

Clear Tamei

Iglooghost

Brainfeeder

8 August 2018

Steel Mogu

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One of last year's nicest surprises was an album called *Neō Wax Bloom*, the debut from Brainfeeder signee Iglooghost. It may well be one of the most electronic unrelenting albums ever made, trapping us in a laser war with every zap aimed at our pleasure centers. There were elements of grime and dubstep; its visuals came from the Japanese video games on which the producer born Seamus Malliagh no doubt was weaned during his Irish childhood. But influences disappeared in its novelty and sonic onslaught. Never content to kill time with loops, *Neō Wax Bloom* felt herculean, the product of obsessive labor in a time when a few flimsy loops and an aesthetic can be the quick ticket to indie fame. All the more impressive given Malliagh was barely out of his teens.



Rumors of an imminent follow-up seemed unbelievable, but less than a year later, here are *Clear Tamei* and *Steel Mogu*, two EPs with a neat light-dark dichotomy (the two are more or less interchangeable, with *Mogu* a little more aggressive). The logical approach after something like *Neō Wax Bloom* would be to either scale things back or abandon taste at the altar of blinding hubris. But Malliagh wants his cake and his ice cream. On the one hand, there's more space between the sounds, and these tracks often move with the iron clank of Fade to Mind-style post-club or American brostep rather than the gravity-defying speed of

*Super Smash Bros.* characters. On the other hand, Malliagh seems to be drawing from an older tradition of maximalism than what Rustie and Joker might serve up. A lot of these sounds belong to the arena or the opera house, not the arcade.

A guitar that'd make Steve Vai blush screams on "Namā". On two tracks, one on each EP ("New Vectors" from *Tamei*, "Mei Mode" from *Mogu*), he deploys a heaven-piercing vocal sample that could only come from a fat lady with a spear and a Valkyrie helmet, such garish uplift does it bring to the music. The tracks often span multiple sections—not just on the eight-minute expanse of "Shrine Hacker", but when the rap on "New Vectors" carries over to "Clear Tamei" as if to let us know the divisions between tracks are meaningless. That rap, by the way, is in a fictional language. If the artist's statement on Bandcamp doesn't mislead, the EPs chronicle the journey of a "young, see-through god in-training named Tamei" in a "hyperspeed, cross-temporal battle". This is the kind of context you expect from the prog of Yes or Magma than an upstart button-pusher.

It's just a shame Malliagh here has gone for broke with his ideas rather than his music. It's a lot more entertaining to be caught in the middle of a hyperspeed, cross-temporal battle than to learn about it through a press release. The impression on these EPs isn't of taste and restraint but of... less. What makes Iglooghost's music so distinctive is the density of his sound, and without it, it's worth wondering what makes him worth listening over his influences. Maybe the wow factor has cooled down a bit, but if these EPs were our introduction to Iglooghost, we might well take him for a bass-music scholar with a Nintendo fetish rather than an unbridled auteur making music like no one else.

"Memorable" isn't really a relevant word with this kind of music; you press play, live through it, come out the other end either exhilarated or exhausted. But one moment nagged at my head: the rap on "Clear Tamei". Malliagh's fictional language is a mishmash of Japanophone sounds interspersed with English, with a typical lyric something like "with the see-through body chema ki sonola". It sounds too much like real language to be mind-bending in the way Liz Fraser's abstractions are, but it's too far from English to have an uncanny-valley effect like, say, the Melvins' grammatical cannonball. It resembles nothing so much as David Bowie speaking Polari on "Girl Loves Me", which didn't work either. At least that cant served the noble cause of helping queer folks communicate under the nose of oppressive discriminatory laws in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This one mostly seems to exist so Malliagh can make up faux-Japanese words.

It's just not good gibberish, and when I think back to the album, it's the first thing to come to mind. I've met at least three people who are turned off by *A Love Supreme* because of its titular mantra ("a love supreme, a love supreme, a love supreme"). If that's an issue for one of the most revered jazz records ever, it's catastrophic for these stopgap EPs.

Rating:

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