

## MUSIC

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# Infernal Agitation

Philastine's Polyglot Brown Sound

by SAM MICKENS

The dictionary definition of "philistine" reads: "A person who is guided by materialism and is usually disdainful of intellectual or artistic values," and while this description assuredly does not describe experimental, globe-suckling producer Filastine, it relates to many of the questions and much of the content his work brings up.

A longtime Seattle resident, Filastine has been a part of the hammering rhythm section of anticapitalist tribal-rock/performance troupe iTchkung!, conceiver and founding member of radical marching band Infernal Noise Brigade, and, most recently, a sweat-inducing club DJ and composer of wildly diverse and drtty laptop music. In short, he has spent his artistic life heretofore straddling the line between unrelentingly political statement and action, and the lost-in-music euphoria of the broadest possible definition of pop music. His new proper debut, *Burn It* (on kindred avant spirit DJ /rupture's UK-based Soot Records), steams with juddering hip-hop/modern R&B rhythms, South American breaks, North African trance, and a grip of vocal and instrumental contributors from every corner of the world.

Recent years have seen an overwhelming influx of Asian and Middle Eastern textures in pop production, with gargantuan hits like "Get Ur Freak On," "Baby Boy," and "Toxic" threading undulating tablas, screeching Bollywood strings, etc. into their black-lit melodrama. While some of *Burn It's* tracks mine these veins in a way just as instantly gratifying and club ready, Filastine's appropriations are more legit. A voracious traveler and student of various global musics, he has studied with Indian tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain, spent weeks at the feet of the Master Musicians of Jajouka, and dug deep into the ancient-to-the-future music of Brazil. Like many great producers, Filastine is also a great instrumentalist, and his years of rhythmic study lend magnificent depth to *Burn It's* varied and intricate programming.

The record's long list of singers, MCs, and musicians brings the songs to endlessly surprising and rich places, as well. Filastine layers artists from distant genres and locales with great architectural sense, and while at times the extremity of the juxtapositions borders on hilarious, the music always feels heroically well designed and strong in conception. On "Palmares," disaffected French oration is overlaid with clouds of gypsy-brass ennui, while party-starter "Judas Goat" lets the *rhaita*, one

of the wailing horns of the Master Musicians, loose over beats that wouldn't be out of place propelling an Aaliyah cut. On some songs, Filastine's constructions are reminiscent of the murky drama of Ninja Tuners like Amon Tobin and DJ Food, and throughout the album the lines between live performed contributions and meticulously contextualized samples is slurred and burnt. The most emotional and fully realized pair of songs come about two-thirds in: "Boca de Ouro" alternates dizzy rhymes about dental work with a fuzzily cinematic chorus, and "Autology" is a slow-burning adaptation of an Indonesian song in which the intoxicatingly mournful singing of Jessika Skeletalia Kenney sails over a bed of screeching bowed bass and quicksand-sinking drum patterns.

Overall, *Burn It* is a stunningly successful integration of varied international musical styles into the polyglot schemes of its maker; way beyond most "electronic world music" in both its conception and execution. Not unlike the Infernal Noise Brigade, Filastine absorbs music from all over the world and bends it (with all due respect) to his own designs. And, like the INB, he veers wildly between pointed polemic discourse and bacchanalian party embrace. *Burn It* contains several brief collage tracks of media snippets and sound bites that illustrate the artist's antiglobalism and anticapitalist beliefs and agenda more expressly than any of the album's proper songs; and overall the work feels like a thrillingly tense interaction between these ideological factors and the gold-toothed, whip-riding luxury of hip-hop culture (which is, of course, also the present dominant global pop culture).

In this way the album has more of a personal stamp and feeling of its creator than a lot of electronic music, as it deals—whether consciously or unconsciously—with these essential imperfections and warring forces in the dude that is Filastine. Ideally, though, the record could be taken as a great statement for the case that party music is the most equalizing and class-unrestrained corner of modern culture—that it is the very lifeblood and right of everyone.

*Burn It (Soot)* is released April 25; more info: [www.filastine.com](http://www.filastine.com).

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