

SPLINTER SERIES PRESS RELEASE - FAT-SP02

JANEK SCHAEFER: 'Above Buildings' CD (Splinter Series. FAT-SP02)

Release date: 20th November, 2000.

TRACK LISTING:

1. Forglen
2. Spindle Spider
3. Contraption
4. Thousand Camera Corona
5. Tone-arm Two
6. Indent Frame
7. Albarad
8. Light Over Las Vegas

Having made his debut outing on FatCat at the end of 1998 (a Split Series 12" alongside Pan American), producer / turntablist Janek Schaefer has since gone on to release material on Diskono, K-RAA-K3 and Stock, Hausen & Walkman's Hot Air label. Having established a strong live reputation, other projects for Schaefer include collaborations with Robert Hampson (a CD under the monicker 'Comae' will appear soon on Mego-offshoot Rhiz), turntablists Phillip Jeck, Martin Tétreault, and Viennese laptop wizard Christian Fennesz in 2001. Whilst a full-length live CD was released on the Belgian K-RAA-K label, this release marks Schaefer's first studio release, and possibly his strongest work to date. Full of shimmering textures and sublime soundscaping, 'Above Buildings' is essentially an album produced through studio manipulations of field recordings and vinyl manipulations built up through live processing. The sound palette was sourced in England, France, Canada and the USA, and marks a move away from Janek's previous emphasis on his Tri-phonic Turntable.

'Forglen': composed from improvisations on an old family organ that Janek came across while visiting his father's relatives in Kitchiner, Canada. These recordings are then re-performed in the studio to produce a track which blisters with tonal sheets and break-ups.

'Spindle Spider': filters through from the debris that track one leave's in its wake. Creating a calm space in between, it uses layers of cyclical textures born from the slow revolution of stuck grooves and electronic patinas.

'Contraption': is a short excursion into the realms of a brittle metallic space which resonates with inanimate activity and the presence of unseen actions.

'Thousand Camera Corona': Underlying this unfolding work is a real-time recording of the 1999 solar eclipse as unseen from the coast in France. A composition that slowly and inevitably grows in tension, drifting through a terrain of slowly pulsating frequencies and feedback to then gently disappear back into a bleached void.

'Tone-arm Two': Emerging from the corridors of Niagara Falls this track transforms into an aural investigation of the faulty connections and scrapings culled from the second tone-arm on Janek's schizophrenic Tri-phonic Turntable. Clusters of cracked connections dispersed around a lilting stuck groove melody which slips out of focus.

'Indent Frame': picks up the pace and tension through a rhythmical and elongated dissection of a prepared baby grand piano, contact miked during and after being moved, and before being re-tuned.

'Albarad': Rekindling the trails of sounds left behind earlier in the album, Albarad takes us into an inner world of overlapping systems both fluid and mechanical. A claustrophobic chasm set before the gaping electric onslaught that follows.

'Light Over Las Vegas': Springing from the shadows, the essential elements of Las Vegas are brought to bear upon each other. Fizzing streetlights emerge and multiply drifting across a soundscape of the relentless slot machines below. Building into a climactic force, these textures surge ahead, eventually thinning down to slowly reveal an unwinding series of faltering vinyl notes. The album then concludes with a period of silence – allowing the re-emergence of your own immediate environment before the CD comes to rest....

Selected Press Reviews: 'Above Buildings'

The Guardian, 'On the edge' CD of the week 22nd December 00

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Scaruffi Italian website

Janek Schaefer is a rising star of new European music electronic circuit, to the level of Marcus Popp, Fennesz and Pita..... Schaefer is in the first place a "not musician", he is therefore essentially a manipulator of sounds and an expert in the techniques of digital recording.... (7/10)

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Friend of the devil website UK

Janek Schaefer's ability to process source material is second to none. Reading about him, and listening to his electronic music you get the feeling that much of his work is derived from accident: stumbling across odd instruments, taking field recordings on the spur of the moment, improvising a recording made with damaged equipment, even a sound recording of the 1999 Eclipse (!). It suggests that there can never be a definable Janek Schaefer piece created from within, because the external options presented to him are infinite. Whatever is on this album would probably not be heard if circumstances differed ever so slightly. So 'Above Buildings' is a fine snap shot in an instant of time. That's the essence of Janek Schaefer. The opener, 'Foreign' is improvisation derived from an old family organ. The final result- a drone piece- sets up a certain mood for the rest of the album, that is gentle washes of sound, speckled by noise and full bodied drone brushstrokes. The sombreness does lift you above building as subsequent levitation becomes heady space flight. It's a calming album, that throws up many textures on many layers so your response will be as infinite as Janek's creative processes, but just don't think that this is the only kind of thing he does. Surprise us again, mate. 8/10

