

Eva-Maria Houben

Works For Piano

Wandelweiser (2×CD)

The Wandelweiser label is often associated with notions of silence in music, but German composer Eva-Maria Houben's work is more occupied with the presence of sound than its absence. Houben has an interest in the nature of decaying sound, the way notes dissolve when left hanging in negative space, their gradual disappearance or their evaporation into the next note. "There seems to be no end to disappearance," she observes in her brief sleeve notes to this double CD set, her sixth release, but the first to feature her piano composition. The composer herself plays all of the seven pieces here.

The first disc is dominated by the repetitive structures of *Klavier*, the oldest piece here dating from 2003, half an hour of slowly shifting two note figures that gradually slide away into a languid meditation on dying notes buried in the low registers. *Drei Choräle (Penser À Satie)* is simpler still, three short pieces that repeat chords slowly, each note mulled over and played with great precision. It's inspired by Satie, but perhaps more resembles Feldman, who also let sounds slowly drift out of earshot. *Senza Espressione (Without Expression)* is a short work that resembles a novice pianist practising scales, with little emotion in the playing, but instead each note allowed to be itself, as if set free to meet its inevitable fate.

On the second disc *Und Entfernt Sich Wieder – Singend (And Departs Again – Singing)* is a 46 minute series of brief, often melodic segments separated by increasingly lengthy silences that allow the listener to ponder over the mortality of the last note, sustained for as long as possible but destined to fade into its surroundings. The disc closes with *Three Lullabies*, a set of short, simple miniatures – delicate studies of the fragility of sound. Houben describes listening as the awareness of fading sound and the pieces here encourage such thinking. Two hours of thoughtful, very beautiful and original music.

Richard Pinnell

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