masayo asahara with
michio foschida
robun dantomi
denzo sawamatsu
meiji benko
chuichi choshi
St Agnes Fountain
A forgotten drone-prog-jazz classic from the 1970s Japanese underground

St Agnes Fountain was composed while Masayo Asahara was completing her masters degree at the University of Osaka in 1974. Asahara’s doctorate concerned the music of the early American minimalists, especially LaMonte Young and Tony Conrad, and her composition reflects her involvement not only in that music, but also with the thriving Osaka free jazz scene from whose ranks this one-off band was put together specifically for this recording. Asahara also cites Faust, Soft Machine, and the Rolling Stones as influencing her work during this period. The rather curious title and artwork come via Asahara’s parallel studies of mediaeval European history and pagan imagery in Protestant hymnal writing.

Asahara recalls how the record was made: “Before anything else was done, I made the organ part, which is a single chord sustained for around an hour. But by putting the organ through various filters I was able to change the sound around, very gradually at first and then more and more toward the end. Then I went into the studio with Michio, who sketched out the bass lines and then worked out some rhythm parts with Robun who he know from his trio. Once they’d recorded those we made tape loops of certain sections, then spliced the whole thing together. Finally Denzo and Meiji came in and we overdubbed the horn parts together with me playing alto and Michio overdubbing 5 bass trombones. At the last minute we added a few subliminal sounds which I took from a shortwave receiver. And there it was! I really don’t believe there’s been anything quite like it either before or since.”

St Agnes Fountain was recorded at Asahara’s own expense, and subsequent attempts to find a label to make the release proved fruitless, unsurprising given the radical and extended nature of the work and the lack of adventurous labels in Japan during that period.

Finally a few test copies were pressed up for band and friends, and the project was forgotten. Shortly after the recording was completed Asahara came to teach in London. The photo of her at Stonehenge with visiting-on-holiday Foschida was taken around that time.

In the mid 1990’s Asahara returned once again from Japan, this time permanently, to teach in the electronic music studio at Sheffield University. Her contact with Sheffield’s active music community has at last enabled this long overdue release to be made, and we hope that this will be the first of many CDs to feature this radical and farsighted composer.

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AL007
Saint Agnes Fountain

Part 1 begin (12.06)
Part 2 continue (17.38)
Part 3 first tempo (04.50)
Part 4 second tempo (07.06)
Part 5 third tempo plus organ solo (03.35)
Part 6 fourth tempo plus trumpet solo (01.36)
Part 7 jazzy freak out (02.05)
Part 8 closing (09.55)
Part 9 first tempo reprise (03.38)

Masayo Asahara
organ, filters, alto sax, shortwaves, composer
with
Michio Foschida
bass guitar, bass trombone, composer
Robun Dantomi
drums
Denzo Sawamatsu
trumpet
Meiji Benko
tenor sax
Chuichi Choshi
producer
Martin Archer & UTT/Foster
re-issue supervision

Recorded October 1974 at Fragrant Life Studio, Osaka

Artwork for this edition by Masayo Asahara