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Derek Piotr – Avia (DPSR)

Released late last year, New England-based electronic producer Derek Piotr's preceding album 'Grunt' offered up one of his most noisy and jarring collections yet, with Piotr drawing primarily on his own vocal utterances as sound sources. Several months on, this follow-up 'Avia', also released on his own DPSR label, couldn't be any more different.

In this case, the twelve tracks gathered here serve as a threnody for Piotr's late grandmother who passed away just prior to 'Grunt's release, with his clandestine recordings of her conversations and phone messages over a period of ten years being accompanied by ambient electronics, saxophone, organs and violin. Throughout this album, the abiding mood is gentle and contemplative more than anything else.

Opening track 'Girlhood' sees a slow sweep of treated violins merging with gently pulsing electronic and gaseous bursts of background ambience before Piotr's grandmother's murmured conversational vocals briefly rise into focus against delicately glimmering IDM electronics and a blink and you'll almost miss it saxophone cameo right at the end.

'Roadwork' meanwhile sees the melodic elements retreating as snatches of a conversation between Piotr and his grandmother about nearby traffic works take centre stage, the 'pocket dialling' style digital crackles that punctuate the recording adding atmospheric framing that flows seamlessly into title track 'Avia's icy yet distinctly emotional blurring of layered auto-tuned vocal elements with melancholic strings – indeed, it's the closest thing to cyborg soul here.

Perhaps more than anything though, it's "Three Voicemails" that offers up this album's emotional centrepiece as tentative violin arrangements, field recorded birds and droning background ambience frame three recorded voicemail messages left on Piotr's phone by his grandmother, the repeated echo of her final "goodbye" taking on a particularly poignant significance. Despite the gravity of the subject matter, 'Avia' isn't a heavy-going listen, but instead one of beauty and wonder that provides a fitting tribute to its subject.