

Aarktica In Sea

"Aarktica's songs are extended reveries, built on loops of guitars & drums & occasional voices. The musical elements hover & circle, float by or bristle with distortion as the songs drift through serenity & trouble." ~ Jon Pareles, The New York Times

In Sea is Jon DeRosa's sixth-full length release as Aarktica & a return to the sound Aarktica has been famous for since its debut *No Solace In Sleep* in 2000. The story of *NSIS* is mythic. In the winter of 1999, after learning of his permanent & near-total hearing loss in his right ear caused by nerve damage, DeRosa struggled through auditory hallucinations & an addiction to painkillers to recreate sound as he suddenly began to hear it, akin to being underwater or "in sea." Disoriented by the cacophony of New York City & self-conscious about his deafness, DeRosa withdrew & began writing the songs that would become *NSIS*. These were sparse guitar compositions recorded quietly in an NYU dorm room on a dying warbly 4-track recorder. While some were as serene as an ice floe passing in the blackest night, others sounded as turbulent & terrifying as a drowning. What followed was the *Morning One* EP on Ochre Records in 2001 & then several years of releases where DeRosa veered away from his modern ambient/drone guitar orchestrations & towards atmospheric-pop & shoegaze with a number of guest musicians adding strings, horns, & vocals on top of his guitar work. While beautiful & unique, these albums are filled with pensive, paranoid, & often disjointed work that mirrored his frenetic mind during these turbulent & drug-addled points in his life.

While *In Sea's* title is a nod to Terry Riley's landmark minimal composition "In C," DeRosa also pays tribute to his teachers La Monte Young & Marian Zazeela ("LYMZ"), with whom DeRosa studied composition & Indian classical vocal music during the difficult years following his sudden deafness. He credits Young & Zazeela with teaching him how to hear without ears, relying on the physical vibrations of his instrument & his vocal chords. This ability allows him to create more detailed & nuanced guitar structures than most could make even with full use of their ears.

In 2007, DeRosa moved from New York to California to break the spiral of artistic decay he felt himself falling into. Just one year later he returned to Brooklyn to reclaim his identity & begin work on *In Sea*, the album that had haunted his head for years. DeRosa approached these recordings just as he did 10 years ago while making *NSIS*, simply trying to capture the sounds his hearing loss offers up uniquely to him. Only this time, he would opt for a studio environment to record the majority of *In Sea*, as opposed to a dying 4-track in an NYU dorm. While there are some vocals & traditional song structures on *In Sea* (something largely absent on *NSIS*) there are no guests, no producers, no electronics – no instruments aside from guitars & DeRosa's antique Bilhorn Telescopic Pump Organ, once used for traveling church revivals & home funeral services in the 1930s.

In Sea's parallels to *NSIS* are apparent on the opening opus "I Am (The Ice)," a majestic dirge reclaiming Aarktica's reputation as a master of chilling, glacial guitar symphonies. Two pieces, "A Plague of Frost (In The Guise Of Diamonds)" & "Corpse Reviver No. 2," were recorded exactly like *NSIS's* opening track "Glacia" – double-speed 4-track cassette recordings played back in regular speed mono. The darker, more rhythmic "Instill" meshes post-punk bass & guitar lines in repetition, falling into cathartic bursts of distortion, while tracks like "Onward!," "When We're Ghosts" & "Young Light" convey a youthful optimism absent from most of Aarktica's catalog. "Autumnal" rides along on layers of lush & layered picked guitars, almost hymnal in tone, while "In Sea" simmers like an oceanic storm, with the sky opening up to reveal both rain & bright sunlight. On "Hollow Earth Theory," one of the two vocal tracks on the album, DeRosa hopes against hope that Inner Earth truly does exist, searching ancient maps for an escape & an entrance, stating "We will wait & we will see, if it's right to put our faith all in this hollow earth theory."

The album ends with Aarktica's cover of Danzig's "Am I Demon?" turning the blues-metal classic into one of deadpan dark, atmospheric intimacy & self-realization with organs & reverse guitar loops that imply an unholy exorcism. DeRosa's exorcism perhaps? We hope so. After all, it sounds like the man has finally conquered his demons. After years of creating fractured pop songs for perfect ears, DeRosa has finally reconciled with the way he hears sounds, letting the rest of the world in on his otherworldly auditory hallucinations.



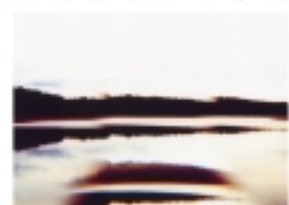
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