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Bright

Bells Break Their Towers
Strange Attractors
2005
B



Though it's fairly easy to use the standard, cookie cutter descriptions when speaking of psyche-rock bands, to do so would be to miss a major theme of Bright's *Bells Break Their Towers*. There's nothing alien about it, it never ventures into the far reaches of space nor does it pierce the cosmic divide that separates traditional rock music from their acid-tinged astronomical cousins. The cover of the album depicts a landscape that might be considered alien—a crag of red rocks low on the horizon—but it isn't. It's the thick and ruddy clay of our very own Earth, and above the horizon, where the sky should be is more earth, more dirt and sand dotted with weary shrubs and the eroded beds of dry rivers. Bright isn't looking up and out into the far reaches of the universe, but downward toward the patterns and tangible textures that give solid ground its weight.

The weaving, rhythmic patterns of "Manifest Harmony" curl and blossom like blurring fractals as the song shuffles over itself, never progressing forward in a traditional sense but always adding and layering more sound (or echoes of sound) onto the starting point. The song's stilted opening notes quickly link up with the band's soft chanting giving it an essence of liquidity. The individual parts sink into a messy mélange, surfacing only long enough to give the impression of their existence among the whole, but never enough to allow closer study or analysis. It's a scenario one is more likely to hear with synthetics, the tremors of electronic oscillations and drum machines. Here it has an earthy, acoustic sentiment. Human voices, though used in an abstract manner, form the dominant thrust of the melody and human hands are coaxing each audible element from the instruments.

The naturalization of these motifs and designs is more deeply ingrained on the eight-minute "An Ear Out," a track which inherits some of the stilted, out-of-phase rhythms that were only flirted with on "Manifest Harmony." It is unusual at first, the shifting syncopation divesting the listener of their expectations of what a song might or should sound like. Quickly, it becomes reassuring, and the unfamiliar becomes the bedrock for a flurry of psyche-rock trilling and jutting peaks threatening to burst the whole coil of tightly wound inertia wide open. It never does, though, content to linger in low atmospheres and the simple, hypnotic regularity of respiration.

Acoustic guitars are the principal actors on "Flood," and the stripped-down sound is the perfect cushion for singer Mark Dwinell to meander all over. It sounds a lot like the addled folk of bands like Animal Collective, who've boiled down the genre to the smallest aural pieces and scattered them about to create a new palette from which to draw. "Receiver" is certainly the most straightforward track on *Bells Break Their Towers*, with all the limbs you'd expect where you'd expect them—though it is still the beneficiary of Bright's sonorous motives.

The crashing, incessant laps of "Bells Break Their Towers" brings to mind those dry river beds once again, and while the twelve minute running time is hardly an epoch, Bright seems to simulate the persistence and patient wearing away of the thick crust to reveal deeper layers of fascinating mantle and fertile soil that exists beneath the senses of the listener. As they plunge ever downward, one can see and feel the larger ideas that spread across the album, as if looking down upon the Grand Canyon from an airplane, the movements and designs that seemed so blunt, so futile and incomprehensible up close become a gorgeous and revelatory experience when approached with the right perspective.



Reviewed by: Michael Patrick Brady
Reviewed on: 2006-01-20
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