



Squarepusher

Just A Souvenir
(Warp)

by Matt J Simmons

There are times when you encounter an album that makes you stop and think, “What the fuck was s/he thinking?” Bjork, Aphex Twin, and of course Squarepusher, have all released albums that do that. A few years ago, Squarepusher aka Tom Jenkinson, punctuated his usual brilliant style of complex IDM blips and bleeps with a foray into, of all things, classical guitar. It was a bit of a slap-in-the-face to his die-hard fans, but to me, this was a change I could take in stride. An artist’s ability to reinvent, evolving and progressing to new levels, is vital, especially in our fast-paced culture. That said, it doesn’t always work. Squarepusher’s latest is yet another shake-up of conventions.

Just a Souvenir is simply just bizarre. Jenkinson has all but left IDM behind and slipped instead into a frenzied world of jazz, classical, techno, and speed metal. Jenkinson’s genius can’t be denied; but the line between genius and insanity is often quite blurry.

The album opens with a tune that, for a few seconds, recalls Squarepusher’s distinct sound, but it rapidly veers into a weird combination of ultra-funky bass lines and riffs on a retro synth. “Real Woman,” a few tracks in, is mental, vaguely reminiscent of New Wave and progressive fusion-funk, with lyrics that, really, I just don’t get. Then, in comes the metal. It comes out of nowhere, but at the same time, almost unnoticed. Speed-metal riffs echo the frantic bass lines of previous jazzy tracks. Jazz vs. Metal, battle of the genres? Or, metal is essentially a form of jazz? Tom, what are you trying to tell us? The classical guitar makes further appearances on a few intellectual Amon Tobin-style ambient tracks, best pondered over a smoky scotch. “Quadrature,” the finest on the album, ties the best elements together.

But *Just a Souvenir* is just that: souvenirs picked up from different styles of music. Why else would you meld jazz, metal, IDM, ambient, and classical onto a single album? Inspired by a bizarre daydream about an eclectic live band, including a kayaking Eskimo drummer and a guitarist who could alter the speed of time itself, the album is actually three albums, each interesting and worthy of praise, but not a cohesive work. Like the dream, *Just a Souvenir* is a disjointed collection of aural images.