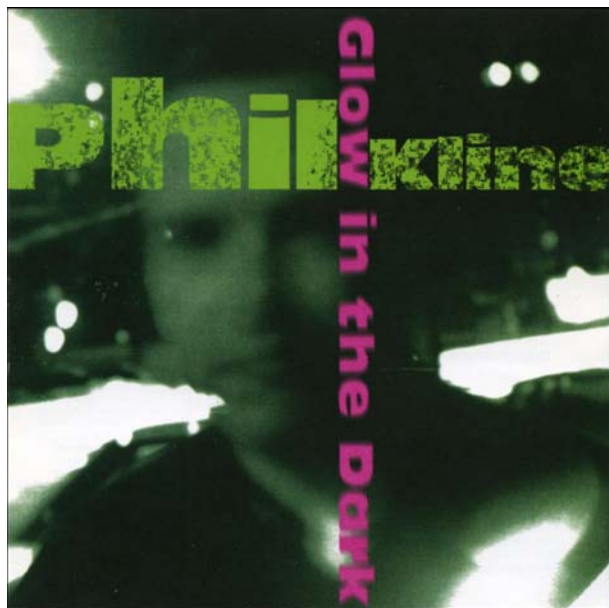


NWCR801

Phil Kline

Glow In The Dark



1. *Premonition* for 25 tape players (1997) (5:16)
2. *Chant for Voice* and 10 tape loops (1995) (13:07)
3. *96 Tears* for 8 electric guitars and basso continuo (1996) (10:50)
Phil Kline, John Bepler, Mark Howell, Peter Principle, Skinny John, Mark Stewart, Wharton Tiers, Ellen Watkins, guitars; Nanker Phelge, basso continuo
4. *The Holy City of Ashtabula* for 25 tape players (1996) (17:09)
Phil Kline, voice
5. *Bachman's Warbler* for harmonicas and 12 tape loops (1992) (16:34)
Phil Kline, harmonicas

Total playing time: 65:24

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Notes

Phil Kline is a native of the suburbs of Akron, Ohio. To get here from there has involved quite a circuit for him, via Vienna 1910, outer space, a hypothetical Bali, the late Renaissance, and a number of addresses on the Bowery, among many other far-flung places of the imagination, along with various side streets and dives along the way. You can faintly make out the stamps on his passport if you listen hard enough to his layered chords. Everything is in there someplace, although his vast accretion of experiences, musical and otherwise, has by now fused into a signature.

I've been acquainted with Phil for something over twenty-five years, and I can truly say that the greater part of what I know about music is owed to him. Before I knew him well I listened to the two shows he hosted on WKCR in the 1970s, "Bach's Lunch" and "Stranger than Paradise" (a title later borrowed by one of his high-school pals). I can see their influence on my record collection to this day: Bruckner, Gesualdo, and Webern; Alexander Mosolov, Conlon Nancarrow, Colin McPhee; the farther reaches of Satie; Weill's *Seven Deadly Sins*, cartoon soundtracks, and Mayan string ensembles. He taught me how to listen, applying to music Ezra Pound's dictum for literature: News that stays news.

I first saw Phil in action as a musician on the Bicentennial Weekend in '76, in a honky-tonk in Kent, Ohio. The budding composer, outfitted in a puffy shirt, was playing lead guitar and singing backup on Beatles covers. It was, you know, a job. Not long after, he was back in New York City, this time giving shape and substance to various artists' tortured or whimsical No-Wave conceits. Guitars and tape recorders and diverse early electronic keyboards filled his rooms. Soon he and some other people started the Del-Byzanteens, a band that insouciantly blended high and low, virtuosity and amateurism, calypso and science fiction, pots and pans and drones and the

Supremes. They released several records, on a British label, which did very well in the former Yugoslavia.

His next segue was into film music. You can hear his distinctive sounds on Sara Driver's feature films *You Are Not I* and *Sleepwalk*, for example. I also remember feebly serving as co-writer on a project that never quite got off the ground—Phil, however, turned in a complete soundtrack before we'd gotten to the fifth page of the script. On the basis of just hints and suggestions he'd gone ahead and imagined a detailed, nuanced, structured movie, a conception that expanded and flattered the few vague ideas we had. These days he carries the same challenge—a blend of fiction and mathematics—into music for television commercials and art installations.

As varied as it is, the music you hear on this disc only begins to give an idea of the Kline sonic universe. You'll note his fascination with orchestration, with self-generating and self-destroying machines, with possible dense chords that move through space eating everything in their path, with the enormous creative possibilities of happy accident, with the rigorous application of poetically terse ideas, with the notion that every kind of sound is a constituent of music. You'll quickly realize that his next move could be just about anywhere.

—Luc Sante

Why boom-boxes? Well, other than the fact that to many young composers real orchestras are about as accessible as Oz, I must cop to a fascination with tape recorders which began at an early age. Even then they seemed like basic instruments to me. I liked to alter their speed, cut and splice tape to make sound montage. I clearly saw recording as part of the musical process, not merely a documentation of it. And even now, as the gates of the Emerald City are beginning to open for me, (or at least seem ajar) there is still the thrill of

hearing those massed asynchronous sound sources in an open, reflective space...

My works for boom-boxes are of two kinds: solo pieces using tape loops which explore the phenomenology of acoustics and recording with the added impulse of an improvising performer, and "spectacle" pieces for large numbers of tape players carried through public areas to create sound collage in changing spatial relationships.

