



I was completely unaware of this Italian sound artist's work until only recently, but he seems to be having quite a big year, as his duo with Roberto P. Siguera (Luton) released their bleakly lovely debut on Lost Tribe Sound and now there is this leftfield gem of a solo album. While I am sure comparing one underheard artist to another is quite a quixotic endeavor, there have to be some people out there who remember Talvihorros's *Descent into Delta* album and Novellino does something similar here:

A Conscious Effort

feels like a sustained and immersive plunge into the mysteries of the mind. In keeping with the ambition of its apparent conceptual inspirations, the music is a shape-shifting and kaleidoscopic fantasia that seamlessly blurs together roiling drones, viscerally snarling feedback, skipping loop experimentation, and even an occasional eruption of pummeling, slow-motion doom metal. Naturally, I prefer some threads more than others, but the entire album flows together beautifully and evocatively.

[Midira](#)

The opening "Conceptual Experience of the Body" slowly creeps into being like a mysterious fog, as murky drones, shuddering strings, and running water glacially and unexpectedly cohere into a warm cello theme courtesy of guest Alex Vatagin. It is an intriguing and deceptive entry point, blossoming into nakedly lovely chord swells that suggest the start of something epic and Romantic. Instead, the album immediately plunges down a buzzing and roiling rabbit hole of hallucinatory darkness with "False Self Cage" and only sinks deeper into that dark spell from there. "Cage" is one of the more viscerally striking pieces on the album, as its strangled and squealing strings blossom into a heaving and seething sea of stuttering loops, hiss, and shimmering noise. Even at this early point in the album, however, it is quite clear that the boundaries delineating individual pieces are largely irrelevant, as *A Conscious Effort* unfolds like a single, unbroken nightmare that gradually becomes more dense and more real. Each new "song" seamlessly segues into the next and the overall effect is like sinking deeper and deeper into an immersive dreamscape that seethes with vague menace and vibrantly kinetic textures. While there are plenty of striking passages throughout the album, they feel like they either blossom forth from a roiling morass or unexpectedly snap into focus from churning entropy.

Brainwashed - Attilio Novellino, "A Conscious Effort"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Part of the beauty of *A Conscious Effort* lies in how seamlessly Novellino and his bevy of collaborators are able to transform their aesthetic time and time again, like some kind of fluidly shifting and phantasmagoric hydra. It is often easy to spot Novellino's influences, but it is impossible not to be impressed with how masterfully he channels each of them and integrates them all into a coherent whole. In "Boundless Hope, Boundless Illusion," for example, the stuttering warm chords of early Tim Hecker transform into a lush, widescreen crescendo in the vein of Popul Vuh's *Aguirre* soundtrack. That piece is then followed by a grinding, swirling, and throbbing eruption of guitar noise that would make Kevin Shields smile ("The Anatomy of Envy"). Later, Novellino's love of noisy guitars surfaces again in the insistently pulsing "Satan is Always Happy," which marries the roaring unison notes of Sonic Youth or Glenn Branca with obsessively stuttering loops à la classic Oval. The last highlight, "Perceptual Experience of the Body," is a full band effort that does not recall anyone in particular, yet dives wholeheartedly into doom territory as a squall of snarling feedback and grinding noise rolls over the top of clattering tribal toms and sludgy, blown-out bass tones. It is admittedly a bit disorienting to encounter such varied tour of underground subgenres on one album, yet somehow it all works and cumulatively snowballs into a very coherent and satisfying arc.

The album ends on an eerily lovely note, as a simple, blearily wobbling piano melody slowly becomes consumed by a passing cloud of distortion, then re-emerges for a tender and unadorned final coda. Notably, I was initially somewhat exasperated by how little I was able to find out about this album or Novellino in general, as the arc and shifting mood of *A Conscious Effort* feels like

it must mirror something like

The Inferno

or some found diaries from a Victorian mental hospital: this album feels very much like an abstract interpretation of a novel or a Bosch retrospective. In hindsight, however, the matter-of-fact and modest statement "Attilio Novellino is a multi-instrumentalist with a very detailed view of soundscapes" is quite apt in conveying what he does, even if it undersells it quite a bit. The details and the craftsmanship are what elevate this album into something special. Novellino is considerably more than a talented chameleon: there is a larger and deeper vision at work here and Novellino executes it all masterfully, crafting a richly textured, thoroughly absorbing, and strikingly vivid sound world that becomes steadily more compelling as I am drawn further and further into it. Viewed a single piece of music, this album is a legitimate tour de force. If

A Conscious Effort

can be said to have any flaw, it is only that Novellino succeeds a bit too well in creating a dream state, as the shifting and elusive nature of the piece prevents it from leaving a deep mark on my consciousness after the last note fades. It is a hell of a beguiling spell while it lasts though.

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Samples can be found [here](#) .