

## Alex Ross: The Rest Is Noise

Books, articles, and a blog by the music critic of *The New Yorker*

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Bill Morrison's film *The Miners' Hymns* [is] a melancholy celebration of coal-mining culture in the great northern English city of Durham. The film is centered on the Durham Miners' Gala, an annual summertime meeting which, from the late nineteenth century until the Thatcher era, brought thousands of celebrants into the city. The gala was famous not only for its union activism but for its carnival atmosphere, its massed choral singing, and its myriad brass bands. Morrison's film has a soundtrack by the Icelandic composer [Jóhann Jóhannsson](#) — a brooding ambient creation, recorded in Durham Cathedral, for large brass ensemble, organ, percussion, and electronic sounds. [...]

If the sound of the miners' hymn in Durham Cathedral doesn't bring a tear to your eye, you must be one of the Koch brothers. Although the miners' gala carries on, its *raison d'être* is gone; the last of the Durham mining pits was closed in 1992. [...]

Voiceless, almost textless, only fifty-two minutes long, [*The Miners' Hymns*] is a beautiful and devastating work, having the weight of tragedy.