

Brainwashed - Loscil, "Equivalentents"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 25 August 2019 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 26 August 2019 07:26



I cannot think of many other artists in the ambient/experimental milieu who are as unwaveringly reliable as Scott Morgan, although his last major release (*Monument Builders*) admittedly threw some unexpected new elements into the mix. With

Equivalentents

, however, he returns to his comfort zone for yet another lovely suite of lush and elegantly blurred ambient soundscapes. Morgan's inspiration this time around was Alfred Stieglitz's iconic series of cloud photographs, which could not possibly be less surprising or more apt: the Loscil aesthetic has long been the musical equivalent of a sky full of slow-moving, abstract cloud shapes and

Equivalentents

is an archetypal example of that. Nevertheless, the Loscil aesthetic still continues to evolve in subtle ways, as Morgan eases up a bit on his characteristic melancholy, resulting in one of his warmest and most quietly lovely releases to date. It is possible that Morgan may have learned a thing or two about balancing light and dark from Stieglitz's striking photos, but the real beauty of this album lies in how he masterfully and seamlessly dissolves chords and melodies into gorgeously dreamlike and gently churning abstraction.

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Loscil is a project that I have always found dangerously easy to take for granted, as Scott Morgan has eternally been devoted to doing one specific thing extremely well and he has now released twelve full-length albums of his blurred and sublime drones. Occasionally, he has tweaked the formula with collaborations or influences from dub-techno or minimalist classical music, but Loscil is exactly what I would play for someone if they asked me what "ambient" sounded like (or if they asked for a definitive example of the classic Kranky aesthetic). Admittedly, Morgan has had some cool conceptual inspirations from time to time, yet his emphasis has always been more upon perfecting the form rather than stretching its boundaries. In at least one way, Morgan is uniquely suited for that path, as his day job is that of sound designer for film and video games. That aspect of his work has always held the strongest appeal for me, as Morgan is a master at transforming chords and melodies into something foggy and indistinct. Admittedly, there are loads of other artists who are similarly keen on blurred and smeared sounds these days, but Morgan tends to be on an entirely different level in that regard and *Equivalentents* is Morgan's culminating achievement: these compositions all feel

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like they are shrouded in a deep fog, but he brings a physicality to everything that makes me feel like I am immersed in the same fog myself. *Equivalents* is not an album that seems like it is unfolding in the veiled distance—it is an enveloping and billowing cloudworld populated with obscured and enigmatic streaks of color and emotional depth.

The album is comprised of eight numbered pieces that all feel a bit like variations on a theme, though the numbers are in non-sequential order and one piece ("Equivalent 7") is a collaborative reworking of an earlier dance score (Morgan is joined by Secret Pyramid's Amir Abbey). Despite the reworking, that earlier piece feels very like the simple foundation that birthed everything else on the album, as it captures Morgan at his most unrepentantly cloudlike. It is not alone in that regard, however, as the second half of the album definitely feels like all of the structures of the first half are dissolving into a churning, hissing, and swirling fog of obscured chords. That is admittedly a very pleasant place to linger once I am there, but the succession of more distinct pieces that open the album is where *Equivalents* shines the brightest.

The difference between the two halves of the album is an amusingly simple and subtle one though, as the better pieces are merely the ones in which Morgan just added one additional element to his usual palette of smeared and heaving soft-focus drones. In the case of the opening "Equivalent 1," for example, the heart of the piece is a chopped and stuttering organ chord with an erratically shifting pulse. The following "Equivalent 3" actually goes so far as to include a slow-motion, melancholy melody, yet the real beauty of the piece lies in the rhythmic swells of a gorgeously angelic chord. Elsewhere, "Equivalent 6" is similarly heavenly, but goes about it in a completely different way, as a languorously looping and radiant melody unfolds deep inside an enchanted mist. My favorite piece, however, is "Equivalent 5." It deceptively opens with an ascending motif of woozy and wobbling chords, but the chords are unexpectedly eviscerated to become a ghostly, swaying presence in a swooning and seismic crescendo of celestial swells.

It is quite difficult to say quite how *Equivalents* stacks up against previous Loscil releases, as I view Scott Morgan more as skilled craftsman than as an artist. That is not meant as a critique, as he is very clearly both, but he is definitely someone who can be counted on to put a lot of time, thought, and effort into getting each album exactly right rather than someone who is prone to bold and ambitious new visions. For as long as I can remember, each fresh Loscil album has been exquisitely crafted and Morgan only grows (incrementally) better as the years pass, so the only real variable is how much the direction of a given album resonates with me. In that highly subjective regard, *Equivalents* delights me more than most other Loscil releases, as it is a bit more understatedly beautiful and emotionally ambiguous than his usual fare: a pervasive sense of deep sadness does not lend itself to heavy-rotation listenability as well as the more nuanced emotional shading found here. If *Equivalents* has a weakness, it is only that it is heavily frontloaded with all of Morgan's strongest motifs, though it does not necessarily become any less immersive and lovely once all of the prominent themes are dissolved into the fog. In fact, that dynamic trajectory is very likely by design: the more structured and distinctive pieces lure me deep into *Equivalents*

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' billowing heaven, but their more overt allure gradually fades away, elegantly bringing the more painterly pleasures of the smeared and dissolving details into focus.

Samples can be found [here](#) .