



Xam Deluxe Edition – EP Review

Description

Rapper/songwriter Laliboi (Sipho Nkondlwane) and producer Volume (Saul Nossel) return with the deluxe version of their *Xam EP* featuring remixes from four talented electronic musicians who breathe a more contemporary, alternative sound into the original four tracks.

The original *Xam* found some success as a Bandcamp exclusive. Although a bit disjointed and inconsistent as a full project, the tracks stood out individually and could draw the listener into their little musical universes.

The title track is a powerful and rhythmic acapella performance with strong influence from Isicathamiya and Mbube. In true traditional fashion, there is little instrumentation and most of the music is made from layered vocals and ambient-background noise. Massive props to Loliboi on this one as he delivers a rich vocal performance. Volume does a stellar job in enriching the tones and compiling the parts to make an immersive experience. All the warm, deep voices draw you in and make it feel like it's being performed right in the room around you.

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The next track, titled *Uyaxoka* is a sharp deviation in style and genre. You can hear the worlds of the two artists stylistically collide in this track, which makes it an incredibly interesting listen, especially if you're familiar with Go Barefoot and Radio 123. Most of the instrumentation point strongly to Volume's indie roots. Everything from the bassline, the chorused guitars, to the acoustic drums, sound like it's pulled from a Go Barefoot sound library. That, compiled with a muted trumpeted as heard on Radio 123's *Manga Manga EP* and a medium tempo create a chill and neck-breaking groove. As fantastic as the instrumental is, the overall track is let down by the lead vocals which are mixed so far into the background that they are impossible to distinguish. Although Loliboi is clearly rapping his ass off, this mix makes the vocals sound like they're interfering with the listening experience instead of contributing to it.

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tracklist=false artwork=small track=627796971]

Track three, *Madlamini* is a massive standout on the EP. This acoustic ballad turns the energy back down and demands the listener gets introspective for three and half minutes. Even if you can't speak the language and have no idea what the subject matter is about, Loliboi and Volume still manage to tell a story through their performances alone. The tone of Loliboi's voice is warm and rough in all the right ways, and Volume's wonderfully dynamic acoustic guitar riff creates a rising action, then comes to an intense climax as Loliboi then goes into a soft spoken-word segment. The creative chemistry between Volume and Loliboi shines in this track. They combined their strengths to create an experience that feels personal and authentic.

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The fourth track *Isithubu Asipheli* is this gargantuan ambient-esc, synth-rap piece. The run-time alone will let you know that you're in for a journey. The instrumental features dark droning synths layered over a soft, arpeggiated melody. This is a piece that I feel was meant to be experienced live. Xam's vocals hit hard, and his and rapid-fire spitting just ooze personality. Considering it is seven minutes long, the track manages to maintain attention and immersion throughout the entire runtime. This track may not be for everyone, but it's a personal favorite of mine.

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Now on the remixes:

The MOKJIVA remix of *Xam* takes the vibe in a strikingly contrasting direction than the original. The biggest new contribution to the track is the chords that have been composed by MOKJIVA and performed on a modeled piano. Harmonically, everything works together, however, there is not much else that would bring the listener to return to this track. The piano sounds immensely fabricated, and the half-tempo drum rhythm lacks charm.

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The next remix is done by electronic producer Tzara and adds a completely different, but welcome flavor to *Madlamini*. While the original was a somber acoustic ballad, this version adds lively drums that sound organically funky. It's plain to see that Tzara tried to capture the spirit of the original and add more, as opposed to variate and detract. The emotional vocal performance still does the job, and there's enough variation in the bridge and chorus of the track to keep it engaging.

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The following track, which is the Gene Suit Remix of *Isithubu Asipheli* is this amazing blend of Laliboi's rapid-fire vocals accompanied by this electrifying Jazztronik beat. I love everything about this, from the staccato e-piano to the electrifying drum loop, and the rhythmic bass. It takes a completely different

turn in style and intention from the original, but the execution was absolutely spot on.

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The closing track on this deluxe project is the Vox Potent Remix of *Madlamini*. This is another massive highlight, as it features a half-tempo back-and-forth acidic synths heavily side-chained over a hypnotic drum rhythm. Vox takes more control of the original, using snippets of it for transition and ambiance. The whole experience becomes wonderfully psychedelic, and the subtle nuances in the track will keep me listening and coming back in the future.

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