

Urs Peter Schneider

Kompositionen 1960–2012

Cubus 3×CD

To mark his 75th birthday, the Cubus label release this five decade retrospective that attempts to map the expansive works of Swiss composer and pianist Urs Peter Schneider. He studied under tutors as diverse as Walter Lang, Frederic Rzewski, Henri Pousseur and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and the influence of each can be heard among this eclectic collection of 22 recordings. While the work varies from densely packed, droning pieces for solo church organ to delicate chamber music, early electronic assemblages and operatic

works of varying intensity, listening to Schneider's catalogue across these three discs reveals common themes. His more conventionally notated material reflects his work as a performer of new music, but a firm sense of rhythm often shows up, even in fractured, stuttering form, which reflects a career-long interest in language in its many forms.

Several pieces feature spoken word elements, incorporated in larger works with electronic treatments or instrumental parts, or in the case of the most recent composition here, called *Abdichtung*, a single narrator reading a simple text, apparently exploring the possibilities of typography as musical composition. As every word is in German, the English speaking listener is left to hear the human voice as just another sonic element. The most satisfying pieces see the spoken parts twisted and dissolved through electronic treatments to form music that retains the flow and cadence of language but takes it somewhere else.

1975's *Senfkorn (Mustard Seed)* is the longest piece at 24 minutes and also the most striking. Apparently a reflection on ecclesiastic music, layered soprano vocals are processed through basic electronic synthesis to form unsettling wails of intensely pleading voices that seem to engulf the listener in menacing waves. The human voice is present on about half of the compositions here. The rest are scored for all kinds of instrumentation and take many musical forms, some more successful than others.

A varied bag, in both stylistic terms and quality, this collection casts a wide net over a diverse career. A sample twice the size may still not be enough to paint the full picture, but this set offers a good primer for the work of an under-recognised, thoroughly individual composer.

Richard Pinnell