

Album Review - *Spirit are you here?* by Ange Halliwell (English Version)

I began my first listen of *Spirit, Are You Here?*, the new album by Ange Halliwell, just a few minutes after takeoff on a West Airlines flight leaving Xi Shuang Ban Na, in China's Yunnan province, bound for Chongqing.

I had been waiting for this album with a kind of ravenous impatience, the kind that grows when you've followed an artist for years, when you've watched them evolve, shift, and shed their old skins. I've known the work of Corentin Laborde (Ange Halliwell) for quite some time now; I've witnessed his progression closely enough to speak of it, not with authority, but with affection, maybe even with a touch of critical intimacy. Yet I wouldn't call myself a critic. I'm more of a lover of music, a passionate listener, an enthusiast. All three at once, which places me more in the posture of friendship than of commentary.

Whenever I start an album, I search for meaning in what I hear. If I don't find any, I stay silent. If I do, I write. And the timing this time was almost humorous: I had just done the same with Malibu's latest record, and now I was continuing with Halliwell's. The two artists know each other well, well enough to collaborate, to guest on each other's tracks, to release merch together.

At first, I thought it was just a coincidence that their albums came out so close together, not a continuation. I already knew I would write about Ange Halliwell as soon as he mentioned his new album, not about Malibu. Yet things unfolded in that exact order: I wrote about Malibu first ([review here](#)), and now, I write about Ange Halliwell. In a way, I'm almost grateful for it as I approached them in entirely different conditions.

I listened to Malibu at home, in the comfort and safety of my desk, at the heart of my room. But I listened to *Spirit, Are You Here?* ten thousand feet in the air, my head full of travel memories, somewhere between two flights before returning to France, with that particular strain of departure nostalgia that sharpens the ear, that makes listening more sensitive, more emotional.

On November 10th, as the album's opening tracks unfolded through my headphones, my gaze drifted out the window. Below, the Wu Liang Shan mountains stretched out their endless forests of century-old tea trees. Slowly, a sheet of flat clouds erased that emerald landscape, leaving behind only a plateau of white, silky mist, the perfect space to surrender entirely to sound. And then, at that very moment, coincidence once more, it was Malibu's voice that slipped into the aerial scene I was watching.

A few years ago, in September 2020, the German collective Creamcake quoted [a line I had written about](#) Halliwell's album *The Wheel of Time*. I had said that Ange invited "*the listener on a journey where eternity exists in an instant, where time is glorified by the notes played, and the life restored by the immanent strength of their music.*"

With this new album, Ange Halliwell no longer simply invites. He builds an altar, raises the lamp, and whispers: "*Spirit, are you here?*"

And so, high above the world, ten thousand feet up, I found myself asking the same question: *"Spirit, are you here? And if you are, who are you?"*

I've tried to answer that question, in my own way, through ideas, through a few notes jotted down on my phone that day, an answer born from listening, and from the spirit of the album that came to meet me.



My review of Ange Halliwell's *Spirit, Are You Here?* (2025)

When one begins listening to *Spirit, Are You Here?*, the new self-released album by Ange Halliwell (out November 9, 2025), one does not simply “listen to music.” One enters a séance, a ritual, a fragile equilibrium between the harp and that which resists it, a subtle oscillation between light and the dark matter of a parallel world. In my own felt and therefore subjective interpretation, Halliwell doesn’t merely compose “contemporary harp music.” He reinvents the harp as a messenger-instrument, a divining instrument. The harp becomes an antenna, an entity; what we thought we knew as a familiar instrument transforms under his fingers into a portal to the invisible. The harp seems traversed, almost animistic.

The album opens with “*Intro – Invocation*”: incantatory voices, a sample from *The Others* (2001), the harp transfigured, tension hanging in the air. The gesture is clear: *Spirit, Are You Here?* begins as a question, and quickly becomes an affirmation. Halliwell places us in the position of mediators, not of a beyond that passively awaits contact, but of one he has already summoned. As he put it himself:

“This album is about a ouija séance with friends that goes wrong and plunges us into a world where the veil between the living and the dead no longer exists.”

