

VARIOUS ARTISTS “Vulpiano Records Ten-Year Anniversary” C45 (Vulpiano Records)



I got the Knight of Chalices, aka the Knight of Cups, right-side up, meaning, in a divinatory way, that I should be on the lookout for offers, opportunities, and invitations. The card was included in my copy of *Vulpiano Records Ten-Year Anniversary*, and every one of its 100-unit run (I got hand-numbered 33) contains a similar card. Which one did you get?

The UK label is home to an array of experimental artists, and the title of this release pretty much says it all. And why wouldn't an artist or label want to celebrate ten years of existence, acknowledging the hard work and creativity and quality output the past decade had to offer? By the time this posts, my site, the Critical Masses, will also be turning ten (although the latter half of that time was spent maintaining a social media presence more than anything, as I wrote for other sites much more than my own), so I get it. It's as good a time as any to take stock.

Vulpiano starts INCREDIBLY strongly with a track by the rightfully beloved Natural Snow Buildings, whose “Charles Thomas Tester” sets the mood with an ambient dream-gaze track enveloping hushed vocals. The duo is rightfully lauded for their restraint and subtle world-building abilities, and they succeed wildly here. From there we're treated to varying degrees of minimal electronics and, gulp, chillwave, the melodies and textures intertwining among artists (Delicasession, Xqui, ish10 yow1r0, Enrico Falbo). There's even some mildly orchestral chamber indie in Anton Rothschild's track “Wednesday,” delightful instrumental folk from Zapa (“Ghosts”), straight-up synthwave from Taker 51 (“Marte”), and the gorgeous lullaby “Memories from a Dead Star” by Osiris Saline.

But my favorite discovery has to be the inclusion of Derek Piotr's “Witness.” Long a Piotr fan, I always find the digital shapeshifter a joy to listen to, no matter what spectrum of electronic music he's tackling at any given time. On “Witness” he channels some of the inspiration he had for *Drono*, his first truly “drone” album (hence the title), but instead of big, lengthy passages he keeps it under three minutes. Still, fragments of tone are sprinkled across the frequency, peppering the second half of the track with these microdisturbances. It's like he's allowing us to reframe what's come before on the comp in a completely different way, offering us a new perspective on how to approach Vulpiano Records and its anniversary collection.

If that's not an invitation to an opportunity, I don't know what is.