



The Deontic Miracle – *Selections from 100 Models of Hegikan Roku*

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By Sean Hannah



The fact that we can even listen to *Selections from 100 Models of Hegikan Roku* would seem like a betrayal of Catherine Christer Hennix’s artistic vision. The Swedish-born majordomo fronting the Deontic Miracle demands of her music both speakers and a venue that can accommodate radical fluctuations in frequency and intensity. The space informs the quality of the music as much as the performer, she maintains. Museums, as well as her own home, are ideal locales for her performances, despite whatever physical limitations lie therein. In the case of *100 Models*, these performances were recorded during an exhibition in 1976 in Stockholm’s Moderna Museet, an art museum that hosted performances of works by Hennix’s contemporaries Terry Riley and La Monte Young during the same exhibition. So, for me, the idea of listening to an album, often through headphones, recorded four decades ago on another continent feels like something of a compromise of the art.

But when listening to *Selections*, nothing about the experience feels like a defeat. The two recordings on *Models*, “Music of Auspicious Clouds” and “Waves of the Blue Sea,” serve as an execution of the limitless possibilities of just intonation, a method of tuning musical instruments that, according to Hennix, best preserves the purity of chordal tone. As a mathematician in addition to a musician and philosopher, her distaste for the popular Western tuning system of equal temperament is born of a mathematical devotion to maintaining the sanctity of tonality. We hear this preciousness for intonation in the way each note of these performances is stridently drawn out and extended to the point where useful labels like “ambient” or “white noise” no longer apply to the music. What we experience is simply *sound*.

Outside of their theoretical elements, however, the two pieces that comprise *Selections* succeed and gratify by virtue of the sheer gravity of the music. Employing a Renaissance oboe, an amplified sarangi, and a sine wave generator, the Deontic Miracle stretch each tone out into eternity. Notes grind alongside one another like tectonic plates, occasionally achieving an awestruck harmony, but more often than not creating a discordant screech that moves along at a glacial pace. The moments when the Miracle’s instruments reach consonance (which are few and far between) are interesting, sure, but the real pleasure is in the passages of noisy dissonance in between.

Opening the two movements is a series of harried oboe flourishes that bray and whirl with abandon. The roots of these dervishes clearly lie with the early adopters of drone music (the aforementioned Young, as well as John Cale’s work with the Theatre of Eternal Music), but the other reference point they conjure is that of John Coltrane. Reverberations of the saxophonist’s brushes with Eastern music surface in “Auspicious Clouds’s” first six minutes, as the two woodwinds flit around each other haphazardly before dovetailing into the sometimes harmonious drones that occupy the remainder of the two selections.

To be sure, these songs are heavy fare. *Selections from 100 Models of Hegikan Roku* demands of its audience a keen ear and a near-monk-like patience. It makes the collection of keyboard works Hennix released last year on Empty Editions/Blank Forms sound almost quaint by comparison. But for all its formidability, its staunch insistence on theory, there's a beauty to the Deontic Miracle. A grating, confounding beauty.

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