

Album: *365 Vol. 4: Orchestral Vibe*

Artist: Galliano Somnavilla

Reviewer: Alice Neiley

Australian born Galliano Somnavilla has released yet another album from his ‘original song a day for a year’ project. I’ve listened to many *365* compilations, and am happy to announce that I was equally thrilled by this latest one, *Vol. 4: Orchestral Vibes*. While there are a few tracks I’d celebrate for effort rather than mastery, the album as a whole is consistent with Galliano’s previous demonstrations of compositional skill and ingenuity. The overall feel of the album lands somewhere along the lines of a movie soundtrack to me—a war movie, to be exact—but not just any war, a war between magical worlds, creatures, or ideals. As usual, there is something magnetic and wondrous about Galliano’s compositions, and this particular collection bursts forth with courage and emotion.

“Song/day 308” begins with military style snare drum, timpani, and thick, orchestral string chords that escalate both chromatically and by octave. The timpani eventually fades, or perhaps is simply overpowered by xylophone sounds, oboe, falling piano chords, and ambient sound effects. A light, bell like instrument mimics the melodic pattern of the string chords, ushering in the first climax of the tune, when all the instruments sound as if they’re having going-away-to-war parties in separate apartments, all coincidentally conversing in the same key. Despite the chaos, each instrument’s part is interesting and/or gorgeous, and they layer together quite nicely, especially in the two or three spots where the tune calms down a bit and Galliano’s trademark mellow groove re-enters, as if reminding us that these very stirred up houses are also homes.

"Song/day 305" feels like the next morning, when everyone is preparing for battle: both the attempt to build courage, and the emotional, fear/sadness driven background. The strings incessantly pulse on one note for a long stretch, then switch to another note, then another, but always relentless, like instrumental anxiety. These strings are what give the song its suspense, its feeling that something big is on the horizon, that bravery will be required. As usual, though, Galliano’s inclusion of ambient vocals and beautiful melodies in specific instruments – clarinet, piano – balance out the urgency with serenity and a melancholic depth: the humanness of war, whether it be with another entity, or within oneself.

"Song/day 260" lays low on any kind of percussiveness at first, especially compared to the earlier tracks. In the beginning, the primary instruments are triangle, string chords, bass, and piano, all blending together perfectly, their rhythms complimentary, their harmonies natural. When what sounds like a bass clarinet arrives—another gorgeous melody on top of a stormy sea of unified instruments—it unearths the image of one soldier, one voice, rising from the resolve. As the tune progresses, the clarinet continues its magic, but the percussion strengthens, overpowering the light triangle with snare drum. Soon afterward, the clarinet passes its spotlight and its melody to the piano, instigating a call and response between the two instruments, as if someone else has answered the soldier’s lonely voice.

"Song/day 212" is a big surprise in terms of any musical flow to the album, but in considering the album a sound-story, it makes perfect sense. The intense mash-up of instruments, sudden fast tempo, and bulldozing effect of at least three different types of drums hammering away at once, presents the distinct aura of battle. However, layered on top is a completely contrasting acoustic guitar line, sensual, spare, and slow. The juxtaposition of the frantic background and the soloist create a theme of complexity, but also provide just the right amount of aural space for our ears can appreciate all that is going on.

"Song/day 190" keeps strutting the drums, then layers them with other sound effects/forms of percussion, creating a beat that feels almost hip hop. By the time the strings arrive, this badass rhythm is swinging deep in the listener's bones, and the strings' aerial vastness doesn't drag the song into conventional electronica, but rather escalates it to a more stimulating, victorious plane. Again, as in "Song/day 260" the piano and clarinet have a call and response with their solos, but in this tune each instrument echoes in the background of the other, creating a sub-melody, like a subplot in a story: secondary, but adding depth.

Some of my favorite tunes on this album, and all of Galliano's other compilations, are those that include waves of choir. In fact, usually when I hear choir in Galliano's songs, I know for sure it will be an extra good one, regardless of how long or often the choir actually appears. However, on this album, there are a couple tunes that weren't quite as successful as I expected them to be, so I'll get the critique over with before I rave on about my favorite track.

Tracks 10 and 12, "song/day 63" and "song/day 285," respectively, are instrumentally messy and piercing. The organ, choir, and bells all seem to come in at once, but as if they're playing different songs, and the intense wall of disorganized sound feels abrasive, rather than interesting. Something that sounds like a bagpipe jumps in at a very high register in "song/day 63," along with the flute in *its* high register, then the percussion rumbles in, along with rock guitar, and as much as I want to love the piece, and "song/day 285," I had to stop halfway through both of them, take a break, and re-listen. That being said, I respect the courage and effort put forth in these tracks, and I think they could both work if a thematic groundwork were established and branched off from, the type that Galliano is usually so successful with.

Now, my favorite: "Song/day 348." It's a gorgeous, immensely atmospheric track that depicts the best smelling, best temperature, calm after a storm—or, if we're sticking with the album as a story, a war of the elements. The choir melody is so beautiful my breath caught in my chest for a moment, and the chimes, haunting piano, and melancholy oboe working together sound like a church hymn or concerto – very spare, very quiet and contemplative. A hint of violin chords echo in the background, but they're barely prominent enough to be heard as anything more distinct than one's own breath. The choir and oboe call and respond as if passing a new soul back and forth, and toward the end the sound thickens, enveloping the listener amongst all the instruments and choir, their fullest expressions wafting over us at the same time. Where else but music, this music a prime example, do we find examples of and inspiration for courage, calm, connection?

Rating: 4 out of 5 stars

Reviewed by Alice Neiley