

from the desk of
mutante-inc

Oliver Cherer - "Sir Ollife Leigh and Other Ghosts" cd/dd - Released 14th April 2014 Second Language

Oliver Cherer steps out from his Dollboy moniker, after 5 albums and numerous singles/eps/split releases, to present a new set of sweet and tender recordings.

Retaining an attractive blend of organic instrumentation, unsettling electronic soundscapes and tender, intimate harmonies that have become his trademark over the years Cherer has produced an album of beautiful, pastoral reminiscences and uneasy nostalgia on the subject of loss.

Recorded in his studio in St Leonrads On Sea, East Sussex and including contributions from Riz Maslen (Neotropic) on backing vocals, recorders and flute, Jack Hayter (Hefner) on viola and banjo and Alistair Strachan (Crayola Lecturn) supplying horns, 'Other Ghosts' is a wonderful addition to an impressive back catalogue.

Renowned for a certain restrained melancholy in his songwriting, mixing low-key electronics, sublime harmonies and folksy acousticism Cherer creates a feeling of warm, historical placement with each album release. The results of an active imagination and songwriting excellence that has produced consistent, compelling english psych folk of the highest standard that echos Robert Wyatt and has a kinda kinship to the output of North Sea Radio Orchestra and Alexander Tucker.

The albums threads and themes

"Firstly there is the attempt to find a unique musical voice for it. To do this I used instruments I was less familiar with and tried to use them in unconventional ways. I took an old 50s f-hole archtop guitar and bowed it more than I plucked or strummed it. I did the same with a balalaika, a dulcimer and a cimbalom which I adapted by replacing the flat bridge with a curved one and then tuning to various modes for bowing. There's even a bowed sitar in there somewhere. I was after the sound of an English indigenous music from some dark age. It comes from being slightly obsessed with Russell Hoban's "Riddley Walker" so it's meant to sound like a kind of pagan folk music from a modern dark age. And I am aware that that sounds incredibly precious and dangerously pretentious! I just didn't want it to sound like traditional folk so there's a deliberate avoidance of virtuosity – it's the sound of people struggling with crude instruments (maybe!).

The sound was enhanced a great deal by the input of Riz Maslen (Neotropic) who did a lot of backing vocals, some of which transformed the songs they were a part of. I've also been doing shows with Riz. I have also managed to persuade Jack Hayter (of his own fame and Hefners') and Alistair Strachan (Crayola Lecturn) to play on it.

As on all my previous records I've utilised electronics too, though less obviously perhaps and again, in more crude ways such as use of an old test oscillator and a 1/4" tape machine and tape echo as well as analogue synths.

A more obvious 'theme' is "Sir Ollife's Theme". It's just a little leitmotif to suggest faded memories and to remind the listener that the whole record is about ghosts. It pops up at the start and end of the record and at one or two points in between, the longest of which is at the end of "Croham Hurst". Each version is slightly more or less faded or broken than the others by dint of running them onto the old tape machine and destroying the tape a little more each time! There are references to phrases within this theme elsewhere in some of the other songs.

The other themes are in the words. The title comes from the tune "Croham Hurst", which could be regarded as what a good friend once told me is known as "the eye of the duck". It's a song about ghosts (which I don't believe in!). In this case it's about memories evoked by place. Croham Hurst is an ancient wood in Croydon (I know it seems unlikely!) and is probably the last place I went with my mother before she died in the late 70s. Sir Ollife Leigh was the 16th Century owner of the place and I thought his name sounded like mine. Some people feel a presence in places like this, some an "energy" and others see things. The whole album is kind of about that thing that happens when a place or object or mundane activity reminds you of a lost loved one or state etc.

It's all beautifully reflected in the sleeve art too.

Oliver Cherer plays most things with Riz Maslen (Neotropic) on backing vocals on lots of stuff, recorders on

Mentmore Waltz, The Charcoal Burners, Flute on Maryon Park, Jack Hayter (Hefner) provides viola and banjo (Croham Hurst & Consider Darkness) and Alistair Strachan (Crayola Lecturn) horns on When We Shut Down.

Track list and notes:

Ollife's Theme - The main thread is about ghosts of one form or another and here is the first. It crops up again three or four times more or less obliquely. It is made from a recording of the original sketch of the theme recorded onto ¼" tape and distressed (screwed up and unravelled!).

The Dead - Inspired by a fabulous short film I saw called Death In A Nut at an exhibition about Britain's folk traditions. It refers to the various death legends of a ferryman crossing the water, lakes, sea, rivers. In the last section the organ picks up Sir Ollife's theme. The organ is an 1898 American Reed organ which I restored myself this year. When I stripped it down I found the dated signature of the man who made it. Features myself and Riz Maslen on vocals.

The Mentmore Waltz - Written in Hackney, overlooking Mentmore Terrace before we moved to the south coast and included because of the sound and the reference to a past life that, to some degree I still mourn!

Croham Hurst - A song about a place (Croham Hurst, the ancient wood on a high plateau in Croydon) that invokes powerful memories of my Mother for me. It also refers to Sir Ollife Leigh the 16th Century owner of the place. It ends with the fullest version of Sir Ollife's theme, again processed with ¼" tape. Features Riz Maslen on backing vocals and Jack Hayter on viola and a very old zither banjo.

Consider Darkness - A song about depression and the impossibility of seeing light when all you understand is darkness. And vice versa perhaps. Features Jack Hayter with a viola arrangement and Riz Maslen on backing vocals.

The Charcoal Burners - Instrumental piece referring to a scene in Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban. I imagine wet, mossy woods and a glade with blue smoke hanging in the trees from the charcoal burners' mound. Features Riz Maslen with her own recorder arrangement.

Millions - a song about lost souls at sea. This comes from almost daily walks or rides along the cliff and fog obscuring the horizon. Features Riz on backing vocals.

Ladybird, Ladybird - A song about children leaving home. I was asked to write a song that included reference to a magic spring for the launch of a local magazine and, not being a very "majick" person came up with this. My daughter is only 7 but I already fear the emptiness of when she moves out! Features Riz on backing vocals.

Maryon Park - Written in response to a recording of Nightingales singing in an ancient wood. A reference in here to Mr Punch who features in Riddley Walker. Maryon Park was the park in Blow-up which had particularly spooky sound design in the park scenes – the sound of the trees! Features Riz Maslen on flute and vocal backing.

Asphyxiation - a second reference to the same painting, Millais' "Ophelia", the first being on my 2011 Dollboy album "Further Excursions Into The Ulu With Dollboy" ("Alice In Clearwater"). Features Riz Maslen on backing vocals.

When We Shut Down - A song about losing a long term partner. I imagine it as a woman in later life reminded of her husband as she does little things like walking the dogs etc. I hope to suggest that these memories or ghosts are the things that you carry with you through life and help to shape you. It's an attempt at a sad, poignant but optimistic song. It features a lovely brass arrangement by Alistair Strachan.

The Dead Return - It ends as it starts with Death and a further reminder of Sir Ollife's theme".