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album review



**Mi Ami**  
**Watersports**

[Quarterstick; 2009]

**7.9**

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For a few minutes early in 2003, D.C. clatters Black Eyes were basically the best band in the world. They fed the sharp-shock Rapture dance-punk of the day through about 50 layers of organically grimy Dischord history, ending up with a whirling sort of catharsis that was as fun as it was heavy. The band's personnel went like this: two drummers, two bassists, and one dude who made dying-pterodactyl squawks while thrashing out tinny, spidery almost-funk guitar riffs and doing everything he could to disrupt the thundering groove exploding all around him. Black Eyes' live shows were dank basement dance parties for the ages: furious, immediate, jarring, sweaty as all hell. And then the band recorded *Cough*, their half-assed dub experiment of a second album, and suddenly ended. They were, after all, a D.C. band, and that's what D.C. bands do.

Black Eyes bassist Jacob Long and squawker/guitarist Daniel Martin-McCormick make up two thirds of the San Francisco trio Mi Ami, whose existence makes me not miss Black Eyes so badly anymore. Their debut album, *Watersports*, takes the skritchety tumble of Black Eyes and stretches it out into something psychedelic, near-infinite. *Watersports* is seven songs long, and it lasts 47 minutes. Their beats don't rattle; they push and flicker and fade. *Watersports* is like the self-titled Black Eyes album calmed down and zoned out, the attempted dub of *Cough* fully developed and realized. The songs don't have verses or choruses; they're endless, mesmeric builds that flare up and then cool out again. Even at their noisiest, they maintain their mantra-like repetition.

Part of the secret is in the recording itself. *Watersports* sounds terrific. A couple of pre-album 12" singles captured a similar sound, but the bass was too thin, the drums too muffled. Here, the bass is thick and supple, echoing and ringing and never losing its footing. Long's bass makes the real rhythmic bed here; Damon Palermo's drums color spaces around that metronomic bubble as often as they keep time. Martin-McCormick's voice, which could be downright annoying even when Black Eyes were at their best, still works as an agent of rupture. But even he has cooled out a bit, muttering deep in the mix rather than yowling overtop of it. His lyrics, on the rare occasions when I can understand them, seem to turn *Watersports* into a disco album about being trapped inside your own skull; other people are "only the echo of my mind." On his guitar, he plays Morse-code pings, letting them fall over the tracks like rain as often as it slashes through them.

The album comes sequenced almost like a DJ set; grooves maintain across tracks, and sometimes you don't notice immediately when one song dissolves into another. That reverby stretched-out quality is Mi Ami's greatest strength, one I hope they keep pushing on whatever records they do next. But you've probably already noticed that I can't help comparing this band to Black Eyes. This isn't really Mi Ami's fault, but Black Eyes were just too good, and wishing Mi Ami sounded just like them is as inevitable as wishing "30 Rock" was even more like "Arrested Development". The two ex-Black Eyes dudes in Mi Ami have some powerful magic working here, but they had even more when they just couldn't contain themselves.

— Tom Breihan, April 7, 2009

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