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ELI WINTER ENSEMBLE PRESENTS: GHOST NOTES

NOV 3, 2024

Eli Winter - electric guitar and piano

Tyler Damon - drums

Gerrit Hatcher - tenor saxophone

Andrew Scott Young - upright bass

David Sexton - violin, bowed guitars

Sam Wagster - pedal steel guitar

Ghost Notes emerged by accident. Part of the irony is that, from a material perspective, this music to some degree stems from circumstances that one would generally expect to be creatively enervating, but that inadvertently imposed productive restrictions on the music. Last January I led a quintet in two days of recording sessions at Electrical Audio. In a desperate attempt to satisfy a sudden critical change to a grant project, Andrew Khedoori and I had half-seriously hatched an organizing concept for the music I'd make. Several months before, walking around Queens Park in Glasgow, an offhand idea emerged for a record in which I'd write, facilitate and arrange music for an ad hoc ensemble, then pull my own contributions out and allow what was left to stand. For some reason, the music of Natural Information Society, a singular Chicago band whose work I adore (and by work I mean not just music, but work), was my frame of reference. When Andrew and I first discussed the project, as we talked about music we loved, we both, out of love, blurted out "Natural Information Society" at almost exactly the same time. What I had to do was clear.

My mission had become to reverse-engineer their music. How I thought I'd accomplish this is outside the purview of this writing. What you hear today stems from my failure to execute my original ideas. For reasons too many and varied to expand upon here, I had the luxury of sitting with the music for the better part of a year: three hours and ten minutes' worth from the sessions alone. It stumped me. I simply didn't know what to do. For months all I had to console myself was the comfort of two running titles that turned me into a giggle factory: "*Ode to Bud Adams' Rotting Corpse*" and "*Natural Imitation Society*." Eventually I moved through an intense depression I could describe as at best thematically relevant. And then, by circumstance, by virtue of the unconscious work communicating to me what the music wanted to be, as I moved outside of the depression and stepped gingerly back into my life, the music arrived. It had everything it needed from itself. It just needed my attention.

At the moment, the most I can say is that, without realizing it, I was effectively sampling myself and the music of my ad-hoc ensemble. What lineage do I have for this? Too many bar mitzvah parties. From Houston, the band Culturcide's record *Tacky Souvenirs of Pre-Revolutionary America*, and from Chicago, the recent work of Anteloper, Makaya McCraven, and the International Anthem label. But none of these are direct influences on the music (except the bar mitzvah parties). Beyond the prerequisite of the work, as always, holding my interest and having the desired emotional effects on me, I wasn't looking for anything. It found me. It arrived.

Longform Editions released this music in October. The title comes from a phrase I heard from my dear friend and bandmate Tyler Damon. Tyler was telling me about

a bell ensemble he plays in with Janet Bean and Michael Zerang. Zerang would talk about the importance of ghost notes, silent notes as you ring the bells (or something like that). In last January's recording sessions, Cooper Crain, brilliant recording engineer, had worked hard to isolate every instrument within the studio space so the music could move outside of linear time. Unavoidably, naturally, as is the nature of recording, there's bleed in all these odd places. And it comes out in the music, as you might have already noticed. The music, I hope, integrates the bleed within itself, but the bleed can't go away. In the same way as, because of the lack of isolation, there are some notes that 'aren't supposed to be there, but they're there anyway, and you just have to work with them, so, too, trauma, whatever it is, for anyone who has it, and that learning to live with it as best one can is preferable to the alternative, where it comes out in ways you maybe don't mean or recognize or want, but it haunts you.

Thanks so much to my bandmates— my dear friends Sam Wagster and Tyler Damon, who play in my trio; Gerrit Hatcher and Andrew Scott Young, who play on Ghost Notes, and David Sexton, here all the way from Baltimore—Alex Inziglian and Kate In at Experimental Sound Studio; Jane Askew, the City of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events; Clean Air Club; the University of Chicago's Women's Board; and Karsten Lund, Mike Harrison, Will Langford, and everyone at the Renaissance Society, to say nothing of the Ren as an organization. I worked here in college. I was a gallery attendant for almost four years and an intern for one summer. I believe in their work and I'm very grateful (and surprised!) that they're supporting mine.

This concert is perhaps the biggest musical risk my work has taken thus far. I hope for this music to further develop into an LP. Thank you for listening, sharing, believing, and helping that process along. This concert is a crucial part of that process. We're translating the samples from the synthetic processing—which allows them to align on record—into a live setting. We're dividing different elements from the samples between acoustic and electric instruments. In short, we're pulling the music apart. No one else would let us try it. The Ren would.

-Eli Winter

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