

## Baltimore, Maryland drone duo Darsombra explore inner and outer space on their sprawling new album

By Joseph Stannard

### Darsombra *Dumesday Book*

Pnictogen CD/DL/2xLP

Baltimore, Maryland's "trans-apocalyptic galaxy rock" duo Darsombra released the 15 minute track "Call The Doctor (Sun Side)" as half of a double A sided digital single with "Nightgarden (Moon Side)" early in April 2021. This was a few days after stay at home restrictions had been lifted in the UK, although meetings with more than six people outside were prohibited. Not deepest, darkest lockdown, then. But Covid-19 wasn't finished with us and neither was the gnawing feeling of claustrophobic dread.

"Call The Doctor (Sun Side)" deliciously evoked the Terry Riley inspired synth experiments of The Who circa "Baba O'Riley", David Bowie's "V-2 Schneider", the fragrant fromage of Daft Punk and Air, Todd Rundgren's messianic "International Feel" and the halcyon heft of New York based avant rock outfit Growing circa 2005's *His Return*. Corny perhaps, but I tend towards the belief, informed by experience, that the title refers to the healing properties of music. This joyous eruption of organised noise administered a jab of euphoria at a time when it was sorely needed. Inoculation against despair.

Roughly a month later the duo posted a video to their YouTube account titled *Darsombra Lovingly Presents "Call The Doctor"... To a Butte In Utah (May, 2021)* in which the duo perform the song live in front of a gargantuan rock formation (an apt description of the song itself) as part of their socially distanced "secret" tour of outdoor locations. Watching the video – which recalled the legendary al fresco activities of stoner rock titans Kyuss (the generator parties) and Scottish electronic unit Boards Of Canada (the Red Moon gatherings) – I didn't feel envious or bereft, but borne aloft on their shared freedom. Brian Danilowski and Ann Everton faced a dire situation with initiative and zero self-pity. They *literally* kept on truckin'!

Around this time Darsombra put word out about a forthcoming double album which now materialises in the form of *Dumesday Book*. Everton has described it as their "mental dreamscape/hellscape of plague times" and at 75 minutes, it's a substantial listen, requiring repeated immersion to fully



Butte rock: Darsombra

grasp. "Call The Doctor" is included in truncated and remixed form, its radiant positivity intact, but the album as a whole isn't an exercise in airheaded optimism. "Everything is cancelled/ The world is cancelled", they intone doomily on "Everything Is Canceled" amid doleful keys and tense, tentative chords. The meaning is immediately obvious. See also the brief reprise "Still Canceled" and the cacophonous "Plague Times". Meanwhile "Gibbet Lore" begins ominously with burbling electronics and elephant call guitars, then shifts gear into a Mike Oldfield gone lo-fi metal lattice of arpeggios and synth melodies with callbacks to preceding track "A New Dell" and "Call The Doctor".

Whereas a lot of music directly inspired by the lockdown (lack of) boogie has tended towards extreme introspection and fixated on the material circumstances of confinement, Darsombra embrace a broad spectrum of emotions. *Dumesday Book* swings from despondency to exhilaration, exhaustion to hope, surveying landscapes internal, external and cosmic. Theirs has always been an expansive music; here it covers more ground than ever and with considerable confidence.

"Mellow Knees" closes *Dumesday Book* with a Gary Numanoid flourish that blurs together triumph and trepidation, gesturing at adventures to come while not ruling out further challenges. As an independent touring outfit in the dangerously unstable world of 2023, that seems wholly accurate. ○

"pocket change" and "dreadful mustard" rendered haptic in sound and texture.

Leah Kardos

### Ken Vandermark & Hamid Drake

#### *Eternal River*

Corbett Vs Dempsey DL/LP

### Jason Adasiewicz

#### *Roy's World*

Corbett Vs Dempsey DL/LP

The Chicago imprint Corbett Vs Dempsey has long complemented its efforts in reissuing overlooked gems of improvised and experimental music with new work reflecting the diversity and depth of the city's current scene. *Roy's World* was composed by vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz for a documentary by Rob Christopher based on the titular collection of short stories by David Lynch associate Barry Gifford.

Adasiewicz wrote the material based on some loose instructions from the director

before he began shooting. Only snippets of the material ended up in the film, but this is no amorphous film score. The music was recorded in 2017 with a top-flight band – drummer Hamid Drake, bassist Joshua Abrams, cornetist Josh Berman and reedist Jon Doyle – which underlines the blues roots of the tunes, toggling between the slinking noir of "River Blindness" and the 1960s Blue Note sound of "Rudy's Basement", a scorcher recalling countless sessions with vibraphonist Bobby Hutcherson.

Adasiewicz exercises restraint on most of the pieces, preferring to shadow soloists as he carves out rich harmonies, particularly on "Do More", a tone poem built around the moody tenor saxophone of Doyle. He switches to balafon for "Blue People", an Afrobeat driven workout featuring great twinned horn passages. The release signals a welcome return to regular performance after a five year hiatus for the vibist.

*Eternal River* is the first duo recording by reedist Ken Vandermark and Drake – longtime colleagues in groups like DKV Trio and The Peter Brötzmann Chicago Tentet. It was recorded amid tapestries created by Moki Cherry in an exhibition at the Chicago gallery owned by the label, and the two medleys weave together themes by trumpeter Don Cherry from various phases of his career. Vandermark sticks to tenor saxophone here, articulating each theme with warmth and patience, coaxed along and prodded by Drake's spread of time.

Those indelible melodies are stretched and smeared by the former, while the latter – who famously worked with Cherry in the 70s and 80s – conjures a sense of propulsion that deftly connects disparate ideas from the trumpeter's work for Blue Note, his duo with drummer Ed Blackwell, the proto-world music classic *Brown Rice* and the Ornette-aligned *Old And New Dreams*.

Peter Margasak