White Hills – So You Are… So You'll Be (2013)

01 – Inwords 02 – In Your Room 03 – The Internal Monologue 04 – So You Are… So You'll Be 05 – Outwords 06 – Forever in Space (Enlightened) 07 – Rare Upon the Earth 08 – Circulating 09 – Mist (Winter) Musicians: Dave W. (guitar, vocals) Ego Sensation (bass guitar, vocals)

"Forever in Space," the longest and best cut on this seventh album from White Hills, begins in a cosmic soup of noises, a dead black void across which pinging, hissing, whistling electronic effects careen untethered to conventions like key, time signature or motif. A pulse builds slowly, bass and drums insinuating a faint eighth-note heartbeat into this inhuman landscape. Guitar notes flare and fade Doppler-style, trailing comet tails of tremolo'd sound. As has been the case from Heads on Fire on, you get the sense of travelling through a vast, impersonal space, sparsely inhabited. Landscapes are lit by sporadic, incendiary bursts of rock guitar, but remain essentially static, meditative and unfathomable.

Yet where before the subtleties were often subsumed by fuzz and drone, So You Are…So You'll Be is clear. Even at the height of Dave W.'s molten guitar riffery, even in the grip of the most repetitive, head-banging groove, you can hear other elements, the eerie empty space sounds, the viscous wallow of bass, the snap of snare. Martin Bisi, who also produced last year's Frying on This Rock, has managed to turn White Hills' fecund stew of sounds into something translucently layered. You can look all the way to the bottom of these tracks. So You Are…So You'll Be feels more composed and less jammed, more produced and less caught live on tape than anything White Hills has done to date.

Two years ago, reviewing H-p1, Talia Cooper remarked on White Hills' ability to build "beautiful near silences." So You Are…So You'll Be, seems, by contrast, to be primarily concerned with power and heft. Short, electronic intervals ("InWords," "OutWords" "Circulating") provide breaks,

but it is the massive, bludgeoning assault of cuts like "In Your Room" and the title track that define this album. The bass/guitar/drum line in "In Your Room" has a Sumo wrestler's weight, overpowering but not obliterating Dave W's whispery vocals, Ego Sensation's sing-songy, robotically paced response. The guitar, wigging-out in frayed whammy-bar effects, tangle with the main riff in a jiu jitsu dance of unequal volume, but you can hear all the sounds, every note, all the time.

There are tranquil interludes tucked into even the most uproarious tracks, a dreamy bit right in the middle of jackbooted title cut " where one guitar arcs out over the silence like a paper plane tossed into a canyon, where bass plunks drop like fat globes of liquid at slow, thoughtful, reverberant intervals.

Still, the trick of So You Are… is not so much to make quiet interesting, but to turn an onslaught into serenity, to launch multi-pronged, multi-textured attacks at the senses which seem, even as they deafen, to hint at a meditation. All of what you might have liked about White Hills is here — the Hawkwind-ish guitar excesses, the free-form Kraut drones that go on and on, a la Wooden Shjips or Bardo Pond. It's just that this time, all the cotton batting has been stripped off, the fuzz removed to reveal structure and complexity underneath. --- Jennifer Kelly, dustedmagazine.com

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