

Review: 2012-2017 by A.A.L. (Against All Logic)

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2012-2017, Nicolas Jaar's compilation of tracks recorded as A.A.L. (Against All Logic) and intermittently inserted in his DJ sets over the years, reminds me of those rumors about Stanley Kubrick making a porn film. This is low-stakes genre fare by an ambitious producer who usually prefers dizzying conceptual fare, and it's interesting seeing Jaar bring his artsy sensibility to tried-and-true genres like disco edits and acid house—interesting, but not always rewarding.

Though it's lengthy and plays like your typical house "artist album," this is clearly one of Jaar's minor releases. He dropped it on the world with little fanfare, and it doesn't try to hide the fact that it's a compilation, as some of the more jarring transitions—the spritzzy disco "Some Kind of Game" into the subterranean Berlin techno of "Hopeless", most notably—make clear. A lot of

this music sounds like it'd work better in the club than over headphones. While most disco edits drive loops endlessly forward in the pursuit of ecstasy, Jaar's are weirdly stagnant, and his samples duck shyly in and out of thick tunnels of filter at their own whim. Those earth-shattering moments where the bass kicks back in and the dancefloor goes wild are mostly absent, and though "Know You" and "Such a Bad Way" would have no problem moving bodies at a club, over headphones they hover in a frustrating limbo between jacking physicality and ambient drift.

If this sounds like a "where's the drop" type of complaint, keep in mind that disco edits are not a genre that requires a lot of elbow grease. Loop a snatch of soul vocal long enough and you've met the basic criteria. It's what you do with them that matters, and Jaar mostly lets them hang in dead space. Hardly anything happens on "Some Kind Of Game" or "Such A Bad Way" (which, interestingly, works in samples from *Yeezus*), and the piano loop gets old quickly, its repetition numbing rather than exhilarating. Their blunt sound design is at odds with the snaky, seductive, almost Villalobosian approach we've come to expect from Jaar, and it's hard to shake the feeling that a lot of these cuts were made in a few hours to appease audiences who might not necessarily be keen on getting down to techno-prog opuses about Chilean voting referendums.

2012-2017 works best when it indulges Jaar's natural gift at sound design, and as expected he works better in gnarlier genres like acid house ("You Are Going To Love Me And Scream," which warps a cantankerous 303 into a stereo-drowning wall of sludge) and purist techno ("Hopeless," which would fit seamlessly onto a Levon Vincent album). One of the more interesting tracks is "Cityfade," Jaar's attempt at an urban miniature, replete with cop sirens (don't play this one in the car) and a chopped-up horn loop possibly sampled from Echospace's "BCU Dub." And the best of the edits, "I Never Dream," works because of the hell Jaar puts the poor sample through; it's said you can make a guitar "cry," but you can do the same thing with a snatch of cut-up soul.

Still, none of this music really sounds like Nicolas Jaar music as we know it, and you'd be hard-pressed to identify the creator of any of these tracks going in blind. It's a different sort of project, sure, and the way it ping-pongs between pastiche and higher art is interesting. But so much of this music has been done better by other artists that it's understandable if you see no reason to listen to *2012-2017* in favor of superior disco edits by Tiger & Woods or DJ Harvey, or more beguiling avant-acid house by Africans with Mainframes—or, y'know, a Nicolas Jaar album. **B MINUS**

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