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Crate-Digging: Derek Piotr – Deliver Remixes

By

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(Bitsquare Recordings, 2012)

I'm pretty sure the Zumba folks, trolling for the latest and zaniest dance remixes for their unique brand of mass-marketed fitness, took one listen to Derek Piotr's *Deliver Remixes* EP and promptly fell asleep in their beanbag chairs, winding into gear the process of re-fattening the asses they so desperately fought to dance away. See, they saw the word "remix" and likely thought, "I'm gonna be the instructor with the coolest underground party mix!" What they didn't realize was that bass need not thump and four need not be on the floor as the result of manipulated source material. Let this be a lesson for all of you, the saggy American masses gorged on cheese and fried food. You must first open your mind, then your ass will follow. Or something like that.

So open your mind, open it wide! Let "Deliver" and its iterations take you places you'd never even be able to understand without removing your eyeballs from the television. How do I know this is a good idea? Well, Piotr's got a pretty fancy pedigree (Berklee College of Music, son!) as well as a stupendously lush yet minimal catalog – *Airing*, the 2012 album from which "Deliver" is pulled, is a masterpiece in electroacoustic craftsmanship, focusing at points on voice manipulation and its subtleties, and existing on the frontiers of cold and warm tonal complexities at almost all times. It's surprisingly stunning, and it's something I shouldn't have let stagnate outside of my purview for this long.

He's a young dude too, and from Poland, and had the distinction of being nominated (for *Airing*) by the Ars Electronica Jury for the Prix Ars prize 2012 for Digital Musics. That's a fancy way of saying that the center of the universe for experimental electronic musical interpretation (located in Austria, as if you didn't know) has taken notice of Piotr's work. He can go to sleep at night knowing that he's doing something *interesting* at least.

And "Deliver" is interesting. The track, buried fairly deeply on *Airing* in the ten hole, is a duet with Pakistani vocalist Carahanni, with improvised lyrics and a rhythm and mood built on organ, tape, bells, and field recordings of a pine forest. Piotr's hushed voice matches perfectly with Carahanni's more operatic performance, and the bells-as-rhythm base and exotic composition wouldn't be out of place in a conversation involving some of Bjork's more unconventional pieces.

So “Deliver” isn’t exactly the type of song that *screams* for the remix treatment, but in the skilled hands featured here, it becomes the source for widely divergent styles. Composer/producer Richard Chartier’s take as Pinkcourtesyphone allows the tune to wallow in its own ambience, gradually increasing the spare rhythm as it progresses. Backyard Gypsy stretches the track out over thirteen minutes, and there’s only one word to describe the result: *hypnotic*. It’s surprising how easily it is to get lost in the mix, letting the intricacies of the original expand and wash over you, revealing deeper levels with each passing minute. And Ivan Cheng covers (not remixes!) “Deliver,” a surprise in itself as I would have imagined the song quite uncoverable – but Cheng does it. His beautiful cut-and-paste interpretation, using his own voice, static, and bits of rhythm, is a standout.

But there are some odd and welcome surprises as well. The remix by Best Fwends is the closest to rock or dance music here, a close cousin to the *Disco* remix albums by HEALTH. And also probably the easiest to exercise to. (Although, no – leave Derek Piotr alone, you slobbering Neanderthals.) Paul Heslin’s mix hews closest to the whirs and clicks of IDM (without being IDM at all, IMO). (Ha, acronyms.) And C. Spencer Yeh is likely featured simply to have C. Spencer Yeh’s name attached to the project in some way – his short, minute-and-a-half drone/noise take on “Deliver” barely registers, although when you listen for it, it’s well concocted and executed. And yeah, it’s hard to argue against featuring his name on your record. I don’t fault Piotr for that one bit.



Derek Piotr is a promising young composer, destined to craft exciting and unique soundscapes and transcend genre trappings. I mean, he’s pretty much already done that with *Airing* – now with *Deliver Remixes*, he’s essentially proving himself to different crowds. Appreciate him now, so you can say you did *before* your kid has him as a professor for some advanced music composition course in college.

RIYL: Richard Chartier, Bjork, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Keith Fullerton Whitman

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