

Doug Hammer

Melancholia

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Sometimes you want your music with a touch of the dark side, maybe kind of a somber atmosphere. Life isn't all sun and roses and we need our music to reflect that. Nothing too drastic mind you, just the main diversion for a stormy evening, and I don't mean the weather. That soundtrack has been finely crafted and produced by pianist **Doug Hammer** on his latest work called **Melancholia**. The title is obviously eponymous.

Hammer, who is not always sunshine and light himself transmutes thirteen tracks of contemporary music into a collection of brooding ambience that I truly like. Not every track is a subterfuge of doom, but the very thought that our world is occasionally darker than one wants to admit is prevalent throughout his music. Sometimes change is a good thing.

The opening track **Darkness Falls** begins with a tone cloak of Einaudi-like nuances, but Hammer decides to take it along into a somber march with a one note cadence overshadowed by a nimbler interlude. He offers the listener a balance of light and dark so that we know there are musical ways to gage the difference. A great opener.

The next tune is called **The Long Night**. Here is where Hammer lets in a little light. Even in the darkest night, occasionally the stars show out and give our souls a bit of respite and hope against the gloom. So now we have the opposing theme of light against dark. This time it has a haunting melody that places a misty shroud on everything, but there is still some kind of light.

We are given a fascinating waltz in the music of **Monsieur Barre's Carousel**. With a sweet, childlike melody, Doug's theme feels as if we took a photograph of the dancers in this scenario, somehow the picture would end up with sepia tones no matter what century it was snapped. This is music from a time machine.

Empty Chair is just plain sad. Hammer's tune has a timeless quality to it. He could have written it yesterday or a hundred years ago. We can imagine that we see the solitary chair in a single spotlight or a ray of sunlight. Its occupant is long gone, dust motes are floating in the air, and nothing else. But the memory still remains as will Doug's doleful melody.

Dancing Alone is another waltz that on the first listen seems very simple, but on close examination it perhaps should dwell in the times of Shostakovich or Prokief's. Hammer's dulcet air suggests a danseuse that is almost invisible to the naked eye, yet her swirling and graceful movement disturbs the space around us. We can feel her more than see her. What a glorious dance it is. It is one of my many favorites on Melancholia.

Doug opens up his vintage music box to produce the tune **Winding Down**. We journey from twilight to midnight in the span allotted to one delicate song. This gentle ballad is the musical background for the time lost when pondering the twinkling of stars, the arrival of dawn, or the possibilities of the future.

Appropriately, the last tune is called **Farewell**, and yes, it has the distinct air of unveiled finality to it. The melody is a mixture of memories shadowed by regrets. We look at things from far away now, our hearts filled with wonder. Hammer's somber tune casts those memories in an impermeable shell. Never to be opened, and never to be completely closed. What a beautiful piece of music Mr. Hammer.

As I said earlier, sometimes you need a dark, serious period that deflects the world for a bit. Some music that makes a barrier between you and everything else. It's one of those good with the bad things. Doug Hammer, through his thoughtful and passion infused piano tunes reminds us about those different shades of black and white, those much needed time outs, and the importance of balancing it all for the health of our spirits. Highly listenable.

- R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews