Album: *One Song*

Artist: Galliano Sommavilla

Over the past six weeks, our city, like many others, has been under ‘shelter in place’ orders. Fenced dog parks are closed, public parks are closed except for walk throughs, and we can only run our dogs off leash in large conservation area forests, and only if there’s no one else in sight. The other day, I happened upon one of those areas previously unknown to me – a beautiful wooded area with canopies of intertwining branches and leaves, unexpected wide-open spaces where the sun streams through, and trails coated with pine needles – a long trail that leads to the river. The day I found it, I’d just uploaded one of Galliano Sommavilla’s newest albums, *One Song*, and had planned to give a listen when I returned home. I unclipped my pup’s leash, watched her fly off through the trees, and suddenly found myself pressing play immediately. It was then that I realized – aside from shelter, food, and love of family and friends – the woods and Galliano’s music are all one needs to survive, no, thrive, in difficult times.

*One Song* is actually one 45 minute song, an improvisational wonderland that he performed/recorded in one take. It pairs so perfectly with an introspective walk in the woods that I’m tempted to label it as an emotional soundscape, but while that is true, it’s also reductive in a way – *One Song* is much more. Essentially variations on a theme, the song shifts moods so subtly that you don’t notice until you’re inside one of the many different atmospheres, wondering why you are suddenly choked up and finally able to fully breathe, all at the same time.

It begins with a lush, full exploration of appealing, melodic chord progressions, both grounding and airy as Galliano’s hands move from low to high on the scale with urgency. The tempo slows for a moment at around 4:30, then picks up again through 5:14, as if a strong breeze has begun to blow, pushing you to a new place and time. That new place, as it turns out, is stillness. At 5:17, Galliano slows down again and makes use of repetition of a single note, urging us to stop for a moment, be present, meditative, and calm. This continues for a few minutes, gradually speeding up and increasing volume (particularly in the bass clef), when at around 7:45 Galliano slows down again, softens the dynamics, and begins to move decisively from a rumbling low register to a floating high register.

After a long while of cascading movement and full melody, of desperate roils of beauty, the single-note stillness returns at 13:00, giving the listener the relief they need at exactly the moment they need it. Frankly, I nearly cried at this moment, wandering the woods, watching my dog leap over fallen logs, watching the river move, understanding that music and emotions have the same leaps, waves, and pauses – all we have to do is follow with acceptance.

At 15:00, the bass clef hand continues to rumble, while the treble clef hand brings back pieces of the initial melody. Then, at 15:20, the treble hand also moves into little ornaments mimicking the sound of a harp glissando, a welcome surprise. The ornamentation and melodic variations ultimately lead into more stillness, as Galliano brings back a similar use of repetition at 24:45 – but instead of one note repeated, it’s a conversation between two notes, over and over again until the listener’s breath becomes deep again. Of course, Galliano soon transitions us into yet another mood and atmosphere as he again varies a treble melody from early in the song, but this time by syncopating its rhythm, adding both playfulness and joy to what is otherwise a (beautifully) nostalgic sounding piece. The playfulness lingers awhile, but piece again picks up pace, heightens dynamics, and gains breadth around 30:00, the bass clef rich with heavy chords, the treble clef moving like lightning between a few notes; by 33:00, though, Galliano has brought back BOTH the single note repetition AND its cousin, the two-note-conversation repetition. Stillness again.

The ending, however, is the real surprise…and yet, at the same time, doesn’t FEEL like a surprise in the moment. It feels absolutely right. Around 40:00, the bass clef hand takes over the melodic line, and it’s very different than the variations that have come before. Perhaps Galliano knew he was reaching the close of his improvisation, perhaps not, but from 40:00 to the end, the richness and melodic awakening in the bass clef seems to bring the song full circle. Or more accurately, bringing the song into what I hope will be a continuance, as only circles are.

I have reviewed many of Galliano Sommavilla’s albums over the past 7 years, and honestly, all of them have been superb in their own ways. *One Song,* however, is my favorite so far. I truly wished it would last forever. I suppose it will, when I put it on repeat.

Review: 5/5

Reviewer: Alice Neiley