



Holiday At The Sea

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Derek Piotr :: Making and Then Unmaking

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Nearly every human story centers around conflict and character development. In many of these stories, we find many reoccurring characters. The wise but enigmatic bearded wizard. The strong but faithful hero; sure of who they are and their calling but not always sure of their circumstances.

Or, maybe the trickster, who is a cunning, sly usurper of the status quo, who can often shapeshift (including gender). leaving you to wonder who or what you just encountered; or didn't.

The trickster might know who they are, but most people never will. Leaving everyone to wonder of even the trickster knows who they are. We can only ever know the trickster as they reveal themselves to us; in ever-changing form; in all the ups and downs; the tricks and turns; the slides and tumbles. Derek Piotr's new album asks us to ask such questions.

Creating what he calls an "Appalachian cowboy record," Piotr weaves trickster imagery and energy through a powerfully haunting and playful set of songs exploring the question of who we are versus who others think we are. In keeping with the up-ending energy of the trickster, *Making and Then Unmaking* is a sharp turn for the Piotr. The presskit calls the album his "most musically ambitious and emotionally raw project to date." Most notably, this is Piotr's first work to feature the guitar. Piotr has made his name so far in modern classical and DJ settings. He says that he: "had a massive taboo against guitar for my whole career... I felt it was extremely common, pedestrian, coffee-shop stuff, represented the most middling and mundane music on the planet."

But thankfully, he changed his mind.

Throughout the album, guitar, dulcimer, pedal steel guitar, clavichord and banjo work to support these explorations of identity and loss and Piotr's unique voice. That voice and its rawness is much of what makes these songs feel like we're privy to some sort of intimate self-exploration rather than just being academic explorations of a musical genre. Piotr's presskit says:

"The composer's voice is foregrounded throughout, operating in a different register to that of the more recognisable singing voice used on previous albums."

On the opening track, "From Your Window," Piotr sings "I consume the wind who consumes me" over a hypnotic repeated rhythm and we can't help but wonder if the life of the trickster; a life of continually changing and keeping up while keeping others at bay will ultimately consume those of us who chase this life.

Diving in to folk, rural, Appalachian, and Irish music. Piotr finds a musical world in which he can explore not only the trickster imagery, but himself. Asked about the album title, he suggests:

"Making and Then Unmaking" refers to building and destroying relationships ... ideas ... past selves ..."

We find this theme of changing, reconciling, growing and the accompanying confusion highlighted in "Invisible Map," where Piotr sings:

"Things I hold on to make me want to change, but the more I change, the more I find myself holding on."

It's this internal struggle of identity that weaves the album together, and here, with slowly stirring strings over plucked rhythms Piotr sings out life's eternal question: Who Am I? The solo a capella "Bolakins," ([Found at the Wikipedias as "Lamkin"](#)) offers up terrifying answer to that question in the tale of a wronged mason who vows to get even. With only his voice, Piotr lays bear this tale of revenge and sorrow.

While "Bolakins" is certainly a standout track, I wonder if "The Stake/De'il in the Kitchen" most encapsulates the album's themes. A song with plucked banjo and bagpipes about feeling like cyborg trying to find love seems to get right to the heart of it. What is programmed? What is real? Who can be trusted and why? The organic wistfulness of the banjo plays against Piotr's mechanical thought: "I am a cyborg." The bagpipes highlight the confusion; are we programmed? Does it matter? What is free will? Is love free will or something that takes us over? The metallic cyborg tinge plays against the organic instruments and feels like a metaphor for many of the album's themes.

"Snow in Paradise" continues these themes:

"It's a wall of snow in paradise / All of us changing for that better life / Did you manifest what means most to you? / Because you can't resist?"

Later in the song, a saxophone weaves in and out of the melody asking us to reflect on these questions. I have time for music like that, and I hope you do too. These nine songs explore the notions of identity, change, love, and free will; all while Piotr challenges himself to take on a new musical identity. I can't think of anything better than an artist who models what they explore. Form and function. Cyborgs looking for love, all somehow without losing hope.

Highly recommended.

[Pre-order the album at Bandcamp](#) (out 05/14/21). Watch the Electronic Press Kit [here](#).