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Omnesia - -

Every once in a while you'll hear an album that is evocative, lyrical and spiritual all at once. I'm not sure if I would like to categorise Anuj Rastogi's debut album *Omnesia* because it transcends any particular genre. A lot of people associate him with Indian Electronica and it's very evident in this album but there's something that goes beyond just a label here. Let me explain...



A total of 10 tracks with 4 interludes give you a fair insight into this very talented man's mind. What I truly appreciated is that he is not one to shy away from experimentation or from unusual juxtapositions; this album is an interesting journey in exploring music. Without any conventional trappings of "desi" music (Thank God for that!) his album brings together a vast gamut of sounds - the instruments used are as diverse as they come; the vocals evoke emotion and are passionate to say the least. There is something very unique about his sound especially since he shares space with other wonder boys of electronica like Midival Punditz or the infamous Mr. Sawhney or Mr. Singh (Nitin and Talvin respectively for the uninitiated). To his credit, the sound is fresh and shows that a lot of thought and effort have been put into the production. He hasn't given into clichés of using *ragas* or *alaaps* to give it a traditional flavour. Kudos to him.

String Theory is the first track from the album that sets the tone for the rest of the album with the surreal sound of the flute. As you move into the next song, *Blue Orchid*, the lounge effect is on full display and don't blame yourself if you feel like mellowing down and just taking in the sound. *Breaking News* - both tracks - present a fluid interaction between the tabla and sitar and I found the background sounds of voices particularly effective. The spoken word by Anuj himself is poetic and has philosophical undertones and shows an artist who is sensitive and aware of the world around him. I particularly liked the interaction between tabla and sitar and the way they reach a crescendo and then soothe alternatively.

C'mon has strong vocals and the opening strains were reminiscent of an Oasis or Coldplay guitar riff. But as ever, the song surprised and meandered into a whole other tone. There's worldliness about this track that brings together different genres and still manages to create a unique identity. Promoted heavily, *The River* is a track that starts out with a desi ghazal feel but the pace picks up before you know it and soon it reaches frenzy. Again fantastic production value.

Let it go/Jaane do is by far my favourite track on this album. For starters, the female vocals are simply fantastic. Soulful and uninhibited, Sandra Chibuluzo, take a bow! It is definitely one that will be getting a lot of

airplay and rightfully so. It is easily the kind of track that has instant appeal and repeat value. The last few tracks on the album again showcase Anuj's artistry in different light. *Turmoil in the West* has a bilingual effect and though I couldn't understand a word of the Yugoslavian lyrics, I have to applaud the experimentation. And honestly, it works. The last track *Grasshopping* is a surprising tune that might just overtake my proclaimed favourite. I think it's the edginess of the track that has me rooting for it.

For someone who has been a producer and composer for a while now, it makes me wonder why he didn't attempt this album earlier. He is no stranger to aficionados who will remember him for co-founding the Dishoom! sessions or his tracks on the recently released Indian Electronica Collection. Omnesia is a strong debut album and an interesting experience for anyone who wants to look beyond the typical sights and sounds of the world today. And I say sights because a lot of the sounds on this album evoke strong visuals and if that was the intention, it certainly has succeeded!

PS: Special mention has to be made of the stylistic album cover! Subtle and artistic are the words that spring to mind.

Reviewed by Savia Rajagopal

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