



BlankFor.ms / Moran, Jason / Gilmore, Marcus Refract

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Digital meets analogue on Refract - the remarkable new trio album by electronic musician and tape loop specialist BlankFor.ms, MacArthur fellow pianist Jason Moran and innovative drummer Marcus Gilmore. To be released on September 1, 2023 via Red Hook Records, Refract is an uninhibited sonic marvel that combines electronics, piano and drums in real time. By spontaneously recording loops grabbed on the fly and re-infusing the sonic planes with various effects, the results borne on Refract are sounds and energies rarely heard before.

The official release show for Refract will be at Public Records in Brooklyn on October 6.

Tyler Gilmore, aka BlankFor.ms, is a highly respected and unique artist known for richly textured, emotive music created from his rare collection of degraded tapes, analog synthesizers and an old spinet piano. In a way, his whole artistic life - thus far - has led up to this moment. "I've lived a few musical lives at this point," reflects Tyler. He began his career as a large ensemble jazz composer, attending New England Conservatory and studying with Moran, while concurrently fostering an interest in electronic music. "I had always loved electronic music and found myself trying to mimic electric textures in orchestrations. Eventually I decided to simply go to the source and work with electronic tools, first improvising with people using DAW-based delays, harmonizers, reverbs, and feedback. But it was really the discovery of cassette tape as a creative medium that spurred my electronic creations into something more." This analog electric aesthetic captivated the interest of producer Sun Chung, who upon hearing Tyler's work, proposed the idea of an album pairing him with improvisers - an idea Tyler called both "thrilling" and "terrifying".

From the onset, Jason Moran seemed to be the most natural fit. "In the time I've spent with Jason, first as a student and then arranging and orchestrating for a few of his projects, I was always in awe of his receptiveness to the present moment... he has an almost aggressive ability to listen and take everything in, and a faith that there was more to find if he were to listen even further," says Tyler. "The idea of combining my electronic vocabulary with [Jason's] playing was terribly inspiring. I had no idea, literally no idea, how he would play when confronted with tape loops, or feedback resonances, or harmonized and twisted loops of what he's just played." With Marcus Gilmore, it was even more mysterious. Tyler and Sun agreed that a percussive presence was necessary for the album to work and again, Marcus was the ideal candidate.

Sun and Tyler went through a significant pre-production period before recording. Tyler prepped a few different pathways for the trio and tried to remain unattached to whichever branch might bear the most fruit. He prepared composed pieces (with melodies and chords), musical sketches with lots of runway, and various tape loops that could serve as a jumpoff point for

improvisation. "Each composition served as a starting point," Jason Moran reflects. "Tyler's ability to mine the song as it was being made created another dimension. It felt more like part of our music reality was being refracted back to us. In that way, intentionality was especially important, because any moment could come flooding back exponentially bigger." Refract marks the first time Jason has ever worked with an electronic musician and fulfills a long-held desire for the Grammy nominated artist. "I have always longed for an outside force to manipulate my piano song and drag the sound into a cistern filled with soft clay."

Album highlights "Affectionate, Painful" and "Inward, Curve" came from more composed ideas, while the album opener "Onset I", "Onset II" and "Stir" were the result of an open-ended framework. On the various tape loop improvisations, the trio really takes flight. Tyler left all of his prepared tape loops unlabeled so that they wouldn't know which was which when they began. "The improvisations resulting from this process were some of the best moments of the session," says Tyler. "Jason and Marcus were sublime in their ability to instantly compose in, out, and around the loops. I was improvising using effects pedals, modular devices, and tape machines, and I had a feed of the piano and drums flowing into my effects. I was creating textures, gestures, motifs out of what they played. I often found myself trying to grab the interesting moments and silently hold them (bent, reversed, granulated, delayed) waiting and listening for a natural pivot moment to reintroduce them."

Spontaneity was a major tenant of the session and instilled in every take. In fact, the mystery of "what would come out" was the driving creative force behind the entire project. "One of the aspects I love about this album is how interactive all the sonic elements are," Sun Chung says. "A lot of it was recorded in real time, so there is a real sense of immediacy in the music's energy that one can sense while listening." Paired with some more of the through composed tracks, this 16-track program is an incredibly balanced and dynamic work.

"When Tyler was a student of mine at New England Conservatory, we would listen to a lot of electronic music and I recall asking how he would transpose these ideas to analog instruments," Jason reflects. "In this way, this is his answer."

Refract is the latest release from the adventurous Red Hook Records, which was founded in 2020 by Sun Chung after a decade-long tenure at ECM. "I love combining sonic worlds and genres - especially mixing electronics and acoustic." Refract follows in the footsteps of Two Centuries, a daring collaboration between Wadada Leo Smith, Qasim Naqvi and Andrew Cyrille, released last year, which also combined electronic and acoustic instruments in a similarly magnificent way.

Featured artist

Gilmore, Marcus
Moran, Jason

Tracklist

1.	Onset I	04:13
2.	Onset II	03:26
3.	Tape Loop A	03:11
4.	Affectionate, Painful	05:19
5.	Inward, Curve	04:11
6.	Tape Loop B I	05:45
7.	Tape Loop B II	03:00
8.	Tape Loop B III	03:20

9.	Eighth Pose	04:03
10.	Stir	05:33
11.	Release	01:33
12.	Little Known	03:36
13.	Tape Loop C I	04:49
14.	Tape Loop C II	02:15
15.	Tape Loop C III	02:37
16.	Tape Loop D	05:07