

Metro Area: Metro Area (15th Anniversary Reissue)

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Daniel Bromfield

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Any of the 12 tracks on Metro Area's self-titled album are certified floor-fillers, but placed end-to-end on a record they take on a curious melancholy. The drums are relentless, a snare reliably landing on the two every time; the bass lines are stretchy and sensual. But the key is always minor. Chords loom low and heavy. And the strings don't zip around with the impish quickness typical of disco but hover sadly in the air, as if in lamentation.

It's the kind of multi-level listening experience that makes classics, and indeed *Metro Area* has a cult following in dance circles. *Resident Advisor* called it the second best of the 2000s, with "Miura" the best track of the same decade, and it's one of the few albums from the last fifteen years to get five stars from Allmusic (four-and-a-half is far, far more common). Rock critics were a bit less rabid: three from *Rolling Stone* and Q.

Maybe a dance mindset's better-suited to approaching it. It's not really an album, but a collection of three EPs that were coveted in dance circles before being compiled here. Dance music runs a track at a time, so a critic whose values come from the album-centric rock world might expect a smoother arc rather than appreciating how these tracks, laid end-to-end, create something much greater than the sum of their already impressive parts.

The tracks on *Metro Area* are clean-cut, shorn of filler, and mostly unsullied by effects. Every element is laid out in front of the listener, and it's easy to assume you've mapped every horn and snare hit and string sweep before you tune back in for listen four or five and notice some squiggle that never registered. Some sounds appear once and are just perfect. Others wait two or three minutes before gliding suavely into the conversation.

Such mathematically precise music doesn't usually inspire a psychedelic sense of place, which typically comes from reverb, effects, and dynamics. It's almost spooky how *Metro Area* perfectly suggests a nice walk around a bustling city like Metro Area's native Brooklyn. There's a yearning here, rare for such hard-driving funk, that's hard to put a finger on. The minor key has a lot to do with it, evoking mystery and foreboding.

But it's also in the way *Metro Area* seems to map out its own world. The album defines itself as much in tracks as landmarks—the human pyramid of vocals that blossoms out of the stereo field on "Miura," or the sheet-metal arpeggio that interrupts the bliss of



“Atmosphrique.” We move linearly through *Metro Area* like a conveyor belt, and though it doesn’t deepen like the best dance long-players it still satisfies our lust for exploration.

And, of course, these beats jack. The drums are pretty similar track-to-track—a big bass drum, a kinky whack of snare—and from there, *Metro Area* have carte blanche. We’re reminded of records like Gas’s *Zauberberg* or Burial’s *Untrue*, where the beat stays constant but everything else can change at the drop of a hat. These beats aren’t as insistent as the disco that inspired them. They lope slowly, as if taking in the sights.

At 71 minutes split across tracks of roughly equal length, it’s a lot to take in one go, but as it’s basically a compilation that’s not really its fault. The 15th anniversary reissue doesn’t add any bonus material—no outtakes, no remixes, no goofy audio of the artists giggling in the studio. We’re not missing out on much. In fact, the later *Metro Area* EPs, which contain some material as good as what’s here, already feel like its bonus tracks.

But Environ Records’ refusal to tack more tracks on only emphasizes its economy, its pinpoint perfection, the way everything stays in place. All dance nerds eventually get around to *Metro Area*, and with this reissue it’ll be sooner for many. *Metro Area* is a great fact of dance music, a pristine, geometric thing lying in wait for new fans to find it.

- Label:
Environ Records
- Release Date:
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