

Mp3 Streamline - Echo Lake



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A compilation of Streamline's ambient mood music. 11 MP3 Songs NEW AGE: New Age, NEW AGE: Ambient Details: Review by Bill Binkelman (Wind and Wire) Gary Mulford (a.k.a. Streamline) is a relatively unknown electronic keyboard artist who can cross between the new age and ambient/spacemusic music genres with uncommon ease. He has bundled his best music from each genre (from earlier releases, although I'm unclear if there is new music on these albums) on these two recordings. Beyond the Horizon features spacemusic and ambient soundscapes while Echo Lake contains (for the most part) friendly warm new age and the softer variant of adult contemporary keyboard music (almost bordering on ambient at times). Both of these recordings come recommended from me, as they both offer plenty of excellent music in their respective genres. When I first reviewed a Streamline CD several years ago (back in the heyday of mp3.com, where Mulford started his career of releasing music), I thought he showed a pronounced flair for solid compositions and performing a variety of music with skill and artfulness. He only needed to focus on one genre, so that a recording would not wander somewhat aimlessly or confuse the listener. Well, he seems to have taken my advice more to heart than a lot of musicians do! Echo Lake opens with the short (two minute) "Winter's Sleep" which flows along on washes and warm tones, as well as some echoed church bells and a nice horn sample. "Alana's Smile" (the next track) is among my faves. It features a wonderful midtempo rhythm on what sounds like sampled kalimba or a variation of it, and a new age melody that is instantly likable as it sways gently, like a sail billowing in a light breeze. The ping-ponging but melodic rhythm lends the piece a relaxed but mildly emphatic rhythm and the burbling tones in the background flesh things out perfectly. "Silhouettes of Blue" is the first song where Mulford shows some fusion of ambient with new age on Echo Lake. Mildly darker keyboard shadings and muted tribal beats are not oppressive but certainly offer a contrast to the previous song.

Soon, things veer off into more of a synth-pop type of tune, with twanging notes (a la Twin Peaks) and a well-executed synth sax solo. The song chugs along nicely and the inclusion of electric guitar later, while unexpected, doesn't detract from the mood. Other songs include the sunny but slow-paced title track, the romantic new age romantic ballad-esque "Linda," the haunting "When Leaves Fall" (with some subtle dissonance that I personally didn't care for), and "Four Walls," another piece that flirts with crossing over into ambient territory with its minimal keyboard brushings, sparse background tones and minor tonalities. Two other cuts stand out for me as well. They are "Sleight of Hand" a great blend of echoed piano and ebbing/flowing washes of synths which captures the reflective sadness of mid-autumn in its blend of beauty and melancholy, and "Sky Glider" which cruises along leisurely but with a pleasant insistent rhythm on Gamelan-like reverberating tones and assorted synths, keyboards and later twangy guitar (Mulford resembles Kevin Kendle on this song). Beyond the Horizon opens and closes with its two best tracks, although the eight songs that are bookended by them offer some solid stuff too. Opening the CD, "Ptolemy's View" is classic spacemusic, kind of like a cross between Jonn Serrie and Zero Ohms' amazing track "The Poetics of Space." Shimmering cosmic synths and flowing washes paint the "night sky" image musically, and at eight-plus minutes, it's the perfect length in my opinion. Mulford knows just when to subtly shift the pitch of a synth chord or weave an underlying tone or wash in or out of the music. It's really a superb track. The closing title track is warm droning ambient with a dash of deep space thrown in (via some flowing melodic elements). The track is a tick over nine-minutes long, again a perfect length. Neither dark nor bright or cheery, the piece has a light airy non-oppressive feel to it, but never becomes too light. What sounds like sampled ewi (Kevin Braheny's trademark instrument) will certainly bring a smile of recognition to fans who loved his classic The Way Home recording, which this song resembles to a certain degree. Somewhat unfortunately, Mulford decided to escalate the drama of the piece toward the end, even bringing in some electric guitar peals (an error in judgment, as far as I'm concerned), although it's obvious he means the cut to end in a moment of exultation or culmination of some sort. In between those songs are offerings such as the shadowy "Adrift" (lapping water and birdsong combine with dark tones and drones and a haunting bass wooden flute), "Peyote Sunset" (not a tribal number, as you might suspect, but a shimmering dark soundscape, filled with rising and falling synth drones and burbbling noises that echo in the background, and eventually taking on an even darker mood later on), "Bioluminescence," an ethereal spacy electronic tone poem with flowing synths and subtle

effects that suggest the eerie beauty of the song's title (best thought of as the creatures that live in the great depths of the ocean and cast a light of their own in the still blackness of the unseen world they inhabit), and "Zero 1" which sounds like a dystopian soundtrack, a la some of the less abstract music on the Electroshock Records label (and although this piece is easily the most adventurous on the CD, as far as I'm concerned, it's still not as alienating as some of what I've heard on Electroshock). The middle section of the piece is warmer and more accessible, but by the end the semi-industrial elements are back and the sky turns grey again. That's just a prelude to the saddest music on Beyond the Horizon, which would be "Forlorn." Talk about a perfectly named cut! Echoed piano, drones/washes, and semi-abstract textures form a cohesive musical portrait of somber haunting solitude (the piano may bring to mind Harold Budd at times, although Budd's music is, of course, a whole other beast altogether). Both Beyond the Horizon and Echo Lake amply display Mulford's talent in two different genres, although truthfully, Echo Lake is close to some of Beyond the Horizon at times. However, the friendlier and more structured music on Echo Lake might give the hardcore curmudgeonly ambient lover a toothache (I personally don't think it's too sweet at all, but it's certainly more optimistic and "pretty" than most ambient music tends to be). Beyond the Horizon, with only a few excluded moments here and there, plays as a solid selection of spacemusic with some floating darker ambient thrown in the mix. So, depending on your personal tastes, you can't go wrong with at least one of these albums. Personally, I give the nod to Echo Lake, but that's just my subjective feeling, being in love with the northwoods as I am.

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