

Mura Masa: Mura Masa

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Mura Masa's self-titled debut is better than average as far as guest-heavy, festival-friendly chill-EDM albums go, but it's not going to win over anyone cynical about this kind of record. So many Kaytranadas and Flumes later, it's easy to be fatigued by this stuff, and the audience for *Mura Masa* will be the Pandora crowd, which doesn't much care who made what so long as the grooves are good.

And the grooves are pretty good. Mura Masa, born Alex Crossan on the isolated British island of Guernsey, has been playing in bands for a while and doesn't seem to have simply pulled out a copy of *Production for Dummies* to cash in on the SoundCloud fad. He's a maximalist, but he can be subtle and even gentle, threading harps around the edges of "1 Night" and "Nothing Else!" He's happy to draw from the weirder corners of British club ("Who Is It Gonna B"), pay tribute to Prince ("Nothing Else!") and punk ("Helpline"), even ditch electronics to sing over a snatch of guitar possibly sampled from a highlife song ("Give Me the Ground").

But the songs from this record that will blast at house parties are the obvious, side-chained jams, like "Love\$ick" or "What If I Go?" which will sound familiar to anyone who's seen a YouTube ad this year. He likes a lot of the same sounds as guys like Flume, Kaytranada, even Kygo: MIDI pianos, marimbas, steel pans, sidechains, chipmunks. It's unlikely Crossan's going to really go off the chain in the future, though if he did he'd probably end up with something more enduring.

An example of a similar recent record that went for broke is Flume's *Skin*, which treated its chart-bait and its beats as two sides of the same coin. Though the split between commercial and uncommercial work could be comical, both were equally weird and simply designed for different purposes. It helped that Flume's technical chops were so clear even the most challenging moments of the record were dazzling even to an audience that might not seek out such eccentric music on their own. Crossan's less of a showoff, which can work in his favor but also means there's less for listeners to latch onto when he goes out on a limb.

One area in which Crossan excels is his choice of guests. The features on albums like this tend to mostly be present for a PR boost, and indeed that's the only reason A\$AP Rocky has any reason to be on this thing. But the decision to feature Damon Albarn seems a lot less cynical once you learn the first album Crossan ever bought was *Demon Days*, whose guest-juggling, producer-centric approach served as a precedent to albums like these. Designer's an odd choice for a rapper, having plummeted since "Panda" and lacking the cool clout of the other guests here, but he raps his ass off and sounds delighted to be doing so.

Most of the guests are British, and their accents are a dominant feature of the landscape. This gives the impression they were selected for a purpose beyond Pandora plays, and indeed a sample of a London bus at the beginning of the album suggests we're meant to think of this as a peculiarly English record. But for the most part, the music here isn't terribly different from that being made by young beatmakers all over the world: Norway, Quebec, Australia, the United States. It's not a bad album, but it runs the risk of blending in with its peers.

- Label:
Downtown/Polydor
- Release Date:



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