

# Album

# Luomo - Convivial

Label / **Huume Recordings**  
Cat # / HUUME016CD  
Released / October 2008  
Style / House, Techno  
Rating / 1 2 3 4 5



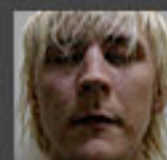
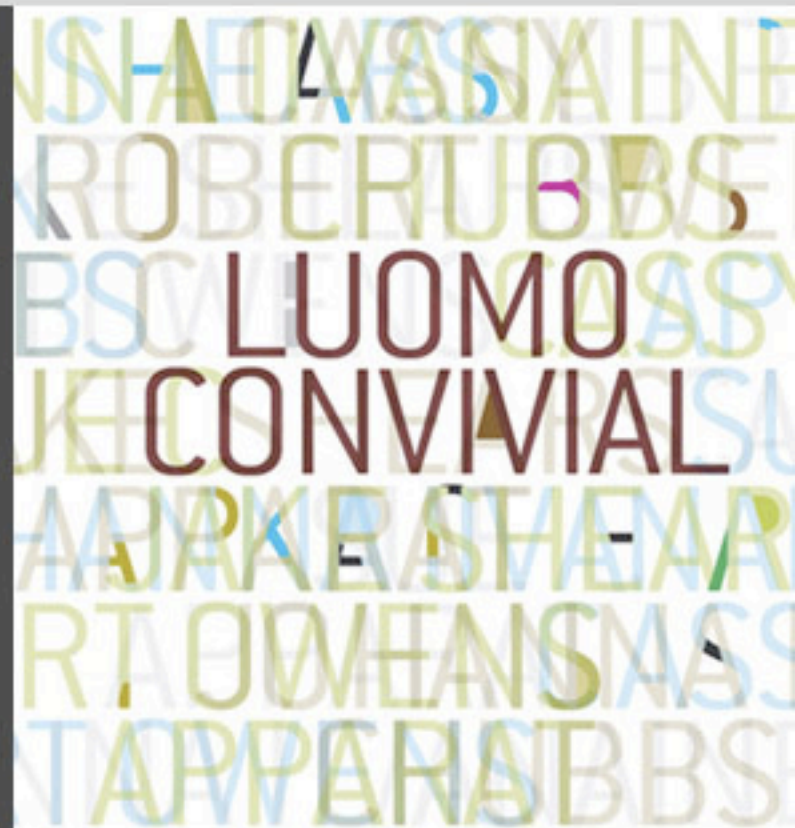
There's no point in expecting Sasu Ripatti to knock us back the way he did in 2000. A rupture like that comes once in a lifetime if you're lucky, and eight years ago Ripatti was lucky as they come. Hearing *Vocalcity*—the debut of Ripatti's house moniker, Luomo—for the first time was a "Eureka!" moment: a merger of deep house's emotional fervor with *Clicks + Cuts*-style methodology. It was an audacious mingling, sounding and feeling wholly European while unmistakably soaked in Jamaican dub and American house. It wasn't unprecedented by any means. But it was so striking and fully formed that it felt like a call to community, and an effective one: a lot of people have found each other through that record.

Ripatti, though, was never satisfied with *Vocalcity*, and three years later unveiled (after many delays) *The Present Lover*, an album so heavily lacquered it made the debut's luster seem modest in comparison. Sometimes this just made things sound like exceptionally frosty darkwave interludes, but it also drove the album's best moments into the sky: the heart-grabbing opening of "So You," the sudden, senses-freezing key change of "What Good," the squinching guitars and head-in-the-clouds male vocal of "The Present Lover," all grounded by basslines as sturdy as oaks. But it wasn't hard to hear inspiration turning to formula on *The Present Lover*, and by the time of 2006's *Paper Tigers*, the project's idea power seemed all but jettisoned. Everything sounded like cardboard, including the emotions.

The major carryover from *Paper Tigers* to *Convivial* is the overall sound. Where the first two had dublike dimension to them, *Paper Tigers* sounded thin and flat, occasionally in an appealingly flexible way, but mostly in a fashion that sucked the mystery out of the mix. All those cut-up phrases by various singers that Ripatti tosses around lost their air of the uncanny; now they were more like jingles. What changes on *Convivial* is that Ripatti sounds surer of himself: instead of relying on stereo space and mixing effects to work his magic, he's relying more on tweaking the groove, on the way his various synth parts underline and move about the rhythms. That's a classic rock band move (think Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*), but developing sound-in-itself is as much the task for techno as the beats are, and it's easy to see *Convivial* as a dividing line: rock fans may end up liking it more than techno fans.

That isn't to say Ripatti hasn't made a dance record. The question may be which kind. *Convivial* seems aimed as much toward a pop audience as was *The Present Lover*, and in a way you can hear this album as that one's analogue: a celebration of accessibility whose tracks start simple and then build on themselves. Take "If I Can't," which features Jake Shears of the Scissor Sisters. It's a clear bid for play in more mainstream and gay clubs where Luomo might not have a following; it isn't quite structured like a pop song but it feels like one anyway. It's almost too sleek for its own good: synths fizzle in spurts like bottle rockets as Shears croons a readymade sing-along ("I don't wanna be, I don't wanna be") that evokes, along with its sprightly track, mid-'80s Prince. (It also made an RA colleague pucker violently.)

But while Luomo albums have always been built on lengthy instrumental stretches, there are some here, such as "Nothing Goes Away" (with Johanna Iivanainen, who with four tracks is the album's vocal workhorse, and Sue Cle), where the synths blat around and the beat shuffles on and the singing comes in Rorschach blots and you just start to wonder why he keeps going, you know? What more is there to prove in this format? The first couple times it felt momentous, even if we were kidding ourselves a little (and we probably were, but only a little). Now it feels like a kind of party trick, and while it isn't a bad one it's become harder to know how to regard it.



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Words / Michaelangelo Matos

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Published / Tue, 28 Oct 2008

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