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 Sound Space

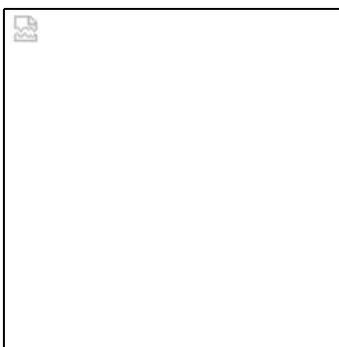
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## Escape from New York

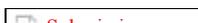
*John Carpenter serves up 'Snake'-charming music*

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 Although he's best known as a horror and science fiction filmmaker, John Carpenter is also a skilled musician. In fact, more often than not, he personally generates the melodies that accompany his productions. His 1981 movie *Escape from New York* was no exception. A new "expanded" album devoted to the adventure's sparse score has recently been issued, offering contemporary listeners an opportunity to revisit these threadbare yet thrilling themes.

Composed and performed by Carpenter and sound designer Alan Howarth, the recording--which showcases remastered versions of the original cues--opens with "Main Title," a dark, meager number that perfectly captures the film's dystopian setting. Ominous, plangent notes undulate through cuts such as "Orientation," "Police Action" and "Over the Wall," while tracks like "Arrival at the Library" and "69th Street Bridge" effectively encapsulate the tense, edgy atmosphere of 1997 Manhattan, which in the story has been converted into a maximum-security prison. "Everyone's Coming to New York" presents the picture's sole vocal work, with a chorus of inmates singing the dubious praises of the Big Apple.

Among the 20 tunes there are also six previously unreleased themes, including the somber "He's Still Alive/Romero" and "Across the Roof," plus a pair of compositions--"The Bank Robbery" and "Snake Shake: End Credits"--that weren't used in the film. Interspersed between the musical numbers are eight selections spotlighting key dialogue sequences from the movie. The liner notes provide a brief plot synopsis, along with an informative tract from Howarth outlining both the process used to initially create the melodies and the high-tech, computerized procedure employed to remix and revitalize the cues for this release.

### A first look at New York's finest

In 1978, Carpenter's classic horror flick *Halloween* intermingled on-screen terror with simple, synthesized sounds. *Escape from New York* builds upon that

 Our Pick:  
B+

innovative approach, interjecting a variety of melodic moods and textures to augment the picture's complex visual scenario. Recent technological advances have made some of these noises passé, but overall the music--produced with what at the time were state-of-the-art synthesizers and a cutting-edge drum machine--remains vigorous.

"Engulfed Cathedral (Debussy)" uses resonant keyboards to loosely imitate a harpsichord motif, subtly evoking the once-grand beauty of a devastated temple. Through scant instrumentation and deep, wavering tones, the work manifests a moving mixture of magnificence and sadness. "Back to the Pod - Version #2/The Crazies Come Out" offers a more discordant clamor, incorporating squeaks and mysterious echoes to enhance the frightening appearance of New York's ragtag population. The "Main Title" is quite powerful too, introducing a slow, spare theme that perfectly captures the lone-wolf demeanor of "Snake" Plissken (Kurt Russell), the film's rugged anti-hero. His scary, solitary attitude is also effectively expressed on the anxious (and formerly unavailable) "Descent Into New York."

The incessant synth-rock beat of "The Duke Arrives/Barricade" makes that particular cue a bit dated, while "Snake Shake - End Credits," which wisely was not used in the final cut of the picture, is far too lighthearted for the gritty adventure. Yet, even with these minor missteps, the music of *Escape from New York* is exceptional. Using only a handful of electronic instruments, Carpenter and Howarth created a truly energetic, effective and enduring science fiction score.

*I normally dislike dialogue snippets on albums like this, but **Escape from New York** is an exception. Although occasionally intrusive, the voices are so noteworthy, and the writing so crisp, that rather than getting me upset, these brief bits brought back a lot of fond movie memories. -- Jeff*

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