



Benoît Pioulard

press kit

Benoît Pioulard



Biography

Michigan-based **Benoît Pioulard** (born Thomas Meluch) has always been fascinated with the sounds of nature and tape decay – through almost a decade of recordings, he has fostered an infatuation with a style of sonic density that combines remnants of pop song structures with a lushly textured lo-fi aesthetic. His proper debut EP *Enge* (Moodgadget 2005) followed several self-released CD-Rs and cassettes, and caught the attention of Chicago's **Kranky**, who released the full-length *Précis* in autumn 2006. *Précis* earned acclaim from across the indie press spectrum, including “Best of 2006” honors from Stylus, Almost Cool, The Milk Factory, Lost at Sea, Gorilla vs. Bear, and many others.

Discography

Releases:

Enge 7" EP (MGT-004), Moodgadget 2005

Précis CD (krank098), Kranky 2006

Fir 7" EP (T7PE009), Type 2007

Compilation appearances:

Random Number...Colors Start CD (MGT-001), Moodgadget 2004

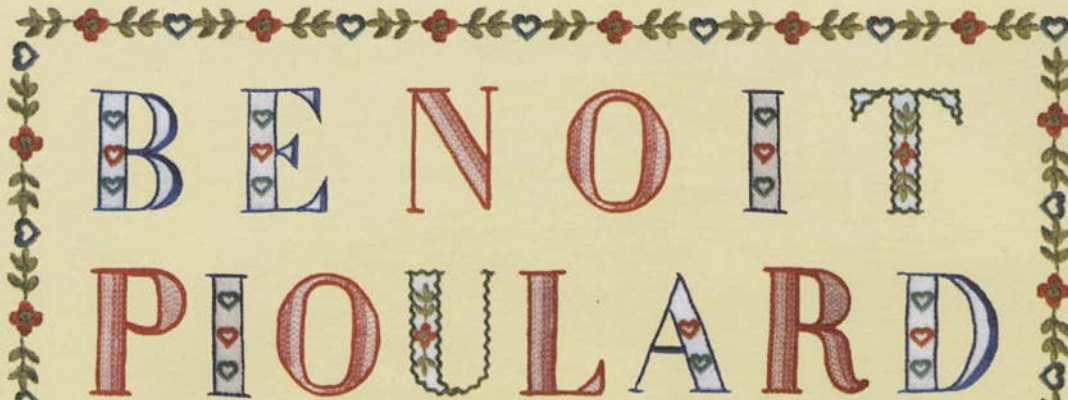
The Rorschach Suite CD (MGT-007), Moodgadget 2006

Idol Tryouts Two 2xCD (GI-51), Ghostly International 2006

New Faces digital exclusive (GIDG-7), Ghostly International 2006

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words } Lauren Sherman, photography * Lucy Hamblin

It's the rarest of rare in this business to interview musicians who are eager to talk. If they are anxious to spill their guts, it usually means one of two things: a) they're has-beens who are thankful for the press or b) they're newcomers who are thankful for the press.

Fortunately for me, Benoit Pioulard (also known in real life as Thomas Meluch) fits rather nicely into the latter category. This ruddy-faced twentyone year old from East Lansing, Michigan doesn't look a day out of secondary school, but his eerie chord progressions, haunting arrangements and smoky vocals are creating a bit of a stir at Chicago-based indie record label Kranky, which is releasing his first full-length album this September.

Our conversation takes place by the pond next to the Boathouse restaurant in Central Park on an extraordinarily warm February day. The photographer sneaks in shots as Tom (or Benoit, if you will) reclines awkwardly in a paddle boat, and openly reveals his musical master plan – or, just as significant – the origins of that plan. Along the way, he reveals a thing or two about himself. Meet Benoit Pioulard:

He fancies himself a Frenchman.

Other than an unexplainable following of adolescent girls in Mexico City, Tom's main audience consists of Europeans. "I think there's something fascinating about a Midwesterner who fancies himself a Frenchman," he determines. His influences range from the requisite Tom Waits to current favorites SSAB Songs, The Ink Spots, William Basinski, and Jandek. "I'm attracted to loads of different kinds of music, and I try to filter them all."

He likes to take the train.

