



It would be misleading to say that Cosey Fanni Tutti has been a singularly unprolific solo artist, as her oeuvre has never been constrained to simply music, but it is noteworthy that her last original solo album (*Time to Tell*) was released almost four decades ago. That album was stellar, setting quite a high bar for future releases. Also significant: Cosey's career has undergone a well-deserved renaissance in the last couple years, culminating in the release of her acclaimed memoir *Art Sex Music*. As a result, *Tutti* has the somewhat unenviable curse of being an album preceded by months of anticipation and high expectations. For better or worse, Cosey has nimbly sidestepped that situation to some degree, as *Tutti* is more of a soundtrack than a major new artistic statement...musically, anyway. On a conceptual level, this album is loosely intended as a career-spanning self-portrait built from reworked archival recordings. Cosey took that "reworking" part quite seriously though, so this album often feels like a warmly hallucinatory collection of instrumental Chris & Cosey remixes despite the submerged ghosts of more abrasive and transgressive days.

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The initial idea for this album originated as part of the 2017 COUM Transmissions retrospective in Cosey's hometown of Hull, as she was asked to create a new work for the event. She chose to make an autobiographical film that recounted her early life in the city through family photos and various visual ephemera from the era. She accompanied it, appropriately enough, with a live soundtrack assembled from various audio fragments of her life, visual/performance art, and music. Thankfully, that particular COUM Transmissions retrospective did not scandalize an entire nation or get Tutti rebranded as a wrecker of civilization. It did, however, result in this album, as Cosey later expanded upon the original performance in her studio. That said, if I did not know the album's background, it is unlikely that I would ever deduce its inspirations and hidden depths, as it often feels more like a series of pulsing grooves than a poignant journey through evocative samples or a monument to a life's work. The title piece is an especially prominent example of that aesthetic, as it barrels along as a throbbing, motorik-sounding bit of propulsive synth pop, albeit one enlivened by a smoky cornet solo and skittering, shuddering flourishes of dub-style production. The rest of the album is a bit less straight-forward than that though, as it often feels more like an indomitable throbbing, thumping groove keeps getting submerged in woozy backwards melodies and eruptions of strange noises, yet quickly fights its

Brainwashed - Cosey Fanni Tutti, "Tutti"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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way back to the surface each time. Much of the album occupies an interesting gray area that is not quite pop, yet teems with grooves and snatches of melody blurred into something more elusive.

That said, there is a definite structure and arc to the album, as the first several songs are more beat-driven, while the second half steadily grows more abstract and soundscape-esque. Unsurprisingly, those early pieces make the strongest initial impression, particularly "Moe," which sneakily builds from a hallucinatory flutter of backwards guitar into a sensuously throbbing groove. The preceding "Drone" is noteworthy as well, as a host of gnarled and ugly Gristle-like sounds increasingly blossom from a squelching, off-kilter beat. As I grew more familiar with the album, however, it was the album's more strange and subtly lysergic fare that began to leave a deeper impact. My favorite piece is "En," which feels like an impressively sophisticated dub-influenced revisit of Gristle's murky ugliness, as a submerged groove quietly burbles and simmers beneath a phantasmagoric soup of vaguely sinister buzzes, swoops, and animal-like howls. "Split" is similarly dark, gradually building from a subdued and benign-sounding pulse into a crescendo of massive shuddering sounds that feels like a plague of sky-blackening, mechanized birds with malevolent intent. Between those plunges into Tutti's darker past, however, lurk a handful of more melodic, tender, and light pieces. "Heliy," for example, feels like a distant relative to more romantic moments like "October Love Song," albeit one that has been stretched and blurred into dreamy abstraction. The closing "Orenda" is similarly lovely, unfolding as a languorous procession of warm, shimmering clouds that feel like they have enveloped and softened the sounds of a bustling city.

As likable as *Tutti* can be, however, I cannot help wishing that I could have experienced these songs in their original and intended context, as this album is kind of a perverse self-portrait on its own. In fact, it verges on self-camouflage, as Cosey's voice is the most iconic and instantly recognizable aspect of her musical work and it rarely surfaces here (and even then only in heavily manipulated form). That makes this a bit curious album, as it feels more like an impressive feat of production and craftsmanship than it does a bold artistic statement: there are plenty of strong ideas here, but they have been smoothed over by (admittedly skilled) artifice into something more accessible than challenging or provocative.

That said, Cosey is at the peak of her powers in many ways, as this is a catchy, fast-moving, vividly realized, and expertly sequenced batch of songs (even if there are no obvious singles). I just would have expected a solo album to be more personal departure from Carter Tutti (or Carter Tutti Void) rather than a variation of those styles sans collaborators. I suspect that the film got the lion's share of the vulnerability and emotional depth in this multimedia project though and the music was primarily for color, pace, and mood. I am definitely the victim of my own expectations here. Granted, *Time to Tell* was amazing and this second solo release has been a long time coming, but

Art Sex Music and

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Carter Tutti Void were great and Cosey's creative energies have been spread in a lot of different directions over the last few years. No one can endlessly churn out bold reinventions and significant statements across several disciplines forever. As such,

Tutti

is merely another very good album and a solid addition to an already wonderful body of work. Fans will definitely dig it, but it is more of a pleasant treat and a polished, breezily listenable tour of her artistic evolution than it is a fresh masterpiece or culminating achievement.

Samples:

- [Tutti](#)
- [Drone](#)
- [En](#)