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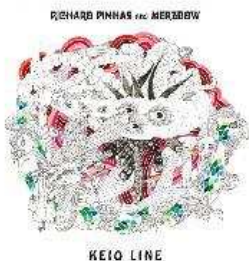
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## Article Details

### Richard Pinhas & Merzbow - Keio Line



KEIO LINE

**Richard Pinhas / Merzbow**

**Music**  
**Cuneiform Records**  
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**Score: 7.5/10**

Between *Fantasma Parastasia*, *Street Horsing*, *Challenger*, and now this, 2008 turned out to be a pretty great year for noise and drone music. I'll be the first to admit that this stuff is pretty hit or miss - really, any idiot can assemble a tuneless noise collage and call it art - but when done well, drone reveals insights into how blurry the boundary between sound and music actually is, and suggests frontiers entirely unglimped by more conventional approaches. Noise-art supreme godhead **Merzbow** is indicative of the genre's potential and its pitfalls--some of his work, solo and collaborative, is fantastic, but the guy releases *a lot* of music and it raises the question of quality control. **Richard Pinhas**, on the other hand, is an old-school electro-rock pioneer, first with French progressive rock band **Heldon**, then on his

own. **Tangerine Dream**, **Goblin**, **Cluster**, and **Ash Ra** were his contemporaries, but unlike the majority of those artists, Pinhas has stayed active, restless, and current, releasing new music up to the present day.

*Keio Line* is the collaborative result of these two geographically disparate talents. In many ways, it comes across as an elder-statesmen reply to the year's earlier **Baker** and **Hecker** team-up; as with *Fantasma Parastasia*, the duo behind *Keio Line* comprises one guitarist with a predilection for drone and ambience, and one electronicist who carves beauty out of raw, violent noise. At nearly two hours, *Keio Line* demands much more of the listener's time and patience, and the individual tracks follow suit, the shortest clocking in at over eight minutes, and some reaching nearly half an hour of pulsating, fractured drone. Rather than coming off as indulgent, however, the length translates into an embarrassment of riches, and gives the album a sense of weight that colors the songs. In other words, this album is not a brief glimpse into a fractured and radiant cosmic light; it is the ocean itself, vast and churning and inscrutable.

Describing the individual tracks in detail would be an exercise in pointlessness. Not that each epic doesn't get its own groove on, but everything's of a piece, composed of the same ingredients - Pinhas's ringing, ambient, **Fripp**-esque guitar work smothered under layers of keyboards and waves of static. As with much loop-based ambience, several patterns are always in play, competing and combining in unexpected ways. And like many of Merzbow's collaborations, it's difficult to tell exactly where he is and what he's doing, but the chaotic, fractious sound of the pieces - as well as the occasional highly-distorted throb that gives sections of "Tokyo Electric Guerilla" and "Herzdon/Heldow Kills Animal Killers," something resembling a beat - bear his stamp. Elsewhere, the warm sound of vintage keyboards - calling to mind the best early electro-rock - lends a comforting sheen to music that could easily be alienating in its opacity. These barely-human elements never become cloying or distracting because they never dominate the mix, but they do work to humanize what, otherwise, is an impenetrably dense tower of sound and squall.

*Keio Line* is a massive, take-it-or-leave-it affair. It's far more jagged and violent than Pinhas is known for, but, that said, it easily falls on the more-accessible side of Merzbow's work. It's aggressively psychedelic, intensely abstract, and fundamentally exhausting; it's audaciously grand and monolithically self-regarding; it's is-ness defined, unconcerned with manifesting itself in any other way. It's all of these things because it *works*, at times brilliantly; in hands of lesser artists, this would be a complete mess. Fans of feedback and roar tempered with trembling beauty, check this out.

-Lucas Kane

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