"It was so nice to take the train down here." This boy (and yes, he is still a boy) traveled fourteen hours on the train just to have his portrait taken and to chat with yours truly. Yet it's not long before it's revealed that there is also a girl in the background...

He's crafty.

When I compliment Tom on his delicate CD packaging – a pink felt cover wrapped in pink voile paper emblazoned with a pink stamp – this causes him to wax lyrical on the ingenious LP version of Vincent Gallo's first record ("It makes me wet.") and the limited edition releases of some fellow Kranky recording artists. He plans to include twentyfive handmade CD covers for the autumn release of his full length album. Not surprisingly, his creative endeavors don't end there: "I can't wait until the summer – I'm finally going to learn how to knit."

He's willing to admit he believes in God.

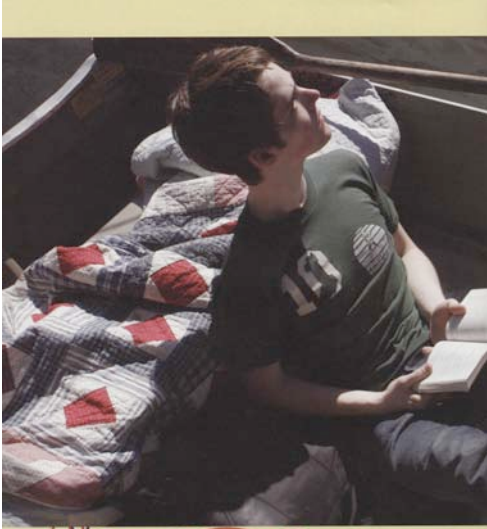
"I feel like I've got the best guardian angel. I do my best to count my blessings." There's something refreshing about a highly creative individual not afraid to be anything but an atheist.

He knows that one day, he will indeed choose New York.

I can say from personal experience that when you're from the middle of America, New York can seem both threatening and exhilarating. Tom's a bit weary, but he feels his next step must be to put down some roots in this musical epicentre. "A friend of mine told me that I shouldn't even considering moving (to New York) because I'm totally of the temperament that would get taken advantage of and become totally miserable... but this place just seems so vital. I hate playing live shows where I'm from because I feel like I could play a house party and ten people would show up and that would be a success. Here I have friends that could promote my performances."

He's just doing what comes naturally.

"I try to write good songs, straight from the gut." As much as the word organic is overused these days, it's an effective way to describe Tom's creative method. The discovery of the name Benoit Pioulard was nothing but. "I keep notepads around my apartment, one of which stays next to the bed most of the time, and I woke up one morning a couple of years ago, finding that I'd woken up and written the word 'pioulard'."



sometime during the night. It sounded like a surname to me, so I added Benoit and kept it... I decided it was a subconscious fusing of 'pioupiou' (meaning 'a young soldier' and also the name of a French cartoon bird) and 'foulard', which is a word I've always liked the sound of."

He likes being a one man show.

Last year, Tom decided to forget about playing with others and started simply playing for himself. "Other people I've tried to work with are aiming for some aesthetic, or something like... Magwai crossed with The Smiths... whilst I say just let it come." Benoit Pioulard's own aesthetic is difficult to pinpoint because he tends to view each song as a work in progress rather than a final product. "I have the unfortunate habit of retuning my guitar for every song and then not remembering what the tune was... but this is the first time in my life that I've felt confident about my recordings."

He doesn't neglect his studies.

As a fifth year at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, Benoit studies film and comparative literature and is currently scoring a soundtrack for a friend's thesis. "I don't think I've had a great idea for a film yet, which is sort of killing me." He finds beauty in the films of Harmony Korine.

He's no businessman.

"I have no attraction to the business aspect (of the music industry)." Yet Tom's thirty-plus hours a week work schedule at Ghostly records, another Midwest-based label, tells a different tale. While juggling uni, music, work and for some time a long-distance relationship, he's managed to save a wad of cash for his post-graduate endeavors. He may not be driven by the allure of making money, but he sure is savvy when it comes to managing it.

Look for Benoit Pioulard's first full length record this autumn, as well as tour dates in the US and possibly Europe. By that time he may have lost the innocence that makes him so damn appealing, but I certainly hope not. What draws people to Tom is not his innate talent or his refined tastes, it's his willingness to open up.

