

April 22, 2009



PHIL KLINE

John the Revelator
(Cantaloupe)

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An idiosyncratic, yet ultimately very moving, "21st Century Mass" from downtown composer Phil Kline, probably best known for the annual Christmastime boom-box parade he leads throughout the Village. For *John the Revelator*, he juxtaposes the fixed parts of a Latin Mass with mostly literary and secular texts from the likes of Samuel Beckett and New York school poet David Shapiro, while employing minimalist compositional strategies. Arvo Part is, of course, well known for doing something similar, but Kline's mass is obviously suffused with a particular stream of American Transcendentalism, as opposed to the dead certainty and high gravity of medieval liturgy you find in Part. As in Thomas Jefferson's bible, the text here mostly eschews the miraculous, yet simultaneously makes a special plea for comfort and notice from on high. The linchpin of the piece is undoubtedly Kline's reworking of Blind Willie Johnson's "**Dark Was the Night, Cold Was the Ground**" one of the very best pieces of music ever recorded, a wordless, moaning gospel hymn transformed into weightless harmony. It is one of many instances on this album that shouldn't make sense, yet perfectly does. Beautifully and impeccably engineered, with superb performances from the early and new music vocal group Lionheart, accompanied by the string quartet Ethel. A highly rewarding listen, even for folks who may have an aversion to choral music. [MK]