

Artist: Galliano Somnavilla

Album: *365/Volume 16*

Reviewer: Alice Neiley

There is no question in my mind that electronica, a genre of music as multifaceted as it is alternative, is the most difficult for me to review, especially when it comes to the masterful musical journeys of Galliano Somnavilla on his '365' project – an original song every day for a year. As I'm sure one can tell by my language, my difficulty in reviewing albums like these is not an insult, but rather a compliment. Somnavilla writes and produces tunes almost entirely resistant to any kind of in depth musical analysis, at least on the first listen. I've been fortunate enough to review Somnavilla before, and his music has plenty to dig into, of course. However, I always find myself daydreaming in the most uninhibited, lovely way during these first listen, full-album experiences, often while I'm driving the long, empty back roads of Vermont—if it's raining, even better. As is true of most of the music I've heard in the '365' project, Somnavilla expands upon the magical, delicate aspect of electronica—often slower tempos and subtle layering of instrumentals.

There are surprises, though. In fact, almost every track has one—a new instrument, the prominence of an instrument that has thus far been background, the adoption of an unexpected genre—but from track to track, there's a through-line, a constant, incremental growth from track 1 to track 12. The opening track, "Day 291: I Love You Guys" starts with a rock-like drum beat that remains consistent throughout, but the song turns distinctly jazzy the moment the echoey trumpet enters the scene. It even takes on some elements of the jazz style 'scat' between 2:18 and 2:40—repetition, ornamentation, etc., but by the end, suddenly slides into more ambient electronic sounds, and finishes off with a few beautiful piano riffs. The quieting toward the end of "Day 291: I Love You Guys," leads perfectly into "Day 266: The Lonely Wanderer," with its eerie flute beginning and much softer, more subtle bass and acoustic guitar-based percussion, rather than snare drum. Snare drum, in this track, mostly contributes with brushes until around 2:29 when it picks up the pace of the entire track, as if the 'lonely wanderer' is running home.'

Then, of course, we have the following track, "Day 257: Home Sweet Home." This track, once again, is a perfect follow up to the track that came before (which ended with fading snare drum a beautiful, repeated guitar riff), as it opens with another insistent (though mellow) snare drum rhythm and an even more melodic piano riff, which both harken back to "Day 291: I Love You Guys," and thus slide the listener back into a feeling of community, a conversation between instruments. The surprise here is the electric guitar, which, rather than sharpening and hardening the sound, which is one of the instruments most frequent uses, contributes to the tune's ethereal warmth and fullness.

See what I mean? Surprise with a through line. A journey, but one that can be easily followed.

"Day 209," "Day 342: Luci D'Albe," and "Day 351," all of which continue the already established warmth and fullness, also contain a touch of African percussion and Caribbean instrumentation as well, creating the perfect opportunities for Somnavilla to introduce what will become another through line on this album: an allusion to different cultures, as if this journey not only took us deep into ourselves, but let us walk to the heartbeats of other people all over the world.

Intermingled with those track is a strong influence of soul, which, for those of you who know my taste, is a direct path to brilliant success. Though “Day 358” and “Day 232” are nice reprises of R&B percussion, prominent piano, and sprinkled vocals, “Day 209” takes the cake, both as a masterful example of R&B influence in electronica music, but also as my favorite tune on the album—it mixes both a Caribbean instrumental influence with brilliant, gorgeous vocals that embody and fill the soul. “Day 354” even ventures into hip hop with its repetitive vocal preach: “listen to me now.”

By the time “Day 82: A Worldly Adventure” arrives, we’re already mentally and musically there, and this track, almost at the end of the album, ties the knot with a spinning, completely unconventional structure, as if everyone, from all over this crazy world, was at a party together—trumpets, African beats, synth, snare, and of course, listeners and dancers, which in Somnavilla’s take on style, may as well be the same thing. Galliano Somnavilla’s grasp of melody, musical surprises, and journey-like instrumental layers from track to track, is so nuanced that a listener would likely just be along for the ride, to infinity...and beyond.

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Rating: 5 stars out of 5.