

Air – Love 2

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You know what brings the new [Air](#) album together? The drums. You read right. Not the beats. The drums. And Joey Waronker is the guy playing them on [Love 2](#), the newest offering from the band.

You probably have heard of Waronker before. Aside from being a major contribution to [Beck's](#) studio sessions and live shows, he's also put in time with [Smashing Pumpkins](#), [Elliot Smith](#) and [R.E.M.](#) among others. He's recently been part of [Air's](#) touring band so it seems natural that he would be the new, specialized, pseudo-secret weapon built on to their new album. And natural it does, indeed, feel as Waronker aids in lifting the band to organic new heights...at least on disc.

Of course, Nicolas Godin and Jean-Benoît Dunckel, the founding backbone of [Air](#), are also doing their part in this regards. There are some nice touches of vibraphone and brass that do well to emphasize the electronics, without feeling like electronics themselves. More importantly, though, is an abundance of rather fluid piano that seems to meander more than its rigid equivalent on their past releases. Throw in some dirty guitar and it becomes well clear that [Air](#) has matured beyond mere programming.

Of course, anyone who knows anything about their live show could argue that this evolution occurred with the band a long time ago. Considering the scope of these live performances, I wouldn't argue with that. Now, however, we are finally privy to witnessing them exercise a few more detailed caveats in the studio. Whereas on prior [Air](#) records, things generally felt compartmentalized and distinct, here we have something that seems to extend out in a multitude of curvy, uneven directions. It almost feels like an album of improvisation. Almost, I say.

They play well beyond the typical [Air](#) fare that we've come to love over the years. They still have they're classic cheese ("Tropical Disease") and it would be a shame if ever they lost that completely. (But they won't because they are French.) Their creepy, lost-in-space kind of stuff is also here ("Do the Joy") but it feels more expansive, particularly because of Waronker and that aforementioned dirty guitar. New to [Air](#) on this go around is the way they seem to touch on some very soulful combinations of sound that seem to resonate similarly to [African-American music of the 60s, 70s and 80s](#). They channel [Prince](#) on "Missing the Light of Day," [The Sugarhill Gang](#) on "Night Hunter" and the [Delfonics](#) on "Sing Sang Sung." Pretty impressive for guys as white as France.

All of this comprehensive writing and arranging, floating effortlessly across the top of Waronker's mellifluous pulse, makes for what may very well be the best offering from [Air](#) yet. Of course, that's always going to be a relatively difficult thing to determine with this band. It's like trying to pick a favorite [Beatles](#) record. You think [Abbey Road](#) is *probably* the best, but how can you really know? The fact of the matter is that their entire catalog is so colorful and unique that making definite choices of preference within it is pretty much moot.

Still though...

Joey Waronker on drums. That's gotta count for a few gold stars at least.