

Porter Ricks: Anguilla Electrica

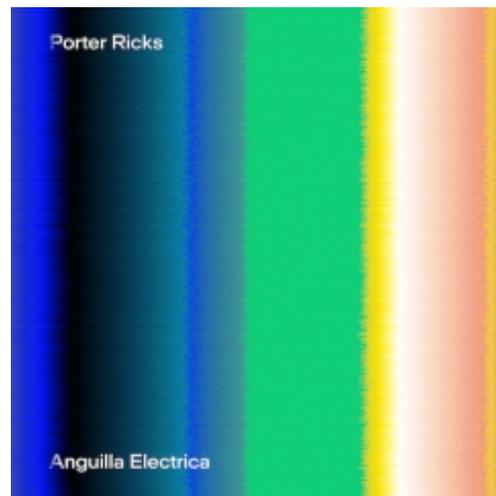
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Dub techno never had much time for albums. Its full-length milestones—Porter Ricks' *Biokinetics*, Basic Channel's *BCD* series—tend to be singles compilations, and these can be difficult to find, even while individual tracks are easy to cue up on YouTube or Spotify. The subgenre remains a niche in an indieverse that still speaks the language of albums—blame it on rockism, or perhaps on the fact that albums are more convenient and don't leave you pressing the next button every couple minutes.

Anguilla Electrica, the first Porter Ricks album of the millennium, is a strange thing: a dub techno album that's obviously crafted as an *album*. There are no versions or variations of the same track, no time-wasting experiments in dub and delay. It comes on strong—the title track, with its phocine chords and jagged sidewinders of bass, seems to rush at you out of the abyss. Designed to make an impression as soon as it enters your ears, the album is over in a tidy 42 minutes, before you've had time to process what just hit you.



And it does. The group is a master of sound design, and every track squirms with detail: the grumbling triple-time synth on "Shoal Beat," the staticky almost-chords on "Prismatic Error," the hollow spurts of distorted bass on "Scuba Rondo" that suggest potential energy as awesomely as anything since Jonny Greenwood's guitar stabs on "Creep." The sonic inventiveness on display is the only real carry-over from the group's earlier days, which saw them practicing a much more patient approach to techno.

Otherwise, the style shown off is far enough removed from the Porter Ricks of yore that these tracks might not seem to bear its stamp even to a seasoned ear. The volume's been turned up to 10, for instance. While the best of the band's work on the great Chain Reaction label was often hushed and patient, these songs explode with a brutal force equivalent to brostep or heavy metal. As in those genres, most of the really memorable experimentation here takes place within the midrange rather than the bass.

Yet the album falters in a way that brings to mind Gas' *Narkopop*, which likewise heralded the return of one of Y2K-era dance music's druggiest experimentalists. That album was bigger and bolder than anything Gas had made before, and while it made it clear Wolfgang Voigt still had his wits about him, it failed as the sort of immersive experience that defined the project in the past. It seemed more interested in the moment than its future; its strengths lay in what hadn't changed rather than what had.

Such is the problem with *Anguilla Electrica*. This is one of the most painstakingly sound-designed techno albums you'll hear this year, but something's missing, and that's the ability to really get lost in the music. Dub techno tends to work like ambient music, relying on expansive runtimes and gentle but beguiling textures to get the point across. This works more like punk rock. It doesn't let you sink into its depths; it hits you with a jolt and stirs you awake, and as such, I suspect its replay value will diminish with the potency of its thrills.

- Label:
Tresor
- Release Date:
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