

Deep Ambient With Daniel: Iasos, Warmth, Loscil

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Deep Ambient With Daniel is a new column where Daniel Bromfield, Pretty Much Amazing writer and former host of Deep Ambient Hour With Daniel on 88.1 KWVA, discusses the ambient treasures he loves, lives with, and falls asleep to.

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Music can change us. It can shake our worldviews, stir our emotions, move us to the very depths of our souls. It can also be just... well... something to do. Just like any other art form. It all depends in how much we want to invest in it. Take movies; if we want to surrender at the altar of art, we can put on something that makes us cry like *Cries & Whispers* or something of sweeping scope like *The Godfather*. Or we can flip channels and find some dumb action movie just to have something going in the background.

The same goes with albums. Most of the time, I don't want to have an earth-shattering experience that shakes me to my core. If I'm on my way to work I'm not trying to listen to *I Am A Bird Now* because then I'd be too bummed to talk to anyone once I got in. Ditto when I have to be up in the morning and I'm trying to fall asleep as fast as possible but have something to think about while I'm dozing off. Or when I'm hungover and trying to cure my malaise with a joint and I need something to feed my brain that won't hurt it.

That's when I turn to ambient music, and I'd like to spotlight three wonderful albums I use for these purposes: Iasos's *Angelic Music*, Warmth's *Essay*, and Loscil's *Coast/Range/Arc*. These records don't provide emotional cues like strings for when you want to be sad or big echoey dub effects for when you want to feel small. Lots of my favorite ambient albums provide those things, but I'm not here to talk about them. I'm here to talk about the music I listen to when I barely even want to be listening to music.

Angelic Music (1978) by Iasos

If you've heard of this one, it's likely because something like forty people who've had near-death experiences have contacted Iasos telling them the music they heard on the other side sounded like this. It's great press, especially for a record called *Angelic Music* (could heaven be real?)—though it begs the question of whether all these people were previously familiar with Iasos, or if the nurse had a tape lying around they played for the patient, or if they stumbled across the music later and felt a pang of recognition. Maybe if they'd been born a few decades later they'd be emailing Julianna Barwick.

But what's funny about this story is the weight it lends to music that's almost comically innocuous. Almost nothing happens on this thing. "Angels of Comfort" is pretty much just a pad, halfway between "strings" and "choir," ruminating on a chord for nearly half an hour. "Angel Play" is the same ten-minute piece repeated three times, and it says everything you need to know about *Angelic Music* that I didn't even notice this until maybe the fourth or fifth time I listened. When I'm in the mood to listen to it, I don't care.

This is new age, meaning it's meant to calm and impart positive feelings—and indeed it's like a cocoon of the dumbest, most animal happiness. The textures are relatively flimsy, but I still find myself sinking easily into it, and there's a massage-like effect in the way the chords crest and retreat and rise up again, lapping on top of one another.

Essay (2016) by Warmth

Essay uses an interesting, dub-smart trick to get its desired effect. Floating at the edge of most of these cuts is a

light mist of static, which 1) creates the illusion that the music's quieter than it is, as if you were listening to something very soft but strongly amplified, and 2) works on a physical level, massaging the ears in the same way a white-noise machine might. This isn't the shrieking, ugly static you might find on a lo-fi basement tape, but a bassy, subtle sound that inhabits the edges of the stereo field.

The static and the warm drones they mask make the record, which achieves its goal but is the least of the three records on the list. At times the producer goes a little too far trying to prettify things, like when a Rhodes rises out of "Youth." But when I'm in the mood to listen to this stuff such criticisms are petty. I don't want to think about the music but to use it, and garish as it is, the Rhodes doesn't snap me out of my reverie.

***Coast/Range/Arc* (2011) by Loscil**

I love this record, and Loscil's one of my top three or four ambient artists. This is an outlier in his catalog, though. Usually, he does dub techno that's meant to evoke nautical scenes and wet weather, but *Coast/Range/Arc* is pure drone not too far removed from the *Essay* album—a little darker and deeper, even a bit dismal, but not too much so.

I like this one because it's the least obvious. The *Lasos* album is, well, angelic music. The *Warmth* one is meant to be nice. This one doesn't tell us what to think. The cover looks like the sea, and the title comes from an ancient mountain range along the Ring of Fire but is split nicely into its three words, allowing us to process each image at a time: a coast, a range, an arc. I usually can't stand unnecessary punctuation in album titles, but here it goes a long way in helping us understand the record. It's best to think of it in abstract terms instead of using it to evoke a specific time or place. It lets you draw your own conclusions, and it gives me a lot to chew on while still lulling me to sleep.

None of these albums are deep, stirring experiences. None of them are subject to any intellectual interpretation. None are challenging. Fundamentally, they represent some of the stupidest music ever made, because they require absolutely no effort to think about and the way you respond to them will be primarily physical. If that seems true of all ambient, compare *Angelic Music* to *Lasos*'s debut *Inter-Dimensional Music*; that's an "ambient" album too, but your brain races to keep up with everything that's going on. If you want excitement, try that album, or a rock or rap record. If you want art that doesn't function much differently than an electric blanket, any of these should do the trick.