Julia Kent - The Great Lake Swallows (2018)



1 Part 1 3:57 2 Part 2 7:18 3 Part 3 6:56 4 Part 4 7:44 Julia Kent - Cello Jean D.L. - Electric Guitar, Tape

The Great Lake Swallows is a collaboration between Canadian cellist Julia Kent and Belgian guitarist/tape machine manipulator Jean D.L. Recorded in Charleroi, Belgium in 2015 during a video installation with Sandrine Verstraete, the music was created using field recordings, processed guitar and cello and serves as a soundtrack to the video of the same name.

The album is an aching, ambient wonderland that ensues beauty at every turn. It was built as a whole and, indeed, should be consumed as a whole. The repetition is hypnotising, a lulling sense of calm entwined in hints of unease that flows seamlessly in and out of sleepy melodies and broken drones. Unfolding over a brief twenty-six minutes, The Great Lake Swallows cannot out-stay its welcome. Everything contained within feels necessary, each movement informing the next, a conversation between two outstanding musicians. ---gizehrecords.bandcamp.com

It’s been three years since we’ve heard a new Julia Kent album, although the cellist has kept busy as a guest artist (Markus Guentner’s Empire) and remixer (Michael Price’s Diary Reworks). On The Great Lake Swallows, she teams up with tape manipulator and guitarist Jean D.L. and field recordist Sandrine Verstraete on the score to a video installation.

The music is suitably shaded, as the disc marks the return of Gizeh's Dark Peak series. The tone is that of a great lake swallowing all who enter, the sludge of time engulfing all. While an alternate reading would suggest the swallow as bird, the sombre mood contradicts it. One thinks instead of the La Brea tar pits, the swamp in Psycho, or more recently, the duck boat tragedy in Table Rock Lake.

Make no mistake ~ this music is morose. The four-part composition flows forward inexorably to its bittersweet conclusion. But it is also lovely and dense. The partnership provides a greater texture than we might encounter from a single performer, the field recordings in particular grounding the suite in a real world setting. We agree with the recommendation to listen to the recording as a whole in order to comprehend its cumulative weight. Sorrowful even at the start, it comes across as a requiem, guitar tones amassing behind Kent's cello in a slow drone.

A humid foreboding occurs at the end of Part Two, as Kent retreats for a short spell, then returns on a lower scale. The threat seeps in like an unnoticed leak. Impassive as the great lake may be, it exudes a feeling of unending hunger. As the fourth movement fades, it produces an aural after-image of its final notes, producing a feeling of great loss, coupled with the lament that nothing could have been done to slow what had been set in motion. The great lake swallows, then shows a placid surface: no evidence, no apology. ---Richard Allen, acloserlisten.com

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