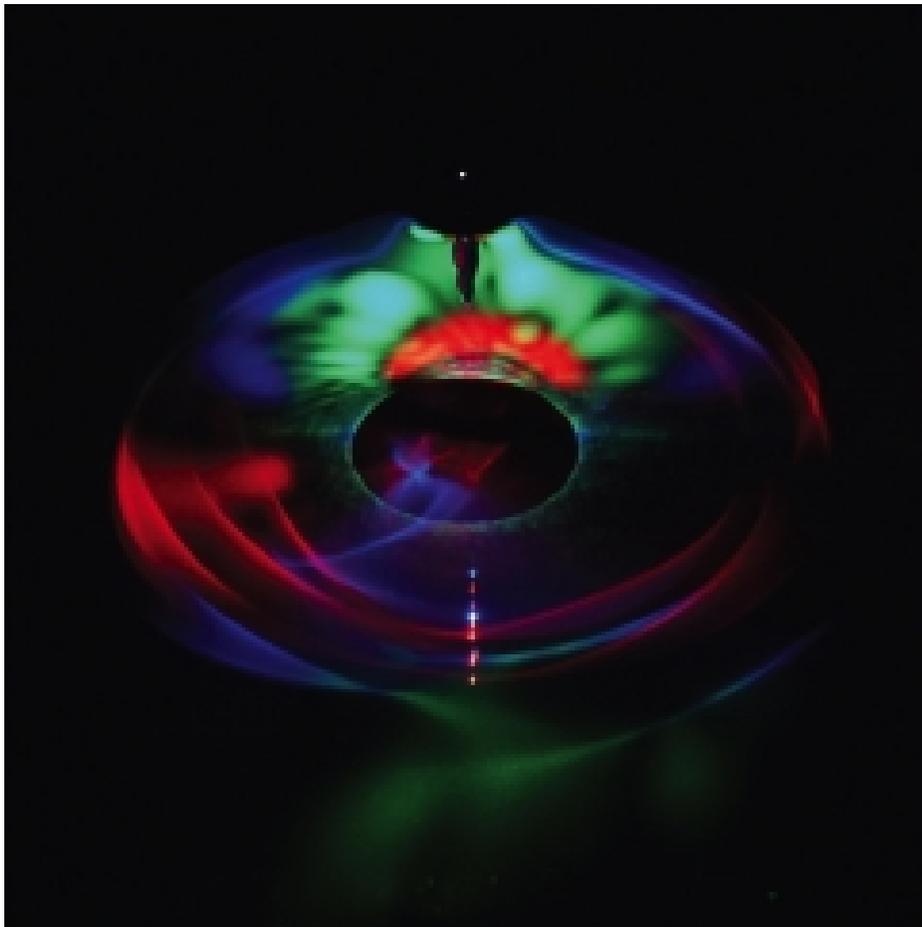


William Basinski: On Time Out of Time

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William Basinski's work has always played with time. The NYC maestro often lets his tape loops sit for years before releasing them. His best-known work *The Disintegration Loops* actually chronicled the process of decades-old tapes falling apart. 2017's *A Shadow in Time* canonized his hero David Bowie by melting his memory into the fabric of the universe. So it's no surprise he'd want to make an album with the sounds of an event that took place billions of years ago.

On Time Out of Time includes the sound of two black holes colliding, recorded by the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory, whose complexes in Louisiana and Washington are the kind of vast rural structures that could inspire a whole ambient album to themselves. Of course, "sound" is a little misleading. There's nothing in space through which sound can travel, so what we're hearing is light signals converted into soundwaves. It's serendipitous that they sound like what we'd imagine space to sound like: rumbling and unpretty, the closest thing to the sound of a void short of silence.

Basinski frames *On Time Out of Time* as a love story between the black holes, which is an endearing angle: two big, unlovely space juggernauts converging and forming a union, like two amorous hippos mating in some swampy Nile bulrushes. Maybe that's why the forty-minute title track starts out as amelodic drone and distant rumblings, reminiscent of the work of late Italian master Oöphoi, and eventually yields to synth tones that almost approximate the sawing strings of some epic Hollywood love theme.