The solo works came first. Following a hunch, one afternoon I went down to J&R Music World; purchased twelve matching Sony boom-boxes, took them home, set them up in a circle and loaded them with tape loops. It seemed like it would work and it did: recording simple patterns onto the loops, then playing them back and re-recording them over one another, one could create incredible phase and feedback patterns, producing luminous clouds of overtones. The patterns would slowly build and oscillate, then spiral out of their orbit in chaotic flow, something like the aural equivalent of a Mandelbrot set in chaos theory.

By chance, the first instrument that came to hand the day I set up the boom-boxes was a harmonica. Within minutes the room was filled with shimmering sound and over the next few weeks *Bachman's Warbler* evolved. The musical material is basic, the only twist being that harmonicas in different major and minor keys are used together to enrich the harmony, an idea I got from Little Walter records. The title refers to the buzzing song of a virtually extinct bird last seen in the swamps of South Carolina.

These solo pieces require a sound stimulus which is flexible and portable and there is none better than the voice. *Chant* began as a warm-up, improvised while I was rehearsing another piece. On the night of the intended performance at CBGB I suddenly decided to do the warm up instead of the other piece, which, to be truthful, I now have forgotten.

The big public pieces began with a single idea: to present an electronic Christmas carol in the streets of New York. I wrote a multi-voiced piece and put the individual parts on separate cassettes, which I copied until there were about fifty tapes. Then it was a matter of recruiting enough friends with boom-boxes to play the tapes. What resulted was an elastic, moving audio sculpture, which walked down 5th Avenue to Washington Square, its shape and sound in constant flux.

When Creative Time asked me to produce a work for their Music in the Anchorage series, I wanted to write something appropriate for the remarkable space, which is sort of a secular cathedral of darkened stone chambers and vaulted ceilings inside the southern base of the Brooklyn Bridge. *The Holy City of Ashtabula* emerges from the darkness in a maelstrom of writhing counterpoint for portamento strings, somewhat reminiscent of the moaning traffic on the bridge's wire roadway. The twisted fugue slowly rises to deliverance in a halo of overtones created by a vast battery of tuned percussion.

Premonition was written as a fanfare for the Bang on a Can Festival's tenth Birthday Party. It is scored for an imaginary orchestra of 1000 strings or, (let's get this right,) a real orchestra of 1000 virtual (computer-midi) strings.

96 Tears is the odd one out here, not a boom-box in sight. It was conceived as a curtain raiser for a concert at CBGB gallery celebrating the release of the CRI collection "New York Guitars." It is scored for an ensemble of eight electric guitars played with E-bows (electromagnetic devices which cause the strings to vibrate continuously without touch, creating a controlled feedback). This gives the guitar the sustain of a bowed string instrument though without, it must be said, the expressive range. But this same limited range brought to my mind the sound of the viol and the viol consorts so favored by sixteenth-century English composers, most especially my man Henry Purcell. *96 Tears* is, in effect, a very loud eight-part viol fantasia (or more precisely, a lachrymae) with a synthesizer basso continuo.

Over, around and through these works hover the voices of hundreds of composers, known and anonymous whose music rings in my memory, but there are a few who have influenced the way I work via their music, writings, and expressed philosophies: Charles Ives, John Cage, Steve Reich, Brian Eno and Glenn Branca. There is also a community of composers currently active in New York whose ideas and energies have been a constant source of illumination, among them are Eve Beglarian, Kitty Brazelton, Nick Didkovsky, Judy Dunaway, Annie Gosfield, David First, and John Myers.

— Phil Kline

Phil Kline was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and raised in Akron, Ohio. He graduated from Columbia University with a degree in English Literature, then, after several years of working as a rock guitarist and classical music disc jockey, attended the Mannes College of Music. In the early '90s Kline emerged as a composer and installation artist whose typical medium was large numbers of boom box tape recorders and players, often placed in non-traditional venues. *Bachman's Warbler* for harmonicas and twelve boom-boxes was premiered at the Bang On A Can marathon in 1992. *Unsilent Night*, an annual outdoor Christmas event for infinite number of boom-boxes, debuted in Greenwich Village in December of that year. *To be sung on the water* was presented throughout the Whitney Museum during the 1995 Biennial, *The Holy City of Ashtabula* premiered at the Brooklyn Anchorage in July 1996, and *Winter Music*, sponsored by Creative Time, was performed in Central Park in December 1996. In 1997, his sextet *Exquisite Corpses*, commissioned by the Bang On A Can All-Stars, was premiered at Lincoln Center. His upcoming projects included an electric guitar work for Mark Stewart, a string quartet for the Sirius Quartet and an electro-acoustic oratorio with text by Luc Sante. Kline also produces concerts featuring numerous composer and musician friends in various downtown venues. He conceived and produced "The Alternative Schubertiade," presented by CRI in September 1997 at American Opera Projects as part of the Downtown Arts Festival and now available on CRI CD 809. Kline also performs his *A Fantasy on One Note* on the "New York Guitars" CD on CRI Emergency Music Series (CD 698).

All works published by Halfisch Music (ASCAP)

Production Notes

Produced by Phil Kline with Bradford Reed

Executive Producer: Joseph R. Dalton

Mastered by Darcy Proper, engineer, at Sony Music Studios

All tracks recorded at the Brooklyn Anchorage, August 1997 and June 1998 by Bradford Reed and Peter Principle, balance engineer, Bradford Reed, except *Bachman's Warbler*, recorded during the Bang on a Can Festival at the Society for Ethical Culture, May 1992 by WNYC, sound designer Bob Bielecki.

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All works published by Haifisch Music (ASCAP)

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