The EP *Enge 7"* is out on Moodgadget in June, and the album *Precis* is out in September on Kranky.
www.pioulard.com
www.kranky.net
www.moodgadget.com



Benoît Pioulard

Précis
Kranky
2006
A



P*récis* is a debut album, but it's hardly the work of a rookie. After self-releasing a wealth of cassettes and CD-Rs, 2005's *Enge* EP, and a track on Ghostly International's *Idol Tryouts Two* compilation earlier this year, 21-year-old Thomas Meluch's has built up a healthy discography, even if relatively few people have been privy to it. Thanks to his new home at the perpetually hip Kranky label, Meluch should no longer have to worry about that. And that's a very good thing for all involved, as *Précis* is a spectacular, fully realized debut and the best thing these ears have heard on the venerable imprint in a good long while.

Précis is less a collection of songs and more a gathering of wayward melodies wrapped in layers of sound. Meluch's gentle, relatively simple acoustic-based tunes and breathy baritone are couched in layers of haze to the point where you aren't exactly sure which part of the music to focus your ear on. This leads the eardrum to pick up the parts that it is used to listening for (like the treated acoustic guitar and vocals) through the sonic debris. The experience is at once disorienting and soothing, and utterly remarkable in the way it shifts and turns as it moves around your head, and as your head moves around it.

With an attentive listen through headphones, *Précis* can be a wonderfully textured recording full of remarkable details. Played aloud in a room at normal volume, it becomes a breathtaking sonic landscape that blends with any environment to take on an entirely new character. Picture the Jesus & Mary Chain's seminal *Psychocandy* with the dense feedback squall replaced by field recordings, tape sounds, bells, and dulcimers and you're halfway there.

All of this would be moot if the songs themselves were no good, and thankfully Meluch shows himself to be just as gifted a songwriter as he is a craftsman. From the dusky, hushed power of "Together & Down" to the sunshine pop of "Triggering Back," Meluch never skimps on the tunes in deference to the production. It is precisely this ratio that elevates *Précis* from what might have been a less memorable work had the balance between sound and song been less even.

So what exactly does it sound like? Well, it sounds like a folk band playing in dense forest from forty yards away. It sounds like a grainy, jumpy home movie of your childhood vacation to the great Northwest. It sounds like what you might hear on a romantic late-summer picnic on Venus. It sounds like the album's cover art. It sounds like nothing else you'll hear this year.

STYLUSMAGAZINE.COM RECOMMENDED ALBUM

ARTIST OF THE DAY

Benoît Pioulard

December 12, 2006

Who: Michigan harbors many secrets, one of the most intriguing being singer-songwriter Benoît Pioulard. Although the name triggers images of berets and cigarettes, Benoît, aka Thomas Meluch, is a 22-year-old Michigan native who has been self-releasing albums since the age of 16. In a one-room apartment, Meluch pieces together his work, and his first full-length *Precis*, released on Chicago's Kranky Records, is an intricate journey through heartbreak and solace.



Benoît Pioulard, aka Thomas Meluch / Photo by Will Calcutt

What's the Deal: Often compared to Elliot Smith and My Bloody Valentine, the complexity of Meluch's work has left many reviewers struggling for comparisons. Although Boards of Canada is a definite influence, Meluch sites more obscure references as sources of inspiration. From the archival films of Bill Morrison, to the Disintegration Loops of William Basinski, Meluch's intellectual curiosity reflects the aural landscape of his music.

Fun Fact: Although Benoît Pioulard isn't really a Frenchman, his mother, a self-proclaimed Francophile, exposed him to the language as a young child. His pseudonym came to him in a dream and sounded just right, so he decided to stick with it. Considering the somnambulistic quality of his music, Meluch chose wisely. *LAURA MARCUS*

Now Hear This:

Benoît Pioulard - "Triggering Back" [DOWNLOAD MP3](#)



treble

Treblezine – December 2006



ALBUM OF THE WEEK

Benoît Pioulard
Précis
2006
Kranky



Fidelity is just a state of mind. After 50 some odd years of rock music's existence, there doesn't seem to be any rule on how lo-fi or polished a record is meant to be. For every *Loveless*, *Pet Sounds* or *Nevermind*, there's a *Bee Thousand*, *Slanted and Enchanted* or either/or to counter. And in every one of these albums, whatever the recording quality or technology, it's part of what makes the album. And yet, there are plenty of studio and home recordings that somehow miss the mark. For Benoît Pioulard, the recording alias of Michigan songwriter Thomas Meluch, nothing more than a home recording setup is necessary to create an entire world of sound, one that no amount of studio sheen could duplicate.

