



## time immortal

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### Tortoise

#### Beacons Of Ancestorship (Thrill Jockey)

Now, here's a word association you seldom see anywhere outside the pages of *Reptile Keeper Monthly*. Ready? 'Tortoise'. And 'fun'.

Not being present to hear those synapses fizz and sputter, I'm going to substitute them with the third track here, 'Northern Something', and spend the next two minutes dancing in a poor impersonation of its squid-slitheing-over-woodblocks motion while you attempt to process the concept.

Let's try it out in a few simple sentences. The new Tortoise album is good fun. Tortoise sound like they're having fun on their new album. Tortoise thought a fun title for the record would be...OK, best not stretch credibility too far.

Flippancy aside, *Beacons Of Ancestorship* is a heartening return from a band who had seemed in danger of vanishing up their own augmented ninths after 2004's placid-verging-on-complacent *It's All Around You*. If *Millions Now Living Will Never Die* defined slow growth and wintry beauty as a template of sorts for many of the post-rock acts that followed, it wasn't necessarily the band's

own blueprint. Instead, 1998's *TNT* exchanged catharsis and resolution and the romantic sublime for a kind of jazzily restless suspension, spinning epochs out of anticipation and deferment. That's still in evidence on 'The Fall Of Seven Diamonds Plus One', where a thousand Ennio Morricone tributes are distilled to their essence: guitar twangs, clip-clopping hooves and the jangle of coins as a lone gunman scans the horizon, waiting.

Elsewhere, it seems that these masters of meta-music have been feasting on the Seventies rock leftovers of *The Brave And The Bold*, their

## Restless suspension

covers album with Bonnie 'Prince' Billy. Opener 'High Class Slim Came Floatin' In' lolls lasciviously on a waterbed with a posse of fat-bottomed synths, before a hippo-sized bassline bursts through the wall and departs on a rampage. 'Prepare Your Coffin' (now there's a title just waiting for Alice Cooper) sounds like a laboratory for guitar solos, unravelling the genes of 'Freebird' and 'Hotel California' and recombining into new, ever-ascending helixes.

It's not quite a scene of bacchanalian abandonment. In particular, 'Gigantes' – whose bright chimes and antsy percussion recall Plaid's trick of throwing sweetness over density – and

the fractured guitar/punchy beats combo of 'Monument Six One Thousand' underline Tortoise's affinity with the kind of careful structuring that is taken for granted in electronic music, but which is treated with suspicion in the realm of 'rock' instruments. But then, no-one expects a theme park ride to be spontaneous. Enjoy.

### Abi Bliss speaks to Jeff Parker

#### Will anything on this record surprise fans?

"Hopefully, our fans have come to expect a few surprises! That said, there is some heavier textural activity that people don't normally associate with us, and our bass and mallet worlds were invaded by electronic waveforms."

#### Do your song titles relate to some external source of inspiration, or do they have as much relevance as calling tracks '1a', '1b', etc?

"The titles rarely have any significance other than aesthetic pleasure. We like to let the listener-observer create their own meanings. This ambiguous aspect is one of the greatest exploits of making instrumental music."

#### What is your own emotional take?

"We try to use different musical textures to colour our music in varying, subtle ways. We were never fans of the 'quiet, loud' bag...there are emotions in our music, just as there are emotions in people, and we are thinking, feeling people."