This shift, from *contact* to *rupture of the veil*, is central. The album doesn't merely allude to the beyond; it brings it forth, dramatizes it, incarnates it. We hear the voices; the harp makes audible the uncertainty of the boundary itself, and the sonic interstices take on bodily form.

The harp's melody, thick with reverb and charged silences, carries its own murmurs, its own voices. A dialogue emerges between two worlds, as if the harp's edge were also the edge between the visible and invisible realms, a crossing where voices meet. And suddenly, a kind of mediumship takes hold, allowing Halliwell to communicate, and by extension, allowing the listener to take part in the séance, to enter the exchange.

It is difficult to say precisely *how* or *where* his music touches. It doesn't strike, it seeps. It infiltrates a space that no word, no image can fully contain. Perhaps this is exactly where Ange Halliwell works: a territory where sound loses its contours, and where the harp becomes what it has always been in mythology, a passage. When, in that first track, he asks “Spirit, are you here?”, we quickly realize the question is addressed not to an external entity, but to the invisible substance of the music itself, or perhaps to something beyond even that.

So who, then, is the spirit? The spirit of his music? The spirit of the world? The spirit of the listener? The doubt is intentional, and the answer each person finds (the one I found, too) structures the entire record.

In Halliwell's hands, the harp is not only a messenger-instrument; it is a totemic instrument. His fingers do not merely “play”, they enact a rite, around and with the instrument. The very movement of his touch, the arabesque, the pull, the plucked string, becomes an incantatory gesture. Sound, after all, is nothing but vibration, yet here, vibration thickens with spiritual intent: the will to summon something other than oneself, or perhaps the self in another form.

It's worth recalling, an anecdote Corentin has mentioned in several interviews¹, that his first encounter with the harp was one of astonishment, almost enchantment. A friend of his parents brought one over and played a few notes. “I was *mesmerized*,” he said². The word suggests not admiration, but possession. It wasn't he who chose the harp, the harp chose him. From that moment on, the story takes on a mythic dimension: the child touches the string, and the instrument seizes him. Since then, the relationship has inverted: he plays, but it is the harp that speaks.

¹ Seen across multiple interviews: *Manifesto 21*, *SICKY*, *Glamcut*.

² Quoted from *La République des Pyrénées*.

One could almost suggest that in *Spirit, Are You Here?*, it is the spirit of the harp that summons Ange Halliwell, not the other way around. The séance turns back on itself: it is the instrument that calls to its player, asking if he is still there, if he still inhabits the body that plucks its strings. Music becomes a loop of invocation: the harp calls the harpist, the harpist calls the harp, and somewhere within that cycle, the listener is caught, an involuntary accomplice to a shared enchantment.

The word *spiritism* is thus not a metaphor. The harp's very sound, its transparency, its long reverb, its breath-like timbre, seems made to materialize absence, the hollow space between

two worlds. The sound wave stretches, evaporates, returns; it breathes with the supernatural respiration of instruments that already contain the void. The harp becomes the body of the invisible, making audible the trace of a breath that cannot be seen but is felt circulating, a silent presence.

Perhaps Halliwell gives us, through the harp's music, a way to see and hear the invisible, not as something outside the world, but as something that has always inhabited it: forgotten spirits, resonant thoughts, embodied forces we no longer take the time to summon or to name. The underside, the reverse, the depth of the visible.

This mystical dimension is not decorative, it structures his compositional act. Halliwell does not compose from the score but from the listening of what escapes him. He improvises, records, then reconstructs from accidents, fragments, resonances. It is a method of sound excavation, unearthing spectres and arranging them into new life. There is something profoundly spiritualist in this very technique: a form of necromantic composition, where every sample, scrape, and silence becomes a remnant of soul gathered within the mix.

What makes Ange Halliwell so singular is that the harp, an instrument historically associated with the angelic, the celestial, with choirs and domes, is here reversed. It turns toward shadow, strangeness, the unexpected. There is something musicological in that inversion: the instrument is no longer a vehicle for pure virtuosity, but a ritual object.

