

The Wire (July 04) [Dan Warburton]

Janek Schaefer might be best known for his technical innovations, notably the Tri-Phonic three arm turntable and the daring customised pressing of last year's experimental vinyl pressing 'Skate' which recently netted him joint second prize in the Prix Ars Electronica 2004. But live improvisations and installations are also a major element of his work. Like 2002's 'Black Immure', Cold Storage started out as a site-specific project when he was invited to perform in Rome in a brick vaulted cellar previously used as a cold storage room. Schaefer went about collecting minidisc recordings relating to 'cold' and 'storage' and incorporated them into a live performance using effects pedals and a mixing desk. In preparing this definitive CD version, he deliberately avoided excessive mixing and post production, improvising the piece direct to disc and editing as quickly and simply as possible, to preserve the sweep and spontaneity of the live experience. Indeed, unlike other notable sonic excursions into cold and storage - one thinks of the glacial austerity of Thomas Koener's 'Permafrost', or the gloomy claustrophobia of Mattin's recent recordings with Mark Wastell inside a bank vault - Schaefer's work is decidedly dramatic, collaging all manner of reverberant thuds and industrial machine loops into the kind of colourful 'musique concrète' associated with his near-namesake Pierre Schaeffer (samples of whose work feature extensively on 'Skate'). If Pierre Schaeffer's observation, "a composed structure (such as we perceive it) cannot be deduced from separate perceptions of its component parts" comes to mind - it is quoted and referenced in Janek's essay/manifesto 'Audio & Image' (available on his website audiOh.com) - so does the work of another Schafer, R Murray, whose concepts of keynote sounds, signals, and soundmarks are of central importance to the British composer's work. Cold Storage is an impressive resumé not only of Schaefer's own career as a sound artist, but of half a century of theory and practice of electronic music in all its diverse forms.