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0023 // Derek Piotr



“*Raj* was sort of my attempt at making an all-out “noise” record, very personal and no holds barred.” Polish born, now New England residing sound-artist Derek Piotr says of his third album. “I had begun working on the record after I recorded voice and organ in a cathedral with a countertenor singer for a separate project. While in that space we also played with the huge resonance – stomping and clapping and chanting. The stomps and organ are the first thing you hear on the record, in “Spine”. It grew from there. My original image for the album was Kali razing all of Manhattan with the Empire State Building in her hand... I wanted the record to sound like steel being destroyed.” As Quietus co-founder John Doran pointed out in a recent review, the range of influences audible in Piotr’s work is quite astounding. As well as an obvious industrial influence, he also cites Eastern music, M.I.A.’s *Kala*, and Black Pus as impacting on the production of the album.

Amongst these assorted reference points, it is the twenty-two year old’s own voice which acts as the constant through the record. ”My earliest experiments in 2007 involved calling my friend up (he had a microphone, I didn’t) and singing or speaking/rapping over the phone to him.” he explains. “He had a mac, so it was built with GarageBand 2.0 or something. He would auto-tune the shit out of whatever I did and email it to me at like 128 MP3... I would then slice it up the way I liked in Audacity. This obviously produced some really strange distortions... Later on I began listening to the work of Maja Ratkje and AGF, and, later, Laurie Anderson and Meredith Monk. I was Monk’s intern in 2010. The most important thing that I took away from that period was the realisation that words

do not matter, or very little. 80% of my output I would say is wordless, although I use my voice on every track I release."

Another artist to inspire Piotr's avant-garde use of vocals was Antye Greie, who ended up mastering *Raj*, at her husband Sasu Ripatti (Vladislav Delay)'s 'Shark Reef' studio in Finland. "Antye and I have been friends for five years. I am guilty of being one of the first teenagers to grow up faced with the internet age – so instead of my awful demos collecting under a bed in a shoebox, the shoebox was the web. I started putting out music under an alias in 2007, and in 2008 I heard 'Head Slash Bauch' by AGF. I was already cutting my voice up on my own, but hearing Antye push that particular aesthetic really gave me hope and inspiration. I wrote her, and, after sending her dozens of terrible demos for a few years, she agreed to engineer my debut record, AGORA, which came out in 2011. I am very lucky that one of my favourite musicians is also someone I can count as a friend, and even have had a working relationship with. When I completed *Raj* I realised Antye was the one who would understand this kind of sound."

Piotr's mix for us draws from a diverse range of styles, going someway to explaining the influences behind the album and his work at large.

"The first thing you hear in the mix is the vocal stem to one of the tracks on my next record...that will come in 2014, that track in particular is called "Yogyakarta". I began working a lot with gamelan samples for this album, kind of a continuity of *Raj*, and I sing a few tracks with just vowel sounds, to figure out a melody. I liked the vocal take so much I decided to keep it – but then though it might be in poor taste, skinny white boy gibbering over "world music" seemed tacky. I was on the fence. I was searching for a title for the record and I knew it had to be Indonesian, so as I went through online translators I realised some of the sounds I had made correlated to Bahasa. I became curious and transcribed both the gibberish tracks and to my great surprise they were all legitimate, coherent Indonesian. Was I possessed by a Sufi?!!! I almost don't believe it myself, but it was a huge revelation to find this out."

Following that, there is a chant from Nuristani women in Afghanistan, which I have loved for a long time. The Nuristani practiced an ancient form of Hinduism before being converted to Islam, which is something I find relatable for this new record...again I mention Kali quite a bit and she is a goddess sometimes shared by both Hindu and Muslim people. She is greatly revered in Indonesia, which was one of my main inspirations for writing the album."

This is followed by some of Piotr's more recent listening tastes.

"Yoko Ono, M.I.A., Omar Souleyman and AGF all have records out this year, which is very exciting to me. Yoko Ono's track is actually a dance hit, which is hilarious to me because she's 80 now. She's still quite vibrant, I really respect her spirit and for not making workout music. Coming off of that, I chose some old favourite that I always seem to pull out around this time of year, Gregor Samsa, Stephen Scott, some Gregorian Chant, and the new Forest Swords which was one of the first producer-helmed records to come by in a long time that really genuinely fascinated me."

Raj having been released February this year, it's been a little while since Piotr's last release, however this isn't reflective of his work rate. "There is work with a countertenor that I began in late 2011, it should come in early 2014." he explains when asked about forthcoming material. "Also my fourth solo record, which I mentioned above. That record focuses heavily on the use of gamelan, and, this time around, lyrics, though used in a repetitive, mantra-like way. It was a challenge to myself to use words on most of it after doing the opposite...also in the works is a split EP with Paul Heslin, a low key noisy experiment between friends. that should be out very shortly."

Tracklist

1. Derek Piotr // Yogyakarta (Acapella) [Unreleased]
2. Afghanistan VA // Nuristani Women's Song [Unknown]
3. M.I.A. // Y.A.L.A. [Interscope]
4. Omar Souleyman // Nahy [Ribbon Music]
5. Ono // Hold Me [Mindtrain/Twisted]
6. AGF // The Generations 1 (Eila Kivikk'aho, 1961) [AGF Produktion]
7. Gregor Samsa // Abutting, Dismantling [The Kora Records]
8. Stephen Scott // Music Three for Bowed Strings [New Albion Records]
9. Forest Swords // An Hour [Tri Angle Records]
10. Choeur Gregorien De Paris // Deus, Deus Meus [Unknown]

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