In interviews, Corentin admits he cannot read traditional notation; he learns by ear, improvises, retries, selects. This gesture confirms his non-conventional approach to the harp, an approach akin to what one might call inhabited minimalism, as we hear in the work of ambient harpist Mary Lattimore³: a non-doctrinal minimalism, organic and expressive, built on repeated gestures and subtle micro-variations. Halliwell shares this spirit, yet pulls it toward territories of the uncanny and the spiritual. His harp, as I've said, is messenger, totem, ritual object, the point where the living and the spectral converge.

³ Mentioned aptly by Adélaïde de Cerjat in her 2020 *Manifesto 21* interview with Halliwell.

In track 5, "*Hindsight ft. Js Donny*", the sudden eruption of screamo and abrasive guitar (with Js Donny credited for both guitar and vocals) creates an aesthetic shock, an *effect of rupture*. The piece marks the album's liminal moment, where all distinctions dissolve. When Js Donny's screaming voice and guitar surge forward, it isn't a rupture but a transfiguration: the harp flares, tears, gives birth to its own cry. What we hear is music crossing the threshold of its own transparency. The séance has veered; what was ritualized becomes an incantation out of control, a response from the spirit, a reply from the depths, from the other side.

In this collision of timbres, Halliwell crystallizes the precise moment when the ritual tilts, when one is no longer alive nor dead, neither calm nor violent, but suspended between the two. The harp becomes a bridge; the scream becomes a prayer. Everything mingles within a zone of absolute indeterminacy. *Hindsight* is not merely the album's climax, it is the rift at its heart, the fault line through which the listener, in turn, crosses the veil. Here, beauty is born at the threshold: liminality ceases to be a concept and becomes an experience. Music ceases to be form and becomes passage.

The album's tracklist, twelve pieces (*Intro – Invocation, They Are Coming, Trilogy ft. Malibu, Agnus Dei, Hindsight ft. Js Donny, Mr. Downstairs and the Spooky Dance, Interlude – La Hialaira, Country Boy, The Humming, Spirit Are You Here?, Moonlit Ripples, Outro – Dismissal*)⁴, reads almost like a narrative progression, one that could easily be imagined through the lens of Joseph Campbell's *hero's journey*.

⁴ I wanted to go further into that narrative framework, but after ten failed attempts I kept losing the thread of what I meant to say, so I abandoned it. Still, it's a great book if the topic interests you.

The album also features an array of collaborators: Malibu contributes piano and vocals on tracks 3 and 13 (the latter seemingly vanished at the time of this writing); Jazz Lambaux provides additional production on tracks 4 and 6; Lionel Laborde is credited with the chainsaw sound on track 6; Valentin Laborde plays the hurdy-gurdy on track 7; and on track 11, Schloss Mirabell adds cello and singing saw⁵.

⁵ I could find no information whatsoever on this person.

This instrumental polyphony makes clear that the séance extends far beyond the harp. Musically speaking, Halliwell weaves together not only the expected arpeggio figures of the harp, but also drones, long reverberations, noise elements (chainsaw, musical saw), and rhythmic ruptures. The result recalls certain strains of ambient or post-classical work, yet with a distinctly gothic dramatic twist. Silence plays a vital role: between each note, or rather, within the prolonged resonance of each string, we hear the void, the waiting, the breath, the shadow.

The plucked string on the harp is a paradoxical event. Each note, immediately upon being born, dies within its own halo. It is an audible micro-death. Within the context of *Spirit, Are You Here?*, this ephemeral quality might be understood as a spiritual principle, that music, here, does not celebrate duration but disappearance. Halliwell understands this profoundly: his harp doesn't only sing, it dissolves. And it is within that dissolution that its mystical power resides: the instant when sound becomes disappearance, when the wave becomes absence.

This relationship between music and vanishing extends into the album's structure itself: the first track invokes, the last dismisses. In other words, the circle opens, then closes. It is not a dramatic cycle, but a ritual completed. And within that interval, the ten intermediate "states" separating invocation from release, something has indeed been summoned: perhaps the memory of the dead, perhaps that of the harp, or more likely, the memory of the artist himself, who under the name *Ange* performs his own metamorphosis.

