

Pender Street Steppers: Pender Street Steppers

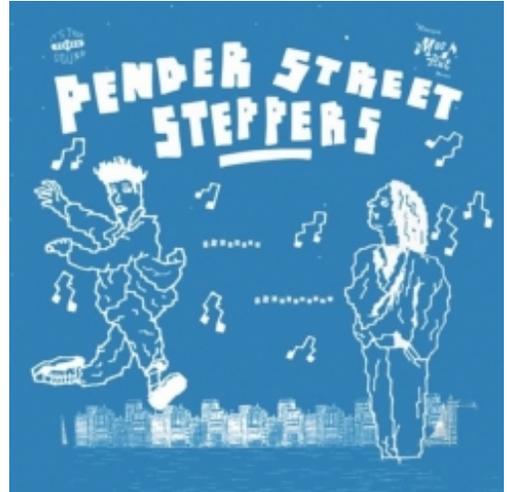
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January 24, 2018

The simple ease of Mood Hut's music is matched only by the difficulty of getting ahold of it. The Vancouver label traffics strictly in tape and vinyl, both of which sell out quick. This isn't unusual for dance music, but Mood Hut wouldn't strike one as like the type to cloak itself in purism: its strain of house is easygoing and stoned, sort of a mix of disco and vintage healing-shop music.

So the question for the casual fan is: is it worth it to seek it out? Pender Street Steppers' new EP is only 5 songs long and barely scrapes half an hour; it will almost certainly take longer to track down than to listen to. Some listeners might find the brief bliss it imparts underwhelming after all the trouble it takes to get it. Others might find the work makes it more rewarding. Maybe we're meant to feel like we're part of a secret club; Mood Hut's imagery borders on the Masonic.



Pender Street Steppers is a fine listen; it's worth seeking out, but it's understandable if you're unwilling to expend the energy on it. It doesn't stray far from the Steppers' comfort zone, though there are a few new developments. There's a marked increase in sound quality, for one: their drums no longer thwack in the midrange but clamber curiously up the sides of the stereo field. It's also a little darker and more downcast than usual—through never enough to be challenging.

Prior Steppers music could be described as sunny. This one's more overcast; the first track is even called "Raining Again," and its drums are treated with a light patina of echo that creates the illusion of feet splashing on rainy sidewalks. There's a pronounced dub influence here, most obviously on "Mirror (Dub)," which sounds like Rhythm & Sound played by a seaside orchestra; the echo from its guitar chords clambers up the sides of the stereo field, seeming to envelop us.

The best tracks, including "Raining Again," are rock-solid permutations of the formula they've perfected. "Molto Bene" is low-stakes and jaunty, and "No Need" is a long-form epic in the vein of Stepper Jack J's "Something (On My Mind)." "Blackboard" tries to expand on the Mood Hut sound by adding dissonant post-punk guitars, but amid such placid music, it seems to interrupt.

The expansions on the Steppers' sound are less twists than tweaks. They keep things interesting, but not much else, and the EP would probably be better if it zeroed in on what the Steppers are good at. I'd trade "Mirror (Dub)" and "Blackboard" for two variations on "No

Need.”

That’s not to say the Steppers shouldn’t experiment. It’s just that the experimentation needs to be justified, and it isn’t here. An extreme reinvention could work. Jack J’s ambient solo releases, like *Mother Official*, make it clear he’s capable of an entirely different style of music. But it’s no wonder they named a 2013 tape *Life In The Zone*: these guys are in no hurry to get anywhere.

- Label:
Mood Hut
- Release Date:
December 8, 2017