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Mark Lyken I Emma Dove

Emma Dove and Mark Lyken are artist filmmakers and musicians based in Scotland. They collaborated on the making of "Mirror Lands", a film which is accompanied by a soundtrack of the same name released on California label Time Released Sound in September 2015.

"Mirror Lands" conjures up stories, memories and perceptions of the people who live and work in Black Isle, a peninsula in the Scottish Highlands.

"Mirror Lands" captures the stories, memories and perceptions of the people who live and work in Black Isle, a peninsula located in the Highlands of Scotland.

On the soundtrack the nature of the area and the industrial work that takes place in it are recorded.

The music takes classic shapes with beautiful piano notes with electronic arrangements.

Mark Lyken granting this interview tells us that "Mirror Lands" is not a conventional natural history film with fast cut images of the form, but "hold the shots for 4 or 5 minutes and give the viewer the chance to explore the scene."

I would say that "Mirror Lands" has a hint of nostalgia and maybe some passages unfold restlessness and darkness. (e.g. "Boars and Bunkers"). What is your opinion?

"I'm not sure if it is nostalgia but there is a sense of the recent past detectable in the present in the area which I think made its way into the music.

Cromarty (the village in which we were based) was traditionally a fisher town with it's own dialect, a mixture of English, Doric and Gaelic words. The Cromarty dialect died out in 2012 with the death of it's last fluent speaker Bobby Hogg. I would say there is a melancholic edge to the place but that may just be something that we are perceiving and introducing. It's hard to say. The Firth was also of strategic military importance during both World Wars and has abandoned bunkers and lookouts dotting the hills. Perhaps that is where the hint of darkness comes from, there is certainly a vibe to these abandoned spaces, all gradually decaying and being reclaimed by nature. Funnily enough, the bunker with the boars living in it is quite comedic! Nowadays the Firth is an important berth of the Oil Industry as well as being a protected habitat for sea birds and marine mammals so there is a certain tension. Restless is an apt description, it's a landscape in constant flux. At the time of writing (Sun 3rd of January 2016) there are 12 Oil Rigs docked in the Firth at various stages of refit. These rigs are tugged to and from the North Sea so the vista is always changing."

The music was composed while the film was in development?

"The field recordings and musical sketches of the tracks were made during filming but for the most part it was pieced together during the edit and in a fairly fluid way. It wasn't scored to picture in the traditional sense rather we would try and capture the vibe of a scene. Sometimes music that was written with a scene in mind ended being

used somewhere completely different and sometimes a scene would require a paired down version of a track so we would stop editing and try and get back into a musical headspace and strip a track down to it's bare bones and use a small section. Overall the music in the film itself is fairly fragmentary with the full versions appearing only on the album. We knew the full works would appear on the album and so were never compelled to try and shoe horn music into the film for the sake of it. Some of the music never made it into the film at all."

What is the narrative of the locals interviewed?

"It is more evident in the film itself where as on the album the voices are densely layered and part of the overall soundscape...but they are all snatches of story, memory, recollections related to us by people who live and work on the Black Isle. Emma and I are both fascinated by peoples individual relationships to place and just how different each persons experience of a small geographical area can be. The album is kind of an expanded soundtrack, more than just the music we wanted the album to be a journey in itself. I think the album and film stand on their own but function well as companion pieces to each other."

What was the process of choosing the images/landscapes/places in Black Isle?

"Sometimes the people we interviewed for the film would lead us to a location or sometimes we accompanied ecologists at the Lighthouse Field Station (where we were based) on field trips and gathered footage there. We wanted to show the land and seascapes, the industry and the inner workings of the place but then mix it up so what you are hearing described might not correspond to the image you are seeing on screen but your brain still makes the connection. We began with an idea to invert the conventions of natural history filmmaking, so rather than the fast cut images of the form we decided to hold the shots for 4 or 5 minutes and give the viewer the chance to explore the scene, replace the voice of god narration with local voices and so on. This was all done playfully and in the spirit of alternative presentation rather than critique. More often than not we would film places we simply stumbled across, sometimes en route to a place we thought would be worth capturing sonically and visually only to discover when we got there that it wasn't that interesting after all. There is probably something in that, the journey being more interesting than the final destination!"

Interview conducted via email by Guillermo Escudero