The final track, *Outro – Dismissal*, sounds like the closing of a circle, the end of a vigil, but also the opening of a void. The dismissal does not so much resolve as it returns us to the absence that remains.



Image de Lilian Hardouineau

Let us now recall the other tracks, as one might call forth the spirits of the album.

In what Ange offers, there is, to my mind, a marriage between music of incantation (repetition, voice, transcendence) and music of ritual (silence, noise, interruption). The piece “*Agnus Dei*” (track 4) crystallizes this perfectly: the liturgical myth of the *Agnus Dei*, “Lamb of God”, treated not as a reassuring hymn but as the summoning of a restless spirit. The harp’s gesture becomes a juxtaposition of notes unfolding in a continuous flow rather than a classical melodic motif, an approach reminiscent of Anton Reicha’s instrumental experiments⁶, carrying the listener into a recital where melody itself seems possessed.

⁶ The analogy to Reicha lies mainly in composition, the diversion of classical forms, the transgression of aesthetic boundaries.

In “*Mr. Downstairs and the Spooky Dance*” (track 6), the harp enters with dark, nimble, muffled arpeggios, played at the very edge of silence, like the paw of a black cat brushing the strings rather than striking them. Then, a chainsaw sound (by Lionel Laborde) slices into the piece, the moment where the instrument itself tilts. The title’s “spooky dance” signals a dance of shadows: the harp becomes a tightrope walker on the blade of the saw. Suddenly, thousands of spectral voices seem to join the dance, a phantasmagoric ball. One could hear in this the manifestation of ritual and incantation combined, a bolero of summoned spirits, a hegemony of the uncanny.

Then comes “*Interlude – La Hialaira*” (track 7): hurdy-gurdy and collective voices, almost folkloric, yet we know by this point that the spirit has already been invoked. The juxtaposition of the folk and the horrific reinforces the liminality mentioned earlier (in track 5). It’s a descent into Occitan rusticity, a traditional song that returns the séance to its roots, to the countryside, the old stones, the ancestral spirits. This folkloric touch makes the invocation all the more visceral.

“*Country Boy*” (track 8) opens a moment of unexpected breathing, as if the ritual itself were catching its breath. Lauren Hayet’s drums and soft synth layers install a celestial gentleness, yet tinged with strangeness, like a memory filtered through mist, a rural recollection faintly audible in the opening moments. The harp, still central, becomes a thread of air between sky and soil: it connects the two worlds, that of memory, of the body, and its spirits. It’s a suspended instant, a slow awakening after invocation, lived in a double consciousness, lucid yet still haunted. The drum rolls, measured and solemn, recall triumphal or funerary marches, a step that celebrates nothing, but accompanies: a procession of return to self, a moment of reconnection.

With “*The Humming*”, the motion closes. The music follows a continuous respiration, a white noise enveloping the harp’s arpeggios like fog. In the background, a voice rises and fades, drawing the distance that Halliwell has worked since the beginning, that paradoxical presence made audible through its remoteness. Here, there is only the exhaling sound, the harp slowly falling silent upon a final note, as if the spirit it had summoned were now ascending back to the vaults. One last breath, almost sacred, before the silence of a hand brushing across the strings.

Gradually, we reach the final pieces. The central title, “*Spirit Are You Here?*” (track 10), wipes away the artifice and asks the question again. The harp is bare, the arrangements numerous yet airy, and the music seems to recover a form of joy, with a voice colored, almost folk-like. The bright organ tones give the impression of a return to light, as though the strange had finally receded and space had widened again. So, which spirit, truly, is this track calling upon?

On “*Moonlit Ripples*” (track 11), the harp, cello, and singing saw bring the album to a close on the echo of a lingering presence, an elongated farewell, something or someone reluctant to depart. And at that point, we realize: the spirit is still there. Perhaps it never left.

Among the album’s greatest strengths are its conceptual unity, instrumental richness, and the finely balanced interplay between the traditional and the ritualistic/noise-based. Ange Halliwell has the rare ability to create a sonic atmosphere in which one doesn’t merely “listen,” but inhabits, becomes an actor within presence itself. With *Spirit, Are You Here?*, he deepens the path already begun with *The Wheel of Time* (2020) and *Lullaby for the Dead* (2022): works concerned with time, the spirit of seasons, the memory of places and departed beings. Yet here, he ventures further still, to the point where the veil between worlds tears, and music becomes the very language of the spirits it calls forth.

