

WIRE

The Boomerang: New reissues and archive releases

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Masayuki Takayanagi New Direction Unit – *April Is The Cruellest Month*

In 1971 Masayuki Takayanagi's New Directions For The Arts Trio performed for an audience of farmers trying to save their land and leftist students fighting the establishment powers that wanted to take it. Their aggressive music, which was mercilessly stripped of genre conventions that might have helped people unacquainted with free jazz to get a handle on what was being played, was the dud of the Gen'ya Festival. Four years later Takayanagi explained that he wasn't playing for any of the people present, but for the earth itself.

The guitarist may not have cared about appealing to audiences, but he nonetheless made the conciliatory gesture of giving his projected ESP-Disk' debut an English name. He needn't have bothered. While this 1975 recording session was awarded a catalogue number, ESP went under before it could come out, and *April Is The Cruellest Month* languished on a shelf for 16 years before being released on CD by the Japanese April-Disk imprint. The album is finally being pressed on its intended format by another New York label, Blank Forms. This necessitates forgoing the CD's alternate take of the album's first track "We Have Existed". But it's hard to imagine anyone feeling shortchanged after experiencing the intensity of this performance.

Takayanagi's determined pursuit of singularity resulted in music that bore precious little resemblance to the straight-ahead jazz that he had played just six years earlier. There are no heads, solos, or foreground/background hierarchies. On the A side, the quartet's members hack away with the micro-focus of prisoners trying to chip their way through a cell wall with sharpened spoons. Nobuyashi Ino's bowed bass and cello thrust mercilessly, again and again, hitting the same spot as Takayanagi's acidic wah-wah guitar while Kenji Mori's woodwinds circle around the target's periphery.

Hiroshi Yamazaki's percussion alternates between a continuous low boil of texture and crashes of ceremonial alarm. But it's on the flip that you hear what got up the festival audience's collective nose. "My Friend, Blood Shaking My Heart" is an example of what Takayanagi called a mass projection. Sounding just a bit like an Iggy-free Stooges playing "LA Blues", it is a side-long wall of coarse-grained sound that hits as harsh as a belt sander to the face, cruel indeed, no matter when you hear it.

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