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Derek Piotr: Bahar (Bit Phalanx, 2015)

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Derek Piotr: Bahar

With each successive release Derek Piotr puts out, the press release insists that he's getting increasingly poppier and more accessible. There's vocals, lyrics, and beats, and certainly less abstraction than his older releases, but this is still far too alien and strange to be played on commercial radio. Even someone like Holly Herndon, who does incredibly complex and futuristic avant-garde electronic music based around vocal manipulation, seems to have a bit more in the way of hooks (as well as energetic, danceable rhythms) than Piotr does. Having said that, this is curious glitching, sputtering machine music with 21st century Thom Yorke-style vocals and plenty of woodwind instruments. There's some creative sample manipulation and skittering, delaying effects. 8-minute epic "Sunlight, Fruit Trees" does a pretty good job of exploring his vocal capabilities and arranging them onto rhythmic noise bursts. But there's such a strange disconnect between his vocals and the sounds behind them. They line up in time, but something still seems detached emotionally. Having said that, even when the music seems to be constructed solely of relentlessly glitching and sputtering, as on "There Shall Be a New Earth", it seems like there's purpose and structure to it, it's not strictly random noises. It's also so minimal that there's no way that any sounds on this album sound extraneous. Really puzzling music, to say the least.