

THE STARGAZER'S ASSISTANT FIRE WORSHIPPER

HOM 029

FIRE IS THE TRANSFORMER. Whatever the other ingredients and intentions for magical ceremonies past and present, their nucleus has invariably centred at some stage around this of the four elements – a focus for renewal and a powerful catalyst for new perspectives.

Such is the terrain of the new psychic travelogue from The Stargazer's Assistant. The brainchild of David J. Smith (Guapo/The Holy Family), this project first came into being as a parallel companion to an art installation at the Horse Hospital in London, in which both his surreal sculptures and the attendant music conjured up the untold depths and lost atmospheres of a subterranean world. Since then, it's shifted into a soundworld in which improvisatory extrapolations are alchemically transmuted into a transcendental headspace – a place where the primordial marries the cosmic.

With fellow travellers and seers David Knight (UnicaZürn) and Michael J. York (Coil/The Utopia Strong) joining along the way, and longtime collaborator, engineer and sound-sculptor Antti Uusimaki adding his skill and inspiration, the result has been a sound that's hallucinatory in aspect and cinematic in depth. *Fire Worshipper* is perhaps the most powerful expression yet of this outfit's evocative and metamorphic approach.

What's emerged is a ritualistic record, one in which base ingredients combine and alchemically build to a mesmerising and overwhelming climax. It's a landscape in which some might hear echoes of the wide-eyed ascendancy of Coil, the kaleidoscopic modernism of Nurse With Wound and the spiritual epiphanies of Popol Vuh, yet all amidst incandescent percussive interplay, psych-rock intensity and feral vocal ululations combining and colluding to startling effect.

The internal narrative traverses soundworlds in which synth-driven serenades and radiophonic electronics drift from the melee like alien cartography, and in which diaphanous textures and opiated drones make for a sublime and haunted sonority. The central theme though is a mantric cycle of sound – a repetitive shamanic fervour fit to levitate both speakers and spirit.

Talk of 'imaginary soundtracks' may be the stuff of cliché and truism in the here and now of 2022, yet *Fire Worshipper* is above and beyond the average as such. It's a soundtrack to internal transcendence, and to primal communion. Amidst these fifty minutes of sound, it's an invitation to witness new dimensions rising from the ashes.

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