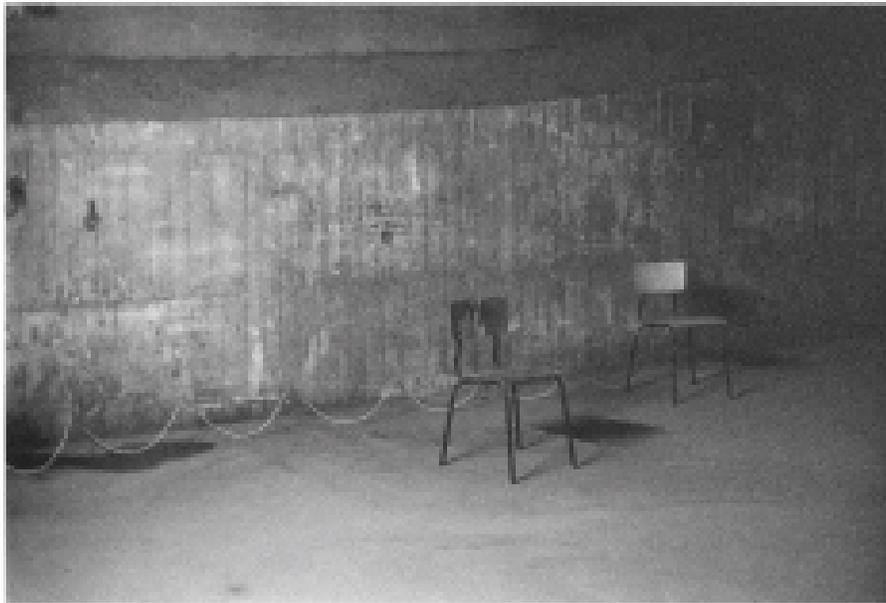


Alessandro Cortini/Lawrence English: Immediate Horizon

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Alessandro Cortini & Lawrence English
Immediate Horizon

The biggest unintentional laugh I've gotten from an album this year comes at the very end of Alessandro Cortini and Lawrence English's collaborative record *Immediate Horizon*. I didn't know the album was live going in, but when the audience claps, I had to laugh—*this was live?*

My surprise wasn't because the music wouldn't work live. Ambient music's fine live if you have a good soundsystem and a place to sit, and *Immediate Horizon* sounds great, its budget no doubt bolstered by Cortini's Nine Inch Nails bona fides. But this is music that retreats so hermetically into itself it's impossible to imagine in a large space with paying people. This is music for blankets, or cold airlocks, or Antarctic islands—ambient in its purest "wallpaper" form, a blur of unvarnished sound with a forbidding low end. The revelation that there's an audience changes what we've spent the last 38 minutes imagining so dramatically it's hilarious.

Immediate Horizon isn't dissimilar to *Selva Oscura*, English's excellent collaboration with William Basinski from last year. On both collaborations English dominates, folding over his collaborator's whims with his focus on the music's center. The Australian composer

has emerged as sort of a defender of old-guard ambient with a FACT essay extolling the virtues of drones and textures over beats and filigrees and a lot of good ambient records that put this approach into practice. Rarely will you be able to identify what instrument you're hearing on an English track. Everything blurs into something that's as much a sonic massage as a work of art.

It's perhaps purposefully hard to tell who's doing what on *Immediate Horizon*, but Cortini likes a glitchy low end on his own work and enjoys post-rockish crescendos into whitecaps of noise, so we can probably blame him for those appearing here. English seems to be the one keeping Cortini in check, and there are few of the beat-like glitches we hear on Cortini tracks save for a slightly unsettling tinkling effect at the beginning of "Immediate Horizon 3" that sounds a little bit like something off Alva Noto and Ryuichi Sakamoto's *Glass*. If this sounds mostly like an English record, it's less because of what English is doing than what Cortini is not.

It's interesting hearing a collaborative effort where the endgame is not to expand on each other's work but to distill it. Perhaps English will become a serial collaborator and similarly strip his partners' music down to their meat and potatoes. I'd love to see him work with Laraaji, who might have perfected ambient-as-wallpaper on the first half of his *Connecting with the Inner Healer Through Music*, and though that gleeful guy might seem worlds away from English's stoicism, it's not a bad partnership: Laraaji epitomizes the post-classical, Eno-defined school of ambient of which Eno is a proponent, and both make unadorned music that feels centering.

Immediate Horizon sounds lovely. Its flaw is that it's not particularly distinctive. There's not that much to separate this from a lot of the music Rafael Anton Irisarri makes or even from other English records and compositions. But with music like this, that's sort of moot. You don't want the artist's ego: you want the sound, and then you want it to fade away after a little while.



https://youtu.be/Qtr3_V96mNE