

The organic arsenal of Limpe Fuchs meets the austere electronics of Mark Fell on a new collaborative work

By Daryl Worthington

Limpe Fuchs & Mark Fell
Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch
Black Truffle DL/3xLP

What common ground could exist between Limpe Fuchs and Mark Fell? ask the release notes to their new collaboration *Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch*. One possibility that's not offered but which feels integral to the record's hypnotic effect is an idiosyncratic embrace of tempo rubato.

At its simplest, tempo rubato describes music which speeds up and slows down. More profoundly, it involves an evasion of rigidity for greater expression, slipping out of the confines of regular time into something freer. It has appeared in baroque music for centuries, often as momentary flourishes or ornamentation. But in many ways it's a formal name for an informal quality in folk and orally transmitted music. Béla Bartók ruminated on it in his interpretations of traditional Hungarian and Romanian dances, contrasting it with tempo giusto's more regular, equally spaced rhythms and melodies.

A subtly uneven quality seeps through much of *Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch*, the tension between tempos giusto and rubato giving these relatively sparse pieces transfixing nuance and fluctuation. This isn't surprising considering Fell and Fuchs's backgrounds. Since his work as one half of snd, Fell's music has felt shaped by a compulsion to find intricate new shapes and tessellations within the gridded structures typically prescribed by hardware sequencers and DAWs. In a career that began in 1960s West Germany with Anima-Sound alongside her then partner Paul Fuchs, Limpe Fuchs has consistently embraced openended, free flowing sounds, whether playing the collection of instruments she invented herself, or her recent albums of piano and voice.

While *Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch* is the duo's full-length debut, their collaboration is well established. They first met in 2015, when Fuchs saw Fell performing with his son Rian Treanor at a festival in Canada. Fuchs and Fell have subsequently performed together in concerts, with a live recording of their duo a bonus track on Fuchs's record *Amor*, from earlier this year. Meanwhile, Fuchs's *Piano In The Rain*, also released in 2024, was recorded at Fell's home in Yorkshire.

Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch meanwhile, was recorded at Fuchs's home in Germany, allowing her to wield her full arsenal of wood, bamboo and metal instruments. It's a joy to hear as their eccentric personalities weave into Fell's equally colourful but more austere computer generated tones and textures. Often, the album evokes something like a Walter Smetak record interpolated with precision whittled electronic sounds; at others it's like a glitching gamelan ensemble. Across the two hour arc there's a sense you're hearing geometric shapes gradually collapse and reassemble. Like a Cubist painting realised on a damp canvas.

The music's unstable gait strikes from the first second of the album. "Dessogia I" arrives in a stagger of synthesized sounds and metallic percussion. Fell's computer generated tone, a peculiar texture somewhere between rubber and glass, comes close to a pulse, but it's never steady. The timbre alters each time its sounds and pauses appear irregularly, as if a machine generated attempt to simulate the unevenness of human playing has exceeded its remit and arrived at superhuman levels of fluctuation. Around this Fuchs plays a set of microtonally tuned metal tubes, elegantly dancing around and between the electronic pulse. The pace slows, gaps spread out before picking up speed again, the acceleration coinciding with Fuchs switching from



Twisted pair: Limpe Fuchs and Mark Fell

tricking percussion to playing jagged yet soaring phrases on a rasping horn.

That looseness continues into "Dessogia II". An incessant rhythm strides forward while amorphous sonics sizzle and spark around. Fuchs starts yelping. Lift off feels imminent, until metallic vibrations strike like gravitational pull. What could have been a linear ascent warps into something more complex.

Their improvisations continue to destabilise from there. On "Dessogia IV", fidgety synth, dewy percussion and avian sounding horns evoke the verdancy and instability of a rain forest, equal parts tranquil and endlessly eventful. "Queetch II" begins with a roaming, mantra-like pulse on percussion which Fuchs freely sings over. Counter rhythms gradually sprout and the whole piece starts to accelerate and decelerate all at once. "Fauch I" has clocklike, marimba-esque tones interrupted with cacophonous creaks and clatter, an intriguing mix of disparate sounds which brings to mind the complex interactions explored by Marginal Consort, and the febrile brilliance of Fuchs's earliest recordings as part of Anima-Sound.

The track marks the extremes of freeform interaction that the duo reach, but it's the moments when they toy more closely with minimal rhythms, bending them out of regularity but never abandoning them fully, that *Dessogia/Queetch/Fauch* is most effective. When Fuchs and Fell push us to become aware of the intricacies of duration and pulse by knocking their even pacing slightly out of whack.

Rubato comes from the Italian word to steal. Tempo rubato means stolen time. In a context when there's no end of things to distract us, the term has different resonances now to when it was first coined. Fuchs and Fell take back time. In their deft, often remarkably subtle evasions of regular tempo and equally spaced rhythms, they open up to a gleefully irregular, magically unquantised world, where the tyranny of the clock is evaded, and a variegated land of play and mischief can emerge in the lopsided intervals. ●