

Martin Glass: The Pacific Visions of Martin Glass

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The music on *The Pacific Visions of Martin Glass* is innocuous enough, but there's something unsavory about the way it's packaged that casts a pall over what would otherwise be a pleasant listen. This is an album of paradise pop indebted to '70s and '80s Japanese lounge lizards like Haruomi Hosono and Midori Takada, whose music slyly subverted Western perceptions of the East as some sort of Shangri-La. But *Pacific Visions* sets this music back by buying into those same Orientalist fantasias, then dressing up the music in irony so we feel we're in on the joke.

Martin Glass is an alias. The name suggests a combination of Martin Denny, the father of exotica, and Philip Glass, the father of sequencer abuse. It's also one letter from "martini glass" and sounds a bit like George Glass, the fake boyfriend in *The Brady Bunch* and *Bridesmaids*. The character is presented to us as an American businessman seduced by an "Asiatisch fever dream" while on vacation in Taiwan. The titles drip with exotic cues, none of which have the slightest thing to do with Taiwan: "Okinawa Fantasia," "Nippon Pavilion" and "Glasshouse at Izu."

If not for these layers of irony, we might be able to enjoy this stuff at face value, but with them, it's hard to say what we're supposed to feel when we listen to it. We're supposed to imagine ourselves at a hotel, which a robotic monologue makes clear when it announces "*Welcome to the Four Seasons, Mr. Glass*" over canned chirps and soothing stream sounds. But are we meant to laugh at the one-dimensionality of this fantasy of facilitated luxury, or are we actually meant to imagine ourselves in an artificial Asian paradise with nothing to do with the real Asia?

This music's too warm for us to get the same corporate creeps from it as we do from something like James Ferraro's *Far Side Virtual*. It seems to want us to buy into this world and feel like we're really at a hotel in Taiwan or Japan or wherever. To Glass's credit, he avoids Orientalist cues in the music—no gongs, no MIDI shakuhachis, no "oriental scales." But he's still playing with an authentically Japanese discipline to create a phony projection of Japan, which means that it's functionally no different from the exotica the artists that influenced it sought to subvert.

Were the music more interesting, this might be a forgivable annoyance. But the actual musical content of this thing feels like an afterthought we're meant to consume as part of a larger aesthetic package. There's nothing beautiful or immersive here. The chord progressions on tracks like "Okinawa Fantasia" and "Acura Cruise" aren't different from what uninspired garage bands strum out. The marimba sequences, adorned only sparsely, play themselves out. While something like Hiroshi Yoshimura's *Green* is actually capable of getting stuck in your head, you'd be hard-pressed to remember anything that happens here once the album's over. If whoever made this music really enjoys the source material, there's no indication they respect it.

- Label:
Kit Records
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