

Aquarius Records review

K11 "Metaphonic Portrait 1230 A.D." (Actual Noise) cd 10.98

K11 is sound artist Pietro Riparbelli, whose concepts are based on spaces as much as sounds. On the last K11 record, Riparbelli recorded short wave radios and receivers placed in Aleister Crowley's Thelema Abbey in Cefalu, Sicily, letting the sounds resonate and reverberate, creating gorgeous clouds of echoey drone and deep haunting rumble. For Metaphonic Portrait 1230 A.D., Riparbelli set up inside Assisi Cathedral in Umbria, again employing shortwave radios and receivers, harnessing the natural acoustics of the building, in this case, the cathedral's lower basilica, where the remains of St. Francis are kept. Adding only bits of organ and voice, Riparbelli has created an epic abstract dronescape, haunting and mysterious, the tones layered into huge walls of sound, allowed to ring out, sometimes fading to a distant shimmer, other times exploding in a cacophonous roar.

There's tolling bells, disembodied voices, blurred into ghostlike streaks, crumbling natural distortion that occasionally builds to a heaving chordal crush that could be Nadja or Tim Hecker. In fact, much of the sounds here, field recordings and recontextualized field recordings, organs and voices, begin to sound as old as the cathedral they were recorded in, some ritualistic conjuring, as if some strange sonic entity laid dormant for hundreds of years, only to be awakened, and captured on magnetic tape. Or imagine some strange recording device that doesn't just capture sound, but the sound of all the spirits and spiritual energy that ever existed in a certain space, hence the strange voices, the howling buzz, the keening melodic shards...

Less an exercise in field recordings, and more a gorgeous assemblage of field recorded sound. Not knowing the source of the music, one would still be captivated by these thick droned out buzzscapes, and epic high end ur-drones, the mysterious shimmer, the smeared voices, it definitely has the feel of some damaged turntable installation, like Philip Jeck set up in the dungeon of some castle, but knowing the mysterious source, and unique setting, only makes the music within that much more arcane and enigmatic.

The cd includes a video of the cathedral where the music was recorded as well...