

Tetuzi Akiyama/Tom Carter/Christian Kiefer

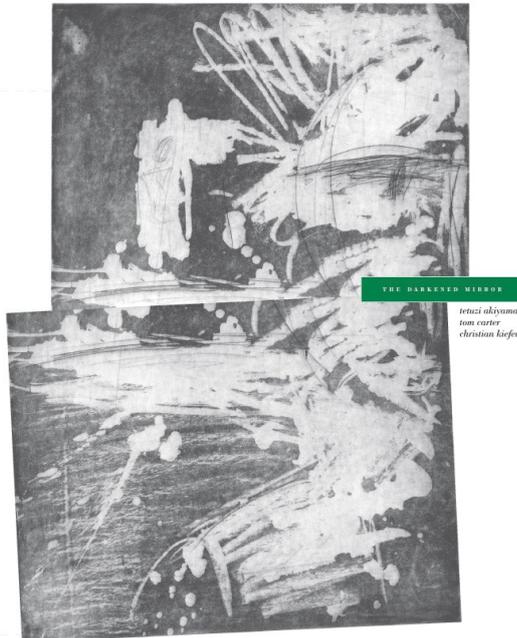
The Darkened Mirror

(mono LP012/cat12) LP

barcode:5908310927619

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which thus became a quartet. Later that year, Akiyama and Sugimoto launched their guitar duo, Akiyama-Sugimoto. They played gigs in New York in 1995, and in the Midwest (including Chicago and Detroit) in '96. For about a year starting in early 1994, Akiyama was also a member of Nijjumu, one of guitarist Keiji Haino's bands.

Recently Akiyama has two improvised music projects: Sutekina Tea Time, a duo with Takashi Matsuoka (guitar, vocal); and Mongoose, a trio with Sugimoto and Utah Kawasaki (analog synthesizer). Since 1998, together with Sugimoto and Toshimaru Nakamura (no-imput mixing board), he has been organizing an inspiring monthly concert series, The Improvisation Meeting at Bar Aoyama (renamed The Experimental Meeting in '99, and Meeting at Off Site in 2000).



side A:

1. Grandmother's Body
2. Alligator
3. Bloody Mary
4. Sea Hag's Lament
5. The Duendes

side B

1. The Lady In Lace
2. The Hook
3. The Express Train to Hell
4. The Vanishing Hitchhiker

bios:

TETUZI AKIYAMA

Guitar, electronics, viola, and self-made instrument player
Born in Tokyo, April 13, 1964.

Tetuzi Akiyama is a highly unique and experimental guitarist heavily applying free improvisation and noise. Besides guitar, he also plays electronics, viola, and self-made instruments.

Akiyama became an enthusiastic hard rock fan when he was eleven years old, and started playing electric guitar at the age of thirteen. Later, he also came to be very interested in free improvisation and classical music. He formed the improvised music band Madhar in 1987. He also started playing classical viola, and formed the Hikyo String Quintet in 1994. The band, which played avant-garde improvised classical music, consisted of a viola, two cello, and two violin players, and included Taku Sugimoto on cello. Sugimoto soon left the band,

TOM CARTER

orn barely south of the Mason-Dixon line, and just in time for the Summer of Love, Tom Carter led a decidedly non-hippy existence being shuffled around various farm and mining towns in Maryland and Ohio by his newspaperman father, before finally making his way to Texas in 1985, just in time to watch all the good hardcore bands die. Already obsessed with American pre-punk and British post-punk, Carter dove into the lysergically spiked musical waters of Texas with both feet, augmenting rudimentary guitar skills with unreliable instruments, cranky analog electronics, and disintegrating practice amps. Over the ensuing decades, he managed to forge his evolving ideas of complete tonal immersion (and the quest for the perfect fuzz tone) into a layered sonic toolkit of rough beauty and unrefined proficiency.

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CHRISTIAN KIEFER

Kiefer began his life in the arts through a fascination with the written word. This fascination is reflected in a long line of publications. His poetry and fiction have appeared in many of America's most prestigious literary journals. He is the author of three novels, the most recent of which is *Out of Iron*.

Kiefer's path led him to Los Angeles, where he studied with novelist T. Coraghessan Boyle and poet David St. John. He then returned to Northern California where he spent several years researching and writing about revisionist Westerns at California State University Sacramento. CSUS awarded him a Masters degree in Literature in 1997.

