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## Tanya Tagaq: Animism – review

Ludovic Hunter-Tilney | January 23, 2015



To the uninitiated Tanya Tagaq sounds like a human beatboxer suffering a breakdown. The Inuk throat singer from Canada goes from rough growls and weird muttering to gentle susurrations: the flipside to the modern pop diva’s splashy acrobatics. It’s not folk music; instead Tagaq yokes the indigenous vocal form to abrasive electronic beats and nervy cinematic orchestrations, with startling results.

*Animism* is her fourth album (she also appeared on Björk’s *Medúlla*), and it beat Arcade Fire and Drake to win Canada’s Polaris prize last year. Its title refers to the belief that every element in the world has a spiritual essence; imagined here not as hippyish togetherness but rather as a precarious, at times threatening collection of auditory effects, as with the contrast between Tagaq’s catarrhal rhythms and opera singer Anna Pardo Canedo’s melodious singing in “Flight”.

The listener is kept in a state of disorientation, one point enjoying a relatively straight cover of The Pixies’ “Caribou”, the next tensing up in “Uja” to the panting sounds of predation set to a claustrophobic industrial beat.

The juxtaposition of Western modernity and aboriginal tradition climaxes with “Fracking” in which horror-movie violins, an ominous synthesiser tone and Tagaq’s desperate gasps and whimpers are the soundtrack to looming extinction. Bracing, yes; but stunning too.