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Frank Rothkamm "Opus Spongebobicum" (2005-2008)

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Extended Compact Disc (Ltd. Edition 1-500)

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Addendum: 10/11/2008

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"The how and the why of the composition and recording of Opus Spongebobicum"

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A micro interview as told to Chris Cutler in 600 words

How ?

A lot of my composing is done in my head as it is very easy to change things around, to invent vast worlds and get a sense of all possibilities. However I only work with abstract sound shapes (Tongestalten), or imagined sound and math, since I am not Mozart and there's a lot of labor and technology involved to actually materialize my imagined compositions into perceptual reality.

In 2006 the recording of 'Opus Spongebobicum' was started on a Casio Privia PX-100 digital piano as MIDI information into Cubase, which is a Digital Audio Workstation. Originally each variation was conceived to be 33 minutes long and there were to be 32 of them (just like Beethoven's Diabelli variations), but after recording 20 of these half hour variations, I changed my mind; each variation was to be 1 minute long. Eventually I recorded 40 segments of 'MIDI-fied' piano music over the course of 40 nights within a 2 year period.

In January of 2008 I sat down and started editing all of this in order to form a coherent whole. I worked in Cubase's Key Editor, which represents notes in microscopic detail and used this program to make hundreds of corrections. There are a few passages that a human being probably couldn't play, but in general a pianist with good technique should be able to play all of 'Opus Spongebobicum.' Each note (there are 15919 of them) makes pianistic sense.

As a final touch, I then started experiments to make a recording of the Casio Privia that would sound real, like a pianist playing a real piano. As a guide I took the characteristics and frequency curves of 1950's monophonic vinyl records. I overlaid a few stereo samples of surface noise with the actual recording of the piano, which was then sent through a monophonic Lexicon Pantheon reverb with no pre-delay. On careful listening you can hear a needle drop onto the record before the music starts.

Variation 40 is actually made from the skipping noise of the needle playing the last groove of a vinyl record. A situation any vinyl lover will recognize! Final mastering closely followed the compression characteristic of mid-20th century Deutsche Grammophone master tapes.

So the ideal experience is that of a classical piano recording, delivered on a Compact Disc, like someone made a CD from an old, but mint, LP: 'Opus Spongebobicum' is thus the recording of a recording.

W h y ?

In my 2004 manifesto I proposed the aesthetics of Supermodernism. Two of its characteristics are the randomization of man and machine and the randomization of time.

In 'Opus Spongebobicum' there are two references that are VERY obvious:
The cartoon series 'Spongebob Squarepants' on Nickelodeon, which is very surreal, and
Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji's 'Opus Clavicembalisticum', a 285 minute work for solo piano.

Sorabji has fugue themes which are of great symbolic importance to him, much like a Formula would be for Stockhausen. So I transcribed the first line of Spongebob's theme song and cast it with the markings from Stockhausen's 'Mantra'. This became the 'Secret Formula from SpongeBob Squarepants', located under the plastic ring which holds the Compact Disc. In the Spongebob cartoon there are many episodes that make reference to the Secret Formula, which is a recipe on how to make the Krabby Patty hamburger.

Each variation contains this formula, in most cases it is a recognizable motif and its great simplicity makes it easy to spot, both melodically and harmonically.

In other cases it is hidden, but not too deeply. The old laws of piano music and the history of the piano are contained therein.

Film:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ts8oCv8ZBBY>

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Official Site:

<http://rothkamm.com/album.cfm?Opus-Spongebobicum>

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European inquiries:

<http://www.rermegacorp.com>

USA & World inquiries:

<http://fluxrecords.com>

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