

# Various Artists: bbliss

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Ambient compilations can suffer from a lack of unity. With so many voices over so many tracks, it can be hard to get the same sense of wandering through a defined space from a compilation as a record with a singular vision. *bbliss*, headed by producer Ryan Fall, circumvents this by splitting a squat seven tracks between six artists who like the same sounds: cloudy chords, the distant ghost of a house beat. It could be the work of one artist, and that's its biggest strength.

In other words: if you liked Pendant's *Make You Know You Sweet*, you'll love this stuff. That album debuted a new moniker from Huerco S., the Kansas City producer who counts some of this decade's best ambient releases under his belt, and the success of that record is no doubt why this compilation, originally a limited cassette run in 2016, is now seeing its wide release. The Pendant track, "Des Vieux Temples," doesn't disappoint. Like the tracks on his record, it makes great use of space, its sonic elements seeming to swirl around us like hostile winds from our vantage point. But if someone told me this were a Pendant album, I wouldn't blink, and if someone told me the Pendant track were made by Fall or Naemi or anyone else who appears here, I wouldn't either. Maybe that's why Huerco and Fall used their lesser-known monikers (Fall usually records as uon, here as DJ Paradise) for this stuff. The music's so interchangeable the best-known artist ends up becoming the reference point for everyone else.

The music here bears a strong resemblance to that released on the Chain Reaction and Mille Plateaux labels that dominated ambient music at the turn of the millennium. It's about beauty in corrosion, it's based more on chords (nearly always minor) than melody, and while the tracks move at house tempos, they're in no way designed for dancing. It's also kind of paranoid. If the title of the record suggests positive emotions, the spelling suggests a certain cheeky remove. Even while the music's healing midrange makes it great to bliss out to, there's something tugging beneath the surface: a wistful transience in the minor key, in how Fall's "Ssumo" and Enamel's "Quad" sound corroded and ancient, in how the chords of "Des Vieux Temples" flicker through endless space, in how the plant on the album cover seems to reach cancerously for light through a fog. Physically, *bbliss* feels like a massage. Emotionally, it has other plans.

If *bbliss* isn't one of the best recent ambient albums, it's because it can be a bit lacking on a textural level. Artists like Gas, Vladislav Delay, and the many affiliates of Basic Channel liked snaky sounds that clambered psychedelically through the stereo field and weaved in and out

and all around the headphones. The tracks on *bb/iss* live in murk, and the sounds are usually blurred together, meaning it's not quite as tactile as one might prefer from this kind of music. But it's possible indistinction is the entire point of this album, which, in melting the disparate visions of its contributors into a slab of monolithic mood music, privileges experience over ego.