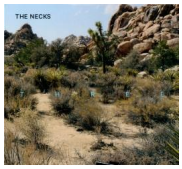
The Necks - Three (2020)



1 Bloom 21:18 2 Lovelock 22:48 3 Further 21:01 Bass – Lloyd Swanton Drums, Percussion – Tony Buck Piano – Chris Abrahams

Twenty-one albums in, Australia's long-running instrumental trio the Necks remain full of surprises. For 33 years, Chris Abrahams, drummer Tony Buck, and bassist Lloyd Swanton -- have offered listeners the delight of the journey, whether it be in nearly ritualistic, improvised live performances where a single piece can last from 30-60-plus minutes, or in composed and arranged, architecturally considered works registering contrast in texture, production, atmosphere, and dynamics.

Three, recorded in the studio, consists of as many pieces, all in the 20-minute range and played by a trio that has been together for decades. While it may tempt fans to regard that strategy as a summation of the group's musical travels, evolution, and career, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, Three offers a nearly dazzling palette of sonic and musical possibility in its gathered and arranged sounds, skillful overdubs, and improvisational acumen, that are performed with unusual directness. Opener "Bloom" offers a single-string pluck from Swanton as an introduction. He moves directly toward rapid, recurring, two-note patterns as Buck triple-times on snares, hi-hat, and kick drum with splashing cymbals added as an engine of movement. Abrahams' piano is crystalline, full of elliptical chord voicings and modal turnarounds. The sampled sound of a solitary harmonica adds the spacious, lonely feel of a spaghetti western. The band goes straight at one another with synths added to pile textures atop one another as the jam's strident pace continues unabated. As a whole, "Bloom" is a through-composed, walled-in labyrinth. "Lovelock" introduces itself with cymbal rolls, an elliptical, reverbed middle-register piano, distorted-bowing upright bass framed by industrial ambient sonics. As Buck delivers an extended snare roll, Abrahams begins to create then define a minimal harmonic melody that gradually seems to melt into a field of propulsive electronics before reasserting itself at irregular intervals. "Further" offers itself as a modal jazz waltz with organ and piano sharing the harmonic role; Swanton walks processional chords and

a gorgeous single-line bass mantra, and Buck swings gently but with pronounced authority on his tom-tom and snare fills, cymbal shimmers, and elastic sense of time. A painterly use of sampled electric guitars and synths are woven in to create a floor while Abrahams improvises with minimal intrusion. The distinct feel here sounds like a direct extension of the music Alice Coltrane delivered on Huntington Ashram Monastery, with very deliberate pacing, open modal lines, and canny economic interplay between bass and piano. This is underscored as Abrahams' drifting B-3 solo eclipses the interrogatory assertions made by his piano. The Necks probe listeners as well as their own musical expectations as the formlessness in "Lovelock" bridges the propulsive rhythmic dynamics in "Bloom" and the processional inquiry of "Further." When combined, it adds up to make Three a masterwork of composition, control, investigation, and ultimately, realization with aplomb. ---Thom Jurek, AllMusic Review

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