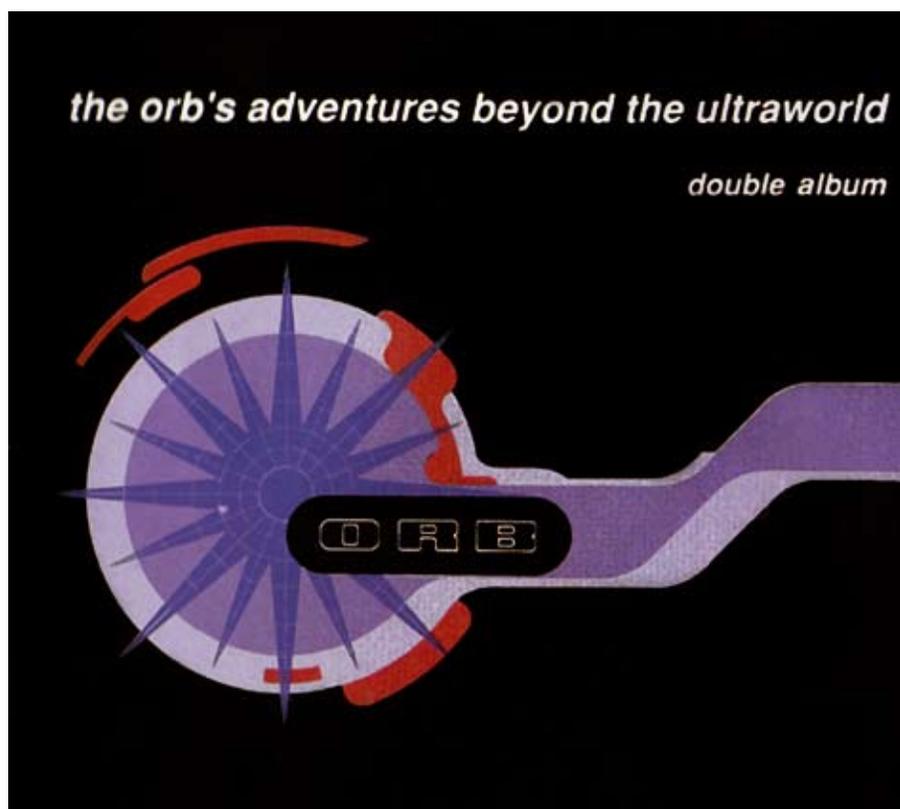


## FLASHBACK

WORDS Orlando Hughes

## THE ORB

The Orb's *Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld*

It wasn't the first time a musician tried to communicate the haunting beauty of space or its unfathomable melancholy, but the Orb's debut album may have been the best — not to mention a pioneering piece of audio-collage. So dim the lights and dream; 40 to 1 it's the same dream your ancestors dreamed on the savanna 30,000 years ago. And when NASA's exploratory spacecraft Voyager narrowly avoids being swallowed by a thousand suns and flumps down in some farmer's field hundreds of billions of miles away, he's going to look up and have that same sensation in whatever passes for a stomach way out there. The Orb invokes the infinite.

This is a rangy album, from upbeat, danceable tracks like "Perpetual Dawn," to gorgeous percussion-free ambient fantasies such as "Star 6 &

7 8 9." It contains a huge number of vocal samples, repetitive strains and extensive use of NASA audio footage: a harvesting of popular culture that drenches listeners with elemental sounds. "Little Fluffy Clouds" achieved astonishing notoriety, was remixed many times and is still the first, often only, Orb tune people will mention. Its originality was striking at the time, and accounts for its continuing appeal in a fertile field.

Orb leader Alex Paterson stands atop a tower of his own devising, roughly termed ambient house. In 1991, *The Orb's Adventures Beyond the Ultraworld* opened the floodgates for the outpouring of chillout music throughout the 1990s, targeting worn-out clubbers unwilling or unable to let go. The grandfather of the new transition genre, Paterson took the urgent strobe and rib-

punching house vibe and, leading the sweating acolytes by the hand, removed the roof from over their heads and showed them the grand scale of the universe (or maybe it just felt like that after the intensity of fierce night's clubbing).

He morphed familiar dance music into something mellow, softer, setting aside the frenzied hyper-sensuality of the rave in favor of a joyous and melancholic downslide into rapture. Tailor-made wind-down music, it eased revelers into their long lonely comedowns. When we were young, we thrilled to the tales of these masters of the laid-back world of legend. It was magical music to us, too, despite our innocent and pure lives. Over the years since, The Orb has reconvened from time to time in a South London basement, lineups shifting but with Paterson remaining as the lynchpin.

*Adventures* takes its time. The longest track is just shy of 20 minutes, and you suspect that the artists would have happily doubled that. An integrated whole, the album should really be considered as a single piece of music. It is almost impossible for your mind not to wander off into other worlds and come back slightly confused, but thoroughly content.

With the Earth spread out below him, Ed White, the first astronaut to perform a space walk, on being told to go back into the spacecraft said "It's the saddest moment of my life." *Adventures* successfully captures this sense of aching sadness which stems from overwhelming beauty.

For me, though, there's a transportation, there's hope, space to wonder. For a short time, we're gurus on the mountain top, tribesmen gazing into the crimson horizon of a dying day, ascetic monks bathing in the reverberations of the canticles, we're Polish peasants silenced by the wall of baroque organ music in a Krakow cathedral, giddy with rapture, soothed by the sheer poignancy of it. Maybe the welling of a tear before we turn away, slowly recalling more practical things. Listen! Dream!