Meluch's latest, his first for Kranky and proper full-length label debut titled *Précis*, is, in a word, stunning. Meluch previously had released an EP in 2005 titled *Enge*, as well as limited run CD-Rs, but *Précis* reflects an entirely new spectrum of home studio magic. While Meluch's songs, at their very core, are primarily simple, lo-fi indie folk, it's what he adds to them that takes them from being good to absolutely mesmerizing. Like some sort of fantasy mash-up of My Bloody Valentine and Elliott Smith, *Précis* is an album of acoustics mixing with electronics, distortion, static and echo effects washing over pretty, graceful melodies. In a way, Meluch's approach is similar to The Jesus & Mary Chain, utilizing noise and effects as instruments in themselves.

Précis is, at times, abstract, particularly in instrumental numbers like the opener, "La Guerre de Sept Ans," the static-laden distant piano in "Moth Wings," or the eerie bells of "Coup de Foudre." These tracks, though wonderful in their own right, work more like transitions or bridges between the more accessible songs. "Together & Down" and "Ext. Leslie Park" are hazy, autumnal offerings, downcast yet striking. Meanwhile, "Triggering Back" is sing-songier, and more uptempo, a true standout that prances upon electronic beats and one of the most dazzling melodies on the album. Hand percussion, bells and marching drums drive the jaw-dropping "Pallmend," the album's awe-inspiring centerpiece. Fittingly, Meluch's vocals often sound somewhat distant and wrapped in subtle effects, making them sometimes as hazy as the music itself, but recording wizard that he is, does so in a way that merely adds mystique rather than erring on the side of over-observed.

The bulk of tracks on *Précis* are rather brief; in fact, only four pass three minutes, and most of the instrumental interludes stand at less than two, all of which adds up to an album of around 37 minutes. This isn't a problem, however, because each composition, no matter how brief, feels complete. The final trio of songs, on its own, provides a powerful trilogy of melodic wonder, and in just over nine minutes. "Sous La Plage" is only moderately adorned with electronic effects, coming off as engaging yet still subtle indie folk, as the next track, "Patter," is actually a tightly structured instrumental with odd laser-like effects phasing in and out, only to close the album with one of the most immediate and anthemic tracks, the dreamy "Ash Into the Sky." In both his mastery of sound and his impeccable songwriting talent, Benoît Pioulard, or Meluch, whatever you want to call him, has proven a maturity and brilliance that some might expect from someone much older. At 21 years old, Meluch sounds as gifted as they come.



CMJ New Music Monthly – November 2006


BENOIT PIOULARD: *Precis*

Benoit Pioulard is the musical pseudonym of 21-year-old Michigan native Thomas Meluch, who spent the last several years recording his experimental songs on tapes for friends. Luckily for us, he decided to broaden his audience, first with 2005's *Enge* EP and now *Precis*, his coming-of-age album and the most exciting new offering from an otherwise exhausted neo-shoegaze scene. However, Pioulard will quickly outgrow any label he's saddled with, since the hazy and romantic melodies captured on *Precis* already suggest an impressive knowledge of pop and a willingness to step outside its boundaries. An initial listen will draw attention to the myriad of sounds layered throughout each track, while the next will draw more focus toward the songs' emotional depth. Impermanence and loss of youth are major themes, and coupled with a sonic backdrop that features tape decay, breathy vocals and digital distortion, *Precis* is a perfect album to fall in love to, and with.

- Nora Cronin



Lost at Sea – November 2006



Benoit Pioulard
Precis
Kranky

Rating: 9/10 ?

buy it at...
insound

Time to clear up a few things:

1. It's pronounced *Ben-wah Pyo-lar* and, in case you didn't get the memo, Sufjan = *Soof-Yan*. I only mention this because it is terribly annoying to hear people ramble on about "Soof-Jon" and/or "Soo-Fawn" and it will be doubly tiring to hear "Ben-Oyt" or however people will mispronounce it.
2. If you haven't read Josh Zanger's interview with of Benoit you should. Here is a [link](#)
3. Pitchfork's review of this album is so far off the mark that it only serves to reinforce the notion that Pitchfork has become the equivalent of People Magazine for the hip set; more tabloid than journal, more blathering egotism than banner journalism.

