

Pantha Du Prince: Black Noise

There are many theories about the origins of music. One such theory maintains that the first song was a lullaby for children; another, that men began to make music in order to please the women. Hendrik Weber a.k.a. Pantha du Prince does not worry about such genealogies. For music is always already there, even without humans. On his new album, the producer and DJ, who lives in Berlin and Paris, claims: music slumbers in all matter; any sound, even silence, is already music. The mission, then, must be to render audible what is unheard and unheard of: black noise, a frequency that is inaudible to man. Black noise often presages natural disasters, earthquakes or floods; only some animals perceive this “calm before the storm.” Black noise is something archaic and earthy. Some tracks on Pantha du Prince’s third album—the first to be released on Rough Trade—are based on field recordings and improvisations produced in collaboration with Joachim Schütz (Arnold Dreyblatt Trio) and Stephan Abry (Workshop) in the Swiss Alps. It turned out that the house in which they lived while staying there stood next to a pile of debris formed by a landslide that had buried an entire village. The cover of *Black Noise* recalls this history of loss. On his quest for the magical acoustic moment, Pantha du Prince burrows through the acoustic debris. He transforms the materiality of the fundamental sounds found or recorded on the Swiss Alp (natural noises and avant-garde folklore) into an expansive and highly speculative acoustic architecture. The music on *Black Noise* balances precariously on the slippery threshold between art and nature, between techno and folklore. That lends it a certain spectral and intangible aspect. Nature and technology become indistinguishable, all authenticity evaporates. Not unlike [Daniel F. Galouye](#)’s novel *Simulacron-3*, adapted for television by [Rainer Werner Fassbinder](#) under the title *Welt am Draht*, it leaves the question of what is artificial, what is real unanswered. Nature as a simulacrum: accordingly, *Black Noise* is not about an anarchical liberation of sounds or anything of the sort, but rather about how much alienation is possible before the listener loses his nerves and his orientation. On this album, rifts, fractures, and digressions are not flaws in the system but acoustic micro-vectors that drive the narrative. The intros serve to present the source sounds recorded “out there”—knocking, barking, ringing, tinkling which are then soon caught in the currents of vaguely psychedelic mutations. In accordance with the principle of morphing, main and subsidiary noises blend into one another, and the most diverse acoustic designs are in play: steel drums and marimbas as well as physical modeling. Although the music goes beyond the conventional techno format in a variety of ways, the dramaturgy always remains intelligible and physically captivating. An introductory phase that is on the somber side ends in euphoric relief with “Stick to my side,” a postmodern hymn, inimitably sung by Noah Lennox a.k.a. Animal Collective’s Panda Bear. Another guest on *Black Noise* is Tyler Pope of !!! and LCD Soundsystem, who plays bass in “The Splendour.” In addition to Detroit techno (thus in “Behind the Stars,” a made-for-Ibiza killer) and deep, stumbling house

of the Theo Parrish variety, Weber's introverted brand of tripping techno draws on traditions of British pop, including Durutti Column's *avant la lettre* shoegaze and noise-pop. Having played bass in the Hamburg-based band Stella, Hendrik Weber has plenty of indie rock experience under his belt. Influenced by electro-acoustic neo-avantgardes (Morton Subotnick, Luigi Nono), Krautrock and deep techno, he shapes a novel kind of club music that is probably best described by the term "sonic house." *Black Noise* blurs a whole number of antitheses: acoustic v. synthetic, powerful v. fragile, epic v. bashful, catchy v. mysterious. The most diverse acoustic sources and moods are folded into one another and bathed in an imposingly well-composed continuum. Pantha du Prince is still a Romantic Conceptualist. And the message we hear him murmuring: beauty is possible even after the disaster; where there was debris and noise, there shall be great art.

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