to the nightclub jollity of arch-downtownians, *Rootless Cosmopolitans* or *Sex Mob* as the noise gates allow more of the original source material through.

**Fiddle Fiddle** for solo violin and interactive electronics also features beats. The opening section violin again recalls Bartók until a kick drum ushers in some fairly ill hiphop beats in 5/4 time, and the violin becomes bluesy. Some formal similarity with the first movement of **Shadow Quartet** here.

**Ambos Mundos** for woodwind quintet employs simple audio processing like delay and step filtering, integrated nicely with the acoustic instruments. The combination of the instrumentation and melodic material remind me of the *Ensemble Modern's* recording of Conlon Nancarrow's player piano pieces. Curiously this piece employs the same ending device as **Fiddle Fiddle**, a kind of canonic ascending "grand finale" type phrase (also to be found in Bartók's First String Quartet).

It is unclear whether the electronic processing is performed in realtime ("live electronics") or otherwise (a "tape" part), however who gives a *schwein's schwanz* about such trifling matters? Certainly not this reviewer!