

Derek Piotr – Raj (2013)

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Contrary to **Derek Piotr**'s AGORA (2011), a 'meeting place' rife with different ethnic sound signatures, *Raj*, 'Kingdom' or 'Paradise', sounds like an endpoint; not a gathering of styles, but their culmination into something monolithic and all-encompassing. And surprisingly catchy.

Listed as instruments are organ, 'black metal noise' and, as always, voice. In fact, quite a few times Derek's voice steals the show before you're actually aware of it. To such an extent has he integrated his use of voice with the other instrumentation, there's now barely a distinction left (*Deforester*, note the throat singing). Two minutes into *Defilada*, I suspect he's even taken over the rhythm section.

Just like the previous albums did, Raj can get humorous at times. The self-aware style of voice-sampling allows for situations where *Karakum*'s vague lines of "dying, dyiing..." bleed into a deadpan "dun, dun, dun" on the next track. *Defilada* (*Clubhook*) continues with some panting parts that sound like dance pastiche.

Briefly returning are the occasional weird semi-narratives, like 'From Whiteness' on AGORA, and the strangely beautiful 'Ribs form Branches' (Elsewhere, 2010). But Raj, instead of hinting at a coherent story, features these as extensions of the everpresent short vocal glitches. *Open* is thus held together with barely intelligible lines like "I saw the first flower open".

Raj's sound is heavy and constantly loaded with momentum. The rhythm sections of *Spine*, *Amendola* and *Grave* are well in the foreground. Full and abrasive, yet finely chiseled, like rows of tall pillars in ancient middle-eastern trade hubs. Here, foreign offerings and outlandish sounds are exposed like curious ornaments, thin melodies waving overhead, not quite detracting from the monuments' own grandeur.

Yet, like the album's onesheet cautiously notes, the word 'Raj' isn't just a Kingdom or Paradise. It's just as well a 'rage' or 'swarm', depending whether you speak Creole or Hungarian. Underneath the steadfast measures of beats and voice, noisy whirring constantly swells and breaks. The undertones are restless, like forced cheers during military parades. As if to make the point that no large structures can last, *Sand Defacing All Surfaces* makes a grandstand as the album's final abrasive movement. Noise bursts through, swirls and pushes against all rhythm and structure, then settles down to make room for *Flow Through Light*. Field recordings of eastern choruses and auto-tuned lyrics reprise the album's scope, toned-down and deformed.

Highlights: *Spine*, *Defilada* (*Clubhook*), *Hutan*, *Sand Defacing all Surfaces*

Raj will be released Februari 26th. For preorders, visit the [artist's site](#) or [bandcamp page](#).