

‘A moving experience, one that does not leave you indifferent.’

If I have to connect music and bicycles, what comes to mind?

At once I think of three examples: Frank Zappa appearing on television in 1963 to play a bicycle; Francesco Baccini singing *Sotto questo sole* in 1990 together with Ladri Di Biciclette; and finally, Kraftwerk’s single *Tour de France*, released in 1983. Perhaps it’s the latter that we can latch onto, to talk about the sound experience proposed by Stubbleman, alias Pascal Gabriel.

The Belgian musician cycled up Mont Ventoux, in the south of France, a summit known as a grueling stage of the Tour de France, with an average gradient of 7.7%. While doing so, he created four modular synthesizer sequences, recording four parameters from his onboard computer during the climb: heart rate, speed, pedal power, and gradient.

These sequences are used to generate patterns, loops, and immersive sonic backdrops, to which Stubbleman adds field recordings and develops melodic and rhythmic textures, spread across the eighteen tracks that make up 1:46:43 – *The Mont Ventoux Trilogy*, released by Crammed Discs.

The aesthetic choices in the composition, and the thematic choices that emerge from the track titles, reveal a strong spiritual component. And as with any valid spiritual (though not religious) experience, everything begins with meditation, with the observation of the surrounding reality. The music attempts to render in sound the landscapes observed by Gabriel during this grueling ride.

Some titles show that, during the editing and conceptualization of the tracks, reflection went far beyond the summit of the Tour de France. I was particularly struck by *The Green Cathedral*. Not knowing what it was, I thought it was literally a vision of a completely green building, a mirage glimpsed on Mont Ventoux, brought on by the athletic effort...

Instead, the *Groene Kathedraal* is a land art work created by Marinus Boezem: 178 Lombardy poplars planted in such a way as to trace the outline of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris! From above, you can see the floor plan of the cathedral. But this green work is in the Netherlands, not near Mont Ventoux. I emphasize this to say that the starting point was the surrounding landscape, where Stubbleman must also have experienced a beautiful solitude (*Alone For Nine Minutes* offers nine minutes of slow, widely spaced chords that convey existential calm within a vast space), but then everything transcended into a meditation on human life in the universe. *On Hallowed Ground* means “On consecrated land”; *The Vanity Of Human Wishes* reminds us, to put it in Branduardi’s words, that all is vanity, and at the end the notes are joined by a violin. Other titles rise even higher: *Into the Ether*, *Lending Splendour*, *Infinite Shimmer*, and even *Rising With The Angels*.

The latter is especially evocative. With its ethereal sounds and its movement across two major chords, it recalls *Pyramids in Slow Motion* by Light Conductor (you can listen to it at the end of the related review here: <http://www.musicmap.it/recdischi/ordinaperr.asp?id=8789>).

At first, one is curious to understand what sounds correspond to the initial sequences (heartbeat, speed, pedal power, and above all, gradient? What do they become musically?). But soon one simply gives in to the overall experience—highly recommended for Brian Eno fans; here and there, in fact, there are echoes of another green world (*Another Green World*). A moving experience, one that does not leave you indifferent.

(Gilberto Ongaro)