

Aegis Noise

Literature and Philosophy

CRITICISM, ESSAY

Sinister Oracles: A Review of Anju Singh's
Nausea 'Requiem'



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Listen here: <https://www.anjusingh.com/works/the-nausea-requiem-lp/>

Sound is visceral. As such music enters us in a way that, art criticism for example, does not. It has an immediacy that automatically excites emotional and intellectual responses and, when the work in question is powerful enough, this can be supremely meaningful. There's a reason we say something 'resonated' with us and so avail ourselves of acoustic language in order to describe an experience that's deeply moving. Because that's our reference for intensity. It should be admitted then that music and sound design reign over this region of the soul; that artforms invested in the other senses cannot compete in that particular respect. Although, personally, I wouldn't go so far as saying that music's inherently superior to other artforms (Which Schopenhauer did) since they do of course move us in their own unique manners. Writing for example is ideal for articulating ideas with the greatest specificity.

I'll try to be as specific as possible in my effort to outline the merits of this album. But those are many, and several of these are naturally hard to express; in even the most overt successes there must be nuances because otherwise the achievement would lie within the reach of ordinary understanding and talent. This requiem most assuredly doesn't. Only a composer of exceptional insight and human awareness could craft a work of such rare virtuosity. Now, occasionally musicians can stumble upon a melody or whatever beyond their ordinary artistic range and perhaps with some additional good luck they can succeed in producing a one-hit wonder but there are also artistic levels that can only be attained by profound genius. And that's true for all art. The superficial aspects of Rothko's paintings for example can be easily duplicated but the sculpture of Bernini has clearly distinguishable elements that no charlatan rock-hewer could ever imitate. Music, given that it encompasses both the minimalistic and baroque, includes work across the entire spectrum here. That Singh's album contains a considerable amount of intricacy however makes it somewhat easier to praise because that instantly establishes a gulf between it and less developed art.

What struck me at the outset when I switched from the initial raw playthroughs of Singh's work to an attempt at analysis was the impactful use of layering and aggregation. There's a weight of architecture present that reminds me of the late **Jóhann Jóhannsson** (One of my favorite composers) The requiem throughout has an immersive feeling to it as a result of its use of expansive tones and hammering rhythms; like some cthonic and fiendish metal smith toiling in a hot dark cavern where the clangs of a struck anvil syncopate a heart beating in the grip of nightmare. And then elsewhere the strings are brought forward into maniacal spotlights where they saw away at the brains of the listener and then sometimes we are pressed upon by walls of noise as if caught in some monstrous dungeon trap. However, despite encompassing its audience in several moments of obliterating crescendo, these are balanced by intervals of considerable subtlety: delicately antagonistic and tantalizing in turns, an undergrowth of flowering evil in monumental and ancient ruins. I'm relying on pictures to convey my sense of Singh's art here because the album is impressively cinematic. Despite the absence of any expository vocals, the sense of narrative is always there (Though of course this is never explicit) and so the experience is like grappling with the message of an elusive dream. We are given a sense of environment and grandeur of movement but are frustrated in the desire for comprehension. And I'd argue that's an effect of the artistry on display: this is a deliberate orchestral antithesis to the aesthetics of order one finds in a classical work like Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' (Which despite its abuse by decades of banal commercials is still the beauty of order *ne plus ultra*) To achieve that effectively, Singh obviously can't just offer the audience chaos, random sounds don't express anything, but does so rather through the demonstration of order being destroyed in various superlative incarnations and with bold ingenuity. Only as such is the real principle of the antithesis to order articulated. But it is certainly something divine to create such an apocalypse as this.

I recommend this album to all music aficionados but especially to those who loved any of the following:

Max Richter's 'Infra 5'

God Speed You Black Emperor's 'East Hastings'

Marcin Przybyłowicz's (ft. Percival) 'Ladies of the Woods'

Hildur Guðnadóttir's 'Evacuation'

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