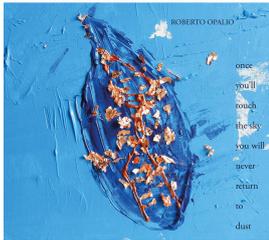


Brainwashed - Roberto Opalio, "Once you'll touch the sky you will never return to dust"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Seemingly birthed from the same fascination with vinyl surface noise as *The Sky With Broken Arms*, Roberto Opalio's

solo companion piece is perhaps even more unique and consciousness-expanding than its sister. It is also unexpectedly varied and weirdly beautiful at times, blurring together the usual deep-space lysergia with viscerally unnerving dissonances and hypnotically looping crackles and pops. While those added touches certainly delight me, this album is unmistakably and absolutely Opalio-esque to its core, standing as one of the most sharply realized and distilled releases in the MCIAA oeuvre. If

The Sky With Broken Arms

is a brief glimpse into a hypnotically otherworldly scene,

Once You'll Touch The Sky

is a phantasmal travelogue of the troubled dreams that follow in its wake.

[Elliptical Noise](#)

In the eternally shifting cosmic fantasia of *My Cat is an Alien*, few things can ever be said to be normal or expected, but "Preludio" finds Roberto opening the album in relatively familiar territory, albeit only briefly. It is a curious sequencing decision, as the bleary haze of spectral vocal cooing and gently blooping and whooshing alienronics does nothing to prepare me for the sustained plunge into the swirling and hallucinatory altered reality that follows. Knowing the proud Opalio tradition of "spontaneous composition," I am rather amazed at the scope, depth, and nuance of the title piece, as Roberto seamlessly transforms its shape again and again like an alien mirage. In hindsight, I suspect "Preludio" exists solely because "Once You'll Touch The Sky" plunges immediately into the lysergic depths rather than wading slowly in through the usual slow accumulation of loops. The opening theme roughly resembles organ drone, though Roberto seems to be playing a modified mini-keyboard through some pitch-shifting and wah-wah effects to weave an unsettling web of undulating and eerily harmonizing glissandi. That opening nicely illustrates an aspect of the Opalios' work that I always enjoy: their approach to psychedelia is an uncompromisingly complete one, as their best work is an absolutely engulfing experience that provides no solid ground or recognizable reference points to get my bearings. It is not an entertainment—it is an ocean that I am dropped in and I am forced to give myself over to it and go where its tide takes me. In fact, there is no better metaphor for this album than submersion, as its slow transformations feel like being immersed in a viscous liquid

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that is continually morphing into new colors, textures, and sundry other sensory and extra-sensory phenomena.

Despite the album's fundamental state of constant flux and celebration of queasily undulating textures and harmonies, its various threads occasionally converge into an oasis of dreamlike beauty. I would not necessarily describe the spell of this album as "nightmarish," as there is no real sense of menace, yet the dream state it evokes is definitely an unsettling and unnervingly ambiguous one. As such, it can be quite striking and wonderful when the seemingly endless and impenetrable phantasmagoric mists of Roberto's vision occasionally give way to a glimpse of heaven (such as the languorous and tenderly warbling reverie that starts to cohere around the 15-minute mark). Those glimpses are always elusive and short-lived, of course, but the fact that it can appear at any time is what makes this album such a complex and entrancing experience. As lovely as the aforementioned interlude is, however, it becomes even more compelling once Roberto's crackling and popping vinyl noise slowly creeps into the picture. Interestingly, that haplessly ravaged vinyl collection does not get a credit on this particular releases, so I believe Roberto is merely approximating its sound with his handmade shortwave receiver. In any case, he takes a different approach with crackle and sizzle here than he did on *The Sky With Broken Arms*

, as it takes shape as kind of a slow, locked-groove-style pulse. There is considerably more happening than that though, as there are some fascinating microcosmic dynamics unfolding as well: the pops and scratches seems to be slightly out of phase and tumbling over one another. It is a truly wonderful bit of sorcery, completely stealing attention from the more overt motifs unfolding around it. It feels a lot like the sky opened up to slowly wash away the rest of the album with an unnaturally reverberating and purifying drizzle. That is a fine way to end an album.

As with all recent My Cat is an Alien releases, it feels hopelessly reductionist to view *Once You'll Touch The Sky*

as an album and even the fact that it is art feels somewhat beside the point. Instead, it is something more akin to a religious experience—not in a hyperbolic sense, but it is definitely a ritualistic event that can transform the energy in a room and strip away the veil of consciousness for a while. That said, sometimes the stars metaphorically line up perfectly to create an especially transcendent communion with the Opalios' extra-dimensional plane of consciousness and this is one of those times.

Once You'll Touch the Sky

is one of the true gems in the MCIAA canon, as it is every bit as immersive and reality-dissolving as I would expect, but goes a bit deeper and further than usual in every sense.

This is more than just a gateway into an alien dreamscape, as it has a clear arc that leads far beyond the starting point. Also, it feels like an unusually soulful and tender journey. I do not think I have ever described an album by the Opalios as soulful before, as subtle shades of emotion tend to get hopelessly eclipsed by the all-engulfing scope of their lysergic vision, but this album is understated and purposeful enough to let Roberto's humanity seep into its ecstatic

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alien reverie.

Samples:

- [Preludio](#)
- [Once You'll Touch The Sky \(excerpt one\)](#)
- [Once You'll Touch The Sky \(excerpt two\)](#)