

<http://www.completelyfictional.com/reviews/agora-by-derek-piotr>



'AGORA' by Derek Piotr

'AGORA', as I've come to understand, is a multilingual pun; in English it means "gathering", in Portuguese and Galician it means "now", and in Welsh it means "opens". I hope you can see where this is going. If you can't, then it is leading into an album that is about gatherings in the strict "people" sense but also about gatherings/confluences of meaning, and how different perspectives bring different meanings to the conversation.

...Which is what I was told. Frankly, listening to the record, I don't get that. Or, I mean, I comprehend that there's a lot of intra-record soundswapping, and I comprehend that there are samples of people in, like, Turkey just doing their thing, but I don't *feel* that. I feel like this is some guy cataloguing what he thinks other people think, that this is his "concept" of a gathering. It's just too drudgy and metallic to really represent an actual gathering; for most people that would sound more like 'Graceland' than 'Songs of a Dead Dreamer', more like a band and less like a DJ.

Does a bit of New Criticism handwaving excuse his assertion that "Behavior State", the seventh track, based on a found poem of terms from the Facebook source code that Piotr found "disturbing", somehow is a part that contributes to a whole meant to be, on the whole, as "hopeful"? That the rampant individualism in the record's lyrics doesn't somehow distract from or undercut the sense of community and togetherness the record is ostensibly shooting for?

*I stand attentive
hands raised here
I reach
I reach
I overtake now my soul
(I am x3)
-"Overtaker"*

Earlier I said Derek Piotr calls it "sound art"; apparently this is because he doesn't feel right calling it "music". You can call that pretentious if you like; I won't because I don't get that he's trying to put up a pretense. For one, he hates James Blake because "he seems like the kind of guy who wears his headphones on the bus." For two, he actually seems to know his stuff. The point of pretension, as far as I can tell, is to flaunt your knowledge. Those who have any knowledge are aware of how little they actually have. Ergo the "pretentious intellectual" is a bit of a straw man. Though, I mean, I'm probably wrong. I usually am.

So I liked this album. It is well-made sound art, which is a term I likewise like. It makes good use of symbols and leitmotif, and it feels pretty cohesive, mostly because of the leitmotifs. Am I ragging on it by calling 'AGORA' Piotr's "catalogue of what he thinks others think"? Well, maybe. But I don't listen to (avant-garde?) (sound art?) for their precise social commentary. I don't listen to (or read, or watch) anything for the social commentary. I read 'The Long Goodbye' because Chandler's a prose master, not for the "edgy" condemnation of the rich. As John Updike said about 'The Jungle', "It's a book I very much would not like to have written." I don't have 'Burn This Book' handy so I'm paraphrasing. Point being that comments, if left unchecked, crowd out the story.

I'm getting into literary theory. I'll draw back. This is workmanlike-edging-towards-artisanal in its technical composition. It's a bit off-putting in places - the third track, "Flood Circuit", is impenetrable white noise - but...

God damn it, I keep wanting to defend this album. Give me a second to rationalize away the album's seeming incoherence.

...Alright, okay, a thought just occurred to me, like, what if this has been not merely a catalogue of concept-gatherings but a catalogue of gatherings in an individual's search for a community? He travels around the world, place to place, but his outlook is so radically different to everyone else's that it can feel like there's an impenetrable divide between him and them (Flood Circuit?), but he still finds solace in the real world, in church bells and hammers (two major leitmotifs) and what-have-you. But he can't find any real communion: he feels isolated, watching the world tear itself apart (From Whiteness); the language the people sing over their work in, while beautiful and strangely fitting, is incomprehensible and thus feels meaningless (Focus). His only other recourse, the seemingly-natural fit of an online and digitized world, quite frankly disgusts him (Behavior State). This is a man who has total power over himself (Overtaker) and his environment (see poetic origins to Scrape), yet is unable to make a friend.

to more than my body should hold
a tenseness
overtakes the body
-"Overtaker"

So it could be that. Or, y'know, I could just be wrong about everything. Either/or.