Ólafur Arnalds - Dyad 1909 (2009)

1 Frá Upphafi 1:46 2 Lokaðu Augunum (Dyad 1909 Version) 3:54 3 Brotsjór 3:53 4 Við Vorum Smá... (Dyad 1909 Version) 3:16 5 3326 3:38 6 Til Enda 4:09 7 ...Og Lengra 3:55
Ólafur Arnalds - Composer, Electronics, Piano, Programming Arndis Hulda Auðunsdóttir - Viola Margrét Soffia Einarsdóttir - Violin Hallgrímur Jónas Jensson - Cello Karl Pestka - Violin

It's nice to see Ólafur Arnalds make a speedy return to the musical arena after his much fawned over Found Songs made a small but significant impact earlier in the year. But those seeking new material should be warned that Dyad 1909 is no new album as such, and it most certainly fits into the category marked ephemera/curio. Earlier in the year choreographer Wayne McGregor commissioned Arnalds to provide the score for a ballet inspired, in part, by the expedition of Shackleton to the magnetic South Pole in 1909. The result is this short, seven song collection.

Somewhat disappointingly, much of the material on Dyad 1909 has appeared in some form already. Lokaðu Augunum and Við vorum smá… both initially first appeared on Arnalds' Variations Of Static EP whilst 3326 dates back to Arnalds' only full album release to date, Eulogy For Evolution. Considering that Found Songs was an album that Arnalds put together over the course of seven days in the studio earlier in the year, it's a shame that so much of this release re-treads old material. However, it may just be that these particular songs happened to fit the performance perfectly, so such gripes may be somewhat overzealous.

Opening the collection with Frá Upphafi, we find Arnalds dealing in sombre droning tones. Dark and foreboding electronic noise rumbles forth, echoing like lonely sonar, punctuated with a pulsing percussion that could well be unforgiving blasts of Antarctic air. The breaking of ice thunders ominously breaking the sparseness of the echoing electronic emissions, and bringing

reality back into sharp focus.

As if trapped in the ice, a plaintive piano figure makes its way to the fore leading into the re-recorded version of Lokaðu Augunum. With dainty and at times achingly sad piano figures augmented by the swell of strings, Arnalds manages to make his compositions emotionally resonant and strangely distant at the same time. The addition of the computerised child's voice towards the end of the song simply puts a particularly frosty icing on this brilliantly evocative piece of work.

Brotsjór opens with a colossal electro bass-drum pounding against the wind as Arnalds slowly introduces battling string sections. These twist around each other, both crying out in their own tearful ways, adding yet more haunting atmosphere to this intense selection of songs. It's the perfect encapsulation of what Arnalds does so well, mixing the contemporary with the classical with a deftness of touch that is at times truly magical.

Til Enda is similar in construction with frantic glitches and stuttering beats firing like binary pistons as staccato strings stab and mourn in equal measure. Arnalds combines emotions in his compositions so well that at times it can feel completely disorienting, and with Til Enda, the constant veering between introspection and bursts of uplifting beats is dizzying as much as it is invigorating.

…og Lengra closes the EP in much the same way that Frá Upphafi opened it; with the wind creating a bleak atmosphere. This time Arnalds populates the landscape with sonorous strings and contemplative piano, not with thundering breaking ice slabs. It's as heartbreaking as we've come to expect from Arnalds and about as good as anything he's done before.

It's impossible to fault Dyad 1909 on its content, despite the disappointment that comes with the lack of new material. However, these little glimpses of what Arnalds is capable of, make the prospect of a full follow up to Eulogy For Evolution all the more mouthwatering. ---Sam Shepherd, musicomh.com

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