

## THE RESENTMENT LISTENER

### Perfect Strangers

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Without particularly focusing on Zappa for a moment, Perfect Strangers is a great album, this is the one thing to say first from a highly biased Zappa blog. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra conducted by Thomas Søndergård plays with energy and self-confidence. The program is well balanced, although Heiner Goebbels music may be sometimes associated with minimalism, it has a progressive attitude. The pieces are classics for both composers. The sound is powerful and almost always clear, also considering that it is reported to be a live recording (at Rockefeller Concert Hall in Oslo, February 11, 2010). The result sounds warmer than some Goebbels ECM recordings, and way more powerful than the 1984 Boulez Zappa album, especially as far as the percussion section is concerned. The LAWO classics album is printed on a Hybrid Stereo/Multichannel SACD medium. Finally, it has a great cover and booklet design and pictures.

Perfect Strangers: such a title probably suggests that Goebbels and Zappa should be both way more known than they are, the first often considered "harder" than he really is, the second too much a rock star than a real composer (if you mount the Yellow Shark or The Perfect Stranger cds in your pc with iTunes, it will give "Indie Rock" as genre, courtesy of Gracenote Media Database). In summary a great production by LAWO classics, whom has issued The Mission, an album by The Norwegian Wind Ensemble, also known for a great Zappa tribute: The Brass from Utopia, on this blog too.

And there are some more Zappa Elective Affinities to report, concerning Heiner Goebbels, as far as Ensembles and conductors. The Ensemble Modern often plays and has recorded his music, and the reference album for Surrogate Cities (full score) is an ECM production with the Junge Deutsche Philharmonie conducted by Peter Rundel (see Yellow Shark), featuring David Moss on vocals (see Gregger Peccary & Other Persuasions).

Back to the LAWO classics album, Suite for Sampler and Orchestra from Surrogate Cities is a Goebbels 1994 composition that has been executed also in 2012 and 2014 after the Oslo recording. It is highly recommended for Zapp-o-philes fond of the darkest Synclavier works (no room for irony here) and with a taste for bizarre pastorals. The suite recalls composer early works with the prog-rock trio Cassiber (1982-92) with Christoph Anders and Chris Cutler.

And here is the Zappa program:

The Dog Breath Variations / Uncle Meat 5:17 (YS: 5:31)

Dupree's Paradise 8:19 (TPS: 7:52)

The Perfect Stranger 13:01 (TPS: 12:42)

G-Spot Tornado 3:41 (YS: 3:28)

Revised Music for Low Budget Orchestra 7:01 (GP&OP: 7:37)

The first time durations mentioned are the LAWO classics cd ones (in the case of Low Budget it does not count 1:15 of applause), the others in brackets refer to the reference versions, with the FZ album titles given as acronyms. If you compare those timings you will notice that they are comparable, and so the renditions are. The Norwegian Radio Orchestra conducted by Thomas Søndergård deliver a solid and warm performance, and thanks to the sound quality of the recording, they give a new light to Dupree's Paradise and The Perfect Stranger.

Also concerning sound, Karl Erik Sylthe wrote a review of the album for audiophile.no. He says:

I feel subjectively that there is a difference in the amount of reverb from Goebbels's Suite and Zappa's works. According to documentation, both are recorded at Rockefeller in 2010, and it's probably the same event. Nevertheless, I find that while the reverb works perfectly on Goebbels's works, there are a couple of Zappa's works where there is a tad too much reverb, leading to that the precision of the highly demanding works depends entirely clear. This is present on Dog Breath Variations and G-Spot Tornado.

I also feel something didn't go perfectly right particularly with G-Spot Tornado and maybe also with Dog/Meat. But I do not think it is a matter of reverb, rather I think that the mid-range response is not as good and balanced as the one related to the high and low frequencies. The result is that wind instruments are not as clear as woodwind instruments for instance. However percussion instruments sound great and, as already noticed, the overall sound is powerful and warm.

Compared with the Zappa reference recordings it is interesting to notice how the 21 years old Yellow Shark recording remains a reference having a more balanced mid-range response. On the other hand the 30 years old The Perfect Stranger recording sounds more distant and with much less detail. Finally the 12 years old Greggery Peccary & Other Persuasions sounds as good as this one.

The above mentioned cds have been played on two different stereo systems (not exactly high-end, but quite nice ones).

Goldenote Koala CD Player

Blue Note S1 Integrated Amplifier

Monitor Audio Silver-RS8 loudspeakers

Cambridge Audio Azur 550C CD Player

Cambridge Audio Azur 550A Integrated Amplifier

Canton Ergo 602 loudspeakers / Denon AH-D2000 headphones

I could not play the multichannel LAWO classics SACD.

A final note. As for today (August 2014) there is not a specific entry for this album on the LAWO classic web site, however check it out later, booklets are usually available as pdf files.