

DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY



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Dreamland, Beat Circus' second release, is proof positive that the concept album did not die with vinyl records and is still very much alive. In fact it is one of the most ambitious and peculiar musical endeavors I've ever experienced. Billed as the first part in a "Weird American Gothic" trilogy, it features a 150-page musical score, written by frontman Brian Carpenter, and is based on the turn of the century, Coney Island amusement park, Dreamland, and the denizens of surreal characters that made it eerily alluring.

This music is not for the casual music fan. If you're looking for sweet pop, sublime indie rock, ambient background music or anything that you can put on and not pay attention to, stay away. Similar in style to The Residents' *Freakshow* and like taking a mercurial musical acid trip, *Dreamland* is a swirling maelstrom of theatrical post-cabaret and vaudevillian post-rock jazz. The 9-member collective, and numerous special guests, create eccentric soundtracks for the equally eccentric stories and bizarre characters that inhabit Dreamland with an exotic array of instruments including pump organ, mandolin, tenor banjo, jawharp, slide guitar, accordion, harmonica, tuba, trombone, saxophones, violin, viola, cello, electronics, drums and percussion.

At times the music sounds like a fitting accompaniment for the opening credits of a Hitchcock movie, a demented soundtrack to a cult-classic animated film or a rousing rumba for a Russian kick-dancing festival, but is always a suitable score for Carpenter's tale of an impoverished, alcoholic gold miner who makes a pact with the devil before fleeing eastward to work in Dreamland's sideshows. The combination of lo-fi production, unusual instrument combinations and the intelligent use of unorthodox orchestral arrangements and melancholic strings, all provide a certain antiquated feel, which in turn brings a genuine and familiar quality to the music. In fact there is ample substantive music here, borne out of challenging expressions and executed with skill, but in a darkly theatrical style that is definitely an acquired taste.

Dreamland is filled with piquant musical abstractions and can be quite rewarding for those willing to put in the time and who enjoy impressionistic compositions, like pieces of musical art. Expect many repeated listens before becoming accustomed to the unconventional musical wisdom and assimilate this multi-faceted and original album.

The cover art and booklet, with antique photos of Coney Island and exquisitely designed and colorful graphics, enhances the experience and offers insight to the ideas behind the eccentric music and helps provide a 45 minute musical escape with more entertainment than a 2-hour DVD rental.

Recommended Tracks: "Delirium Tremens", "Dark Eyes" and "Slavochka"

-Matt the Raven
07/23/08

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Dark, theatrical Americana

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