His interests in academia have continued and he is now working towards his Ph.D., continuing to research the development and settling of western America. The interdisciplinary nature of his interests allows for a broad base of primary and secondary material to be considered, allowing for a diverse view of a subject area. Kiefer's studies include American folk music, social systems during the gold rush, and the myth of the American West.

This latter subject has long been of interest, particularly the intersection of history and mythology. As a native of the American West, his work has circled around that period of Western expansion so often represented in film and fiction, the period beginning in the mid-19th century and ending at Wounded Knee.

Kiefer's first album, *Welcome to Hard Times*, is an exploration of the American West from a new perspective. Following in the footsteps of recent historians such as Richard Slotkin, Richard White, Donald Worster, and Malcolm Rohrbach, Kiefer's work revises the history of the West, moving away from John Wayne's flawless hero of the West to a darker, more malevolent point of view. The title is derived from E.L. Doctorow's novel of the same name, and Doctorow's influence is especially noticeable in the spoken-word track, "Giants."

This work was intended as a soundtrack to a non-existent film, allowing for several areas of soundscape which perhaps would not have been considered in a more traditional format. The concept surrounds a retelling of the Western myth where heroes do not necessarily win, indeed where they do not necessarily even exist, where villains appear and disappear without logic or reason, and ultimately where the landscape itself takes on a dark and wounded tone.

With *Welcome to Hard Times*, Kiefer has crafted a cycle of lyrics describing his vision of the American West. It is a cycle influenced by songwriters as diverse as Townes Van Zandt and Lou Reed, Chris Whitley and Doc Watson. But such songwriters do not truly represent the full scope of Kiefer's influences. His field of interest also veers toward the experimental ambience of Brian Eno as well as the compositions of the minimalists and fluxus movement (especially Terry Riley and Steve Reich). Combining these

Best known for his work with acclaimed iconoclasts Charalambides, which he co-founded with Christina Carter in 1991, he has branched out into other collaborations since 2001, playing and recording with long-term projects Zaika (with Marcia Bassett) and Badgerlore (with Rob Fisk, Ben Chasny, Liz Harris, and Peter Swanson), as well as in frequent collaborations with Bay Area sound artist Robert Horton. Other fellow travelers have included Christian Kiefer, Tetuzi Akiyama, Shawn David McMillen, Thurston Moore, Dredd Foole, Loren Connors, Pip Proud, Inca Ore, Jandek, Bardo Pond, Steve Gunn, and Matt Valentine, among many others.

Most recently, Carter has focused on his solo performances and recordings, touring constantly from 2007-2008, and finally settling in New York City in early 2009. His solo work covers a vast territory, but latter-day sightings show him to be concentrating on looped guitar drones of immensely-stacked grit and beauty, with heaps of psychedelic melodic content missing from the repertoires of many noise and drone bands.

Carter has released dozens of recordings in every available format for many different labels, including Kranky, Digitalis, Eclipse, Important, Root Strata, and 3-Lobed. His most recent solo release is available on his own Wholly Other imprint, which he has operated since 1995.

Christian Kiefer grew up in an area of California famous for the gold rush of the 1840s and 50s. It was a childhood spent around the ever-present detritus of that period of history: abandoned mine shafts, rusting hulks of stamp mills, ruins long since forgotten. As he began working towards a life in the arts, these images returned to him, appearing again and again in fiction, poetry, and music, becoming the thread which binds his work together.

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elements with the folk/songwriting impetus is what makes Kiefer's music a unique and singular vision.

The recording of *Welcome to Hard Times* was accomplished over the course of a year in a private studio in the gold rush town of Auburn, California. While the project was recorded entirely into digital format to preserve sound quality, the concept required that as many acoustic instruments be employed as possible. The completed work features Kiefer on several different guitars (including National and Martin), banjo, harmonica, and dulcimer, in addition to vocals. Michael Madden, project engineer, laid down additional banjo and piano work, as well as backup vocals.

The percussion on the album veers away from the traditional rock and folk music drum kit, relying instead on a series of non-traditional percussion instruments. A three foot circular sawblade was beat and scraped with a tractor wrench during one session. Another featured Kiefer on doumbek and Moroccan finger drums. Another a series of African shakers. Another an office chair and a tin of salt.

This use of non-traditional percussion instruments, coupled with the sense of experimentation, creates a compelling and contained work. There are moments that sound like Woody Guthrie (éThe Highwayman's Song) and others which are more akin to the Kronos Quartet (éFrontier 2a).

Always circling, always changing, *Welcome to Hard Times* is a unique vision of American music, and a unique retelling of the story of the West.

