

Ras G and the Afrikan Space Program: Stargate Music

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Ras G is the strangest producer in the Brainfeeder stable—and one of the best. The fame of compadres Flying Lotus and Thundercat has eluded him, though he doesn't court it. He's content to toil in his own little corner of the universe, cranking out music that runs the gamut from laid-back Dilla worship to astral cacophony that could rub elbows with the gnarliest relics of the Afrofuturist free jazz era from which he clearly takes inspiration. Listenability and accessibility are dead last on his list of priorities, and if there's a direct link between the L.A. beat scene and the "chill beats" format beloved by stoned millennials, Ras G's hardly to blame.

He puts out an album or two a year on average, but his latest, *Stargate Music*, seems like a tentpole release. It's been more heavily promoted than trifles like *The Gospel of the God Spell* and *My Kinda Blues*, and it's credited to "Ras G and the Afrikan Space Program;" though Ras G seems to be the only member of the Afrikan Space Program, the bipartite name suggests an expansion of scale and scope, similar to Prince's *Revolution* and D'Angelo's *Vanguard*. And unlike most Ras G releases, which can be ramshackle, *Stargate Music* comes on strong as a complete, all-encompassing marvel of sound design, clearly the product of a lot of elbow grease.

The project is billed as “an astral ode to woman,” though Ras G’s focused on only one part of the woman for this project—and not even one all women have. *Stargate Music*’s persistent yonic fixation is likely less the product of feminist fury than a stoned horndog’s masturbatory fantasies, especially once titles like “Is It Lust Or Love” and “Heaven Is Between Her Legs” swim into view. The concept doesn’t reward much thought and really isn’t necessary in order to enjoy the album. Nonetheless, there’s something fleshy and tactile about these beats that suggests a *Fantastic Voyage* into the body, and at its most ambient it’s worth calling amniotic.

This is far from your typical beat tape, and beats are only a small part of the equation anyway. *Stargate Music* is often best at its most formless—like opening “Primordial Water Formations 1,” which could pass for an outtake from Vladislav Delay’s *Demo(n) Tracks*. Elsewhere the music congeals into rhythm but drifts apart just as quickly; “Quest to Find Anu Stargate” starts in good-natured G-funk territory but is soon subducted by impossibly deep house chords. While we’ve grown to expect predictable build-and-release structures from this kind of beat music, *Stargate Music* is fluid and labyrinthine, seducing us with its bewitching sound design.

This is an unusually hi-fi release by Ras G standards; more often, he’s comfortable amid the crackle of old vinyl. The clarity of the sounds on *Stargate Music* makes them that much more beguiling, but it also means the music loses some of its mystique. On tapes like *The Gospel of the God Spell*, Ras G seemed to be channeling another world through his record collection. With an entire Space Program at his command, he has the resources to take us to that other world, and although the sights are something to behold, they don’t leave too much to the imagination.