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Other Music Reviews NYC [Robin Edgerton]

Schaefer's last record used his imaginatively conceived and constructed mutant, three-arm turntable. But here he eschews the construction glee for a piece of fascinating textural density. Manipulating field recordings (okay, and some vinyl), this work, in eight parts spread over an hour, is like the sound_in_between all the sounds we consciously hear, only amplified and messed with. Dominating the proceedings are sequences of ephemeral, almost three-dimensional rustic, spastic buzzings – the flaws in every fluorescent tube you've ever heard cracking and humming. He works on a massive scale, filling even the tiniest of speakers with drones and malfunctions, rushing water, raging electrical arcs. Once in a while a conscious sound penetrates the torrents, a close-miked piano wire making like a church bell, or overtones of slot machines. *Ambitious, revealing, and terribly, abstractly impressive.*

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Forced Exposure USA

Janek Schaefer returns with his first studio release. Full of shimmering textures and sublime soundscaping, Above Buildings is essentially an album produced through studio manipulations of field recordings and vinyl manipulations built up through live processing. The sound palette was sourced in England, France, Canada, and the US, and marks a move away from Janek's previous emphasis on his Tri-Phonic turntable.

The songs are based on a family's rec-room organ, a faulty tone-arm connection, a Las Vegas night, (including the sizzle of neon and the arcade effects of slot machines), the contact-miked deliverance of an un-tuned baby grand, a corridor of Niagara Falls, and (incredibly) a real-time recording of the solar eclipse of 1999; in turns expanding on the familiarity of everyday life and bringing the enormous, infinite universe down to whisper a secret in your ear. A cinematic-like venture that evolves and climaxes, then concludes with a moment of silence. *Above Buildings is a remarkable experience for the adventurous listener.*

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Uzine webzine Holland

Delightful! And how beautifully does the final track blend back in with the sounds in your house indeed! Musically, this most certainly is Mr. Schaefer's most mature release yet, although his triple-armed-turntable antics were of course very heart-warming as well (cf. elsewhere on our Ultra site). This eight-tracker, on the other hand, certainly sounds more freezing than warming, but then again aluminium and the atlantic were more likely bound to meet on record than on the Aran islands, or the Acores... Lest I spoil your fun, however, quickly think "Mzui (UK)" era Dome, and a lot of it; add some "Shivering Man" era Bruce Gilbert ; stir with frozen Eno ; have it mixed by a Pierre Henry dreaming of doing the Eraserhead soundtrack ; and top it off with a dash of Kubrick's 2001 time travelling through a field replete with crickets that were handicapped by the Gumbo boys. Or just stick to your first image: Janek in the sky with diamonds, reinventing his kitchen. (And if you still need convincing: have the Fat Cat people e-mail you the press release text: it's beautifully written. Or get to know Bruce Gilbert urgently.) (pv)

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The Wire Nov 2000 extract

Schaefer's new album for Fat Cat, is an altogether more leisurely exploration of his aural Op Art. Throughout, his music brings hidden colours flowering forth out of apparently monochrome waves. These spectral, shivering pieces layer phased and irregular frequencies, punctuated from time to time by immanent clunks and clicks, whose origins remain obscure even as their jagged edges and crumbling boundaries bring to mind the awkwardness of tape dropouts and chipped styluses. Schaefer combines his sources in shifting, guided nebulae, whose organic progress often manages to transcend the greyscale austerity of the original material. In his hands, the sudden entrance of high pitched tape chatter ["Spindle Spider"] takes on the evanescent magic of birdsong. Which is not to say that "Above Buildings" is a pastoral experience exactly. Schaefer's boffinish concern with the effects that extremes of sustain, decay, and distortion have on soundwaves, and the harmonics they throw off produces a bracing aridity.