

Electronica Masterpieces

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Jean-Michel Jarre: Oxygene Trilogy
Sony, Germany (three-disc CD set)
Catalog # 8985361862

1976 vintage French electronica dusted off and pulled from the cellar:
Uncorking Jean-Michel Jarre's original Oxygene part 1, with newly added parts 2 and 3.

A reissued celebration of a high-water mark for analog synthesizers.

Son of famed film composer Maurice Jarre (academy award winning Doctor Zhivago soundtrack composer), Jean Michel Jarre studied classical music in school and began dabbling fervently in electronic music from the late 1960s. Holed up in his Paris apartment for much of 1976, that fall he unleashed Oxygene, a continuous suite of six movements awash in complex layers of drum computer controlled sequenced analog synth rhythms and arching, swirling cinematic melodies. Moody, elegant and captivating in a delightfully subversive alien vein, it was predictably turned down by a number of record labels as too avant-garde, even for the French. Finally, fellow Frenchman Francis Dreyfus took on the project for his eponymous label and pressed an initial run of 50,000 LPs which sold out surprisingly quickly. You could say the gamble started to pay off.

Now, here we are more than 15 million copies later. The reissue from Sony Germany is a three-disc set encompassing the original 1976 release, remastered from the original analog tapes, as well as parts two and three originally issued in 1996 and 2016, respectively. Although parts two and three show Jarre's steady artistic evolution from the original disc's style and have some arresting moments, they do not compare as a whole to the nuanced warmth of production value and intense creative fluidity -the inspired genius- of the original 1976 release. The sonics of the first disc are as close to the original French LP as any have been on CD. The later discs sound quite good but less flowing and relaxed, having more modern, slicker commercial production values. The difference seems to lie in the recording techniques, as the synthesizers are analog throughout, but only the original work has the magical, atmospheric analog recording stamp.

If you like the hypnotic trip where this music takes you, try exploring his excellent Equinoxe follow-up release from several years later.

