

## Brainwashed - Yoshi Wada, "The Appointed Cloud"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Saltern's latest Yoshi Wada reissue unhappily coincides with the composer's unexpected passing, but at least he managed to live long enough to see his work get some wider appreciation in recent years. Or at least managed to see some of his major albums finally get remastered and released outside Japan, as "wider appreciation" is very relative when one's vision is as unapologetically challenging as Wada's. In fact, I always viewed him as a Final Boss in the appreciation of difficult and adventurous music, as it takes a lot of immersion in dissonant and outré sounds before one reaches the "I crave a deep dive into avant-garde bagpipes" stage. In fact, I am not sure I am yet there myself. Given that, *The Appointed Cloud* is probably more for devout connoisseurs of sound art's more prickly fringes than, say, the heavy drone of Wada's 2009 triple LP

*Earth Horns With Electronic Drone*

. However, this album

was

one of Wada's personal favorites, as it documents the "memorable" opening performance of his "first large-scale, interactive installation" at the Great Hall of the New York Hall of Science in 1987 (which featured "spaceships hanging from the ceiling so people felt like they were traveling in outer space"). That certainly seems like a suitably disorienting environment for sounds this fascinating and unique. I dearly wish someone had thought to film some post-concert audience reactions, as I bet they were quite something.

[Saltern](#) /EM Records/Edition Omega Point

There are some artists who seem like that they have absolutely no influences other than themselves, but there are also some equally rare visionaries who combine such bizarre and seemingly clashing influences that they seem equally unique. Yoshi Wada was arguably the king of the latter camp, as he began his creative life studying sculpture in Kyoto before moving to New York in the '60s and falling in with the burgeoning Fluxus scene there. He also studied composition with La Monte Young, North Indian classical singing with Pandit Pran Nath, and Scottish bagpipes. That impressive collision of jarringly divergent impulses makes sense if one simply accepts that Wada was a deeply curious person though. And *The Appointed Cloud* similarly makes sense if one understands that sculpture was Wada's first love and that Fluxus showed him a path to applying those talents to music, as one of its primary themes is emphasizing the artistic process over the finished product. Appropriately, process lies at the

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heart of this performance, as it is based around "a custom pipe organ, among other homemade instruments, controlled by a computer equipped with a customized interface and software designed by engineer David Rayna." The ensemble is further rounded out by four bagpipe players (one of whom was Wada) and a percussionist. All of those elements make their presence strongly felt at various points, but most of the album sounds like a very tight and professional bagpipe ensemble with one rogue member who keeps steering them towards crescendos of squalling dissonance (and it also sounds like he may have invited some friends from a gagaku ensemble along). It also occasionally sounds like a pipe organ jam at a Zen retreat, an air raid drill during a mass at a cathedral, a flock of crazed geese fleeing a storm, or an appealingly frayed and out-of-phase Philip Glass homage. Needless to say, that makes for quite a wild and unpredictable ride and it is not one for the timid: Yoshi Wada was truly a one-of-a-kind artist and

*The Appointed Cloud*

is exactly the sort of ambitiously challenging and strikingly unfamiliar album to (emphatically) affirm that.

Samples can be found [here](#) .