



AIMA and THE ILLUSION OF SILENCE | Music For Certain Rituals

Review by Tom Plovie  
for "Peek-a-Boo"

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Music and Italy: it's a good marriage. Not only for baroque lovers, but also for those who enjoy neoclassical, folk or dark wave. In addition to well-known bands such as Ataraxia, Camerata Mediolanense or Corde Oblique, I got to know AimA only a year ago. She would have come to Belgium this month (#Trouwfest) but Covid-19 decided otherwise. The organizer refused to make it into an online version and postponed everything to next year. Quite right! Patience pays off and experiencing music behind a screen comes not even close to the real, live thing.

I will not deny it hurts not to see and hear AimA live these days. My reviews of her previous work are a good proof to that. The personal contact - what a lovable and erudite lady she is! - made me look forward to this exciting festival... Fortunately, her new album fell into my lap last week. With the headphones on tight and extra literature about the Orphic Hymns, I was able to immerse myself into "Music for certain rituals", as the work is called.

Before writing about that listening experience, let's talk about the cooperation with Luca Bonandini from 'The Illusion of Silence'. With TIOS, this Italian lad creates "songs about existential questions, light and darkness with a melancholic mood", as he describes himself on his Facebook page. The instruments he plays are quite exotic, based on names such as bowed psaltery and zither (ancient string instruments), santoor (Indian dulcimer) or the m'bira (thumb piano). In addition with piano, keyboards, guitar, percussion, melodica and flute, this multi-instrumentalist has everything to fully support AimA's phenomenal voice.

The central theme of this concept album is the mystery cult of Orphism, with a focus on the Orphic Hymns. This is a collection of 87 religiously Greek poems, dating from the late Hellenic period (second to third century AD). They were recited during mystical rituals in honor of Orpheus. It was an expression of how they were fighting for the survival of the Hellenic past while the new Christian faith was spreading everywhere. Orphism on itself was never institutionalized but was usually practiced in a closed circle of those who had been initiated, the so-called Orphici or Orphikoi.

Orpheus knew the secrets of the underworld. After all, based on his extraordinary singing skills and lyre playing, he was allowed to lead his beloved Eurydice back to the world of the living. After violating the only condition to do so - he was not allowed to look at his lover on the way towards the sunlight - it meant a final farewell for him. His knowledge of the underworld and teachings about afterlife played a major role to the Orphici. In order to have a better life after death, they pursued physical and spiritual purity by living a very ascetic life and being initiated with special knowledge about the afterlife.

The Hymns used for this purpose are dedicated to specific divinities, as well as to the cosmic elements and the incense used during those rites. The album also includes lyrics from gold leaf tablets with Orphic prayers. They were found in the graves of Thrurii and Hipponium. One of them can be seen in the museum of Naples. The purpose of these tablets was to provide the deceased with instructions to cross into afterlife. AimA, a poet herself, adds two poems as well, written from a contemporary point of view.

AimA started working on these Hymns on the album 'Di AimA il Segno' (an earlier

review can be found) with *Insula Lucis*, a collaboration with Nico Guerrero. This ambition can now be finalized with *TIOS*. A first impression makes us realize that this work is best listened to and experienced as a whole. In this way it completely brings the listener into the atmosphere of those rites and occult texts. AimA herself sounds more intertwined with the music than on her other records, which makes the experience more intense and coherent. The rich musical support, packed with lovely little details, creates a real 'grand cru' within the genre. The ritual itself gets all the attention not so the artists themselves, although their skills are very admirable.

The harp, voice and scarce percussion set a nice atmospheric on the opening track "To the Sun". It sounds calm and meandering like the first rays of the early morning sun. On "To the Moon", subtitled: Fumigation from aromatics, the ritual is given more body due to the recitation of AimA. It gets darker and stranger on "To Mars": this sounds like a real sacrificial song in which blood needs to flow to please the deities. Once a sacrifice has been made, the soul can pass to the afterlife on the tones of "To the Graces". The long held low notes and airy voice of AimA are the perfect soundtrack to accompany the lost soul into the world of Hades.

Let's get into the two gold leaf tablets now, with -as starter- "The Pætília Tablet". Steeped in a marching pulse, compelling (echoing) recitatives and a airy voice, this track sounds like a real rite of passage. Opposite song is "The Thuriis Tablet" which has a more intimate character, with bells and percussion, preserving the focus on the ritual atmosphere.

To end we have the poems written by AimA. There is the Latin "Spiritui Carmen" (Ode to the spirit) that is literally introduced with a drum roll. This is a very exalted and highly spiritual song. AimA is said to have the mystic Hildegard von Bingen in mind while writing it. Background vocals are provided by Northgate (aka Evor Ameisie from the previously mentioned band *Camerata Mediolanense*). There's an excerpt of the song set into a video clip based on the painting 'March of the Goths' by Arnold Böcklin. In addition, there is "Ama il tuo sogno se pur ti tormenta" (Love your dream even if it torments you) where AimA sounds best in her mother tongue: whispering the chorus, reciting the verses and being supported by sober percussion and bells. Love it!

I have to say it once more: the Italian AimA, this time in cooperation with *TIOS*, has created another very fine album. It is perfectly built up with a sophisticated eye for detail, including the graphic design of it. In the booklet she thanks the Greek Muses, with which she proves to be in exquisite company. The album is only released in a limited edition of 300 copies. Buy the cd and make yourself one of the initiated Orphikoi or AimA-adepts!

Video and artwork are made by Aimaproject sa ([www.aimaproject.com](http://www.aimaproject.com)).

<https://aimatheillusionofsilence.bandcamp.com>  
<https://www.facebook.com/retortae>

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