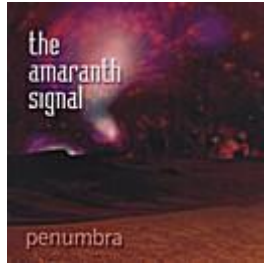


## Mp3 The Amaranth Signal - Penumbra



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Airy space music for meditation and contemplation 5 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Ambient, NEW AGE: Meditation Penumbra Songs Details: The Amaranth Signal's up-to-the-minute CD, "Penumbra", takes the listener on a journey done interior space. Electronic textures and threads interweave a transonic fabric of surreal ambient soundscapes which flow with a soft intensity. All five pieces on this CD were recorded from live performances. Mark Mahoney, Roger Hausmann, and Michael D. Peck bring three different views of ambient music and are able to focus them into a cohesive body of work that is spacey and yet grounded. Reviewed October 2004 in "Wind and Wire" by Bill Binkelman: "The Amaranth Signal is a trio (Mark Mahoney, Roger Hausmann and Michael D. Peck) of ambient artists who operate in the same vein that Toronto's Sylken does, i.e. improvisational ambient music that retains the essence of musicality no matter how far afield it wanders in its winding path toward conclusion. This is the group's first recording and it's excellent, combining two short tracks ("echoes from the well" and "this passing tide") with three longer more evolving numbers ("canyon de chelly," "automating the sphere," and the title song). Each selection has strong elements to recommend it, but more than anything else, I admire and appreciate the adventurous nature of the music while still retaining basic accessibility. This is not alienating avant garde mumbo jumbo, yet it's highly evolutionary on the longer cuts and improvisational in nature.

Instrumentation includes a variety of synthesizers and other electronics, some "ordinary" electronic keyboards ("canyon de chelly" contains what sounds like some tasty Fender Rhodes electric piano) and electric guitar, sometimes processed and manipulated to alter its more traditional sound. "canyon de chelly" is a haunting opening track, filled with sounds like snake rattles, synth bells, cascading notes, male synth chorales, and that mellow Rhodes (heavily echoed). It all fits perfectly with the song's obvious inspiration, that being the Native American ruins site of the same name in the desert Southwest of the

US. Swirling textures of various sounds evoke a dry desert wind sweeping done centuries old dwellings while the voices of tribal members long past are carried on a breeze. "echoes from the well" begins with a metronome-like rhythmic sound to it, as the steady beat from a sample frame drum starts the track, amid assorted buzzing and whizzing synthesizers (carrying a faint hint of Berlin) and reverbed/echoed plaintive guitar. It's on this track that an astute listener will start to become aware of the imaginative and dense mix on the album - this is a CD to play and play and play (using headphones, if possible) and have fun deciphering all the various elements placed in the soundfield. Perhaps my favorite song is the retro-futuristic "automating the sphere" which contains this really cool sample that sounds like some electro-organic cyber-mechanism in an endless loop of regeneration. Waves of analog synths, chattering electronics, and that almost voice-like sample carry you along an alien highway, as if the song is some version of Kraftwerk's "autobahn" that's played on a faraway planet in a galaxy somewhere in Orion. Those synthesizer swells sigh gently underneath the other electronics and it's like a blissful ribbon of liquid-blue concrete flying under your feet. Some might feel the track goes on too long, but not me (and I'm the first to claim a song has worn out its welcome). The Amaranth Signal always finds ways to keep the song evolving (check out the percolating/cascading analog keyboards later in the track and then the ethereal tones later still). There are two more songs on the album, including "this passing tide" which melds evocative and somber ebow electric guitar with subtle Berlin sequencing (it's there but back in the mix). The CD closes with the title track, a textural exploration of rhythms (at the start, reminding me of those on Michael Shreeve's "Transfer Station Blue"), shadowy shadings of reverbed/echoed electronics, bell tones, and undulating synthesizers. Later on, acoustic guitar is brought into play and the song takes on a prog fusion feel - an interesting change of direction to be sure, but it works! However, the track is nowhere near over; to discover how it all ends, well, you'll have to get the album! This is a most promising start for The Amaranth Signal and an ambitious and audacious debut. From their website, it appears they play live a lot (in fact, more or less this album is a live recording, which makes it even more remarkable when you hear how cohesive and well-engineered it is). I sure wish they'd play here in Minneapolis. I seldom endorse live ambient music, but like the aforementioned Sylken, these three artists are bold voyagers into unexplored territory and hearing them get there would be a great way to spend a few hours. Until then, though, I'm content to wander down the paths that penumbra takes me. The CD comes highly recommended." Reviewed August 2004 in "Wind and Wire", Ben Fleury-Steiner wrote: With Penumbra,

The Amaranth Signal has accomplished something unusual today: They present compositions played without overdubs as a working three man ensemble. Yet when one dissects the phrase "live ambient ensemble" it is ironic that there are not more such works being released - as opposed to the plethora of one man or woman electronic offerings regularly spun out. Alas, there really is nothing ironic going on here at all - the advent of the fully electronic studio and thus the relative ease of the 'go it alone' approach - has meant fewer electronic musicians coming together to write and perform material as a working ensemble. Penumbra is thus a long overdue dose of fresh, live recorded multi-instrumental ambient soundscapes. In approaching this work then Webster's is a good place to start for a refresher: Ambient n. 1. Something that surrounds or invests; as, air . . . being a perpetual ambient. Ensemble n. The whole; all parts taken together. In short, an effective ambient ensemble is one that produces enveloping - indeed, surrounding - sounds as a whole. From this perspective, I would give The Amaranth Signal - three fellow Tennesseans: Mark Mahoney, Michael Peck, and Roger Hausman - very high marks. This album reminds me of some of the live recordings of the Ashra Temple or even early Tangerine Dream in that it displays very strong chemistry between each performer. The sprawling - sometimes tribal influenced - textures serve as a rather ethereal foundation for Mark Mahoney's heavily reverberating guitar passages. That's right, Mahoney plays guitar, and his sound is reminiscent of Jeff Pearce's approach on Bleed or some of Pearce's live recorded works that I've heard bits and pieces of online. Only Peck and Hausman's accompaniment take Mahoney's soothing and sometimes otherworldly guitar sounds into an incense-tinged tribal and altogether more mysterious realm. This is a very cohesive collection of sounds that almost blends together: A good indicator of a strong live offering. On the other hand, those listeners looking for a more surprising and diverse array of uncategorizable sounds beware: you won't find anything avant garde on Penumbra. The standout track on this set is the title track, "Penumbra." It is a gorgeous almost symphonic ambient work. The sounds of incoming moans (produced perhaps by a strings ensemble preset using Absynth or the like) and floating flute accompanied by Mahoney's driving guitar create something altogether unique and absorbing. The Amaranth Signal obviously rehearses rigorously, as the transitions between passages on these live recordings are, at least to these ears, flawless. In some respects, listening to Penumbra also reminds me of the multi-instrumental work of Terra Ambient - perhaps only because I have been recently listening to clips from said artist's forthcoming release The Gate - nevertheless, I would recommend this album to listeners who enjoy very well

composed ambient and tribal soundscapes.

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