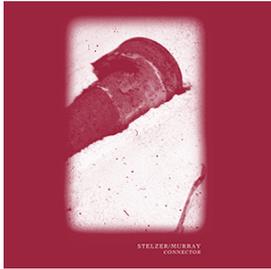


Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 13 May 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 13 May 2018 10:17



In his two most recent works, Howard Stelzer branches out to less aggressive, more subdued sounds, while still heavily staying faithful to his core roots as a noisy manipulator of all things cassette. His work with long-time friend and long-time collaborator Brendan Murray shows a wide variety of approaches and styles, while *A Strange Object* is largely him at his most focused and meditative. The two tapes may seem vastly different at times, but make for excellent complements to one another.

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The feel of *Connector* is established immediately on "one". Murray's field recordings construct a vast space in which Stelzer introduces the textures of his mangled cassette tapes, coming together at what feels like familiar field recordings with unexpected abrasive outbursts. The two trade off being on center stage, from recordings of cars passing by into heavily panned and wobbling tape detritus, culminating in a nice, brittle sheen. For "two", the humming rumble of an engine is at first the primary element, with the occasionally abrupt pop or click and far off noise added to give a bit of color. Eventually there is an abrupt halt that then introduces a lengthy synth like pulse for the remainder of the piece, making for a unique conclusion.

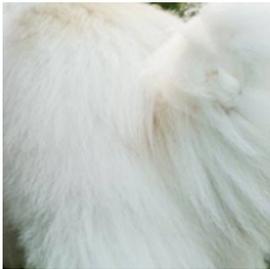
On the flip side, "three" is at first an immense, pseudo-orchestral shimmer full of heavy, droning organ-like passages that expand outward. It is a rich and complex mélange of sound, and one that is rather dissonant and eventually shifts into some even harsher, grinding passages of noise that teeter on uncomfortable before concluding on a decaying, decrepit note. For most of the concluding "four" things are calm: a machinery hum, some warm organic processing and effects and some subtle, quiet interruptive sounds throughout the mix. Eventually though the mix becomes more tight and shrill, with the abrasive conclusion tying things together quite nicely.

samples:

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- [two](#)
- [three](#)
- [four](#)



Stelzer's latest solo work, like *Dawn Songs*, is a kinder, gentler bit of sound in comparison. He himself has said on record that these are pieces intended to reflect smaller, intimate settings, and that is completely evident. There are a plethora of small, light noises within the rhythmic electronic pulses of "A Strange Object Covered in Fur Which Breaks Your Heart" that is wonderfully varied, but also muted and warm. He also constructs a sparse, minimalistic space for "The Historical Aspects Have Been Adequately Trodden by Others", grounded by some sort of distant hum, but everything kept very soft and quiet. If Stelzer was to ever do an unplugged release, this is probably what it would sound like.

"Dressed in Heavenly Blue" is short, but perhaps a bit more boisterous within the context of this tape. A pleasant pairing of brittle static and shimmering drone, it is not as drastically removed from his noisier works, but presented in a quieter, intimate sort of scenario. The second half of the tape is taken up by "And Joy", a complex tapestry of various hums and buzzes filtered in various ways that give them an excellent sense of depth, but in a more airy, open framework. Distortion and noise of course appear, but kept restrained to make for added color and texture, without ever dominating too much.

For these two releases, both sides of Howard Stelzer's sonic personality come through greatly: the forceful and heavy noise on *Connector* (not to at all discount Brendan Murray's contributions, which add significantly to the tape), and his more peaceful, meditative tendencies on *A Strange Object*. The former is a complex mass of sound that is equally Murray's hand that, at times is challenging and unpleasant fascinating from start to finish. The latter, however, excels in its intimacy. In some ways I could not help but be reminded of a more analog take on the work of Richard Chartier, an associate of

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Stelzer's from the earliest days of his Intransitive label. Taken together, both are essential works in his (thankfully) every growing and varied discography.

samples:

- [A Strange Object Covered in Fur Which Breaks Your Heart](#)
- [Dressed in Heavenly Blue](#)
- [And Joy](#)