

Album: *an ethereal landscape*

Artist: Galliano Somnavilla

Reviewer: Alice Neiley

Rating: 5 stars out of 5.

It's supposed to be summer here in North America, but it's chilly and rainy, neither of which gives one much joy or hope for what's to come. On the other hand, the chill sometimes feels refreshing, and gives us a repeat of spring, one of my favorite seasons. The other refreshing part about this moment in time, at least for me, is Galliano Somnavilla's newest creation *an ethereal landscape*. I reviewed two singles from the album about two months ago -- "air and water" and the title track "an ethereal landscape", so I won't be discussing them here; however, I am happy to say they were merely the first taste of an exceptional musical experience.

The album opens with a perfect track for spring, or...re-spring...or really any seasonal transition. Its cool, simple structure is easy to access and lovely as well. The percussion sounds a bit like clapping, or horse trotting -- consistent enough to let the listener get into the groove, but inconsistent enough (a few moments of snare cymbals and syncopation) to provide little bursts of surprise, like finding a blueberry patch in the middle of a beautiful grassy field. Then oboes, chimes, strings filter in, giving way eventually to an oboe solo, an instrument that nearly always signifies life and new arrivals. At the 1:55 mark the tempo changes, as does the percussion rhythm to a less forward moving, more dreamlike vibe. Vocals arrive, and the listener is carried into his/her own imagination, a sweet, sleepy place. When the percussion rhythm comes back, we're ready to get moving again after a rest, see the world as it is, but through the lens of love, light, and hope.

"gravity wave" is quite a shift from the, shall we say, *ethereal* nature of "a chilled sunny day" at its end. The cymbals that open "gravity wave" immediately ground the tune -- it settles into the listener's skin and remains steady and calm, with a few moments of pace shifting and varied instrumentation that bring the exact appropriate amount of groove. The repeated acoustic guitar riffs give way to a thicker sound, complete with a held, one note vocal, more textured percussion, and an echoey, trumpet-like solo. The acoustic guitar comes back, but moving down the scale instead of up, soon followed by electric guitar riffs, both of which sneakily prepare us for an even bigger wall of sound and a darker mood when the electric guitar amps up into prominent, meaty chords. The tune fades out by reintroducing the acoustic, mellow feel, while keeping the electric guitar chords at a softer dynamic and sparser entry. As with all Galliano's pieces, there is a beauty and tranquility, but without a single moment of boredom—the surprises, both heavy and dancing, give this track the importance, but also the magic, of gravity.

Pulse Wave picks up on the more intense side of gravity wave with its drawn out, minor key synth entrance, and the intensity -- perhaps badassness would be a better description -- increases with a vocal rap riff: "it's like that / uh huh uh huh". The use of repetition in this tune, between vocals, acoustic guitar, and electric guitar, could have

wound up feeling tired or overwhelming, but Galliano's use of other synth sounds – buzzes, beeps, rattles – as well as the addition of strings, once again draws the listener into the swirl. As the texture becomes more complex, the repetition becomes the tune's stabilizer, and by the end, when a beautiful moment of vocal melody – almost imperceptible – arrives, we are reintroduced to that shining patch of blue in a beautiful field.

“see what tomorrow brings” is probably my favorite track, in part because of its ample use of vocals (I'm a singer, myself), but mostly because of its breathtaking instrumental combination: strings and piano. It's a beautiful feature, and there's nothing to distract the listener from that particular flow. The percussion is a light touch, but constant, like air – it's there, and essential, but it doesn't seem meant to be noticed in this tune. Instead, eventually the keys take the front seat, with the occasional gorgeous vocal crescendo. As the keyboard riffs turn to chords and the percussion/synth sounds layer a bit, things get a little muddy, but still enjoyable enough to peg this tune as very high on my list. Then ending settles back into one of the smoothest moments on the album – a fade out to just a few piano chords and long-held strings, as if tomorrow, whatever it brings, might be the loveliest tomorrow yet.

“the tribe wave” and “tumble wave” are perhaps the two tracks most perfectly placed side by side. They are both somewhat fast paced with similar instrumentation: they both feature electric guitar, vocals, and percussion. These two tunes almost seem to be extensions of one another -- they both escalate in intensity and volume toward the middle, so listening to the two of them in a row gives the feeling of a gentle roller coaster or double bell curve. While the electric guitar is more heavily featured in Tribe wave – a bit like a rock-chant, and very prodigious—it shares the stage equally with percussion and vocals in Tumble wave, quite literally overlapping and tumbling through each other over and over again, a very interesting and appealing soundscape.

Then, of course, the final track: “white light wave” is a perfect ending to this album, bookending “a chilled sunny day” in tone and texture. Both tracks are entrancingly mellow, allowing the listener to drift into a dreamy, relaxed state, with the promise of newness ahead. “white light wave” is also the only tune that features synth sounds and textures in a prominent way. While all the tracks obviously involve synth, this track allows it to be the main event, the primary source of beauty and mood, and brings back memories of Galliano's earlier work. As with nearly every other album Galliano Somnavilla has created, ethereal landscape gels very well, and takes the listener on an almost physical journey through a world that's part dream, part reality; part changing seasons, part settling in; part ethereal, part intellect; part gravity, part cloud.