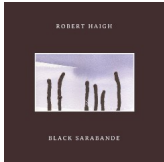


Robert Haigh - Black Sarabande (2020)

Written by bluesever

Tuesday, 11 February 2020 10:26 -

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1 *Black Sarabande* 2:43 2 *Stranger On The Lake* 5:58 3 *Wire Horses* 2:43 4 *Air Madeleine* 2:32 5 *Ghosts Of Blacker Dyke* 5:32 6 *Lady Lazarus* 2:00 7 *Arc Of Crows* 3:49 8 *Progressive Music* 2:41 9 *The Secret Life Of Air* 3:06 10 *Painted Serpent* 5:07 11 *Broken Symmetry* 2:39 Mastered By – Denis Blackham Producer – Robert Haigh

Depending on what release you discovered first, you might have believed there were two different Robert Haighs operating in the UK during the 1980s and '90s. There was the pianist and composer who worked with Nurse With Wound and released elegant modern classical albums like 1987's *Valentine Out of Season*. But what to make of the Robert Haigh behind the neck-whipping jungle breakbeats of the Omni Trio, a force throughout the drum 'n' bass era in the UK? As that project drew to a close in the early 2000s, the more contemplative side of Haigh reemerged with a string of contemporary classical albums. They made for a perfect fit for New York's Unseen Worlds label; his 2017 album *Creatures of the Deep* slotted well alongside pianists new and old, ranging from "Blue" Gene Tyranny to Lubomyr Melnyk to Leo Svirsky.

Haigh's *Black Sarabande* explores terrain similar to *Deep*, mixing gorgeous piano melodies with a patina of electronics. But where that previous album evoked the properties of water, *Sarabande* feels grounded. It draws on Haigh's childhood memories of UK coal country and the hardscrabble "pit village" of Worsbrough in South Yorkshire where he was raised. There's a heavy atmosphere to these 11 tracks, never wholly enveloped in blackness but always threatened to tip over into it.

The opening title track is hushed, provoking comparisons to Harold Budd or Erik Satie. Yet as Haigh's struck keys hover in space, they turn slightly discordant, like a chill settling into the skin. "Stranger on the Lake" strikes a balance between piano and electronics to luminous effect, its melody shadowed by ghostly overtones. Midway through, the ambient haze swells, and when it

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finally recedes, the piece is suffused with harp plucks and electronics, making you feel like you've left one piece behind and emerged in another one entirely.

Black Sarabande's calm surface proves illusory the more listens you give it. Struck piano wires startle the surface of the otherwise-placid "Wire Horses"; a gush of strings arrives and just as quickly disappears into the woozy, fluttering ambience of "Painted Serpent." There are moments when Haigh's playing verges on silence, so that if you're listening on earbuds, you might hear your own footsteps through the snow more loudly than the music. The gorgeous and brief "Air Madeleine" sounds as if you're walking around a frozen pond in the countryside and seated next to Haigh on the creaky piano bench all at once, as imaginary a landscape (and interior) as anything Brian Eno could have conceived. ---Andy Beta, pitchfork.com

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