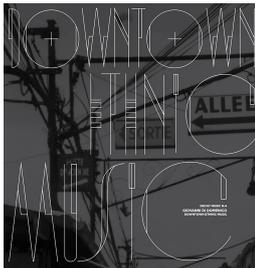


Brainwashed - Giovanni Di Domenico, "Decay Music n. 4: Downtown Ethnic Music"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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I believe this is Di Domenico's first appearance on Die Schachtel, but the Brussels-based pianist/composer has had quite a prolific and fascinating career, racking up collaborations with a wildly varied array of iconic artists ranging from the ubiquitous Jim O'Rourke to free jazz sax titan Akira Sakata to Nigerian drum god Tony Allen. Given that pedigree, it is a bit of a surprise to see him turn up in a series of ambient albums, but the strange and eclectic *Downtown Ethnic Music* is too much of a freewheeling and hallucinatory experience to fit comfortably in that milieu (or any milieu at all, really). That said, the album is something of a spiritual (but not stylistic) descendant of Jon Hassell's "fourth world" vision, as Di Domenico set out to reimagine "the future of urban music" with a varied and eclectic host of collaborators. While I sincerely doubt the future of urban music will be anything like the kaleidoscopic and boundary-dissolving psychedelia of this album, Di Domenico has certainly managed to conjure up some truly unique and alien-sounding gems in the attempt.

[Die Schachtel](#)

The opening "Gap-Filling" is a half-great/half-maddeningly teasing introduction to the album's elusive and chameleonic aesthetic, as it makes me feel like I managed to just catch the final spaced-out minutes of an intense performance by an experimental guitar/free jazz drummer duo. Regrettably, drummer João Lobo never makes a prominent return, but neither does anything else from that opener, as Di Domenico's imagined future cities feel like a surrealist hall of mirrors. For example, the following "Yoghurt to Yoga" resembles a tense nightmare about an exotic ritual in a distant temple, while "SKJ" resembles a tonally unpredictable retro-futurist synth reverie. At other times, the album resembles a haunted and deranged carnival, a stiltedly funky krautrock jam, and a mash-up of old sci-fi film soundtracks. The latter, "Teratology," is definitely the most strikingly bizarre and "outer limits" moment on the album. In fact, it felt even more so once I realized that it was composed and performed (with an actual choir) and NOT merely a collage of samples (not a pure one, anyway). At its peak, "Teratology" calls to mind the cacophonous scene one might imagine if *The Shining*, 2001, and *Solaris* crashed into a modern dance troupe and a short wave radio enthusiast. Is it good? Possibly. Is it unique? Absolutely. My personal favorite is considerably more conventional, yet eerily beautiful nonetheless: the closing "Soft on Demand," which is basically a mournfully trippy elegy of gloopy classic sci-fi synth tones. Part of its appeal may be because a relatively unmangled

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melody feels like a safe harbor in a maelstrom of endlessly shifting moods and juxtapositions, but I liked a lot of the maelstrom too. While not all of the phantasmagoric urban futures conjured within *Downt*

own Ethnic Music

quite hit the mark for me, all are certainly imaginative and vividly realized, which makes this is a solid headphone album for those with a taste for the unusual.

Samples can be found [here](#) .