For weeks now LAS Freebie guru, Josh Zanger, has been pestering me about listening to a disc by some French guy. I finally gave it a listen and all I've got to say is that bastard Zanger was right, *Precis* is an amazing album. Also, Benoit Pioulard isn't French at all and is, in fact, from Michigan. Benoit's real name is Thomas Meluch and, at the barely legal age of 22, appears to be some kind of wunderkind. A debut of this caliber is rare and most definitely worthy of all the hype.

Precis is the kind of densely layered album that expands with an increase in volume similar to works by My Bloody Valentine and M83. Meluch also muffles his vocals somewhat, creating a soothing effect that more than makes up for any vocal or lyrical shortcomings here. All this discussion of layering and distortion might lead one to assume that *Precis* is somehow inorganic. That assumption is wrong. The electronic elements have the effect of submersing the listener in a warm sonic bath that the acoustic guitar phrases float upon.

Highlights of Benoit's debut include: "Ash Into The Sky" which is reminiscent of classic Echo & The Bunnymen and "Alan and Dawn" a dark folk song with a mournful vocal. The strumming march of "Palimend" buries some loops deep into the mix that seem almost to be ghostly moans. The album is also interlaced with gorgeous electronic/instrumental gems like the Boards of Canada influenced "Moth Wings".

Benoit Pioulard is not to be missed. No matter what some pop sites might say. I've heard the new Califone, and it's good, but it is nowhere near the gorgeous layered quality of *Precis*. The definition of a "précis" is a short summary of a work. If this album is a short summation of what Benoit Pioulard is capable of, I think that Pitchfork will soon be rethinking their dismissive attitude toward certainly one of the best and most interesting artists to emerge in 2006.

Reviewed by [Jon Burke](#)



Pitchfork Media – November 2006

Infinite Mixtape #50: Benoit Pioulard: "Palimend"



Who is Benoît Pioulard? The name sounds vaguely familiar-- is he some impressionist painter? Some cheeky dadaist? Some dude who dabbled in the New York avant garde scene in the late 1970s? Nope, just some Michigan-dwelling kid named Thomas Meluch, who only reached drinking age last year, and who happens to have recorded a gorgeous album of wistful electro-folk under that sophisticated-sounding, faux-French, accent-adorned adopted moniker.

Pioulard's debut *Precís* dropped on Kranky earlier this week. Its centerpiece, the lush "Palimend", floats along on a haunting chorus melody and stately acoustic strum, while against the gallop of

ghost snare and some spectral moaning, young Pioulard offers an incantation to impermanence: "I always wanted you to know/ I never wanted you to go." The result: another autumnal smash and the landmark 50th addition to Pitchfork's Infinite Mixtape series.

#0050 > [Benoît Pioulard: "Palimend"](#)

[from *Precís*; Kranky]

