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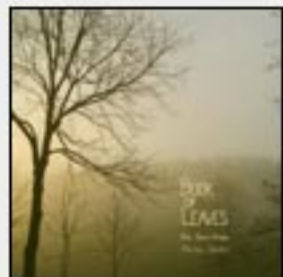
Dusted Reviews

Artist: Rachel Grimes

Album: Book of Leaves

Label: Karate Body

Review date: Oct. 22, 2009



Rachel Grimes - "Every Morning" (Book of Leaves)

The Louisville musical ensemble known as Rachel's wedded indie-rock resumes with grander ambitions over a decade before the indie/classical overlap became the stuff of *New York Times* articles and curated concert series. And while they were hardly the first group to occupy this grey area, they did so memorably, releasing a series of distinctive albums, well-crafted on both a musical level and in terms of the ornate packaging in which they appeared. At times, Rachel's seemed to be the musical complement to their math-rock contemporaries, making the case that a chamber music influence could be just as compelling as winding bass and guitar parts.

Rachel Grimes played piano in Rachel's, and while *Book of Leaves* is her first solo work, her playing style here echoes her work on the group's *Selenography* from a decade earlier. The format here – 14 works, many of them completed in under three minutes – is reminiscent of Max Richter's recent *24 Postcards In Full Colour*. Another recent point of reference would be Ryuichi Sakamoto's 2007 collaboration with Christian Fennesz, *Cendre*. Grimes shares with Sakamoto a tendency towards an ambient style of playing, one that allows for space to hover between notes and for small resonances to emerge. This fondness for ambience reaches its apex – or, depending on your point of view, its zenith – when the sound of chirping crickets closes out "She Was Here."

The tone of the songs on *Book of Leaves* ranges from sparse and muted to relentlessly propulsive. Both "My Dear Companion" and "Mossgrove" find a brisk pace from the outset, though in the case of the former that pace is contrasted with a more dramatic melody suitable for Gothic landscapes; for the latter, those notes are eventually enveloped by others, creating a drone-like quality. It's significant to point out that the formats in which *Book of Leaves* is available includes not only the expected formats – CDs, LPs, and MP3s – but also as sheet music. Grimes's intentions with this album are as much a demonstration of her abilities as a composer as they are about her work as a performer.

Those two sides of Grimes's music don't always mesh. "Bloodroot" is nimbly played, but the piece itself feels less defined: a Michael Nyman influence is perceptible, but Grimes's own take on it is less clear. "Mossgrove's" foray into drone is far more interesting, and suggests a summation of Grimes's musical experience and interests. The later "Every Morning Birds" has the album's most interesting (if literal) integration of field recordings, using looped birdcalls to create a percussive effect. And while *Book of Leaves* occasionally becomes too understated, its most interesting moments blend a precision that's as old as the instrument Grimes plays with a willingness to incorporate more contemporary elements. The album's artwork includes the designation "For Solo Piano," but *Book of Leaves* is at its best when it subverts and modifies what is expected of that phrase.

By Tobias Carroll

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