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Carolan (Peter Carolan)

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Carolan
Overland
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Peter Carolan is a composer and performer with a long history of working in world, ambient and electronic musics. He was a founding member of Gondwanaland and later a member of Sirocco. Although this retrospective of his work doesn't give dates of compositions, it charts a stylistic progression from static ambient style towards energetic electronic dance music influences. Most of Carolan's compositions are grounded on a drone with layers of drum groove, ostinati patterns and repeated melodic lines. Usually there is a limited harmonic progression idea, such as alternating triads, underlying the music, but Carolan sometimes explores the idea of more complex chromatic chord progressions over a drone note. "Spirit" and "Maleny" are good examples of this. The focus of Carolan's work is exploring the meditative potential of limited compositional means. From this perspective, the standout track for me is "South Seas" a tuned percussion piece with simple layered repetitive melodic ideas based on an A minor pentatonic scale over a D drone. Carolan is also skilled at creating interesting grooves and textural ideas with didjeridu samples. The use of Charlie McMahon didj samples on both "Dragonflies" and "Airwaves" is particularly effective.

Although Carolan's music is, for the most part, gently harmonious, he sometimes ventures into more edgy territory. "Skyscrapers", featuring the very distinctive improvisational skills of electric violist Cleis Pierce, uses dissonant pitch elements and disruptive groove changes to critique the neuroses of contemporary society. Carolyn is not adverse to musical parody. He sends up techno music in "Transformer" by using twelve-eight metre combined with a doof beat, and adds a laughing kookaburra break to the light-hearted "Airwaves". Generally Carolan creates interesting slants on musical genre. For example the application of his layered ostinati ideas onto the reggae grooves of "Zion Suite" shows new textural possibilities for reggae.

The first two tracks of the CD are the least effective in my view. The first, "Floating World" is a long one-chord ambient piece with melodic elements that move far too slowly and without much rhythmic definition. Even though the introduction of a drum groove about five minutes into the track enlivens the stodgy texture a bit, it also seems structurally problematic. To make matters worse, this piece has an unacceptable level of high frequency noise on it. The second track, "Dolphing", contains far too much aimlessly improvised melodic material as well as lashings of overlaid dolphin calls. Neither of these pieces demonstrates the compositional restraint and distinctive textural invention of the some of later tracks. I also thought that the inclusion of the Sirocco piece "Dying of the light" with its overtly folksy style and conventional song structure seemed out of place with the rest of the material on *Overland*.

Generally, however, I found the album an enjoyable and engaging listening experience and recommend it to those who have an interest in the genres it covers.

