

Sun Araw: Guarda in alto OST

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Guarda in alto is a limb of latter-day Sun Araw, a band that's more pointillist than psychedelic, more like molecular gastronomy than a stoned soul picnic. Austin-born, Los Angeles-based musician Cameron Stallones started out making dub-inspired groove music stoney enough to land on the soundtrack to *Hotline Miami*. But Since 2012's underrated *The Inner Treaty*, he and his cast of collaborators have moved towards something more ambient, more remote and more about silly sounds bumping into each other at high velocity. You really have to stand back with this stuff to see the whole from the parts, and albums like this one, *The Inner Treaty*, and 2015's *Gazebo Effect* (credited oddly to the S. Araw Band) get better the further they deepen.

This is the soundtrack to an Italian art film about a man who discovers a magical world on the rooftops of Rome. Its obligation to accompany images supersedes its ability to conjure its own, and it lacks the clear-cut identity of its kin, which more or less have distinct personalities: the hermetic austerity of *Belomancie*, the cowboy irony of *The Saddle of the Increate* and the incense-scented mysticism of *Professional Sunflow*. To invoke an artist to which Stallones'

music is often compared, it's a good Sun Araw album in the same way *Pangaea* is a good '70s Miles Davis album. It's not essential; it's more of an extension of his oeuvre than a great stand-alone work, but play it for neophytes and their minds may very well be blown wide open.

Individual sounds stand out more than songs. Stallones is fond of a rustling sound that sweeps across the stereo field and suggests a plastic bag being crumpled. "Muto" climaxes with a humongous clatter of what sounds like silverware. "Rattan" is centered on a solemn guitar pattern that could have been on *Saddle of the Increate*; it's the least abstract, most obviously rock-like composition here. "Volano," track three, is when the maw of the album really yawns open and sucks you in. It's the best track individually, in part because its eight-minute length (short for Sun Araw, long for this record) lulls you into submission and in part because of its dancing duet between luminous whooshes of organ and blasts of disgruntled sequencer noise.

Parts of *Guarda in alto* can be a little irritating, like the relentless steel-drum thwacking on "Porto Alchemico," though that song luckily dissipates before the noise becomes overbearing. But give it long enough and the individual bits melt into the whole. Moments that should assault you with sound become as unobtrusive as good ambient music. Appropriate seeing as it's a soundtrack, this music is maybe best enjoyed as a distraction in the back of your head rather than focused listening. It seems inappropriate to critique this as a proper album—it's hardly been promoted at all—but it might find some fans down the road as the epitome of mid-'10s Sun Araw, the dead center of its approach if not its most engrossing manifestation.