In this sense, *Spirit, Are You Here?* stands as his boldest work to date. By transforming the harp into both medium and totem, Halliwell poses a vital question to the field of ambient and contemporary experimental music: how can an instrument historically sacred, angelic even, become the agent of a more subversive beyond?

There's a deep irony in the idea that the harp, so often the music of heaven, of light, of golden lyres, is here used to invoke shadow, breath, the invisible. This inversion creates a dialectical tension: the sacred becomes sub-versive, split open from within.

In medieval theology, as I hinted earlier, the harp symbolizes the voice of the angel, the instrument of celestial spheres. But in infernal iconography, think of Bosch, we also find harps twisted, warped, tortured: instruments of damnation through sound. Halliwell positions himself precisely upon this fault line. His music is neither celestial nor damned, but of the in-between, a sonic purgatory. And that purgatory is inhabited. One can still hear the trace of the angel, but corroded, tremulous, humanized. The trace of the spirit, then?

To this, Halliwell adds an almost literary narrative dimension, as he has in his previous albums. The listener is not simply immersed; they become an actor within a séance. In this way, his work borders on what might be called topographical music, music as place, yet here, it is more aptly trans-topographical: the harp draws a map between the visible and the invisible, which one traverses.

Halliwell's own description of his process "*I play the harp, improvise, pick out some interesting parts... then build or rebuild these little pieces into a full track*" is comparable to a surrealist collage, or even to an ethnographic method of found sounds embodied within the harp.

When the harp resounds after the chainsaw's roar, the sonic object ceases to be mere music, it becomes a presence. The saw's chain yields to the arpeggio like a sacrifice offered to silence. The ritual intensifies; it is no longer a lullaby but an incantation. The state it summons is that of the between-world, the liminal threshold itself.

And finally, one must ask: who is the spirit? Is Ange, perhaps, the spirit of his own instrument?



Photo de Naïa Combarry

This question, I think, contains the entire force of the record. The artist set out to question the spirit; yet by the end of the ritual, isn't it he who has become the spirit? The harp, once an external object, has come alive, while his own being has dematerialized into resonance. This is the fundamental inversion of sonic spiritualism: it is not the spirit that returns to the living, but the living who crosses to the other side of sound.

There is something profoundly shamanic in this reversal, akin to those ancient practices where the musician becomes the medium through which vibration passes. The harp itself, in its very anatomy, strings stretched within a wooden frame, a hollow resonant body, vibrations suspended in air, is a possessed organism. It lives by the forces that animate it. But Halliwell inverts that relation: he allows himself to be possessed by what he plays. Hence that impression of an "inverted soul" one perceives in the listening, it is not the artist who produces the music, but the music that produces the artist.

By the end, we no longer know whether the spirit has come, or which one it was. But we feel, undeniably, that contact has occurred. *Spirit, Are You Here?* is not an answer, it is a presence. And the harp, in Ange Halliwell's hands, becomes once more what it was before being domesticated: a door, an antenna raised between the visible and the invisible, between the world of sounds and the world of breaths.

There is something ancient in this modernity, a music that seeks not to please, but to reveal; not to seduce, but to bring forth. The question Halliwell poses with *Spirit, Are You Here?* thus resounds as a prayer to everything within us that remains open to the invisible.

Perhaps the spirit he invokes is not that of the dead, but that of music itself, that fluid, hypnotic force he first encountered as a child, when a family friend played a few notes on a harp by the fireplace, and the entire world seemed, for a moment, to stand still. Since that day, perhaps, Ange Halliwell has not so much played the harp as continued that interrupted séance. And perhaps, too, he calls upon that same invisible moment within each of us, buried deep, still resonating, which has never ceased to be played, but only awaits being recalled, so that we may hear it once more.

Listen to the album here :

<https://angehalliwell.bandcamp.com/album/spirit-are-you-here-2>