



Review – 4 1/2 Stars (out of 5)

by Gregory McIntosh

Quick on the heels of his two 2003 releases, both titled *Sisters* (one an LP, one an EP), Paul Brill escaped to his studio and stayed there through the winter of '03/'04 to sculpt *New Pagan Love Song*. By shutting himself in and playing the roles of engineer and producer, it is clear Brill afforded himself, in both time and money saved from camping out without hired guns, the room to experiment, twiddle knobs, and edit sounds together to explore a new direction. Toying with electronics and

sequencing found sounds can be scary ground to tread, especially for an artist unfamiliar with the territory, considering overemphasizing of computerized clicks and whirs for the sake of texture has been a common pitfall for far too many, but Brill carries off his new direction with the presence of mind to keep it fairly subtle and never sacrificed his knack for engaging songwriting in the process. There are some moments later on *New Pagan Love Song* where the pageantry of loops and electronic trials are more upfront, even the main source of propulsion, and credit must be given to Brill for both sequencing the album to ease the listener into the depths of his creativity and for always keeping the songs in the same sharp focus exhibited on his earlier records.

The introduction to Paul Brill's new exploration is immediate. Opening with electric piano, vocals with a hefty serving of reverb/delay, and sparse, percussive electronic squiggles, "Trindade" introduces the intensity and precision of *New Pagan Love Song* and displays the fantastic understanding mixing engineer **Nancy Hess** has for sonic spatial relations. The entire album spins with this lucidity and feels truly three-dimensional, transforming the reality of sound into an inviting, comfortable and intricate museum of sound artifacts. This musical exploration serves also as a parallel for Brill's concept of the lyrical core: A story which spans the entire album via elegant wordplay and wisdom that weaves the tale of a troubled amnesiac coming to terms with the disturbing moral indignities and reckless behavior he does not remember committing, but which have landed him in his current situation. Brill is never heavy-handed while delivering this story, but instead he builds the scenario with indirect subtleties, leaving enough room to incorporate a cover of **the Doors**' "Indian Summer," though taken in the context of Brill's concept, the lyrics present a much darker tone. In every area, *New Pagan Love Song* is an impressive step for Paul Brill. The complex imagery and the breathing melodies that blanket the recording combined with the delicate mingling of acoustic and electronic sounds make *New Pagan Love Song* one of the most compelling and stunning albums released in 2004.