

Hypnagogue

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The Sound of Thunder

Things are going to get a little heady when you delve into *The Sound of Thunder*, the new collaboration from Onewayness and dRachEmUsiK. How can they not, when the four long drone-based pieces here draw inspiration from T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" and are crafted to reflect four virtues of the Hindu texts, the Upanishads—Charity, Mercy, Desire, and Peace. The artists note that "the movements are intended to represent the conflict and resolution between these virtues and the 'undesirable' qualities that they are meant to keep in check." What flows from this starting point is a hypnotic blend of warbling electronics, textured drones, spoken word (from "Wasteland"), and "lowercase" minimalism—the use of small, amplified sound samples blended with spaces of quiet.

Three of the four pieces begin on the challenging side of things. Dark and raspy hums of grinding electronics, dissonance, uncomfortable, croaking vocal samples—each track brings its own. And in time, each smooths out to become something new and lighter, having found that point of resolution. This is an hour-long voyage that wastes no time getting into your head.

"In Charity" opens with wavering tremolo chords that quickly render into a hypnotic wave. There's lowercase aspect here in the background, in the form of manipulated percussion sounds—they go off like tiny explosions. It's fairly grim and challenging at the outset, but it's so dynamic and has such presence that it holds the attention. But make no mistake, you get through the first few minutes. This track's resolution comes with a chant-like line of sound for a slightly sacred edge as it draws to a close. The transition is excellent, and the way in which it releases the tension coming out of the darker sections is something you actively feel. This track also drops in the first "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. Shantih. Shantih. Shantih." from "Wasteland," which will recur through the disc.

"In Mercy," which has the aforementioned dissonance and the creepy vocal sample looping through its strangled utterances over and over, holds on tightly to its disturbing aspects as a glitchy beat begins to work itself into the mix. The transition is hard-fought in this track, but eventually gives way to softer pads, a melodic line, and a light rhythm.

"In Desire" takes the listener straight into the lowercase end of things. Here an electric piano drops single notes over snippets of processed voice, electronic crackles, and random noise. I like the solid recognizability of the piano against the more fleeting, abstract elements. Long pauses and hanging notes drive home an emotional core. It's like being half-awake and not sure which side you'd rather be on. The phrase "strange beauty" would be fully applicable here. The transition here is perhaps my favorite, arriving on a percolating sequencer line loading in a little touch of lightness and energy. Also great that the electric piano doesn't change its approach. It just keeps flicking out those single notes.

The final track is the longest, and the one that subverts the standard equation. "In Peace" begins with big ambient pads, surprisingly soothing, and includes a fairly lengthy spoken passage from the "What the Thunder Said" section of the poem. (I must admit that listening to this disc and doing a bit of research brought me back to read "The Wasteland"—something I've undertaken in the past but not gotten through.) This track simply courses quietly along, taking the listener deeper into its calm motion. In places, bassy rumbles stir the flow. In the final minutes, I feel I must warn you, the narrating voice again returns to chant, "Datta...Shantih, Shantih, Shantih," the arrival of which, lost as I was in the depths of this excellent piece, pretty much scared the shanti out of me.

I've said a lot about this disc, more than I usually do, and that's because there's so much going on. These are depths to be plumbed in close listens. There's a lot happening and a ton of feeling lacing through the mix. Onewayness and dRachEmUsiK (aka Adam Holquist and Charles Shriner) expertly manage this tenuous juggling act well, effecting the balance between easy and difficult listening. *The Sound of Thunder* is a disc you need to go into with an open mind. Do so, and it will likely win you over quickly.