

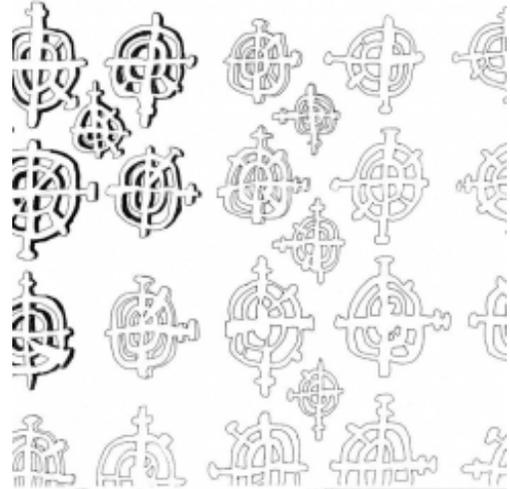
Gigi Masin: Kite

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The Italian ambient artist Gigi Masin released his first album *Wind* in 1986, but for all intents and purposes he's an upstart. His early music didn't sell, and for most of his career he was best-known to the hip-hop crate-diggers that worked his "Clouds" into beats for everyone from Björk to Post Malone. It's because of 2014's *Talk to the Wind* compilation and his subsequent formation of the band Gaussian Curve that he's been known to a broader audience.



Kite is Masin's first album since 2001's *Lontano*, and it doesn't sound much like anything else he's made. His previous albums were restless, sometimes too much so; they flirted with jazz and minimalism, singing and spoken word, and their indulgences could come across as a little corny. *Kite* sticks to a single sound, dominated by acoustic piano and shadowed by faraway pads. It doesn't really feel like classical music, but it evokes a sort of Grecian stateliness that can be represented in white temples, seaside cliffs, mosaics at the bottom of sparking fountains.

Interestingly, it sounds an awful lot like the records Gaussian Curve guitarist Jonny Nash puts out on Melody as Truth with partner Suzanne Kraft. Their work owes almost nothing to any development in the genre since Brian Eno's *Ambient* series. What makes their music feel fresh is their approach: rock-solid intent over experimentation, compressed dryness over the reverb that's a staple of the genre's early years. All of this describes what Masin does on *Kite*, and these improvements are beneficial, stripping Masin's sound as they do to the core of his appeal.

At 40 minutes that seem even shorter, *Kite* refuses to deepen, nor does it transport us to a faraway place as so many ambient albums desire to. We don't get lost in it; we stay grounded as it drifts weightlessly around us. But it's extraordinarily effective when it's on. It generates almost exclusively positive emotions, though it brims a certain wistfulness; if the pianos are all flowers and sunshine, the pads seem to cast long shadows, reminding us of the inexorable approach of the night. This is a good late-afternoon ambient album, and a doozy as a sleep aid.

Kite is probably Masin's second-best album, the best being *Clouds* with Gaussian Curve. That album was as solid as this one but more surprising, and a lot more went on during its runtime—perhaps inevitable, as it was the work of three musicians rather than one. It felt like a Great Album. This is a bauble, succeeding through dogged consistency rather than razzle-dazzle. Every element is in its right place, its only real missteps being an incongruous shift into

dissonance halfway through “Blue Line” and a slightly-too-insistent synth sound on “Irish Dove.”

But *Kite*’s remarkable for another reason. A lot of the best recent ambient albums have been by grizzled old vets. Mike Cooper’s *Raft*. Ariel Kalma’s *Eternalia*. Laraaji’s *Bring On the Sun*. Gas’ *Narkopop* Ryuichi Sakamoto’s *async*. Those albums all extended logically from what we already knew and loved about those artists. *Kite*, on the other hand, finds the 62-year-old Masin actively trying to fit in with musicians half his age—not by kowtowing to trends, but by eschewing anything remotely dated from his sound and zeroing in on its crucial elements.

Masin’s Bandcamp statement (this album was self-released and is only available on that site) talks a great deal about change. “Whether it’s a turning corner of keeping on walking straight down the road, or a ship adapting its course to the winds and waves [...] I’m thinking about new passages, further destinations,” Masin writes. It’s ultimately this desire to move forward that makes *Kite* such a good album. Rather than prove his mettle as a veteran, he’s taken lessons from the kids and made an album that feels classic *and* contemporary—an album outside time.

- Label:
- Release Date: