

**Puce Mary**  
***The Spiral***

Posh Isolation LP

The venture of utilising noise as little more than sonic weaponry is slowly receding deeper into the history books. Sometimes, it's interleaved with that sort of swaggering machismo that refuses to entirely disappear from music scenes both dominant and recessive. It manages to thrive even in such unexpected places as the musclebound arms of free improvisors, honking those great big horns of theirs while crowds of Metallica T-shirted dudes look on. And of course, industrial music's complex heritage fans out into a wide delta of tributaries, some of which rely as heavily on precision and process as they do sheer volume and brutality.

But the (relatively) shorter form excursions that make up much of Copenhagen's Posh Isolation label suggest progress. There's a shift away from the anarchy and nihilism of noise music's old paradigms of rough power electronics and sweaty basement gigs, towards a newer, more studious and capacious approach. Though she neatly wraps her work in handsome and classy designs, Frederikke Hoffmeier aka Puce Mary remains first and foremost a producer of scarred and scarring noise music – albeit one of a new breed.

*The Spiral* is the third album proper Hoffmeier has released under her Puce Mary guise. It marks her return to solo work after a year's worth of collaborations that followed *Success* (2013) and *Persona* (2014). In place of the empty white sleeves sheathing her two earlier records, *The Spiral*'s cover artwork is pastel pink with an obtusely cropped monochrome photo portraying a swim-capped female lying at an equally obtuse angle. Her rubber-gloved right hand is clasping her own bare breast, while her left could be sliding between the legs of another figure cropped out of shot. Her mouth is open, but it's unclear whether she is going to scream in ecstasy or in agony, to give or to receive.

Following the visual departure of the cover, a peek at the track titles and times of *The Spiral* also suggests a streamlining and maturation of Hoffmeier's procedures. Her use of repetition has been further trimmed, with none of the eight tracks on offer breaching six and a half minutes, while the number of core ideas on display is far greater, even as they're stirred into the brew more gently. This is arguably the most understated Puce Mary release to date. It often barely buries the needle at all, instead utilising empty space to portray its deep sense of spiritual disarray, internal conflict and imminent dread. Throbbing Gristle used to do something similar on tracks like "Persuasion".

One of a handful of noise music's key attributes has been its ability to carve out a void in the mind of the listener. It generates so much interference as to simulate the absence of data, while distorting mental

Rejecting anarchy and nihilism  
**Puce Mary** takes a considered approach to the future of noise.  
By **Tristan Bath**



imagery into nothingness. Clogging up the third eye if you will. Puce Mary recently compared the "uncomfortable and fascinating" nature of extreme music's traditional imagery of bondage, sex and violence with the merits of blunter symbolism and an openness that allowed perceivers to make up their own stories and music (see *Invisible Jukebox*, *The Wire* 384). That same struggle between the virtues of chaos and emptiness permeates *The Spiral*. Indeed, it even manifests itself in the equal space given on its front cover to clean, empty pink and the swim-capped erotic avatar in the photo.

The penultimate track "No Memory" is perhaps the most chilling moment to date in Puce Mary's catalogue. A gradually spreading web of drones and field recorded mush years into life, and a single uncharacteristically high fidelity bass note chimes away, ushering in a scant rhythm. Hoffmeier starts speaking with a sort of brooding acquiescence, slightly buried in the mix, and the instrumental web gradually crests in a sustained moment of emotional torsion. The mood is carried over so fluidly from "No Memory" into the wonderfully titled "Slow Agony Of A Dying Orgasm" that the change is virtually imperceptible. But above all, Puce Mary conjoins that mood across *The Spiral*'s vast sonic spectrum into cohesive single, slow-moving barrage.

From the water droplet piano notes of the opening seconds, to the screeching feedback howls and heartbeat kicks of "The Actor", the album's fingerprint is unmistakable, even amid Puce Mary's own back catalogue. Individual moments exist only briefly, like passing faces in a crowd soon melting into an unfathomable greater whole. Yet it's all made of the same mimetic polyalloy, able to take on any shape at any moment.

In a field overencumbered by wanton garbage, Hoffmeier's restraint and dexterity are admirable. Puce Mary and her Posh Isolation contemporaries – plus a handful of other practitioners including Helm's Luke Younger (with particular regard to the cinematic experimentation of last year's *Olympic Mess*) – are trailblazing an inbetween space left unexplored. They're rediscovering a recess missed out by industrial music's hyperspeed evolution into power electronics three decades ago. Sombre moods and emotions are densely envisioned. A lot of it comes down to a clear sense of purpose behind each composition, and a rejection of noise's founding nihilistic and dada principles in favour of something more akin to constructivism.

Still building with the same base materials as industrial music and its descendants, Puce Mary applies an adroit sense of feng shui to the factory floors she envisions. *The Spiral* is a miraculous piece of work, pulling off an acousmatic magic trick: the music gets imbued with so much of the artist's tortured self, her physical being seems to disappear completely. □