

October 26, 2007 – Ken Waxman

All 10 members of Ensemble 2 INQ, which has a long – if unrecorded history – are German. Several of the players – such as reedists Joachim Zoepf and Dirk Marwedel, bassists Ulrich Phillipp and Georg Wolf, plus percussionist Michael Vorfeld – have names with some overseas resonance. The others, flautist Margret Trescher, and percussionist Wolfgang Schliemann, electronics manipulator Ulrich Böttcher and vocalist Marianne Shuppe, are unknown qualities – at least outside of Germany.

Belying its numerical membership, INQ's sound is minimalist and reductionist, somewhat like the Berlin-based King Übü Orchester. Containing burbles, whistles, slaps, mumbles, jiggles and quivers, there are no real featured soloists. Each of the numerical tracks reaches its descriptive zenith through a pointillist accumulation of electronically-triggered or acoustically expelled timbres.

That doesn't mean however, that individual expression isn't heard. It's just that, unlike more aggressive music, not one exists in isolation from another. At points Tammen's strummed reverb hangs in the air, as do hollow, wooden drum clip-clops and cymbal clangs, tough, broad puffs from Trescher's quarter-tone flute, bowed double bass vibrations and rotating electronic drones. If either Zoepf's or Marwedel's wet reed tones, hisses or tongue slaps define some passages, then single word articulation in French and German, as well as Bedlam style expostulations from Shuppe define others.

At nearly 17 minutes and almost 23 minutes respectively, tracks "II" and "V" give the tentet the broadest field on which to display extended swells and undulations. On the first piece contrapuntal percussion and wavering electronic pulses provide the shifting ostinato for the other players' sound layering. Among the pitches exposed are irregular drum plops, flams and ruffs; double double bass sul tasto sweeps and spiccato motion; and connective tongue rolls and note swelling with body-tube vibrating from the reeds.

Even longer, and climatically the finale – followed by the nearly-six-minute coda of "VI", "V" initially balances on reed split tones; tooting flute lines; continuous signals that could arise from Tammen's, Böttcher's or even Phillipp's electronics; and most prominently the vocalist's throat gargles and phrase-swallowed muttering.

Eventually this inchoate sequencing reaches a crescendo of sorts when Shuppe's basso tongue rolls unite with Zoepf's bass clarinet lines and sweeping double-stopping from Phillipp and Wolf. With the massed troops now galvanized for a purported, lower-pitched attack, string swells and echoing percussion thumps harden into battle-ready abrasions. Just when the point-of-no-return appears to have been reached, however, the track dissipates into growling electronic drones and reed gurgles plus double and tripe drum paradiddles. A conclusive reed squawk confirms the finale.

More-in-your-face than Rhön's evolutionary reductionism, the 10 tracks on Expedition easily reference passionate 1960s Energy Music. If the 10-member Ensemble 2 INQ seems to be holding back, then the Expedition quartet charges forward, symbolically firing on all cylinders.