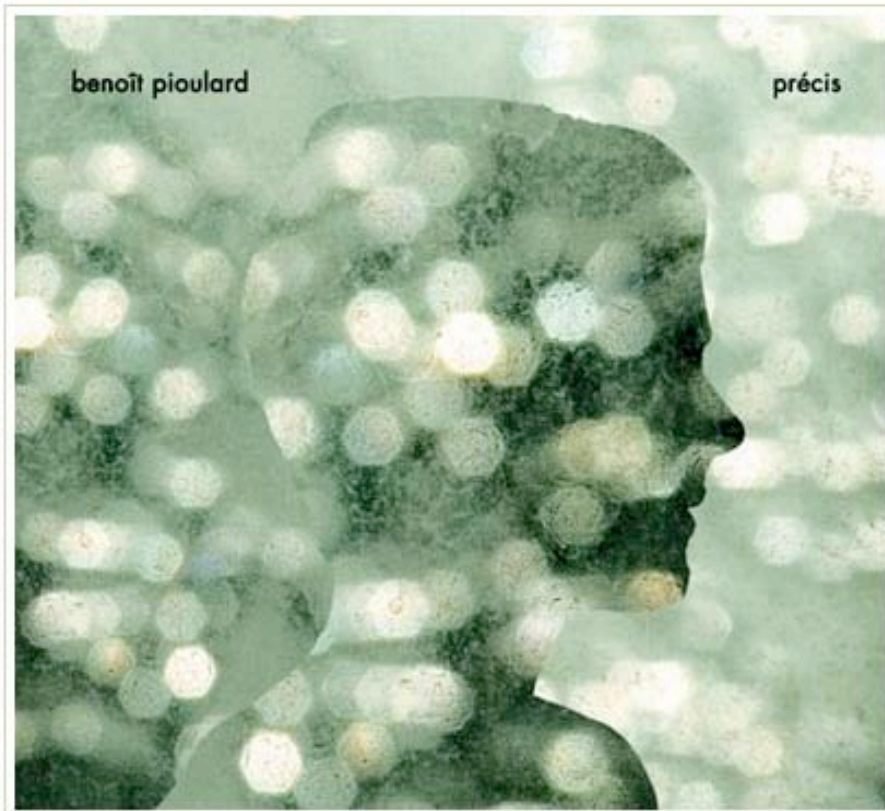
Info: [[Benoît Pioulard](#)] | [[MySpace](#)] | [[Kranky](#)]



Gorilla vs. Bear – November 2006

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 07, 2006

i always wanted you to know, i never wanted you to go



I'm a bit surprised the blog world isn't already all over [Benoit Pioulard](#). He's a Michigan kid, only 21 years old. Also, his new record ***Precis*** is his first LP, and it's alarmingly self-assured and detailed for a debut. I really like [what Matt had to say](#) about this song, which has fast become one of my favorite things I've heard all year:

Benoit Pioulard [Palimend mp3](#)

DELUSIONS OF ADEQUACY

Delusions of Adequacy – December 2006

Previously Featured



Benoît Pioulard
Précis
Kranky

Much ado has been made about 22 year old Benoît Pioulard (real name: Thomas Meluch). Some are singing his praises while others write him off as an inexperienced charlatan. However, the fact that *Précis* is so astounding has next to nothing to do with his young age. Meluch has managed to produce an album so full of poise and beauty it would be a total shame to dismiss it.

First there's his voice. Elliott Smith is a decent reference point but Meluch bears an even stronger resemblance to The One A.M. Radio's Hrishikesh Hirway. Then there's the sound of *Précis* which combines rickety acoustic guitar with elements of Brian Eno's ambient works and to a lesser extent some processed guitar in the vein of Christian Fennesz. The entire thing is literally dripping with reverb including Meluch's vocals. Unlike other artists or bands who sometimes use reverb to disguise the flaws in their songwriting, on *Précis* it establishes an interesting dichotomy of distance and warmth. Right down to the cover art the album plays like a photograph taken with vaseline smeared across the camera lens.

"La Guerre de Sept Ans" which translates as "The Seven Year War" is an instrumental guitar piece that leads into "Together & Down." This track's crooned vocals and clip-clopping percussion set the tone for all of the non-instrumental album tracks. Meluch's guitar strumming on top of this is like a feather falling on a pond. The

overall effect is achingly gorgeous. Other tracks on the record conform to this template without falling into the trap of becoming tedious and boring. Meluch's songcraft is some of the finest I've seen this year from a new artist next to Beirut's Zach Condon. "Moth Wings" sounds like an outtake from *Ambient 2: The Plateaux of Mirror* (one of my all time favorite Eno records). "Palimend" is another of the album's highlights, with delicate fingerpicked guitar parts, wood block percussion, and tinkling bells.

To sit and pick apart the songs one-by-one would do the record a great injustice. It sounds and plays like an extremely cohesive whole. Each song leads perfectly into the next but is easily strong enough to stand on its own. Rarely does an artist or album come along this fully formed this early on. If we're lucky enough to get a second Benoît Pioulard record he's going to have a hard time topping this one.

2006 has been a landmark year for Kranky. Tim Hecker's *Harmony in Ultraviolet* and Keith Fullerton Whitman's *Lisbon* are nearly flawless. That's not even counting the other awesome releases by Chihei Hatakeyama and Charalambides which are both incredibly good. With the addition of *Précis* the label is nearly batting 1000. Benoît Pioulard's debut for the label is easily among the year's best.

