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Big Kitty Excelsior Breeze Catchers, Rick Weaver The Secular Arm

by Ernie, Paik

May 31, 2017

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Big Kitty *Excelsior Breeze Catchers*, Rick Weaver *The Secular Arm*

Big Kitty

Excelsior Breeze Catchers

(Teaberry Records)

Big Kitty—the alter ego of former Chattanooga Clark Williams—has a knack for music-driven storytelling with vivid dreamworld scenarios that bloom in unusual ways from the physical world as we know it.

The new Big Kitty album, *Excelsior Breeze Catchers*, leans more toward the full-band approach of the 2011 album *Florence* than more stripped-down affairs on recent releases.

Although Williams now resides in Sebastopol, California, he still has strong ties to Tennessee-based bands and enlists the help of nine other musicians and singers, including two from Future Virgins (drummer Cole Champion and guitarist William Joseph Johnson) and Grady O'Rear of ADD/C.

Williams' voice, with its distinctive twang, is as inviting as ever among the album's bouncy, gentle county-folk-pop tunes or its more driving songs, like the upbeat "Johnny Rosemary" (quite literally a driving song), a grim tale involving intense weather and auto mishaps.

The sound of "Dr. Harmony" seems to employ an alternate-universe George Martin for production, with a



charmingly lithe mix including euphonium harmonies and Williams' vocal melodies mirrored by strings and whistling.

A significant part of the album's richness is the attention to detail, from heavenly keyboard flourishes to ecstatic guitar licks, like the piercing, severely distorted solo on "Body of a Lion, Head of a Man," and ambient background sounds are plentiful, from nature noises, wave transmissions, chimes or a soft, child's voice.

It's another consistently strong and engaging album, from the alternate perspective and eccentric interpretation of a biblical account on "Magdalene" to the Johnny Cash-esque "Brian" with a dreamy waltz-time section.

The album's title refers to endangered creatures that are a sort of butterfly/firefly hybrid that have expressive faces and only live in Big Kitty's isolated sanctuary, and the description sets the perfect tone and offers a fitting parallel: a rare, intimate journey to a musical oasis, with glowing brilliance to inspire and illuminate joy-making and dancing on moonless nights.

Rick Weaver

The Secular Arm

(Hausu Mountain)

The off-kilter, often messy brilliance of Rick Weaver is responsible for a bounty of fascinating material under names such as Four Hands, Dinner Music and Ruined Frame, and although for the time being, he has seemingly settled with his own relatively normal real name, as before, there's nothing normal about his work.

Weaver's new album *The Secular Arm* on the label Hausu Mountain (which previously released a split album that featured his 4-track trio *Form a Log*) wastes no time getting down to business with the opener, "Roy the Rodent," with Morse-code rhythms tapped out with synthetic scraps; its buzzing tones and keyboard sorcery channel a sort of Goblin/John Carpenter vibe.

The brief "Historical Music #1-4" would fit in nicely with the universe of Ralph Records (known as the home of The Residents and Renaldo and the Loaf), and in particular, the ice-pick stabs from the electric guitar have a Snakefinger feel.

With its beat-box rhythm and chimpish keyboard vamps, "Tin Tan (mono)" has a strange primitive momentum to it, with little repeated melodic fragments smashed together in a mushy ball; if someone told this writer it was Saharan disco exotica, he wouldn't blink an eye. "Far East" offers scales evocative of the titular region with a menacing, fang-bearing bass line coupled with dramatic, mysterious synth notes.

The Secular Arm offers many unsettling moments, from harsh noise to the disturbing stew of noises on



“Cause for Alarm,” with what sounds like amplified, buzzing purrs to distant sirens to caustic keyboard acid burns; with ominous synths and bubbling noises, “Lie Detector” could be a horror noir soundtrack.

Previously released on his 2014 split cassette with Spiritual Recess (recently reissued), “KO’s Obit” makes an appearance here with an alternate vocal mix, and it’s hard to pin it down, with a vague southeast Asian plucked-string approach, perhaps suggesting Sun City Girls mixed with some lost obscurity on the Nurse With Wound list.

Always stimulating, The Secular Arm is a nervous and animated excursion outside of comfortable, climate-controlled regions.

by Ernie, Paik
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Chattanooga Market at Erlanger

Nov 30, 2018 10:30 AM

Erlanger Hospital

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Our Neighbors - A Photo Exhibition of Highland Park and Ridgedale

Nov 30, 2018 4:30 PM - 7:30 PM

Amani Chattanooga

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Binji Varsossa

Nov 30, 2018 6:00 PM

Cancun Restaurant Downtown

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Ice on the Landing

Nov 30, 2018 6:00 PM

Chattanooga Choo Choo

CONCERTS & LIVE MUSIC

Gino Fanelli

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Westin Dorato Bar

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John Carroll

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Westin Alchemy Bar

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