

The Sound Projector 18th Issue 2010



Chris Watson

Cima Verde

ITALY FONDAZIONE EDMUND MACH AND
LOL PRODUCTIONS S.I.A.E. 76111802708
CD (2008)

Chris Watson's astonishing *Cima Verde* record likewise requires physical presence in and alongside a definite geographic feature, and in this instance the great man has precisely calibrated his position on said feature in terms of altitude reached. To put it more plainly, he climbed a mountain. Gathering his material from the three peaks of Monte Bondone in the alps, Watson here offers seven snapshots taken from progressively lower altitudes as he makes his way feelingly down the slopes. The second piece 'Cima Verde' was recorded at 2101 metres, for example, while its neighbour 'Bucaneve' was captured some 200 metres lower at 1800m. 'Air in motion' is what his powerful microphone seeks; 'ice crystals, water vapour and changing pressure'. Hopefully that pressure decreases as he nears the bottom, lest he suffer the mountaineer's equivalent of 'the bends'. Along the way, this journey naturally takes in glimpses of bird and plant life, melting snow, water, and trees; all of nature's abundant bounty providing plenty of stimulation for the ear and mind. Watson himself is filled with mystical inspiration from this voyage, referring in a matter-of-fact way to such things as 'ritual performances', 'spirits of the forest', and 'voices' which he has assigned to elements of nature that the rest of us normally consider to be mute. Truly, this visionary artist has, through his lifelong work, reached a transcendent point where he finds that all of nature is speaking to him in a clear, unmistakeable voice. How much we could all learn from him about the environment, and our careless mistreatment of same. This release comes with a substantial full colour booklet, offering a photograph and an explanatory paragraph of text for each episode. The project's patrons, Daniela Cascella and Lucia Farinati, contribute the short essay explaining their site-specific work within the Sound Threshold aegis; they stress that they are attempting 'to move beyond a commonplace notion of landscape'. An extremely peaceful and quiet collection, *Cima Verde* may not be as immediately dramatic or startling as previous Watson recordings, but it is still super-charged with the same sense of awe and wonder in the face of these created miracles; Mother Earth is depicted as a powerhouse of hidden energy, much of it located in remote and unspoiled places such as this. Indeed, the very first piece 'Soffi di Vento' describes the sound we hear as 'A gathering of elements in a place we cannot tread.' Mandatory listening for anyone who feels the need to reconnect with the globe, find their feet on the mountainside and bathe in cleansing atmospheres!

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www.manifesta7.it

www.chriswatson.net

www.touchmusic.org.uk

www.cealp.it

Loren Chasse and Michael Northam

The Otolith

USA THE HELEN SCARSDALE AGENCY HMS014 CD (2008)

Chasse again appears on *The Otolith*, now joining forces with an equally footloose and wild-eyed mendicant of the musical spheres, Michael Northam. Sometimes trading under his mnortham guise, this roaming North American genius has created the impression he's in touch with the same powerful currents and hidden energies that Watson teases out of the gentle landscapes around him with his specialist microphones. In Northam's hands, the energies sometimes appear that shade more wayward and unpredictable, as if they could almost be diverted for dubious or malevolent ends in the hands of an unscrupulous enemy. These same apprehensive and ambiguous sensations resonate through much of *The Otolith*, gradually limning a portrait of a world filled with many unexplored corners and dark shadows, whose contents we cannot fully know. Loren Chasse has gladly signed up for this expedition of discovery; his benign walking-magic spells (see above) have undoubtedly played a part in shaping the direction of these eight cuts. Using recordings made over a three-year period, the duo speak in passing of their travels to very specific parts of America and Europe which ended up in the release (although unlike Polli they feel no need to resort to citing grid references), and 'some nameless trails along the way', that last vague utterance conveying much of the uncertainty of the whole enterprise; there was no guarantee they would arrive anywhere, nor that these recordings would succeed in the intended ways, if indeed there was any intention. Yet there is evidence of much success to be heard. The third track 'Waiting' is one of the more exciting experiments, showing how three vital and tension-filled minutes can be extracted even from the most seemingly banal and uneventful moments in one's day. Waiting around for something to happen is usually construed as wasting valuable time; this record shows us otherwise. By waiting, we see things that hasty passers-by might overlook. One has a vision of an isolated country road, both voyagers waiting for a bus that will never arrive. Or perhaps they are waiting watchfully, beholding the unfolding of a simple alchemical experiment (using an old oil can and a brick) they have set in motion. 'The Spectral Harvest' as a title seems to confirm all of their mystical hopes, as they weave sounds together like pixies gathering moonbeams in a jar. It becomes clear that Northam, at least, seems to have progressed onward from his earlier methods where he was overly obsessed with processing and reprocessing the layers of recording, until most of the 'nature' had been bled away. *The Otolith* is certainly not free from such processing, but many of the good meaty chunks of unusual experience have survived the cuts of the digital blender. On this cut, and 'Eggeater's Retreat', we hear some of the promised 'droning psychedelic ragas', as if all of nature had become a private harmonium to be activated by the walking feet of these wandering vagabonds. It's also true you can hear a lot more of the Jewelled Antler side of Mr Chasse in parts of this record, by which I mean that aspect of his personality that causes him to dress up in eagle wings as a winged shaman and leap off the sides of mountains in a peyote trance. Enacting as it were the very same 'ritual performances' that Chris Watson speaks of.

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www.helenscarsdale.com

Pierre Yves Macé

Passagenweg

FRANCE BROCOLI 004 CD (2008)

So far we've spent much of our listening time in the countryside, or in very remote and extreme parts of the globe; or both, in some cases. French composer Pierre Yves Macé takes us back to the comfort of the city with his *Passagenweg*, which to be honest is really a sampler record, but one made using field recordings from urban scapes. He combines these samples with other samples taken from early French chansons (presumably old records of same), working mosaic-fashion to fashion loops and collages which follow a strange internal logic. In so doing, he creates compellingly idiosyncratic visions of city life, which are also rather quaint and old-fashioned; it seems to me that when 90% of sound-artists want to make a statement about urban life, they invariably end up telling us that it's dirty, paranoid, claustrophobic, corrupt, pervasive, and generally unpleasant. Some of those same creators go so far as to wallow in that unpleasantness and can't wait to inform us there is no escape from it. Macé is almost pure nostalgia, by contrast; his short episodes appear to us as fragments of black and white film, and the urban activities depicted are as genteel and harmless as those from the Golden Age of Edwardiana, or pre-war Paris. One almost expects to see an early cinematograph appear on the street corners, which are filled

