

## Suzuki Junzo — *Sings II* (Nod and Smile)

February 22, 2014

The heavy psych/rock scene in Japan is streaking ahead of any other, with acts like Fushitsusha and Acid Mothers Temple producing music of effortlessly visceral — not to mention loud — weirdness. Julian Cope once dedicated an entire compilation to the scene, appropriately titled *Nihon Nihilist*, which grouped together luminaries past and present such as J.A. Caesar, Les Rallizes Dénudés and Kousokuya. Add to that the resurgence of Mainliner and the ongoing vitality of the Land of the Rising Sun's noise scene, as well as a seemingly innate ability to meld and blend genres such as folk, drone and the avant-garde, and it's clear that Japan is the place to go if you like your sounds hard, trippy or unfathomable, sometimes all three at once.


Suzuki Junzo is a lesser-known Japanese artist who nonetheless seems to encapsulate all of the above on *Sings II: Sings Ballads of Contemporary Sadness, Point of Views and General Love and Depression*, a strange hybrid of an album that takes in just about every form of music imaginable that isn't electronic or hip-hop. The album's core crosses American blues and folk, refracting both through an arcane spirit that recalls Loren Connors and Bill Orcutt. "In the Eyes of Naze" opens the album with bizarre choked hiccups, inhalations and gasps from Junzo over prickly, close-miked finger-picking. It's as if he's popping out a ballad whilst dragging on a joint. The track's sweet central melody is intermittently subsumed by the strange ululations of its creator, building a potent tension. Again, Bill Orcutt's primitivist approach to the blues springs to mind. Elsewhere, however, Junzo is more straight-forward. "Missummer's End" and "A Tree of Night" are charming if unsurprising acoustic ballads in the style of Jackson C. Clark.

*Sings II* turns meatiest in three central workouts, two of them placed back-to-back in the running order. "Eclipse IV" swamps Junzo's subdued, morose vocals in screaming electric guitar lines. The cut nudges into Rallizes territory with piercing feedback and open-ended solos, and Connors' *Long Nights* is a probable reference point. The wonderfully-named "Crying Out Double Suicide Blues" is more circumspect, the guitars moaning wistfully in the background and Junzo's vocals reduced to sparse interjections around bleak moments of introspection. If any track inhabits the album's morose subtitle, it's "Crying Out Double Suicide Blues."

At double those two tracks' length, and arriving after a handful that feel a bit like filler, "Chi No Mure" towers over the rest of *Sings II*. It condenses into 12 minutes everything that Suzuki Junzo has been trying to express on the nine previous pieces. It starts nondescriptly. A chugging riff repeats for several minutes before being joined by unsettling vocal eruptions that sound like black metal samples. A guitar drone builds slowly to subsume the track in baleful noise. Again, one thinks of Loren Connors and Acid Mothers Temple, and Junzo expertly balances trippy psychedelia with abstract noise. "Chi No Mure" ends in a blissful climax, from which the calm, acoustic waters of closer "The Man with the Golden Arm" are the only possible respite.


Joseph Burnett

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