

Animal Psi



John Davis – ‘Open Ground’ [Review]

28 Dec 10 - Cassette, Review

Here are three exercises in drone from the latest batch of 15 cassettes from Peasant Magik. Straddling the conspicuously-absent PM100, the batch downplays the momentousness of the event (congratulations Sal!) while equally depriving a diverse lot of phenomenal releases of isolation for due praise. Let's try to make a dent by taking a closer look:

'Open Ground' is an unusual presentation of the familiar, and therefore hard-to-subvert concept. The latest by **John Davis** (SF regular around Root Strata, but also Digitalis and Students of Decay labels) is a C48 done in the man's virtuous drone style. However, with nine tracks in all, he breaks from the formal pattern of sidelong, double-digit expanse in favor of getting to the/a point in a diversity of compositions which don't lose sight of the literal experience of 'drone'. How's he do it? Brilliant and deceptive, Davis manipulates each track along the X-axis (time) to inset a compressed micro-pattern (that is, now a regular pattern) in an otherwise stable tonic. The effect blurs a new-found border with the Noise composition, and offers a new lens to interpret the vivid detail shared with the likes of Alex Cobb and many alumni of his SoD roster. Largely guitar-derived and effects-tweaked, these metallic figures receive a regular bolster from synthesizer which both aids in shaving down the rougher edges to normalize the drone, but also lends a depth which enables the sleight-of-hand outlined above. A prime example is "Vorpal", a warm swirl of synthesized harmonics over which the metal coil of the guitar string warms and cools with objectively unmellow pangs. Highlight "Baker's Note" uses a similar palette, though in drastically different formation, stretching the resonant vibrations out over keynotes, over a babbling stream of electronic evoking the organics of early Growing. Despite the regular heterodoxy of the album – from the room noise on "Vorpal" to the organ song of "Heartland" - finale "Jean Seberg" feels more a bonus, like a cover of some Roy Montgomery western done in muted bent-notes on a heatsick background buzz, the notes dropping as if into liquid, and Davis' masterstroke confirmed. Recommended.



DAVIS, JOHN *Open Ground* (Peasant Magik) cassette

Dec 10 - Cassette, Review – Weekly picks

Northern Californian media artist John Davis is a bit of a renaissance man. Film, photography, and sound design all come together through looping systems that pile old means of construction on top of new ones, with all sorts of erasures and additive marks along the way. The results throughout all of his media can be strikingly beautiful, if idiosyncratic in the way the old becomes new and vice versa. Such has been evident on his musical output for Root Strata, Students Of Decay, and Digitalis; and it's certainly true for his cassette on Peasant Magik. The tape begins with a drone-field of pastoral impressionism that fits very nicely within the overarching aesthetic of Root Strata as something of a reclamation of rural psychedelia (a phrase coined by Flying Saucer Attack to describe their first album), yet Davis intervenes through small phrases of electronic plinks and strange field recordings buried behind the Chalk-ish guitar drones. He then moves onto a piece driven by ring modulated tone and motorized clatter that harkens to early electronic music experiments merged with the scrabblings Keith Rowe would sometimes offer by disrupting guitar pick-ups with other magnetics and motors. Elsewhere, Davis fuses a no-fi layering of mashed textures on par with any of the Richard Youngs albums of grit and shimmer crossed with the Jasper TX / Machinefabriek means of song deconstruction. Needless to say, there's a lot going on in each of the tracks that Davis provides, but it's not an overload that he's seeking rather a curiosity to explore as many possibilities while maintaining a hushed restraint. Limited to 100 copies.