

The Neolithic Palace, a new 2013 LP from Sunflower Fundamental

Reviewed by Richard Fisher

After nearly a decade of inactivity, the three-man Austin based "post-indie" band Sunflower Fundamental, has finally released their second album *The Neolithic Palace* on the online platform Bandcamp. Since their debut album *Antenna* in 2004, Sunflower Fundamentalism has enjoyed a small, but dedicated following from the underground circuit. Their single "Pursuing Prelude" quickly became one of the most downloaded songs of the experimental genre to be hosted on the popular indie website GarageBand.com before the sites' demise in 2010. Since then, the band has garnered modest exposure through online file sharing and the distribution of bootlegs. Live performances have been infrequent at best, scattered throughout much of early 2000 and limited to a handful of one-night gigs in the small peripheral venues littering the fringes of Houston.

For those unfamiliar with the sound of Sunflower Fundamentalism, their music can be described as a wild and eclectic mix of folk, progressive rock, and electronic, with heavy use of guitar effects and vague vocal melodies blending into violent interludes which narrow slowly into artfully flat, yet emotional solos. Synthesizers weave a menacing visitation to the rusted dronescape pioneered by Narcosis and the schizophrenic assemblage of found sounds and crime surveillance tapes employed by Ain Soph and Synapscape. The listener is plummeted into a surreal voyage of unease and growing dread, punctuated at calculated intervals with intense guitar riffs and relieved only by the wavering fade of distant vocals.

Lucian Mueller, 23 year old vocalist and song writer for the band invited me to a personal interview at his ancestral home in Abilene, Texas. The meeting was entirely casual; Mueller, a personable yet subdued young man, fits the almost staggeringly painful template of struggling indie artist, producing with an almost non-existent budget from a remote and lonely garage-converted-to-studio concealed entirely from view by a fortress of ash tree and native scrub brush. The interior reveals a mess of scattered instruments, speakers, pedals, and their respective power cables spilling in all directions. The accumulated tools of a burgeoning Foley artist are heaped upon shelves: glass bottles, cans, wooden dowels, and recycled metal to name a few of the items used for sampling. Mueller obsessively oversees all stages of editing. Mixing and mastering is completed painstakingly on a single laptop hidden behind precariously balanced columns of computer textbooks and **zines**. Every track is laboriously and crudely fashioned piecemeal through each stage of production on open-sourced and pirated software running just barely above the threshold of system requirements. Mueller explains that although the methods of this unique sound crafting are primitive, it is far from restrictive: "The resources available to me online are enough to sustain the endeavor. Even with the physical limitations of our instrumentation and hardware, the wealth of programs and sound editing software is limitless. Eventually, everything will be constructed entirely on the cloud with virtual editors and mixers. Many of these found objects we use on stage can already be simulated. We will migrate to digital."

Mueller invited me to sit with him in an uncluttered section of his house designated as the listening room, an exclusive opportunity for me to sample the new album. He hands [redacted] to me, the burned ash sprinkled atop with several pinches of fresh [redacted] first [redacted] rshest, the smoky exhalation slowly drifting nebulously at eye level. The music played softly, pumped through hanging speakers of a Samsung home sound theater. We sat and listened quietly at first as the album played, but soon Mueller absently began to free associate and narrate the track progression. "I downloaded software that enables me to embed steganograms onto my audio tracks. It's nothing new; a few bands have already done it. Hiding funny little Easter eggs in their music."

"A steganogram", I asked. "Like the face of Richard James?"*

"Right, any audio editor with a spectrogram feature can reveal it. There's nothing new about the technology. Radio, Slow Scan Television... I contemplated the limits of what information I could embed into a track and how the listener might decode this message, or rather how it might decode itself, without software."

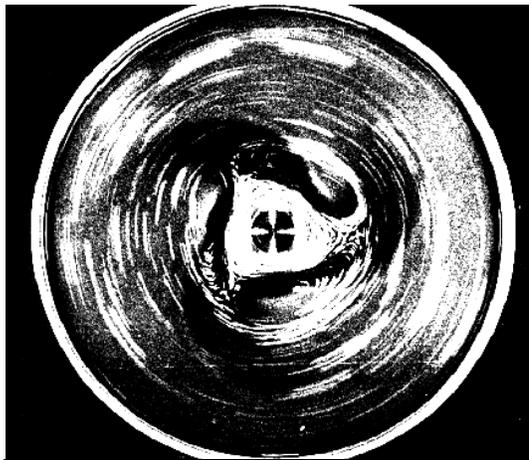
*The English electronic artist best known by his stage name Apex Twin embedded a picture of his face as a steganogram in his song Window Licker (Warp Records, 1999).



Sunflower Fundamental performing at The Warehouse (Texas City, TX) May 15, 2011. Pictured from right to left, Lucian Muller (Vocalist), Roy Arnold (bass guitar, trumpet, backing vocals), George Garcia (drum, percussion, synthesizer). Not pictured: Gregory Morton of *Slings and Arrows*, Donna Sims and Julia King of *Adjacent Ego*, Jeremy Galindo and Chris King of *This Will Destroy you*.

