

Singles Review
By Alice Neiley

Word on the street is that Galliano Somnavilla has a new album – nine tracks – called *An Ethereal Landscape*. While I haven't heard the album in its entirety, I have had the privilege of a sneak peak at two singles from the album: "Air and Water" and the title track "An Ethereal Landscape." So far, this album seems to promise a slightly different mood than much of Somnavilla's previous work, at least that's what these two initial tracks suggest. While many of the other tunes in his repertoire walk the lines among meditative, dreamy, and lilting, the mood of "Air and Water" and "An Ethereal Landscape" walk the lines among dark, pensive, and stormy.

The percussion heavy beginning of "Air and Water" is striking (no pun intended), particularly due to the overlay of high, haunting vocals and a very short, quick piano riff. Then, insidiously prominent waves of synth take over, and remain underneath some brief glimpses of beautiful electric guitar. The piano resurfaces to set a calm tone, setting us up for an even more intense experience once the tune shifts into a much stormier mood.

At first, the song sounded so much like a soundtrack for a scene in a dark, cold forest, with creatures roaming the night, that for a while, I couldn't figure out why it was called "Air and Water". Then I got it. The steady movements of the beginning may have been meant to serve as a backdrop, the backdrop of natural elements behaving as we love them to – safe and beautiful, with subtle surprises – breezes, soft, lapping waves. When the song shifts gears, it represents the elements at their wildest, their most powerful: hurricanes, rip tides, big winter waves with all their thrill and chill.

Dragon Stanic's guitar work plays a huge role in the evolution of this power-house sound, while also serving as a constant element, always resurfacing, like the tide. His musicianship is stunning – it sounds almost improvised, in a good way. Either it is improvised, and Stanic is a brilliant improviser, or it's scripted and the Stanic is equally brilliant for making it sound so like an element, natural, stream of consciousness.

Essentially, this tune, in all its darkness and power, mirrors the connection between the elements -- wind whipping up the waves, waves crashing into the wind, everything turning and meshing into everything else, picking up pace and volume, carrying us all along, no matter what is going on in our individual lives. There is always something bigger at work in the universe, and Somnavilla has captured it here.

Slightly, lighter in mood but no less powerful in muscle, "An Ethereal Landscape" starts out with a chord pattern and synth (quasi-vocal) that almost sounds like the start of a modern hip hop song. Of course, even in his earlier work that often hits familiar emotional notes, Somnavilla never does quite what's expected, and yet always what satisfies the ear. Just when I expected him to surprise me one way (perhaps a rapper? I suppose it's possible!) a stronger synth wall (non-vocal) roll in to drown out both the familiar chord progression and the pulsing voice-like sounds.

The pace picks up significantly as the acoustic guitar and drums arrive, almost simultaneously, and the combination of percussion and Barry DeMarco's wonderfully melodic guitar licks create a repetitive, trance-like feel. That melody is then passed off to a synth instrument that sounds a bit bag-pipe-like (if there's such a thing as a bass

bagpipe) or, if we're staying orchestral, an extremely rich, deep oboe. Even with the flawless grace of shifting melodies and instruments, the songs pace and power continue to build until 2:03 when the melody and large wall of sound drop away to feature bass, percussion, long, mellow chords, and various chirping sound effects. When the melody and wash of other instruments arrive again (including more of Stanic's electrifying guitar work), I'm almost caught off guard, and the intense presence of each one makes me desperate to pay attention to EVERYTHING at once.

It's a bit overwhelming, but at the same time feels like a world unto itself, a step into Somnavilla's own version of Oz, where everything is unfamiliar, new, and entrancing. At first, one might want to retreat, but eventually can't help but follow the curiosity into this beautiful swirl of sound and movement.