

Crate-Digging: Derek Piotr – Bahar

By

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You've likely read a little bit about electroacoustic experimentalist [Derek Piotr](#) on this here site before, and so I'm not going to tiptoe through his back story to acquaint you with him. I will, however, point you to an [interview](#) I did with him last year, and also to reviews of his ["Deliver" Remixes](#) EP, and albums [Raj](#) and [Tempatempat](#). I fully expect you to read every word before proceeding with my review of Derek's new album *Bahar*, because I'm barely going to refer to them again. Once you've got the background down, you can come back.

Ready? Oh, sorry, you're still reading. Keep going.

Now? Perfect. Let's jump in.

I'm going to come out and say this up front – I love *Bahar*. You may not be surprised since I've ingested quite a bit of Piotr's tunes over the years, but it's rare that an artist can continue to surprise you as he ages, grows, and tries out different methods, sounds, etc. And not that I haven't thought this in the past, but with *Bahar*, I think that Derek Piotr sounds his most natural throughout this album, in that it seems like the music flows through him with purpose and intent, and does so at an effortless clip. There's also a sense of the *naturalist* in him, and I'm not crazy with that observation – he has tried in the past to get a series of concerts off the ground performed entirely in the woods. So with those two things in mind, *Bahar* is an amazingly compelling listen.

Derek's referred to *Bahar* as more "pop" in style (or maybe in approachability), and I wouldn't argue with him. There's an accessibility here that hasn't necessarily been missing from his earlier work, but it's a bit more pronounced. The electronic melodies are quite pleasing, and Derek's vocals flit through Eastern scales, marrying the traditional with the exotic, intertwining them with ease and precision. And he even Auto-Tunes his vocals in places, which was a strange and not unpleasant surprise. The album begins with the sublime "Springs Revealed," a short piece where Piotr layers his voice in angelic euphony – or perhaps "forest spirit" would be a more apt source than a Renaissance angel. But perhaps what grounds the experimentalist tendencies the most is Derek's employment of woodwind instruments and the straightforward composition of their parts, such as on the gorgeous "Forest Floor."

I'm finding a sort of song cycle among *Bahar*'s roots that points again to Piotr's love of and connection to the outdoors, almost as if he envisions the degradation of modern society back to a pastoral existence, maybe to the point where humanity has disappeared from the equation entirely (not unlike [the Marky Mark/M. Night thingy](#) where the trees killed everybody – which I honestly haven't seen). Even on something as playful as the tribal "Tone Offering," the track devolves at the end, disintegrating into rhythmic bursts and glitches, much like an audio representation of decay. Imagine an original tape recording of this song left in the middle of the forest in the heat of the summer, and then try to play it again – you'll get this. "Day Residue," perhaps my favorite track on the album, buzzes and shimmers like the afternoon, mischievously peering out from behind tree trunks until Piotr's processed voice deteriorates in front of us, and the track ends. I'm reminded of Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy, where an anomaly is terraforming a part of the earth back into a primitive, untouched state. (But don't talk about it – I haven't read book 3 yet...)

"Sunlight, Fruit Trees" is the eight-minute centerpiece of the album, at once peaceful and impish, and from there the true devolution begins. "Sprawl" leaves behind the electronic trappings for woodwind by its end, and "Exchanges" is all woodwind and voice, pastoral and meditative. The aforementioned "Forest Floor" sees new growth, and "There Shall Be a New Earth" envisions the next phase of the planet, and even ends on what sounds like an EKG flatline. *Bahar*, which is a Persian word for "spring," envisions an eternal, unimpeded budding cycle, and it unfolds as easily and organically as its title implies. Derek Piotr has taken a strong step forward as a composer, and he's also provided me with a new favorite album of his.

RIYL: Oval, Björk, Autechre