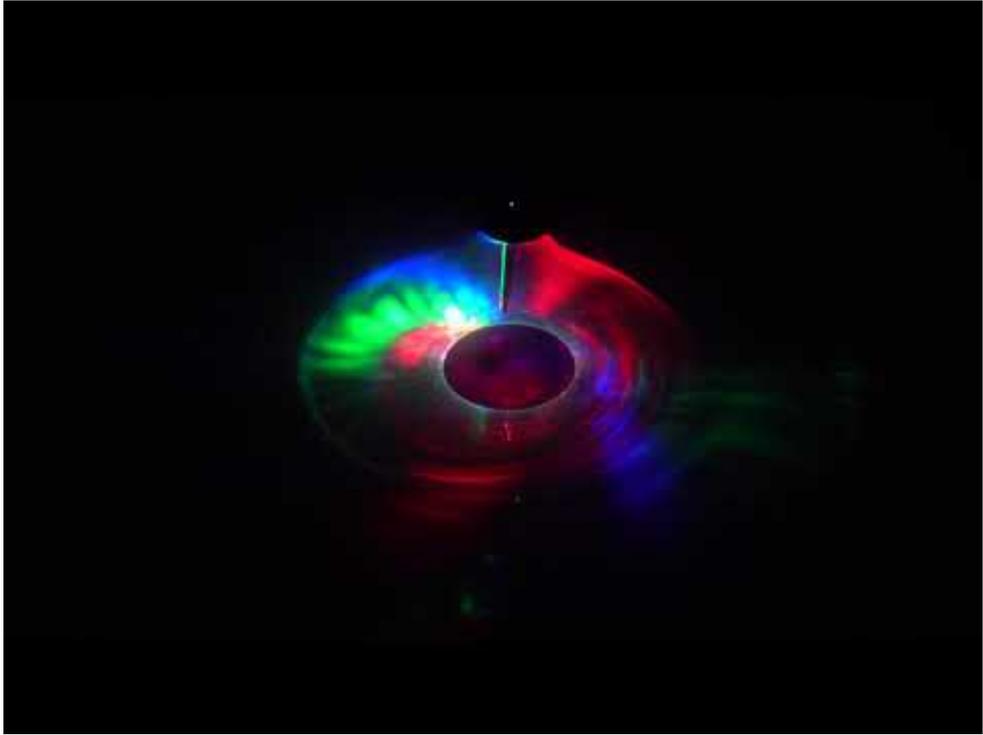
But black holes aren't people, and in blasting off from the Blue Planet Basinski's left the human element of his work behind. Even Basinski's most ambient pieces are charged with melancholy. That's because he tends to use loops of recognizable instruments like strings and piano and submerge them until they seem to echo from the very bowels of time. It's the same reason vaporwave, Gavin Bryars' *Sinking of the Titanic*, and Leyland Kirby's work as the Caretaker are so effective: it's ephemeral, lost music in ghost form.

On Time Out of Time is more abstract and thus much more neutral than we're used to from Basinski, especially when you consider outer space is the epitome of neutrality. We don't even get the same face-peeling awe of the vastness of the universe we get from Lustmord's *Dark Matter*, which remains the best of a handful of recent records made with space noises. (Others include Quindar's *Hip Mobility*, Lefse Records' rock-centric *Space Project*, and Swiss label Cadenza's *ALMA Sounds*.)

Basinski admits the black hole sounds comprise only a small part of the album's palette. "I didn't use all of it because some of it was really scary, and then I extrapolated with my imagination, how these waves traveled billions of years to come to earth," he told *Pitchfork* in a recent interview. One wonders what kind of music Basinski would've made had he bottled that fear in the music instead of shrinking away from the possibilities of surrendering to it.

To be inspired by something often means forming an intimate relationship with it, which is why so many of the greatest ambient artists are inspired by places: Brian Eno and Harold Budd by architecture, Loscil by Vancouver and its wet weather, Wolfgang Voigt by Germany's great forests. Because Basinski approaches his source material from such an awed, respectful distance, *On Time Out of Time* never quite transcends its status as an experiment.

In addition to the 40-minute title track, the digital edition contains a 10-minute piece called "4(E+D)4(ER=EPR)," which repurposes a tape loop from his excellent 92982 record on top of black hole sounds that are louder and more frightening than what we hear in the first piece. There's so much feeling in that loop we wonder why he didn't drag that one out for longer. The black holes that feature on this album are 30 times the mass of our Sun, but they're puny next to the universes Basinski conjures at his best.



<https://youtu.be/Kh38oOSo9dM>