



Single

Justine and the Victorian Punks - Beautiful Dreamer

Label / **DFA Records**
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 Released / **November 2010**
 Style / **Disco**
 Rating / **1 2 3 4 ½**



It's a relief that music like this is still there to be discovered, lurking just out of arm's reach in the digital pre-history. At a time when every shred of avant-disco's shadowiest past would seem to have been aired out on YouTube, eBay and Facebook, DFA comes up with some mindblowing archival dance music from late '70s New York.

Justine and the Victorian Punks was a collaboration between Justine, AKA Colette, a French-Tunisian performance artist living in New York, and Peter Gordon's Love of Life Orchestra, a stylistically omnivorous, pop-loving ensemble of avant-garde musicians. Gordon hung out with Beefheart in LA, met Harry Partch through his father, and had his mind blown open by Terry Riley; settling in New York in 1975, he met Arthur Russell and Rhys Chatham and proceeded to immerse himself in the downtown scene surrounding the Kitchen, an experimental performance space where Russell was musical director.

"Beautiful Dreamer" still sounds like a revelation 32 years after it was recorded, and that's not just for the angelic tint of the background vocals. Drums and electric bass lay out a hypnotic disco groove while synths and trombone add aquatic tone color; the strangely collapsing rhythm comes from vibraphones inspired by the pulse minimalism of Riley and Steve Reich. Gratuitous key changes and a honking saxophone solo, with shades of the E Street Band's Clarence Clemons, flirt with unabashed pop cheese, but without irony, taking the tropes at face value and making the most of them.

In a fascinating [interview](#) for *Bomb* magazine, Gordon says that he learned from disco that "if you could keep that groove going, then you can do whatever you want on top of it," an observation borne out by the song's playful, polymorphous changes. The star of the song is Justine, whisper-singing her way through it all like a confused child, halting and occasionally off-key, almost creepily naive.

"Still You" begins with the kind of loping, punky disco groove that bands have been imitating for at least a decade now; it's accompanied by a conversation between Justine and a man, some kind of murmured sweet nothings buried too low in the mix to make out. The song never lets up on the groove, but it never stops shifting around it either, full of contrapuntal horn lines and odd harmonic switchbacks. Gordon explains, "It's like taking a journey through the music and the music is a very big house and it has lots of different rooms in it and it's multi-dimensional—you can go into one room and it'll take you into outer space or you go into another and suddenly you're on this river or something. And somehow just by turning this doorknob you enter into this whole other space. And it's like by shifting the prism, by slightly shifting the point of view you find yourself in this totally different world, which is a musical world."

What's so remarkable about Justine and the Victorian Punks—as well as the album-length Love of Life Orchestra collection—is how elegantly they could twist up space and time, and how effortlessly they could make such bewildering architecture so eminently livable.

Words / **Phillip Sherburne**
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Tracklist: Justine and the Victorian Punks - Beautiful Dreamer

- A Beautiful Dreamer
- B Still You

