

CD REVIEW: CHRIS HÜLSBECK - NUMBER NINE

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It's been overdue for a long time. Germany's most popular composer of game soundtracks kept us waiting for ten years until he finally really released his new album. Its name is short and sweet - "Number Nine". It's supposed to go back to the roots. It's leaving the path of bombastic orchestral music, for which Hülsbeck has been known for quite a long while. "Number Nine" is about pure electronic music with catchy melodies. So the question is: Can he maintain the quality of soundtracks he created for the Apidya and Turrigan games?

Hülsbeck's ninth album has been available for some time now. Reading song titles such as "6000 Miles from Home", "Germany calling", "Those were the Days", or "Solitude", you'd think he's been afflicted with some serious homesickness. It makes some sense though as he's been working in the USA since 1998, when he joined game development studio Factor 5 ("Star Wars: Rogue Squadron"). Together with Rudolf Stember he's taking care

of the music and sound effects, mostly for games of the Star Wars lineup. So his song titles kind of make sense. The booklet discloses that he settled down quite well in San Francisco. Probably those melodies are just a memento, which has been recorded in notes and tones. A melancholic homage to his home country?

Anyway, "Number Nine" seems to be some sort of time travel for Chris Hülsbeck. Starting off with his departure from Germany (6000 Miles from Home), the first scenic attractions of America (Endless Dunes), his walk through San Francisco (Lombard Street), to the point of his nightly adventure (North Beach

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Night Life). We accompany him on his explorations and absorb impressions while listening to his melancholic melodies. This relaxed mood draws almost through the whole album. The curiosity for the foreign country is balanced by the melodic music, which appears to be disillusioning. The typical Hülsbeck sound is still highly inspired by Vince di Cola, who has performed the soundtrack for movies such as Transformers and Rocky IV. For-

get about waiting for a climax like with the fast-paced music of Turrigan, which still is remembered for its brilliant melodies. The wait is all in vain. When coming back to Germany becomes a central subject, it sounds as if the game is over, music for an end title instead of an arrangement of fear or uncertainty.



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You have to just start listening and approach it with different expectations. Those who expected a second Turrigan record, or the richness of variety like the soundtrack of Apidya, will be

disappointed. The album is filled with calm and canorous electronic music. Melodies that will stay in your ears, but they fully unfold their potential after you listen to them repeatedly. For instance, "Those Were the Days" is probably the best track of the new album. However, it's only based on Hülsbeck's melodies and has been composed by Jan Zottmann and Fabian del Priore. You'll also absorb tracks like "Remembrance". Its sadness sinks into your heart with its piano-sounds and strings. There are also a bit more uptempo approaches like "The Island", where the musician himself picked up the ukulele to give a real instrument a chance beside the pure electronic sounds. He could not completely deny his game-oriented past. The album contains a true classic with the "Turrican 3 Piano Suite". It appears with a totally different sound arrangement. It has been arranged by nobody lesser than Jonne Valtonen, who is better known as Purple Motion of Future Crew in the demoscene.

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After you've listened to the CD several times, "Number Nine" has its right to exist. At the beginning you won't be overly excited but it develops a strong, melodious power as you go by.

Hülsbeck's ninth is still unmistakably Hülsbeck. More relaxed than before but still with enough homages to his old style, most notable in "Golden Gate" and "Regatta". Only the two tracks featuring vocals ("Tomorrow's Yesterday", "Stay") seem like they are out of place. The first one sounds too much like mainstream Eurodance and it would fit a lot better into the mid '90s. "Stay", on the other hand, is a nice orchestral production, but the voice of Raquel Gozez doesn't fit to the rest of the music.