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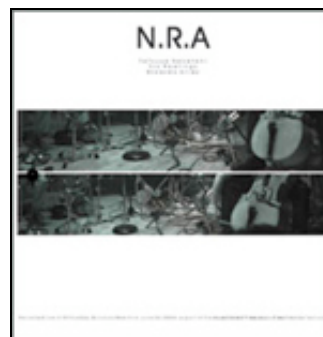


Dusted Reviews

N.R.A. - Recorded Live at OfficeOps

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## Dusted Reviews



**Artist:** N.R.A.

**Album:** Recorded Live at OfficeOps

**Label:** [Free103point9](#)

**Review date:** Jan. 11, 2006

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The three extremely resourceful musicians who make up N.R.A. have numerous musical connections and like-minded tendencies, but it's their inventiveness that's the most appetizing facet of this meeting. Tatsuya Nakatani has made a name for himself with a cache of percussive elements and techniques that leaves conventional percussion, even within the context of free improv, far behind. Vic Rawlings' work as a cellist depends heavily on preparations and extended technique, though it's his work with open-circuit electronics that more obviously engages the imagination. Ricardo Arias, a Colombian expatriate, is the least notorious member of the trio, though he's the man with the most interesting instrument. Arias has been working for over a decade with what he terms balloon kits, essentially collections of balloons with a common physical anchor. Here, he utilizes the bass-balloon kit, holding down the bottom end of N.R.A.'s improvisations.

As the title so handily relates, *Recorded Live at OfficeOps* was captured during a live performance, part of the "Assembled: Free Jazz and Electronics" festival in June 2004. The disc is heavily influenced by its environment and while the audience is a largely impalpable presence, the physical space N.R.A. performed in that night is audible through the recording's distinct reverb and the interplay of the sound.

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There's little space between the background and foreground, creating claustrophobics when things become crowded, especially in the recording's low end.

N.R.A.'s music can be quite anonymous; though some sounds can be attributed to specific players, it takes merely an iota of imagination or a millisecond of confusion to find oneself unsure of who might be responsible for a jagged clatter or resonant thump. Rawlings' electronics are easily identified through their grainy squeal, but much of *Recorded Live at OfficeOps* is more mysterious, a compelling yet frustrating facet of the trio's performance. The elephantine whine of a manipulated balloon could just as easily be the sound of a bowed cymbal, and where one ear may distinctly hear Nakatani's pattering, another surely identifies Rawling making a percussion instrument of his cello. With the three musicians using such particular tools in their creation, this ambiguity is a surprise, but not an altogether unwelcome one. More distinct voicing might make what sometimes feel like a disjointed session even more so, whereas the aural camouflage can help to provide a more cohesive sound.

Nakatani seems often a musician who's best enjoyed live, and with *Recorded Live at OfficeOps* this figures to again be the case. Experienced in person, this set was likely bolstered by not only the cues to who did what, but the visceral visuals of the trio's novelty instruments. On disc, the set can be rather impenetrable, but whether such difficulty breeds curiosity or disregard will depend on the listener, since both seem valid reactions.

By Adam Strohm

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