

# SIGNAL TO NOISE

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF IMPROVISED, EXPERIMENTAL & UNUSUAL MUSIC

summer 2009

## CD / DVD / LP / DL

The season's key releases and reissues from the world of creative music ...

### Phil Kline

#### John The Revelator

Cantaloupe CD

#### Around the World in a Daze

Starkland DVD

Phil Kline made his mark in New York in the 1980s with works conceived for multiple boomboxes, the works' shape being dictated by the uncontrolled variables of cassette tape leader length and playing speeds. He has since shown himself to be a remarkable and imaginative composer for more traditional ensembles. His 2004 release *Zippo Songs* (issued by Cantaloupe Music, the label founded by venerable new music collective Bang on a Can) was a moving set of songs based on inscriptions found on Vietnam soldiers' lighters; it displayed a capacity to stir profound and genuine feelings that was new to the composer's work.

*John the Revelator* is no less surprising or effective in its raw emotion. And where *Zippo Songs* dealt with mortality, here Kline faces nothing less than questions of the eternal. The work is essentially a vocal mass in 16 parts, performed by the Lionheart vocal sextet with the string quartet Ethel. (Kline himself appears on only one track, playing organ). It's a staggering piece of music, both reverent and modern, neither passing as a period piece nor falling into the trappings of "new music." It feels, if anything, lost in time, but more importantly is a remarkable, beautiful work.

If *John the Revelator* approaches the eternal, *Around the World in a Daze* aims at nothing less than covering the globe. Taken as a whole, the ten pieces are dizzying in their scope. Beginning on New York's Lower East Side, the audio travelogue moves through New England, Switzerland and the Central African Republic; through Bach, Nancarrow, Wagner; and through a montage of string and vocal compositions (Ethel violinist Todd Reynolds is featured prominently) and field recordings. Released as a DVD (for the surround-sound audio capacity; the photo sequence that accompanies the music is fairly incidental), the set comes with a second DVD which includes an interview with Kline plus his audio/video work *Meditation* (run as fast as you can), an enjoyable handheld-camera run through lower Manhattan with a pulsing electronic soundtrack. The discs come housed in a double digipak designed to look like a boombox—a nice nod to the composer's old axe. **Kurt Gottschalk**