

Brainwashed - Louise Bock, "Abyss: For Cello"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 05 April 2020 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 06 April 2020 06:46



Louise Bock is the latest guise of iconoclastic composer Taralie Peterson, who is best known for her role in psych-folk luminaries Spires That in the Sunset Rise. It is probably fair to describe some of her previous work as "polarizing" or "an acquired taste," as she is not one to shy away from dissonance or nerve-jangling intensity. However, it is also fair to say that she has recorded some truly transcendent and impressively wild pieces over the years. In some ways, *Abyss: For Cello*

captures Peterson in comparatively accessible form, but that is mostly because there are limits to how much infernal cacophony one person can create with just a cello and a saxophone. That said, that limit is considerably higher than I would have expected, as

Abyss

is quite a churning and heaving one-woman tour de force of cello-driven violence. Moreover, it is quite an impressively focused and tightly edited one as well. It is quite a pleasure to witness Peterson's power so beautifully harnessed for maximum impact, particularly on the album's brilliant centerpiece "Oolite."

[Geographic North](#)

This is the second album that Peterson has recorded as Louise Bock, as the project made its debut back in 2018 with *Repetitives in Illocality* (Feeding Tube). Prior to that, Peterson's solo albums were released under the name Tar Pet, but she decided that a new name was warranted for her cello-focused works. It is also worth noting that this album is the seventh installment of Geographic North's "Sketches for Winter" series, meaning that it was "composed during and intended for the dead of winter." Having now heard the previous Louise Bock album, I think I can safely say that

Abyss's ostensible winter theme has not radically shifted Peterson's tone in any significant way, but this release is a bit more unrelenting in its intensity than its predecessor. In general, however, intensity is a defining trait with most of Peterson's work. In that regard, Peterson gets almost immediately to work on the lead-off "Horologic," as the opening drone quickly descends into a churning miasma of sliding dissonances. There is some bleak beauty to be found in the simplicity of "Horologic" as well, however, as Peterson manages to make the descending, elegiac chord progression feel heaving, sensual, and organic as masses of rich, woody tones languorously plunge and swoop.

Brainwashed - Louise Bock, "Abyss: For Cello"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 05 April 2020 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 06 April 2020 06:46

The following "Jute" takes shape from a similarly droning foundation, but heads in a very different direction as Peterson saws away at a stuttering melodic fragment that is never allowed to reach completion. At first, it is not nearly as strong as "Horologic," but eventually those paroxysms resolve into a haunting and semi-melodic outro of deep drones. Peterson's saxophone then makes its first appearance with "Actinic Ray," which achieves an intriguing collision of fluttering Philip Glass-style minimalist patterns and *Decasia*-style ruined and discordant strings. Peterson's palette expands yet again with the gorgeous "Oolite," as the moaning and sliding foundation is fleshed out with a lovely and warm melodic figure and a very cool splash of garbled, ululating vocal sounds. Apparently "Oolite" also features some guest guitar work from Kendra Amalie, but I am hard-pressed to find anything resembling a guitar in the piece, so I suspect she must be somehow involved in the vocal-like sounds. Regardless of who is doing what and how they are doing it, "Oolite" is an absolutely sublime and wonderful piece. The closing "Prithee" returns to more expected territory, however, as a darkly churning bed of gnarled cellos lazily undulates in a state of uneasy ambience that fitfully breaks open to offer glimpses of a more radiant and tender piece lurking beneath. It is quite an impressive compositional achievement, as it feels like it is continually dissolving and reforming while casting a simultaneously brooding, epic, and precariously hopeful spell.

As someone who first encountered Peterson's vision in the wilder, more freeform context of *Spires That in the Sunset Rise*, I was pleasantly surprised by how tight and exactly composed this album feels. There is not much about *Abyss* that feels improvised or at all indulgent, as Peterson has masterfully distilled her art into a perfect and concise series of emotional gut punches. Aside from that, I was also struck by how much some of these pieces transcend their instrumentation. Using a term like "neoclassical" to describe

Abyss

feels completely misleading and inadequate, as the cello seems like a natural extension of Peterson herself: this does not feel like an album composed for cello—it feels like a cello just happened to be the most effective tool for expressing the harrowing and cathartic sounds that were swirling around her head. That said, it does not hurt that this is a cello album, as I have always loved the warmth and the physicality that accomplished players can wring from that instrument and Peterson makes the most of those attributes (particularly the latter).

Regrettably, I have yet not delved deeply enough into either *Spires* or *Tar Pet* to confidently assess how this album stacks up against Peterson's oeuvre as a whole, but it is difficult to imagine that she has recorded many pieces that can top "Horologic" or "Oolite." Then again, maybe she has. In any case,

Abyss

is a hell of an album that captures Peterson in wonderfully fiery and undiluted form.

Samples can be found [here](#) .