

Spelling: Mazy Fly

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Tia Cabral, late of Oakland's terrific Ratskin Records and now signed to Sacred Bones, might be the most visible face of the East Bay experimental scene, which consists largely of young queer musicians and musicians of color rather than the pasty bald mountains of brawn we typically see behind noiseboxes. It's easy to see why her Spelling project is the biggest post-Ratskin success story to date. Her music's approachable, not necessarily because it has much for the casual listener to latch onto but because it rejects the extremes of aesthetic and thematic ugliness in what we think of as experimental music. Cabral comes across as pleasant, and indeed my former *Bay Guardian* colleague Emma Silvers had a terrific time feeding ducks with her at Oakland's Lake Merritt and writing about it for *Pitchfork*. It's easy to imagine a lot of people liking her Sacred Bones debut because of who she is as a *person*; once you bond enough with the protagonist of a piece of music, everything else tends to fall into place, and moments that seem inexplicable are thrown into blinding light.

Mazy Fly is steeped in speculative fiction, from horror to sci-fi to fantasy to the flights of the imagination that grow organically out of everyday life. Some of her stories are simple: *What if my border collie could fly? What if aliens came to earth?* Some are uglier: “Haunted Water” imagines Atlantic waters echoing with the cries of those who died on the Middle Passage. For the most part, Cabral looks at the improbable with a friendly smile, never winking at her own nerddom or betraying any awareness that the plot of “Real Fun” is not terribly different from that of *Earth Girls are Easy*. It’s rare to find a pop album inspired by these themes but not the Cold War camp of pulp comics and flying-saucer movies, which haveve been beaten to death in recent years by Burger Records and affiliates. *Mazy Fly* excels in laser noises and organs but is light on surf guitars and theremins.

The sound palate of the record is basically synth-pop, all bubbling sequencers and endless gated snares. Where it gets weird is in Cabral’s vocals. Her voice resembles a thick skin that’s been allowed to settle on the music, and she sways impressively between wicked cackles and tenebrous moans, usually accompanied by a small army of herself. She sings slowly and deliberately, and the first sentence of “Haunted Water” takes nearly half a minute to pass by. *Mazy Fly* sounds sort of like a New Romantic classic dredged from the Dagobah swamps. It’s less musically interesting than her much stranger Ratskin release *Pantheon of Me*, perhaps because it’s in limbo between pop and the primordial murk. It’s never particularly hooky nor terribly atmospheric, and the songs often end up so far from where they started that they’re hard to keep track of. Cabral only recently began making music seriously after a long hiatus spent pursuing the visual arts, so it’s likely as she progresses she’ll tighten her craft and learn to write songs as good as her submersions.



<https://youtu.be/FTmBdT12qNU>