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Metatron

by Richard Pinhas

Cuneiform Records, Silver Spring, MD, 2007

2 CDs; 12 audio tracks + 1 mpeg, Cuneiform Rune 228/229,
\$21.00

Distributor's website: <http://www.cuneiformrecords.com/>.

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Metatron is basically a compositorial system French guitar and electronics veteran Richard Pinhas uses. Multiple layers of sound are superposed, some of them consisting of gradually changing loops. Practically every layer is either computer generated or electronically processed (certainly the voices and the guitar). Mostly, one or more live improvised layers are added, resulting in tracks that can be bluesy, (free)jazzy, rock-ish, or even simply minimal. As Pinhas might say: "Voilà. That's it. The recipe is simple, now it's up to me to do something with it. Ecoutez!"

The 12 tracks on these two disks are cooked according to the same rules, but with different ingredients. Of course, Pinhas' guitars and electronics are always present, as well as Jérôme Schmidt's loops and laptop, and Antoine Paganotti's drums. And aye, there's the rub. Apart from one track ('Babylon Babies') where Paganotti chooses for a free percussionistic style, whenever he sticks to the rock and pop idiom, things are going from bad to worse. In 'The Fabulous Story of Tigro and Leloo' the basic recipe direly fails: the pudding collapses and the roast is overcooked. Strangely enough it is an overload of beat, which turns the whole thing into blubber. Worse even is 'Moumoune and Mietz in the Sky with Diamonds' which verges on the bombastic – let's assume Pinhas did this on purpose, with an ironic blink of the eye to the Fab Four.

Generally, however, Metatron offers quite enjoyable semi-mysterious sounding loungy music that could also have been used as soundtrack for a sci-fi movie. (After all, Pinhas did his PhD in philosophy under Deleuze on the topic of Time in Science fiction!) The four pieces of Tikkun, named 'The unification of the name', 'Tikkune Zahar', 'En Penta Eddenai' and 'Gematria 52vs814', each start with hesitating guitar babbling, setting the atmosphere to 'mystery'. Gradually, smooth layers of synth, moog, voice and sometimes violin, are added, leading to a

swaying and surfing movement of shifting colours. There is a lot of Fripp or Eno in the air, but it clearly isn't either. Pinhas' sound is less transparent. It appears to have more layers of meaning - or at least it intends so, certainly when a layer of philosophical or literary text is added.

The method or procedure of Metatron is most clearly illustrated in 'Metatron(ic) Rock', which is not a rock number at all, and 'Double Face of Metatron', both on the second CD. Frankly, those are the most interesting tracks, along with the aforementioned 'Babylon Babies', simply because the listener is allowed to fill in his own parts à volonté, to fantasize about alternatives and the oppressive beats are avoided.

On CD 1, part four of the Tikkun suite is packaged with a video, showing flicks of the 2004 tour through the States. A nice extra indeed. With this release, Cuneiform continues its brave policy of distributing not overly commercial semi-pop, semi-classic, semi-avant-garde music. Fine.

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