



Carl Craig
Sessions
[K7; 2008]
Rating: 9.0

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The image shows a promotional graphic for the album "Carl Craig Sessions". On the left is a black and white portrait of Carl Craig looking slightly to the right. The text on the right provides the album title, release information, a rating of 9.0, and four action links: "Buy it from Insound", "Download it from Emusic", "Digg this article", and "Add to del.icio.us".

Carl Craig is so simply good at what he does that he can be hard to talk about. The effects of his best tracks, among the best in techno history, tend to be more incremental than incendiary. The arc of his career, so long and actually arcing, has never swerved through the kind of progressive flashpoints that make for grand narrative. Craig has always been about reform more than revolution-- even for his most stalwart fans, voicing support has been less a matter of redrawing electronic music borders than of waving flags for whatever Craig happens to be doing at any given time.

But not all of it: Another reason Craig is hard to talk about is that a fair amount of what he's done has been less than essential. It wasn't long ago that Craig seemed to be going the way of other aging Detroit techno artists whose reputations owe more to legacy than to potential. However interesting his forays into jazz fusion, however stirring the occasional track that reiterated his influence, Craig remained stuck somewhere foggy between the there-and-then and the here-and-now. And the problem was compounded by the fact that there was never a single manageable manifesto-- a lone album, mix, or compilation-- that you could hand a new initiate and just say "...here."

Sessions is that manifesto, at long last. Gathering 23 original tracks and remixes on two continuously mixed CDs, it catalogs all the hallmarks that have come to define Craig from the start: his concise beats, his distinctive warmth, his fluency with all the different subtleties and nuances of "soul." All prove abundant on Disc One, which moves between tracks made from 1992 to 2007 without showing the slightest bit of strain. The newest cut is one of the recent epics that have reasserted Craig's importance in the present: a remix of Junior Boys' "Like a Child" that plays arpeggiated vertigo games with source material whose emotive delicacy Craig retains while piling on sci-fi strings and a hissing beat that creeps until it cracks. The nature of that crack-- into a crevice burrowed between a spirited house-y saunter and robotic techno drive-- figures in other tracks as old as Paperclip People's "Throw" and as new as a remix of Delia Gonzalez & Gavin Russom's "Relevee", which pushes cosmic synth patterns past the red-line toward something more majestically black and blue.

Disc Two features fewer remixes of other artists and more tracks of Craig's own-- either under his given name or aliases like 69, Tres Demented, and Innerzone Orchestra. Though two of the highlights are in fact more remixes: a steaming, stomping, strobing rework of Faze Action's "In the Trees" and a tender take on X-Press 2's "Kill 100", whose fleshy vocals and dark acid lines signal Craig's facility with both pop humanism and techno alienation. Plus, like so much on Sessions, it's hard to place in time. Indeed, the most noteworthy aspect of this invaluable set is that there's so little disparity in terms of quality between tracks that span 15 years. They're all just simply, extremely, uncommonly, uniquely... well, good.

-Andy Battaglia, March 27, 2008