

Misha Mishenko - Strákur Sem Spilar Með Vindi (2013)

Written by bluesever

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1 Kvöld Í Borginni 3:28 2 Fundi Með Vindi 3:40 3 Skilningi 3:42 4 Móðir Náttúra 5:55 5
Á Hliðarlínunni 2:39 6 Öndun Fiðrildi 3:12 7 Síðast Swan 2:41 8 Þjóðarmorð 5:02 9
Þoka Í Þér 3:14 10 Á þeim Tíma 3:53 Misha Mishenko - piano

If you're looking for winter weather that'll bite your face off, Russia is about as good as it gets. Its proximity to the North Pole and rugged terrain lead to unusually harsh winds and temperatures that rarely rise above zero Celsius—and usually drop far, far below what most people will ever have to deal with. Much like Iceland, though, the country's frigid climate is a hotbed for musical talent: among the many artists to be found in the cold is neoclassical artist Misha Mishenko, whose latest release, *strákur sem spilar með vindi* (The Boy Who Plays With The Wind), shows a compelling humanity beneath its chilly climate.

If that approach sounds simple, that's because it is. The driving force of his music is his sincere, world-weary piano melodies, but he surrounds them with otherworldly instrumentation. Much of *strákur sem spilar með vindi* is shrouded in a sense of something beyond this world, an intangible element buried somewhere in the foggy ambience hanging over much of the album—yet it's also still recognizably grounded in something within our reach.

Transcendence rarely comes without effort, though, and Mishenko's compositions show a creator with a knack for constructing journeys. “*fundi með vindi*,” Icelandic for “meetings with the wind,” feels like a meeting indeed: the piano has hints of an RPG hero's theme in its rises and falls, and Mishenko holds back on the instrumentation before bringing accompaniment in the song's climax, a decision allowing the moment of triumph to feel truly triumphant. There's something charmingly innocent about the song's unabashed tendency towards drama, but the melodies are too weighted with melancholy to be naïve, and the unresolved nature of the song's final ascent lends it a valuable ambiguity. “*móðir Náttúra*” (“Mother Nature”) has a decidedly

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more upwards trajectory. It's a fuse waiting to go off, opening with soft brass and ambient noise while the piano barely seeps in. It's a straightforward foundation on which Mishenko builds more and more—sweeping string melodies, percussion that churns as if he were excavating it from the depths of the sea, and a marching-band serenade—but the effect feels completely organic despite the way in which it's constructed.

Despite the emphasis on construction, the sheer sensory joy of the music often proves to be enough. "skilningi" ("Sense") is an absolute delight, conveying a powerful sense of discovery with its uplifting melodies and rich sound. Wisely, the song avoids the pitfall of cramming in too much: the instrumentation here is sparse, but it's as textured and soft as a field of grass. As it turns out, the idea that just feeling the blades peek through our toes would be enough is where the song finds its sense of clarity. Even darker escapades are oddly beautiful. "þjóðarmorð" ("Genocide") may be a march to imminent death, but the strings, the swirls of ambient noise circling the track, the piano chords that chime like church bells, and the choir chants buried deep into the mix lend it a haunting majesty. Just to give Olafur Arnalds a run for his money, Mishenko sneaks in a little experiment at the end of his album: "á þeim tíma" ("At the Time"), which utilizes innovative rhythms and stronger-than-usual instrumentation to reach an anthemic climax.

Ultimately, however, it's when strákur sem spilar með vindi strips back that it reveals the most. "á hliðarlínunni" ("On the Sidelines") gets introspective, focusing solely on the piano. Mishenko has an internalized understanding of circadian rhythms which comes out in full force here as the song oscillates wildly from spurts of light to pitch-black corners, a simple but powerful display of the emotional forces pulling at the heart of the album. "öndun fiðrildi" ("Breathing Butterflies"), another piano piece, shows the same tendencies towards contemplation: it's a little soft-spoken but wonderfully paced, developing its themes in a completely organic fashion. Even when the ethereal grandeur of Mishenko's music fades, there's a resonant emotional core to it that proves to be teeming with life. Frankly, the most impressive aspect of strákur sem spilar með vindi may be that sense of vitality most prominent in its quietest moments: Mishenko's compositions may be layered in frost, but spring is coming and it looks like even beneath the ice, the world was alive and well all along. ---muzikdizcovery.com

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