-Joe Davenport
12/05/06



Two Way Monologues – December 2006



So, how about that time I fell in love? Oh right, it just happened, as I pressed play and was swept off my feet by *Precis* and its masterful creator, Benoit Pioulard (aka Tom Meluch).

The man is only in his early twenties, and he is creating big sounds from a small space. The album was put together and recorded in the corner of the artist's room, late at night, sometimes even using pillows as sound makers. I guess it goes to show that one doesn't need much to make genius.

The 15 songs of *Precis* are amazingly crafted pieces of art and nothing quite like what I've heard before. They are woven together to tell his story, not just random songs thrown together to make a CD. I love his simplicity, maturity and flow, and the random, interesting and unusual sounds throughout.

Since my curiosity was certainly sparked by *Precis* (clearly an understatement), I decided to look further into this man and surely enough, I now love him even more. His website is beautifully put together using Polaroid imagery, and everything I read about him made me decide that I want him to be my future husband. How many men actually hang on to their journals from their childhoods and use some of its material to craft music? Or come up with their monikers on a notepad, after it had been jotted down in the middle of the night? My only problem is the fact that I need a cheat-sheet to pronounce and spell this name of his.

I somewhat feel wrong telling you any more about this album. It was a great experience the first time I heard it, and it continues to be so as it haunts me with its bells, acoustic guitar, electrical bursts and Pioulard's whispering voice. Each song brought with it a different emotion, led me by the hand into my imagination and let me dream.

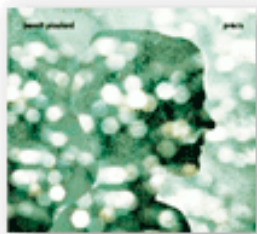
As the record progresses you get a clearer sense of who Pioulard is and where he's coming from, and personally, I can't help myself: when the record comes to an end and I press repeat to start it up all over again. I was captured right from the beginning, with a powerful entry and exit and simple enchantment in-between. The more I listen and learn, the more appreciative of his music and talent I become.

"It sounds like a folk band playing in dense forest from forty yards away. It sounds like a grainy, jumpy home movie of your childhood vacation to the great Northwest. It sounds like what you might hear on a romantic late-summer picnic on Venus. It sounds like the album's cover art. It sounds like nothing else you'll hear this year." *Stylus Magazine* wrote that, I couldn't agree more.

I personally love what I hear, see, read and feel. Benoit Pioulard, will you marry me?

SCORE: 8.9

Télérama (FR) – November 2006



Précis

Benoît Pioulard

► Commandez sur fnac.com



Il faut d'abord traverser une cascade de sons. C'est un peu la chute d'eau du Temple du Soleil, mais derrière on ne trouve pas de momies incas, plutôt la musique très vivante que trame un parfait inconnu du côté de Chicago – comme son nom ne l'indique pas.

Dans les reflets kaléidoscopiques de *Précis*, on croit voir tourner, rougeoyer encore les cendres de certaine cold wave qui jadis nous réchauffait, le Cure de Seventeen Seconds, Eyeless in Gaza ou les guitares de Vini Reilly (les Durutti Column) soignant l'ennui par la répétition. Puis ces reliefs-là s'estompent et sous le palimpseste on finit par distinguer la trace d'un classique obscur et matriciel, non des moindres : The Notorious Byrd Brothers. Entre l'album le plus évanescent des Byrds et les récentes aventures électro de l'Autrichien Christian Fennesz (auquel est ici emprunté le concept remis au jour des field recordings), Benoît Pioulard semble faire le grand écart. Mais précisément non : il réduit assez la distance pour que l'auditeur fasciné se demande si le garçon n'aurait pas chaussé des bottes de sept lieues. Surtout, ces ballades frémissantes à la rosée cristalline, aux nervures sans fin, promettent de charmer l'oreille au-delà d'une dizaine d'écoutes. La voix de Pioulard, celle d'un gentil loir psalmodiant du creux de son arbre, est traitée comme un instrument parmi d'autres. C'est elle pourtant qui nous guide en somnambule, et dans leur forêt de micro-sensations, rien ne sert de coller une étiquette aux chansons qui ruissellent.

François Gorin