

## Thom Yorke – Anima review by Jessica Otterwell

Do you have trouble remembering your dreams? Advertisements posing the question popped up, seemingly over-night, adorning tube carriages and offering a solution to tired and over worked commuters.

The ads, featuring Victorian style etchings of people falling and flying, offered for sale Anima Industries' dream camera, to record and recover those lost moments. All you had to do was call or text the number displayed.

Bemused posts started to appear on social media, with people questioning if they were actually in an episode of Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror*, how was this real? Was it real? Those who called the number were confronted with a recorded message about high court legislation and illegal operation.

When it was finally revealed to be a digital marketing campaign for Thom Yorke's latest solo offering, *Anima*, there was relief, surprise and a common understanding. Yorke has always questioned the role technology plays within our daily lives and whether this is a positive influence or whether society is turning increasingly voyeuristic. Never one to shy away from pushing the boundaries of making music, at the centre of Yorke's song writing there has often been at once a fascination and a deep mistrust of technology, Yorke and digital advancement have a complex relationship that began with Radiohead's *Fake Plastic Trees*, *Paranoid Android* and continued into his solo offerings. That complexity shows no sign of abating with *Anima*.

The release of *Anima* is an event, a spectacle, a piece of theatre, it's exciting, it's tantalising and above all, fresh. Along with the intriguing viral marketing campaign, there is the accompanying short film directed by Paul Thomas Anderson, premiering on Netflix and in selected iMax cinemas. There will also be a North American tour.

It would be a shame to listen to *Anima* without viewing the accompanying short film. However, the dream-like state the opener, *Traffic*, creates offers the listener a state of anxiety and fore that builds visuals all of its own, no help required. The short begins with the inside of a subway station, passengers judder and shake around the carriage, prisoners of disturbed sleep. The film is delicately choreographed by Damien Jalet, who at times owes a debt to the early work of [Pina Bausch](#), when conveying the otherworldly suffering of Yorke and his fellow slumbering city dwellers.

Thom Yorke has stated that *Anima* was created during a period of intense anxiety and it is easy to see this despair on tracks like, *Last I heard (...He was Circling the Drain)*. 'Swimming through the gutter, swallowed up by the sea'. Anxiety dreams are in a genre all of their own and Yorke's created dreamscapes are feverish nightmares.

*Twist* offers up rapid repeated vocals, layered with dark beats and at times an airy falsetto. The track offers more than a nod to the dance and dub flavourings of his previous solo effort, Tomorrow's Modern Boxes. *Twist* seems more accomplished, what started off as an idea, is now showcased fully formed. While some may be wishing for Jonny Greenwood's input, it would almost smother the production here and Yorke should be allowed to venture

out alone. His solo efforts, from debut *The Eraser* to *Anima* have evolved to such a height that with *Anima* and *Twist* in particular, Yorke has really allowed co-producer Nigel Godrich to weave something spectacular.

Talking of spectacular, the stand-out moment is *Dawn Chorus*, with its woozy waltzing synth beats oozing uncertainty all over the place. If listeners were at any point missing the melancholy of Thom Yorke old it's back, in spades. With lines like, 'quit your job again, it's your last chance'. There is a feeling of chilled depression that nestles in the very core of this song. In Anderson's film it is a moment of calm, with Yorke standing in a graffitied alleyway rolling and tumbling over the woman he has been chasing in his dream (real-life partner, Dajana Roncione) bathed in yellow light of an underpass streetlight. It sounds gentle, calm, a moment of respite if not resolution.

The mistrust of the machine returns to the fore on *The Axe*, with its nightmarish bleeping and echoes, the synth is sickening and claustrophobic. The opening, 'Goddamn machinery, why don't you speak to me?' The machines have malfunctioned again, they are broken, they have broken listener. Yorke's pleading, 'I thought we had a deal?' will surely resonate with anyone feeling the isolation that technological overload can bring. *The Axe* whirrs and falters to its conclusion, calling to mind earlier Aphex Twin offerings and yet remarkably managing to be more unsettling.

Penultimate track, *Impossible Knots* begins with a pulsing beat and is the most stand-alone track on the album, 'I'm tired of impossible knots, I'll take anything you got'. The beats bend and break over each other, the vocals layer. If it were a person, Impossible Knots would be louche in a green velvet jacket, Gitane cigarette in hand, the cool observer of the chaos. Maybe Yorke is the observer to his own chaos, ever the outsider, never quite breaking inside.

Closer, *Runwayaway* is sublime, we are back in the dreamscape, it's no longer the fractious child we encountered at the beginning. Laidback basslines and beats reminiscent of Four Tet. Suddenly the mood changes, a demon voice creeps in, 'this is when you know who your real friends are'. Lulled into a false sense of security, the subconscious is prickled and bleeding, trust no one, Anima Industries will steal your dreams.

*Anima is out now on Rough Trade. Anima (short film) can be viewed on Netflix.*