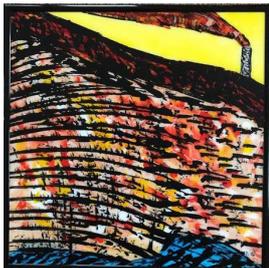


Brainwashed - Jason Wietlispach, "Oak Creek Recordings"

Written by Duncan Edwards

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This confident and well-balanced record by multi-instrumentalist and producer Jason Wietlispach confounded my high expectations. From the intriguing choice of instruments and the way they are played and recorded, to the subtle variety and flow of the music, it is an inspired assemblage of diverse musical elements. Some are finely layered and deliberately structured, others more improvised, but all add to the unfussy atmosphere and clear sense of direction pervading *Oak Creek Recordings*.

Soutrane

As a fully paid-up member of The Cloud Appreciation Society the superb opening track "Cumulus" hooked me immediately. Building slowly with snatches of acoustic guitar, adding other strings, synths and percussion, it pulses into being quite beautifully. It is the longest piece on the album and I did not really want it to end. Lauren Hummert sings a list of cloud types in a similar way to how The Cavaliers once recited names of legendary English cricketers on "It's A Beautiful Game." Alex Stewart's sparse guitar solo is the very definition of unpredictable and even perhaps of post-rock. Similarly Wietlispach's tenor sax is warm and slightly abrasive manner but devoid of any clichéd associations. When instruments drop down in (or entirely out of) the mix, the subsequent dip in intensity suggests patches of clear sky between cloud formations.

A theory exists which states that sound waves never truly fade or disappear but travel through time and space becoming fainter and fainter. Thus, if equipment were invented with sufficient precision and power it would be possible to hear any sound that has ever occurred. We could listen in at The Sermon on the Mount or hear the final words of Admiral Nelson. Such technology is not yet available but this does make me wonder about where inspiration arrives from and what conscious or unconscious references are at play when an artist composes or plays music. The second song, "The Joe Daley Trio," salutes a tenor sax player based in Chicago for four decades (who I am guessing may have taught Wietlispach). Hal Russell and Russell Thorne were the other members of the trio. This is one of several places on the album where the tone and mood are such that I half expected a recognizable figure from history to make an appearance: in this instance Moondog, the Viking of 6th Avenue, improvising with a

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foghorn from the Staten island ferry. Similarly, "Sketch for 24 bass clarinets" achieves a droning quality like the sound of a vacuum cleaner heard several rooms away during a semi-nap on a summer afternoon and I waited in vain for the voice of Ivor Cutler to break in telling some tale about pylons, stones, or life in a scotch sitting room. If only. Both these tracks have an unpolished feel in contrast to "Cumulus" and could easily fit into an earlier musical milieu, for example Matching Mole's first album.

"Improvisation For Two Waterphone players, Vibrationist and Bass Clarinet" has a magnificent sonorous quality. Anyone who has ever felt that Harry Partch's cloud chamber bowls should have sounded better should listen to this piece. At any rate this is how I would have preferred them to sound - more like a massive church bell that has just been released from its cast and is being polished. Two tracks feature Wietlispach alone, including "Silent Rael's Empty Boat" where the combination of Mellotron m400 and bass clarinet throbs and pulses as might a vessel passing through caves or tunnels. I imagined a train more than a boat. There are a lot more instruments and players on "Washington Island" with guitar, singing bowls, modular synth, sound icon, mellotron, bass guitar, bass clarinet, and upright bass for a similar effect of being on a journey, in this case passing through the hiss and purr of a thick mist of pollution.

Possible descriptions for this album might be ambient, experimental, improvisational, modern classical, folk, jazz, post-rock or even world. None really fit the bill, though, since these tracks skirt genre-boundaries and strip individual instruments of cliché. This is refreshing. warm, unsentimental, carefully underdone, spacey and intense music. It is a treat to have a release where the instruments are clearly identified track by track on the cover. Equal detail and care has been taken in producing and recording the music to let them all be heard and breathe in some separation. *Oak Creek Recordings* goes against a few grains and does so very well.

[I listened to the vinyl on a Reloop turn3 turntable, through HE1000 headphones powered by a Fosgate Signature headphone amp at Duet Audio in Bergen.]