

Crate-Digging: Derek Piotr – Tempatempat

By Ryan "Critical" Masteller March 24, 2014 (**Monotype**, 2014)

It's a daunting task, following up a masterpiece. I pretty much called Derek Piotr's [2013 album *Raj*](#) that, and I stand by it – it was one of my two favorite albums of 2013, and I admitted as much on our year-end podcast. (Wanna know the other album? [Here's the podcast link](#). Now set aside an hour and a half and you're good to go.) It felt foreign, yet supremely familiar, a dichotomy Piotr tightrope-walked effortlessly. It was experimental and accessible at the same time – someone once referred to Björk's output as the type of experimental music that anybody with a passing interest in music would feel comfortable with in their collection. *Raj* gave off that same vibe – in this sense, it's the new *Homogenic*. So what does that make *Tempatempat*, Piotr's second album in as many years? I may have thrown him off with my revelation that *Raj* was so approachable – *Tempatempat* isn't as much, and it's more of a grower than immediately gratifiable. Perhaps Derek was skewed by my reception to *Raj*, or perhaps I was skewed by *Derek's* perception of my reception to *Raj*. When he sent it to me, he said it was poppier than the last album – I disagree. But don't get me wrong – that's not a bad thing. It just means the headspace required for a successful listen of *Tempatempat* is different than that required for *Raj*. Got it?

I'm confused, maybe a little, myself. But that doesn't help you any, so let's start maybe where we should, and acknowledge that Piotr is a master electroacoustic musician who focuses on recording and manipulating his own voice as a base for his compositions. It's augmented with other elements – percussion, synthesizer, found sound, etc. – but his voicebox is his true emphasis. *Raj* had all kinds of extraneous clanging, but *Tempatempat* doesn't – it's content to immerse itself in its own sound, and it's more meditative and inward-looking as a result. Its title is even a clue as to how sound can change perception over time – according to the album's web page, "Tempatempat is an Indonesian word, chosen for its repetition and meaning; the meaning changes depending on how the word is broken: *Tempa Tempat* means 'forging place'; *Tempat Empat* means 'fourth place'" Although that might not immediately trigger a response in you, let it roll around your mind as you listen to the album, and see where it takes you.

In fact, [the album's web page](#) has incredible blurbs for each track, as Piotr explains some of the background of each – it's required reading, and I'll link to it here so that this review doesn't become an entire rehash of what he's already said.

OK, maybe I'll do one, because album opener "Bhadrakali" completely and perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the album. Piotr chants supposedly nonsense Indonesian over a spare beat with little accoutrement, but it turns out that his lyrics end up having deep meaning. He asks, "Was I possessed by a Sufi?" Not hard to believe. It's as transcendental as it gets, the mood of the song barely changing as it passes through its six minutes. But there is deep mystery in the incantations, and great care in the composition. I have a feeling it could go on for much longer (indeed, many of the tracks here possess that quality), but there is so much more to explore!

Speaking of mystery and magic, that's what *Tempatempat* exudes in spades. Song titles in foreign tongues roll around the palate and escape reverently and hypnotically when spoken aloud, such as "Mahakali," "Mandala," and "Yogyakarta." They make for superb chant bases as well. Even English-language tunes like "Thicket of Light-Needles" evoke unusual locales and events, and in this particular case, the accompanying instrumentation is composed to sound pretty much like its titular otherworldly copse.

Piotr excels at creating amazing voice-only compositions as well (again, his forte), and it's incredibly hard to parse the sound effects at times – how on earth are those made by human voices? "Rift," especially, is a tough call, as sounds ping around the easily perceptible singing. "Encloses" is a little easier to figure out, but it's also easier to be blown away by Piotr's performance. "Encloses" also gets the remix treatment (by Steve Roden) to close the album, and even though more synths appear alongside the voice, it retains the spirit of the original.

Tempatempat runs the gamut from the found-sound drone of "Conifers" to the clanging and Björk-like rhythmic adventures of "Mahakali" and "Mandala," and of course showcases Derek Piotr's remarkable compositional skill with his own voice. His is a bold and exciting style that pushes the limits of electroacoustic (and indeed electronic) experimentation, veering into both deep spiritual and meditative passages as well as those with more widespread appeal. *Tempatempat* is absolutely another strong record by the young musician, and the future is wide open for him.

RIYL: *Oval*, *Björk*, *Autechre*