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(4AD)



09 May 2006

The best mysteries come in triads, like the Sibyl's three visits to king Tarquin and the three prophetic books he ended up with. Scott Walker's third solo record in 30 years is no less abstruse an endowment. Using Eno-approved experimental sounds and that rich baritone, in this maudlin musical, a creosote-coloured mood holds sway. As with the last two cerebral rambles we were invited on, instead of minor key symphonic arrangements and the Mannheim Rockets of old, Walker tenders minimalist "blocks of sound", which occasionally involve actual concrete blocks.

A lament to torn humanity, 'Jesse' notes that in times of loneliness, Elvis Presley would speak to his stillborn twin brother. The protagonist beholds September 11th and relates the images of "noseholes caked in black cocaine" to his spectral accomplice.

'Clara' is based on the fate of the woman hanged alongside Mussolini in 1945. A love song of sorts, Petacci is dipped in blood in the moonlight, this time her vilification negated as she holds forth in all-too-human contemplation.

Familiar themes of death, love and despair are all pervasive in the splintering white bones, shattered teeth and pee-stained trousers of 'Hand Me Ups' and the "germs pinging on the night wind" of 'Psoriatic'.

Laid out like modernist verse, the lyrics of *The Drift* don't lend themselves to straightforward interpretation, but for those who found Tilt an inhospitable quagmire of stubbornly evasive symbolism, here a whole zoo of disparate characters serve to guide: pale monkeys, black crocodiles, Caligula's horse, singing, swinging corpses, Donald Duck, Tzarist cavalrymen, braying donkeys on the streets of Galway and a chorus of ghosts.

A recording of events in history that have wrought a misshapen future, *The Drift* is relentlessly unsettling and enlightening, exhaustive and exhausting, and like the Sibyl's spidery handwriting, the measured moments of bad trips within are part documentation, part admonition. The old man's back again.

Lisa Coen
Rating: 9 / 10



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