

Paul Avgerinos

Shanti Noel

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You have to appreciate the beautiful sentiment in the title of Multi-Grammy© Winning artist **Paul Avgerinos'** new album **Shanti Noel**. In it Paul inserts his unique talents into popular traditional western Christmas music adding some eastern ethnic and world vibes to make his music universally appealing. Some of this ambient/New Age music is layered in cheery, rich Indian vocals, which may at first seem off to the western ear, but upon multiple listenings becomes a unique perspective of vivid textures and stylistic sounds. It is like looking at a sepia photograph that suddenly turns into a color image. Miracle!

O Holy Night is a noel of warmth and delight to start off the album. It even has some playful, repetitive elements. It is a bit different for me as I know this song as a much more serious carol, but Avgerinos jubilant take is more than satisfying. Another tune that we hear yearly and without much change is **Silent Night**. Paul's version starts out in a familiar fashion, but then the warbling vocals change the well-known timbre. Still reverent, the new rendition, with a bit of tabla in the background, seems to make the very character of the song more appealing to international audiences. Take that drummer boy.

With a wondrous a capella intro, Paul offers up the old chestnut **God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen**. This song is usually heard created by penny whistle or by grand Siberian orchestras, but with a minimal amount of music, his vocals blend beautifully with each line becoming layer upon layer of sweet harmony. It is as if the song is sung by a group of your friends. Paul tenders one of my favorites called **In the Bleak Midwinter**. This one is a bit different than most renditions. It is a full-on ambient instrumental with a lot of drifting, atmospheric textures that have been slowed to represent an early morning snowfall. You can feel the wind as it shakes the windows. You can see the big, fluffy flakes that cover the earth in a blanket of quietude. And inside, you can hear your heart as it beats slowly, trying to find rhythms in a world of falling random whiteness.

The title tune **Shanti Noel** is another ambient undertaking in which a soft, slow, tender version of Silent Night is lovingly cached inside a sea of flowing sound waves. This one really slows down time as you feel yourself immersed in the music. **Carol of Love**, a song new to me, has a Theremin-like melody that seems ageless. Trembling strings and a subtle piano theme combine in this drifting tune as if the earth turns only for the listener. This is a Christmas carol like no other. Carol of Love became a new favorite. **What Child is This** develops into a smooth, endless environment of rolling vibrations, ebbing and flowing like some living, breathing entity. At almost ten minutes long, you can get lost fairly quickly in this ethereal soundscape. You spirit will thank you for this.

And finally, the best for last. **There is No Rose of Such Virtue** is a resplendent tune of such deep sentiment that I was surprised on the emotional effect it had on me the first time I heard it. And the second time. And the third. It comes from a secret Christian document written on parchment from the 15th century called the *Trinity Carol Roll*. History lesson notwithstanding, Paul's beautiful song is singular in form and melodious in delivery. If ever a voice could weep while singing, this is it. This modern day sacred homage to the Virgin Mary is a quintessential carol in praise of faith and beauty not just in the Christian world, but everywhere. Honestly, I loved it.

I have heard many electronic albums with Christmas Music. This isn't like them. With space and time I would write positively about all 14 distinctive tracks. This is new ground for a New Age Christmas Album. Or maybe it has been done before, but not this well. Avgerinos has imbued his works with a deep sentiment of universal peace while creating music of delicate, subliminal splendor. I thoroughly enjoyed every track and was not hesitant to put the album on REPEAT. Highly listenable. - R J Lannan, ArtisanMusicReviews.com