



The Free Jazz Collective

Reviews of Free Jazz and Improvised Music

Exotic Sin - Customer's Copy (Blank Forms Editions, 2020) ****½



By Cam Scott
October 16, 2020

Combining minimal electronics and plaintive acoustic identities, Exotic Sin is a two-person parade of sonic demonstration, bringing a sense of play and ceremony to their medley of instrumental means. The first thirty-seconds of *Customer's Copy* are science-fictional, as piercing tones and whirring electronics evoke the bridge of some ambient starship. But after thirty-seconds of ear-cleaning frequencies, this electronic invocation fades into a Feldman-esque tableau of pianistic silences. Synthetic chimes alternate arpeggiated chords with thoughtful hesitancy, and these voices blend in an uncanny electronic decay.

Naima Karlsson's delicate chords assume greater strength and surety beneath the warm reed-work of Kenichi Iwasa, whose sobbing, plastic voice spans generations of musical innovation. Karlsson, notably, is the daughter of rapper Neneh Cherry and post-punk mainstay Bruce Smith, and the granddaughter of trumpeter Don Cherry, and artist Moki Cherry. This descendancy accounts for the show-and-tell consistency of the pieces gathered here, which encapsulate a variety of fascinating sounds, including many of Don Cherry's homemade instruments. The twenty-two minute opener, 'Dot 2 Dot,' evolves from austere minimalism to a relative cacophony: at the climax, a barrage of electronic percussion strains against a spacious chordal accompaniment, before piano and horn make a pentatonic theme in unison, hearkening directly to the melodic clarity of Cherry's own music.

The instrumental variation of 'Charlie Vincent' unfurls from a simple, descending figure for organ and woodwind. The funereal dirge repeats for almost fifteen minutes, as timbral variation develops the theme, based on a single minor chord. Electronic textures predominate, and the piece reaches a brooding plateau before an acoustic restatement of the theme, solemnly harmonized and with greater melodic flexibility. After the contemplative abstraction of 'Dot 2 Dot,' 'Charlie Vincent' feels notably cinematic in its pursuit of an unbroken melodic subject; and its namesake references Ridley Scott's 1989 film 'Black Rain,' scored by Hans Zimmer, whose electronic palette surely informs this arrangement. 'Canis Minor' is a miniature coda by comparison, a suspenseful arrangement of digital chimes and discomfiting tones, changing the pressure in the room before fading out on a triadic figure for kalimba—a hopeful ascent that inverts the doom-laden motif of the piece preceding.

From slapstick contrasts to contemplative moments of musical accord, *Customer's Copy* is a gorgeous document of instrumental chemistry and uninhibited experimentation, with enough strangeness and variety to ensure repeat listens. More movingly, this duo demonstrates the continuation of Don Cherry's innovation in the present, as well as the happy fact that every instrument, no matter how closely identified with a particular voice or figure, assumes a different meaning and expression in the hands of a given player.

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