

Jessica Moss – Pools Of Light (2017)

Written by bluesever

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Glaciers II (Pt II) Written and performed by Jessica Moss

Jessica Moss is best known as violinist, backing vocalist and co-composer with the acclaimed cult chamber-punk band Thee Silver Mt. Zion Memorial Orchestra, the avant-klezmer group Black Ox Orkestar, and for her involvement in multiple records by Carla Bozulich's Evangelista and two albums by Vic Chesnutt.

Having made six full-length albums and toured extensively with Mt. Zion from 2001-2014, Moss began performing solo work two years ago as that band went on hiatus, leading to mesmerizing solo appearances at ATP Festival, Le Guess Who? Festival, the Basilica Hudson 24-Hour Drone, the Winnipeg New Music Festival and the Montréal Museum of Contemporary Art, among others. *Pools Of Light* is her first full-length solo album, following the 2015 self-released cassette *Under Plastic Island* (recorded with Guy Picciotto of Fugazi).

As fans of the aforementioned projects will know, Moss has developed a distinctive and impressive approach to violin that combines a natural technical fluidity, a recombinant command of folk, classical and modern idioms, and an adventurous exploration of signal-bending and analog effects that uniquely expand the spectrum of the violin as sound source. Her solo work is deeply rooted in live performance, where she builds up and breaks down stunning longform compositions in real time with an array of pedals – including distortions, octave/harmonizers and samplers/loopers. To hear all of this brilliantly rallied and unfolded on a wholly solo recording (without reliance on software-based dubbing or effects) is intensely rewarding.

Comprised of two side-length multi-movement compositions, Pools Of Light unfolds at a stately, inexorable pace, combining sound-art and signal-processed timbres, extended melodic and contrapuntal lines, and the periodic deployment of stark, minimalist vocals. “Entire Populations” is a 24-minute tour de force on Side One, opening with gently blown-out solo violin layering a maqam- and klezmer-inflected theme that gradually recedes to near-silence as vocals are introduced, with Moss singing a single phrase (anchored by the song’s title) which builds up anew in careening stacked vocal loops, towards a majestic juxtaposition of dive-bombing electronics and strident melodic string excursions, ending in a tender scorched-earth denouement. “Glaciers I” and “Glaciers II” on Side Two are more explicitly textural and cinematic, moving between minimalist and maximalist, widescreen and intimate, ice and heat; a highly compelling suite of drone-inflected, nuanced and subtly plaintive instrumental pieces.

Moss explains: “As a solo performer, I feel an alignment with the transportive nature of storytelling tradition. My music is narrative, and I feel it’s subjects are already on everyone’s mind (climate change, refugee crisis, plastic garbage island floating in the sea...). My aim is to create a space where we can reflect on these things together. I prefer not to use too many words to relate; once the ideas are contextualized, conjuring images with sounds and melodies feels just as powerful to me and also more accessible in many ways. I don’t have an agenda, certainly not a solution, just a great sense of empathy and desire to be sharing space and experiences. I believe that having these transporting moments together can be both a balm and a way to receive energy to move forward, to engage.”

Pools Of Light is elegiac durational music at the intersection of neo-classicism, soundtrack, electronic, art-punk and avant-folk – a decidedly organic, non-academic, profoundly searching and emotive work, guided by Moss’s liner note mantra: “FEELING LOVE IN A MELTING WORLD”. ---cstrerecords.com

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