

Ariel Kalma: Eternalia

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A lotus flower, a babbling brook and a palatial arch ensconced in light are things we see pretty often on new age album covers. A skeleton isn't, and the one on the cover of Ariel Kalma's *Eternalia* seems to beckon us into the depths of one of the headiest and most enjoyable new albums from the old guard of new age—an album to be mentioned in the same breath as Laraaji's *Bring on the Sun/Sun Gong* and Kaitlyn Aurelia Smith & Suzanne Ciani's *Sunergy*.



Kalma is a French-born, Australia-based new age musician who's been recording since the early 1970s. Despite being the subject of *An Evolutionary Music*, a wonderful 2014 compilation from RVNG Intl., he's been largely passed over in the new age revival. Blame the fact that most of his music wasn't available for years; blame the massive Bandcamp dump that made it accessible to the masses but not in chronological or even remotely coherent order. He's obscure, and *Eternalia* probably won't change this. It should.

Kalma's voluminous Bandcamp describes *Eternalia* as a "saga," giving listeners detailed descriptions on how to approach it. He recommends humming along. He also advises listeners to go in drug-free, which might sink the hearts of some listeners hoping for a psychedelic experience. Whether you follow Kalma's word in listening to the album depends on how much you buy into his new-age philosophy—this is not an album that makes concessions for the jean-jacket crowd—but its structure as an album in the classic-rock sense means it flows seamlessly and has a clear beginning and end.

More than three-quarters of the runtime is taken up by the title track and "Astral Contact," both stretching past fifteen minutes. These are fearfully symmetrical ambient tracks that writhe and undulate, the load-bearing drones running through the center of the stereo field as Kalma toys with synths and his trusty saxophone in the surrounding space. Of the two tracks, "Astral Contact" is a lot more effective by virtue of being beatless; a looped hand drum grounds the title track and makes it feel a little less astral.

Sandwiched between are two shorter tracks: "Harmonics of Light" and "Encounter Loop," both brief drones. That the titles both emphasize the actual sound and construction of the music is telling. *Eternalia* doesn't emphasize worldbuilding or positive atmosphere, like the bulk of new age albums do, but pure sound. Its most rewarding moments come from the sheer physical impact of the sound design.

That directness is the key to its success. Nothing stands between the music and the listener: no affectations, no exotic scene-setting cues. It works because of sound alone. When Kalma whips out a Tibetan singing bowl, it's not to take us to far-off Tibet but to achieve what Bodhisattva, the world's biggest seller of singing bowls, sells as an "immediate centering effect." I certainly felt centered listening to *Eternalia*, but it also has a way of centering itself—like a laser beam straight through the center of the head.

- Label:
Self-Released
- Release Date:
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