



It has been roughly four years since Dunn last surfaced with his sprawling *Kyle Bobby Dunn and the Infinite Sadness*

triple LP and he clearly spent some of that long hiatus reassessing and rebuilding his woozily dreamlike vision: "The Searchers" is likely the single most gorgeous and perfectly distilled piece that he has ever recorded. The unenviable task of trying to follow such a bombshell fell to hapless fellow ambient-minded guitarist Wayne Robert Thomas, who understandably gets eclipsed a bit. Thomas's languorous "Voyevoda" has a quiet beauty of its own, however, making this release a fine introduction to his work. In fact, Thomas's piece would have been perfectly suited for a split release with Dunn at any point in history before now. On this release, however, it is relegated to dessert after the main course, as "The Searchers" is an instant classic.

[Whited Sepulchre](#)

It is always a rough day when I have to begin a review by outing myself as an uncultured simpleton, but I have never actually seen John Ford's *The Searchers*, generally hailed as one of the most enduring masterpieces of American cinema. Dunn, however,

has seen it, as his piece draws its inspiration from the classic western, meditating on how "the imposing expansiveness of the American West worked upon the minds of its inhabitants who fought, lost and did terrible things to each other in their attempt to claim it." Certainly, the collision of John Wayne and sublime contemporary minimalism is an unexpected one, yet I can definitely see how a fairly deep thinker (particularly one of melancholy disposition) would be fascinated by the contrast between the vast, beautiful, and timeless landscapes and the petty, stupid, and cruel events that occurred (and occur) there on the human scale. While the concept is certainly heavy, "The Searchers" is a deceptively simple piece structurally, mingling gently quavering and lush drones with an endlessly repeating pulse of swooning, see-sawing swells. It is an achingly lovely piece from start to finish, as its dreamlike bliss is masterfully deepened and darkened by subtle textural and harmonic hints of anguish and sadness lurking in its depths. I suppose that buried undercurrent of deep existential pain is what makes this such an absolutely transcendent piece: anyone can make music that sounds pretty, but only great art can mingle the sublime with a profound sense of loss to yield something truly and lastingly rapturous. Dunn achieves that rarefied feat with "The Searchers."

Brainwashed - Kyle Bobby Dunn/Wayne Robert Thomas, "The Searchers/Voyevoda"

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Thomas's "Voyevoda" is quite a radical departure from Dunn's piece compositionally, as it unfolds as a gently billowing and shifting haze of warm tones rather than a trancelike repetition of structured loops. While there are occasionally some passing shadows of darker harmonies that appear in its depths, it is a far more pastoral and radiant affair than its processor. It does share a bit of its widescreen grandeur though, evoking the feel of lying on my back in a field, enjoying the shifting play of light as dense clouds slowly roll across the sky. As far as guitar-based ambient goes, Thomas is quite adept at his craft, achieving a calm, quite, and unhurried elegance reminiscent of Stars of the Lid. For my taste, however, "Voyevoda" is a bit too amorphous and edgeless to make a particularly deep impact, though it is not like Thomas took aim for my personal aesthetic sensibility and missed the mark. Rather, he skillfully realized his own vision of dreamlike suspension and tranquility with an enviable lightness of touch and impressive attention to small-scale dynamic shifts. By any measure, "Voyevoda" is a strong piece.

If there is any flaw with this split, it is only that there is a significant gulf in the emotional heft of the two pieces, even if they occupy roughly the same stylistic territory: it metaphorically feels like Dunn brought a goddamn tank to a gunfight. "The Searchers" is truly an artistic breakthrough and culminating achievement for Dunn. With *...and the Infinite Sadness*, he presented a huge volume of similar-sounding material designed to weave an extended and immersive spell. "The Searchers," on the other hand, is an achievement on an entirely different level, as Dunn has crafted a single motif powerful and absorbing enough to be extended into an infinite loop. If this is what happens when Dunn takes four years to release a new album, I am more than happy to wait. Embarrassingly effusive praise of "The Searchers" aside, it must be said that this split is also quite good as a whole, offering an excellent snapshot of the state of solo guitar composition in 2018 (the ambient drone-based variety, anyway): one piece that expertly captures the state of the genre coupled with another that ambitiously strives to transcend it.

Samples:

- [Kyle Bobby Dunn, "The Searchers"](#)
- [Wayne Robert Thomas, "Voyevoda"](#)