

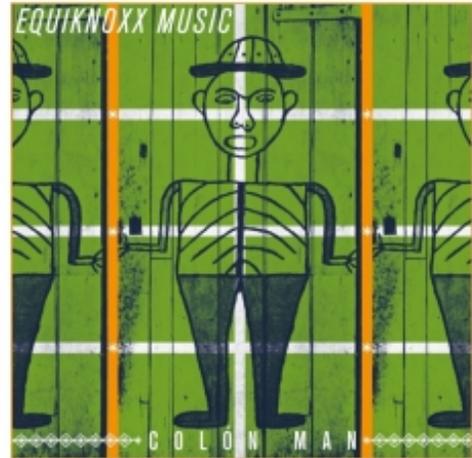
# Equiknoxx: Colòn Man

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Equiknoxx are famous enough among reggae aficionados that there's a dancehall in Poland named after them. They're hired hitmakers in the Jamaican music industry, with smashes from T.O.K. and Beenie Man under their belt. If you're unfamiliar with those names, perhaps you know Equiknoxx from *Bird Sound Power*, a compilation of their weird and wonderful productions ("riddims" in the Jamaican parlance) that wormed its way onto a few year-end lists last year.



Now here's *Colòn Man*, their first music made without deejays in mind. Though the Equiknoxx stable counts several vocalists among its ranks, this is the product of delightfully named producers Gavsborg and Time Cow. Unmoored from pop-song form, beholden only to their own structure, these tracks barrel forward with relentless linear motion. Their productions for others can be turgid on their own, but when a dub melodica snaps into action on "Melodica Badness," it doesn't float mournfully above the music but tosses around like a coin caught in the wash.

It's hard to say how much the development in Equiknoxx's sound owes to outside influence. American listeners might hear traces of witch house or Houston hip hop in the slowed-down vocal samples, and there's something Aphexian about the way the drums clamber skeletally up the sides of the stereo field. Indeed, the record's name, which will put off too many joke-ready listeners, references the Jamaicans who left to work on the Panama Canal in 1914 (Colòn being the city at its mouth) and came back more worldly. But there's nothing here that couldn't have just as easily been the product of evolving thought processes. Besides, hitmakers blowing off steam behind the boards is a Jamaican tradition.

One of the most delightful things about *Colòn Man* is it's clearly made by pros. For all the bleeps and bloops and bird calls Equiknoxx throws at you, the sound that comes on strongest is the kick drum, as punchy and fat as the most precise Berlin techno. This is an experimental album you can use to test headphones.

The titles are obscure jokes ("Sent for Ducklings, Got Ducks," "Enter a Raffle... Win a Falafel"), and there's plenty of sonic comedy to be found too, as when they insert a cash-register sound into the latter as if daring themselves to visualize this bizarre raffle. But at other times, it's surprisingly gloomy. "Kareece Put Some Thread In A Zip Lock" opens with a dense wash of synth pads that only hesitantly yields a beat. "Flank" is full of gothic vocal samples that seem to screech "lose your soul." Even "Waterfalls in Ocho Rios," the prettiest track here, sounds eerily

artificial—closer to a tourism ad for the famous resort town than the real thing.

But the dark parts are beneficial in that they inject the music with a welcome spikiness, and the music's never dour or depressing. They like to craft summer bangers for their clients, so most likely this is just an outlet for their nastier sonic ideas, or perhaps they're showing off an emotional range independent of the songs they're given. It's worth wondering if, here in the States, top-ten goons like Ryan Tedder or Jeff Bhasker have music like this buried deep in their hard drives—and if so, if it's anywhere near this level. This is pop production set free.

- Label:  
DDS
- Release Date:  
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