

DEREK PIOTR / BERNHARD GÜNTER – The Shallows Variations

By Massimo Ricci April 20, 2017

Trente Oiseaux

Good news from Bernhard Günter. After a hiatus that lasted years, in 2016 he relaunched his historic imprint as a netlabel, the intention being that of releasing new material – of course – besides restoring the interest about selected minor milestones of the days of yore. The German had been known from the early 90s as a scientist of electronic palettes exploiting a minimal amount of acoustic substance, yet in recent times he has devoted himself to improvisation almost solely. *The Shallows Variations* reveals, first and foremost, a remarkable proficiency on the reeds. And if you check the label's website or its Bandcamp page, materials that might stimulate the ears of guitarists are also coming out.

I had received the promo for Derek Piotr's *Drono* last year. To this day, Piotr was a name that simply added the umpteenth scar to the face of my ignorance and, it goes without saying, I (involuntarily) neglected that album, published by Richard Chartier's Line. Thus only now I know that "Shallows" is one of the tracks comprised there, which was meant to be remixed/reworked in a way that the Polish imagined as a direct development of the piece's primary vibrancy.

Günter – stubborn as his late father Peter Bernhard, to whom his contribution is dedicated – had other ideas. In various phases of addition, subtraction, parallelism and solitariness he generated music that mostly shows his commonsensical command of alto sax and clarinet. If you're expecting the continuation of threads that used to include unspoken gems such as, say, *Time Dreaming Itself* then prepare instead to be greeted by spiralling lines that would not be out of place in a (quieter) Evan Parker recording, plus or minus – pun intended – droning purrs or loose sonic corpuscles in the background. The final episode was composed by Piotr by transforming Günter's clarinet sounds and assembling them together with a few strokes of the original "Shallows"; the result is soothing and intense at once.

The record's significance grows as soon as the process of familiarization is complete. There's a sense of planning at work, a method inside the improvising quest – listening to and *around* the pitches – that pays respect to the individual needs of both artists. We, as listeners, were left rather expressionless at the beginning, willing to understand a little better where the music was actually heading to. Subsequent to further analysis, we can now quote from Genesis' "Firth Of Fifth": the path is clear. And this record – despite its title – is all but shallow.