

Poppy Ackroyd – Resolve (2018)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Paper* 4:35 2 *Light* 5:21 3 *The Calm Before* 6:09 4 *Resolve* 4:16 5 *Quail* 4:55 6 *The Dream* 5:23 7 *Time* 6:10 8 *Luna* 4:41 9 *Stems* 1:34 10 *Trains* 4:36 Cello – Jo Quail Flute, Clarinet – Mike Lesirge Grand Piano, Violin, Harmonium, Spinet – Poppy Ackroyd

When composer and multi-instrumentalist Poppy Ackroyd signed to Björk's One Little Indian in 2017, she offered a stopgap release called *Sketches* on which she re-recorded previously issued works as solo piano miniatures. Listening to *Resolve*, her first full-length for the label, it's obvious she's opened a new door. *Resolve* finds the idiosyncratic composer utilizing her long-developed method of delivering simple, almost minimalist melodies, now refracted through sounds by her accompanists and her own truly imaginative digital editing style. The latter may unsettle those who've placed Ackroyd's previous work in the stylized ghetto of "classical crossover" music. While she doesn't actively rebel against that catch-all, she does push its boundaries toward an elusive musical terrain whose common signifiers are mystery and surprise. Each piece here is open-ended and could either be exponentially expanded or pared down to a skeletal essence. Which is not to say they aren't perfect just as they are.

Her editing skills and recontextualization of her playing -- whether on pianos (electric and acoustic), and/or violin and harmonium -- are not juxtapositions so much as recombinant methodologies. On opener "Paper," the piano's middle and high registers create a repetitive melody as staggered percussion from, one assumes, the instrument's pedals and wooden frame, is woven though lithe flute and layered cellos stretching a mutant 4/4 time signature to its limits. "Light" initially sounds like an homage to Michael Nyman's post-minimalist theme from *The Piano*, as swirling violins and cellos color the spaces behind an economical yet elegant piano line (played inside the instrument as well as on its keys) as percussive loops and beats -- all looped from wooden sources -- create movement and drama. While the title track employs a short repetitive piano line, hand percussion, flute, clarinet, and bass clarinet offer an impressionistic Debussy-ian layer, as a cello, both bowed and plucked, pulses toward a

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dynamic trio interaction that finds a crescendo's cliff edge but backs away. Two pieces, "The Dream" and "Stems," are performed solo on pianos and violins, but sound no less full -- especially because of their sometimes-jarring combinations of keys, droning violin, and plucked piano strings, all of which create their own elastic rhythmic statements that underscore a Hang (a hollow percussion instrument derived from the idiophone that looks like a UFO). Ackroyd overdubs "Time" in staggered cadences, as well as with shard-like atmospheric melodies she elucidates on the piano. The result is a theme-like work one cannot "unhear," even as it builds to a tense breaking point, then unravels itself by whispering to a close. Resolve is easily Ackroyd's most confident and mature statement. She remains devoted to lyric melody, but her re-combinations of sounds and textures inside these compositions are almost compulsively listenable, even as they move toward the undefined -- and untamed -- musical border she seeks. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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