

Kotaro Oshio - Eternal Chain (2009)

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Well, I guess it was just over a year ago that we covered Tussie mussie, Oshio's first cover album of pop standards that I got a huge kick out of. While Eternal Chain was released shortly thereafter in August of 2009, it marks our third review and his third full-length album release in the period of a single year. That's pretty impressive, and it's all quality work.

For those who missed out on our reviews of You & Me and Tussie mussie, Kotaro Oshio is one of Japan's most well-known guitarist, working magic with just an acoustic guitar and his fingers. While you'd categorize his music as mainly "easy listening," there are certainly some melodies that will have you humming along and even bopping your head as you progress through his latest outing.

Oshio breaks Eternal Chain up into individual sections separated by brief interludes. Aside from with minute-long "Prelude ~sunrise~," that works you into the album with dreamy arpeggios, "Interlude ~frostbeat~" features bass notes and rhythmic slaps to create an almost funky electronic sound, while "Interlude ~starlight~" acts as a gentle lullaby.

Getting into the album proper, the first track, "Landscape," is a powerful and vibrant piece with a great bass line, deliberate tapping, and an exotic Spanish flair. It would make a great overworld theme with its catchy melody and "fullness" despite being performed on a solo guitar. "Always,"

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on the other hand, is one of my favorites on the album with its distinctly laid back lounge vibe and call-and-response melody. It also works in some lovely Spanish elements, coming off as exceptionally beautiful during the bridge section. You can see a random guy on YouTube performing his version of the song below. Is it just me, or does it kind of sound like Faxanadu?

“Snappy!” is a fitting title for this overwhelmingly upbeat tune that leans more towards blues with its soulful melody, although the occasional rhythmic clapping (not tapping on the guitar) caught me by surprise. Still, it lends the track a playful edge. “[カノコ](#)” gets me into more familiar territory with a sweet pop sound that is reminiscent of his arrangements from Tussie mussie, while “Paradise” takes a similar approach, reminding me of a drastically slower version of “Wind Garden” from Super Mario Galaxy with its “blustery” feel and familiar note progressions. Later, “Believe” plods along without a hurry in the world, letting you soak up its bright melody while “Bond” is one of those tracks that will have you bopping your head along with its catchy melody and perfectly time tapping.

Taking a break, “Sunday’s Beer” stands out for sounding like an actual solo guitar track. Oshio fleshes out so much of his work with complicated melodies, added bass notes, and tapping that it’s hard to remember that this is all being done with a single instrument at times. The minimalistic approach on this track gives it a soothing atmosphere, although the melody is appropriately playful. “Happy News” is equally carefree, progressing with a high-pitched melody that is fitting of the track title. “Earth Angel” takes this minimalistic approach to the max, coming off as meditative with its heavy use of reverb. It certainly has a therapeutic quality about it. On that note, The album closes out with “Coda ~sunset~,” returning to where the album began with dreamy arpeggios and that attempt to lull you to sleep.

And there you have another amazing journey into the world of acoustic guitar from Kotaro Oshio. This is a great album for relaxing on that day off from work, lazily sitting at home. It’s also pretty good at soothing that road rage on the crazy California highways. I also dig the packaging. Lots of blue and green colors contrasts nicely with the white, and the jewel case comes housed in a sturdy cardboard sleeve. --- Jayson Napolitano, originalsoundversion.com

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