

# Animal Collective: Tangerine Reef

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*Tangerine Reef* is an ambient sort of thing that more closely resembles earlier Animal Collective releases like *Danse Manatee* or *Water Curses* than anything they've put out since becoming accidental rock stars with 2009's "My Girls" and *Merriweather Post Pavilion*. If you stumbled across the band during that *annus mirabilis* for indie rock, you might be sorely disappointed by the lack of great pop songs on *Tangerine Reef*, and the absence of the band's Brian Wilson surrogate Panda Bear might make this a non-starter for some fans. But this is the most relaxed and easygoing thing they've billed as a full album in over a decade.

*Reef* is a soundtrack to art-activist duo Coral Morphologic's film of the same name, made to spread awareness of the plight of coral reefs—colonies of invertebrates (literal animal collectives!) that are sensitive to changes in the water such as the warming and acidification caused by human activity. The film emphasizes the alien shapes of the corals as they gyrate in the ocean currents, their beauty acting as our impetus to help save them. *Tangerine Reef* takes a similar approach. It doesn't really suggest environmental dread; it's sound scuba, evoking both the immersive qualities of the ocean and its status as one of the last true wildernesses.

Processed guitars slosh like waves and scrape like sea-sharpened stones. Bits of melody swim faintly through the murk, like the marimbas on “Buxom” and the “Stir it Up” synth on “Hip Sponge.” Avey Tare’s voice is a constant, sometimes singing, more often murmuring like fishermen on the beach. His vocals are the weak point of the album—when he sings “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times” on “Best of Times (Worst of All),” we think of Charles Dickens, not coral—but they’re tasteful, and perhaps the album benefits from the absence of Panda Bear, whose singing is much showier and might have been a distraction.

*Tangerine Reef* is in line with recent ambient albums like Jake Muir’s *Lady’s Mantle* and Mike Cooper’s *Raft*, which appreciate the sea not for the postcard fantasias of relaxing on a beach-towel in the sun but for its savagery, its status as one of the last true wildernesses. Like *Tangerine Reef*, Cooper’s album had a political angle: it was a deconstruction of faux-Hawaiian tiki bar music that used steel and slack-key guitars to create something far from most perceptions of paradise. You might be able to guess that from listening to Cooper’s record free of context. Not from this one. Without the story, it scans as mindless mood music.

The efficacy of the *Tangerine Reef* project as a call-to-arms for the earth is worth questioning. The money from this album is not going to a charitable organization, and by showing the animals in a healthy state, the video is unlikely to mean anything to those unfamiliar with the plight of coral reefs and will appeal more to stoners who still carry *Oddsac* close to their heart than anyone who might want to help their cause. Everyone knows coral reefs are beautiful. Not everyone knows that they’re in danger. Likewise, the alluring aquatic drift of this album makes the ocean seem like a wonderful place to be—which it is, for some species.