Also not pictured: Darrell Willis of *Feign Sleep*. Bruce Cohen and Clayton Lambert of *Thin Red Vein*. Jeffery Ward, Daisy Fowler, and Milton Bennett of *Procession of Dead Kings*. Cameron Davidson, Terri Christensen, Billy Maldonado, Cecil Morrison, Marie Perry, Sheldon Brock of *Abjuration of Dreadful Instruments*. Jimmy Adams of *False Conjurations*. Melinda Goodman of *The Second Cleric Who Joined in Hopelessness*. *Clever whispers who bless the black sultan. Drowned quarreling of pavilions lost, hidden and benevolent by the black Tsar who wanders insane and beautiful, crowned blameless by evening ash and blaspheming the coming of morning radiance*. Also not pictured: The tumor, which is composed of elements of the connective tissue of the brain (glia) and of blood vessels of enlarged calibers. Some of these blood vessels have thick walls; others thin ones, with defective construction of the layers of and microscopically small bleedings into the surrounding inter-cellular spaces. Also not pictured: *Solicitude*, robber of affection parts cadaverous gray flesh with meticulous incisio

pride himself as an artisan of intrusive thought, having downloaded a rare, pirated copy of [redacted] in some anonymous corner pocket of the dark web. Cloak and dagger proxy. The pirate server is operated and maintained in some unlisted location in the Ukraine, perhaps Bulgaria. Mueller stood over me, his lower jaw stretching down, impossibly so, into a black cavernous yawn. An infinite scream. I recoiled in horror, climbing backward against the sofa in a mad frenzy. I must have resembled a mindless beast fleeing the scorn of fractal landscape bleeding awful vortices shimmering outward from the bomb. A Trojan horse of the mind. Mueller's encoded soul, his manifesto, Faust compressed to 16 kbps. The releases its malicious code into the host barbed teeth sank into my skull and swallowed teeth and withdrew my eyes. He continued, "Think of a film reel, tightly wound. No, that's not right." Mueller slumped forward, visibly tired as he searched the air for words adaq convey his thoughts. "More like, a sea shell, the hierarchy i eventually truncated at each int. In fact, you can write a review about all this in your little zine pass it around for a couple of good laughs and maybe bump up the number of listeners by one or two. It's all just one big cle jerk as far as I'm concerned. You can't understand it unless



References to this figure: *Nezlin M., Rulov A., Snezhkin E. N., Trubnikov A. S., Self-organization of spiral-vortex structures in shallow water with rapid differential rotation, Sov.Phys.JETP, 1987, v.65(1), pp.1-4.* Also not pictured: Blasphemous slaves drifting silent in the black yawn of desperate un-space. Unknown gaunts climbing pinnacles, spires of audio leprosy shimmering gold isomorphism. Inherently meaningless symbology began assigning its own meaning within my brain.

wildfire. I glimpsed the rolling splendor of clarity on ripples of dark scream. So many epicenter, a whispery poisoned fugue: a logic Blurry, sound-crushed discontinuous flood of layered beneath sediment of whining audio. malicious script unfolded itself as a viral capsid cell. I begged for Mueller to stop. A thousand split it, cranial contents spilling in the ether. I back into my sockets, blood pouring out in gout

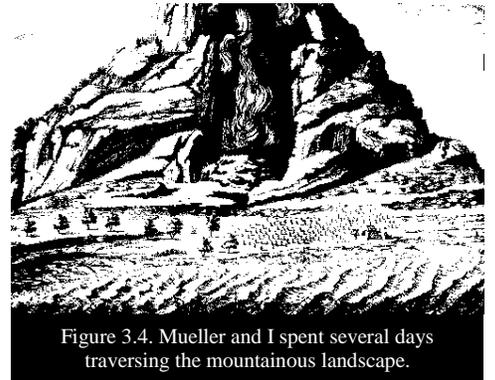


Figure 3.4. Mueller and I spent several days traversing the mountainous landscape.

inhabitants, communicating with one another in a language which sounded to me like the squeaking of rodents. I lifted a heavy rock with both hands and hurled it at the animals. They scattered, my missile rolling harmlessly across the white sand. The creatures shrieked angrily and retreated a dozen meters. The brow of their dull black eyes furrowed intensely with some nameless and ancient animosity, the corners of their mouths pulling back to reveal a baboon grin of gum and yellow teeth. Mueller whispered to me, "We have to keep moving, but don't let them out of your sight." We continued our labored trek across the cold dead wastes, the creatures continuing to trail a mile or so behind us. With each passing hour, they closed distance with us, slowly building nerve to mount another attack. As dusk approached, the blood red sun slowly descended behind the imposing visage of crescent mountains, the fading columnar beams drawing to a focus a trail leading the two of us at last to that sublime monolith: the Neolithic Palace.

Pictured right: Mueller's newly added canto, expanding upon the original 33 of Dante's Divine Comedy. Not pictured: A polygonal maze. Inner war of self-hatred. Holy satellites orbiting a dead god, drifting blameless in the black sea of the cosmos. A procession of self-flagellating monks trailing bloody footsteps on cobbled streets of antiquity. Botulus fluke worm invades the intestines. Bacterial mats growing on subterranean pools of sulfide-rich groundwater. More toroidal vortices. A grieving family gathered in the lobby of the emergency room. Waves of trilobites flourishing in the mud of the Cambrian explosion. Dead basking sharks



pleading desperately but the tracks continued to play one after the other for what seemed like years

The paraphrase of Gödel's Theorem says that for any record player, there are records which it cannot play because they will cause its indirect self-destruction
Sunflower Fundamental is available to download at www.sunflower-fundamental.bandcamp.com



About the author:
Richard Fisher reviews indie bands on his blog Crash.Indie and is a regular contributor to independent music zines Cheap Shot! and Arms Race.