

Womens Work issue 2, 1978

Womens Work Alison Knowles & Annea Lockwood (Editors)

Primary Information Pbk 36 pp For a long time, Womens Work was one of those fabled publications impossible to get one's hands on unless you were near a research library (and even then) or had access to one of the samizdat copies that circulated around as photocopies or, more recently, phone photos. First published in 1975, Womens Work is a compilation of instructional text scores collated and edited in New York by artist Alison Knowles and composer Annea (then Anna) Lockwood, the latter newly arrived in the US after some ten years in London. Womens Work only ran to two issues (the second came in 1978) but, between them, they carried scores from 25 women composers, including works by the two editors, as well as Pauline Oliveros, Ruth Anderson, Christina Kubisch and

Carolee Schneemann. Taken together, Womens Work is an immensely important. intensely thrilling work of feminist, musical scholarship. It sits close to the great swell of feminist polemics - Oliveros's "lady" composers article of 1970 and Linda Nochlin's "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" essay from the following year - as well as the inventive and energetic promotion of new music that surrounded Larry Austin's contemporaneous magazine, Source: Music Of The Avant-Garde. Equally significantly, Womens Work identified the barriers faced then (only?) by so many female artists; and curator Irene Revell and artist James Hoff have done a mighty thing in republishing it.

This facsimile edition of Womens Work benefits from the care that Primary Information have put into it. The same, off-white colour paper and brown ink of the original first issue, a saddle-stitched

magazine, have been used. The second issue, which comes in the form of a fold-out poster, is printed on pleasingly heavyweight paper. Both issues come in a wrap-around cardboard cover that bears Knowles's utilitarian stencilled font It's a covetable edition of 1500 copies, so anyone interested had better be quick. The scores of Womens Work vary: there are text scores, photographic scores, diagrams, drawings. Some are from women within the musical world, others from those in dance or performance art. There is a heady sense of crossover, possibility and immediacy still fizzing in the works. There is also a strong sense of community and permission: these were works whose DIY-ness invited participation. "These are scores ready for you to do," wrote Knowles and Lockwood in issue one. "Please notify us of performances." Looking at the scores today, it feels that that generous invitation is still open.

That the invitation had to be made in the first place is something to reflect on. It's nearly 45 years since Womens Work was first conceived and it's salutary to look back on the list of its participants. Many of them are well known: in addition to the artists already mentioned, visual artist Mary Lucier and the choreographer Simone Forti certainly fall into that category. But there are others whose work should be more widely known and celebrated: composers Beth Anderson and Heidi von Gunden, for example, or Barbara Benary, who died earlier this year. Knowles and Lockwood's Womens Work should be hymned with fireworks not only for its existence, but for also pointing out, quietly, how perilous a creative existence is for anyone marginalised in their society. Every culture every age needs a Womens Work, and this is a fantastic place to start the liberatory journey. Louise Gray