

Deep Ambient with Daniel: Entain by Vladislav Delay

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Deep Ambient With Daniel is a new column where Daniel Bromfield, *Pretty Much Amazing* writer and former host of *Deep Ambient Hour With Daniel* on 88.1 KWVA, discusses the ambient treasures he loves, lives with, and falls asleep to.

I'm not sure the world deserves Vladislav Delay. The Finn toils tirelessly at ambient colossi—formidable hellscapes that bubble and burp as you drift deeper into their depths—but the electronic music world would prefer he recreate a goofy house album he made when he was 23 and barely had any idea how electronic music worked. Granted that album, 2000's *Vocalcity*, is one of the best house albums ever made. But the four or five world-class ambient dub albums he's made since go all but unheard due to discussion that largely amounts to “where's the kick?”

Vocalcity has a twin sister. *Entain* was released the same year as that landmark. It contains the same number of tracks and is only four seconds longer, meaning the track-length average is almost equal (just over thirteen minutes). Perhaps it's coincidence, but I suspect they're meant as inverses of each other. *Entain* is as neutral as *Vocalcity* is melodramatic, as monotone as *Vocalcity* is colorful. And they seem cut from the same cloth, both using chords and static in similar fashions, bearing the same warm, mid-fi sheen that would disappear from the Delay project a few years later as his taste in texture began to skew more towards the mechanical.

Entain is massive. It's formidable even to look at. Its tracks crawl well past the fifteen-minute mark. Its plain-white cover looks like an unreadable document. And once you put it on, it creates an illusion of being in a tremendous space. As all manner of ambient detritus flickers in the foreground, the central harmonic element—a thin mist of brooding, minor-key chords from the Basic Channel playbook—is buried deep in the distance, cloaked in a filter that makes it sound unimaginably loud but emanating from miles away. The effect is akin to being lost in a blizzard.

It's psychedelic, but it doesn't blindside you with texture the way its close cousin Gas's *Pop* does. It creeps quietly and builds. The 22-minute “Kohde” does very little for its first half, and most of its central elements are only introduced in its last seven minutes. If you're awake by the time “Kohde” kicks into full gear, you'll want to stay up to hear what happens next.

“Kohde” dissolves into a short sketch, a little shorter than two minutes, that samples a scene from Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days*. (The young Delay liked to sample contemporary movies; a memorable bit of dialogue on later album *Anima* came from the obscure Sean Penn flick *Hurlyburly*.) Then comes “Piko”, composed principally of percussive elements, spiky and ominous. “Notke” approaches hip hop. And “E.L.E.” (a reference to the Extinction Level Event in *Deep Impact*?) is astoundingly beautiful, its percussive chords slowly rising to the surface.

I found *Entain* frustrating at first. It was simply too much for me when I heard it in sophomore year of college. But thoughts of it nagged at me, and I soon found myself listening to it more often than I anticipated. I initially treated it as a puzzle to crack. But as I mapped its beeps and burbles, its terrain began to make itself clear, and it became more reassuring than frightening. Now, it's one of the albums I listen to most, and it's become as comforting as a warm cup of tea.

Entain is Delay's best ambient album, but his resume under the name has since far surpassed those of his other aliases. *Multila*, released on the mighty Chain Reaction, has earned praise from luminaries like Animal Collective and Huerco S. (whose *Railroad Blues* EP is a Delay ripoff as good as the real thing). *Anima* is an effective foray into a risky format, the single-track ambient album. *Whistleblower* suggests continents slamming together. *Visa* is a song-cycle baptized in industrial noise. Most of his work is worth a listen, but *Entain* ought to be a classic.