

Album: *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2*

Artist: Galliano Som mavilla

Reviewer: Alice Neiley

Well, Galliano Som mavilla has done it again. By “it,” of course, I mean magnificence. I can only imagine that a musician prolific enough to write one song a day for a year is also prolific in other ways—hungry for knowledge, experimentation, and cultural expansiveness—and after one listen to Som mavilla’s *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2*, I rest my case. The twelve songs on *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2* diverge slightly from the usual smooth as glass consistency of some of the other *365* albums I’ve reviewed, and its mostly Som mavilla’s genre and culture bending that shakes things up. There’s also a less labored arrangement to the song order. Like usual, the tracks aren’t listed in the order they were composed, but instead of arranging the tracks to create Som mavilla’s classic mellow, beautiful endlessness, the order seems more spontaneous, feeling based, rather than thought based. In the context of *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2*, this new approach, whether intentional or not, does bring about a few similar elements as the other albums in the series: magic, for example. The gorgeous, magical sound-worlds that I’ve come to expect from Galliano Som mavilla still envelope me, and likely all listeners, as fully as always, just this time, they also bring with them a sparkling freshness.

In “Song/Day 116,” the freshness comes from all angles, travelling between moods, letting us listeners know we’re in for a new kind of experience. The tune begins, as usual, with an intoxicating drumbeat and long, ascending synth chords, but soon, trumpets arrive. Or maybe it’s more like a flugelhorn, but the beauty is unmistakably brass—almost angelic in its melody. Listening, I’m flooded with sweetness, and again, as usual, with clear imagery: huge, face sized flowers, a wide field, city skylines from a plane. But then the tune shifts, and we’re IN that city, the electric guitar enters in a long solo, and the rest of the instrumentation follows. The synth adopts what sound like vibes, lacing the tune with 80s style—an unusual but pleasing turn for Som mavilla—like the middle part of the song could have been included in the movie *Ghost* or *Top Gun*. In short, the mood travels from familiar to fresh to fresher, heating up from sweet to magical to sexy and back to magical again.

The next track, “Song/Day 5,” stays in magical territory, but moves even further into familiar, long-toned synth, which feels literally like a flashback, and echoey guitar and flute sounds unquestionably provoke nostalgia. Melodic and steady, like a calm lake or pond, this tune is reflective by nature, and continues the imagery of water with the addition of the playful shimmer of high register instruments. What I find most interesting about this tune’s journey into the past, is that it’s quite literally a jump backward in time. Day 5 is, of course, before Day 116, meaning “Song/Day 5” was written long before “Song/Day 116,” but was placed directly after it on the album—a

move toward nostalgia I have to believe was, at least on some level, brilliantly intentional.

“Song/Day 17: Space Travel,” one of the three tracks on this album with an additional story in the title, certainly does continue the exploration of new territory, a new Sommavilla planet. Like the first track, he experiments here with beats and instrumentation from some of the sexier genres, R&B, for example, or Latin. At times, how Sommavilla bends these genres crosses from sexy into other types of fiery energy: preparing for battle, or chasing one’s dreams. The drumbeat here is essential, as it usually is in Sommavilla’s music. It lets us know what to expect in terms of mood, and prepares us for any shifts. This is especially true in “Song/Day 17: Space Travel,” as the percussion texture, simple and driven at the beginning, develops more complexity and increases its energy with the addition of maracas, like a rocket taking off. Then piano chords and saxophone arrive, slowing the fire into a mystical vibe—drifting smoke—or, more related to space travel, it’s like landing on a new planet, just beginning to set foot and gaze around.

The other primary way this album broaches newness is, as I mentioned before, a kind of culture bending. What I mean is that Sommavilla works solely in the genre of electronica, which most easily adopts traits from African American culture, Spanish/Latin, or the countries of Europe and Japan, where electronic was said to begin in the 1970s. However, in track 8, “Song/Day 47,” I heard distinctly Irish instrumentation and chord progressions, elements I’d never expected to encounter in electronica, but was very happy about. First of all, the beginning of the tune alludes to vocals. I say “alludes” because the vocals sound synthesized, not live-recorded, but still, it’s unusual for Sommavilla, and a welcome shift from the driving drum/chord-synth way his tracks often begin. In fact, in this track, there’s a distinct lack of drums for quite some time. They return in full on “Song/Day 71,” a track also defined by Irish-sounding chords and instrumentation. The culture bending in both of these tracks distinguishes itself with what sounds like synthed accordion, or harmonica, or organ, or bagpipes, or all of the above, lilting along on a very folky beat, in a very Celtic harmonic architecture. As in many other songs that Sommavilla composed in this *365* series, all the sounds he chooses in “Song/Day 47” and “Song/Day 71” seem to blend together to create images/representations of the natural world, and in this way, the tune remains rooted in the familiar. However, it’s also revelatory. He’s travelling to a new place, a new culture, at least one I’ve never heard from him before: Ireland fog and dusk before the sun rises in “Day 47,” and sun bursting up over the rolling hills in the more up-tempo “Day 71.”

My favorite tunes on the album are the last two, which, perhaps coincidentally, perhaps because I love anything with a story, are the only other two with more narrative titles: “Song/Day 177: Across the Skies,” and “Song/Day 27: The Violins Fall Silent.” Unlike some of the other Sommavilla albums I’ve reviewed, this one ends on a melancholy note, rather than the dance-trance in which he often finishes, letting the each track build on the one before, rising in energy. Instead, “Song/Day 177: Across the Skies”

features acoustic guitar and very light, swishy percussion, both of which brush-stroke a sadness over the whole tune. Somnavilla brings vocals back again in this track as well, choir-like, which adds to the sadness but is also somehow comforting, as if a group of people is trying to sing to themselves in order to feel better about a departure, a loss, a rainy day.

Ironically, in the next, and last, track on *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2*, “Song/ Day 27: The Violins Fall Silent,” begins with ample violins. It does wind up staying true to its title, though, as the violins can’t ‘fall silent’ throughout the tune if they aren’t featured at the beginning. The violins do, as the title suggests, fade out as the piano enters, along with flute—my only criticism of this song, and indeed, this album, is the use of flute—I think almost everywhere flute was used, flugelhorn would sound better. As another, more positive side note, though: I love Somnavilla’s use of synthed stringed instruments. *Love*. Their melodies are always flawless, their placement always feels like a chilly breeze, something gentle, but refreshing—a wake up call. This tune is no exception. I love them even, and perhaps especially, when they fade over the course of one tune, have to miss their presence. The melody of the violins in “Song/Day 27: The Violins Fall Silent” is melancholy and gorgeous, complimented very well by more brush-like snare drums, and an interesting almost clapping sound that I can’t quite pinpoint, and this inability might be part of the point. It blends in so perfectly with everything else, just barely asserting its originality, that I’m entirely happy not identifying it, but being swept up in the feeling instead.

Emotion. Image. Journey. Magic. If four words could describe Galliano Somnavilla’s work as I’ve experienced it, those would be the words. Furthermore, in *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2*, though he roots the album in many familiar instruments and moods, he also takes us on *new* journeys, with new landscapes, new equipment and emotional destinations. Despite the few flute moments that I could have done without, and the feeling that I’d like to have encountered even *more* Celtic sprinkled across the album as a whole, I thoroughly enjoyed *365 Vol. 10 Mixed 2* for its musical skill, sense of comfort in consistency, as well as its sense of experimentation and adventure. Keep it up, Galliano Somnavilla. I can hardly wait for the next installment.

Rating: 5 stars out of 5.

Reviewed by Alice Neiley