

Brainwashed - JH1.FS3, "Trials and Tribulations"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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While Frederikke Hoffmeier is justifiably best-known for her solo Puce Mary project, she has had a hand in quite a few collaborative projects over the years as well (a common trait within the Post Isolation milieu). Most have been one-off events, but this duo with Jesse Sanes (Liebestod/Hoax) has held together long enough to make a second album (or arguably a third, if their earlier Fejhed project counts). I am delighted that it did, as JH1.FS3 have evolved from a solid noise act into something considerably more distinctive and wonderful. In fact, *Trials and Tribulations*

shares a hell of a lot of common ground with last year's brilliant *The Drought*

, though the focus is shifted away from Hoffmeier's confessional-sounding spoken word and more towards an inventive and vibrant onslaught of mangled and haunting textures. It sounds like two dueling noise artists at top of their games, except they are trading imaginative, sharply realized textures rather than escalating ferocity. And it also feels like Hoffmeier has brought the same incredible level of compositional and editing rigor to this album that she brought to her most recent solo work.

The Drought

was one of my favorite albums of 2018 and

Trials and Tribulations

will likely be one of my favorite albums of 2019: it is a bit more seething and understated, but it is every bit as masterfully crafted.

[Dais](#)

For an album recorded by two artists with such a history of extreme music, *Trials and Tribulations* is an unexpectedly slow-burning and nuanced affair. As a result, I was only fully drawn into it after being beguiled by its Puce Mary-esque centerpiece "Every Little Detail." On its surface, the piece is quite a compelling and unnervingly intimate tale of erotic obsession that unfolds within a shifting and evocative miasma of ghostly harmonies and tormented electronics. As I listened to it more and more, however, I began to appreciate its deeper complexity and detail, falling in love with the wobbling and distorted "tuning fork" sounds and the way that the clouds occasionally part to allow some tenderly beautiful harmonies to fleetingly dispel the tense, creepily voyeuristic mood. Also, Sanes and Hoffmeier unleash quite an impressive firestorm of

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strangled, squirming, jabbering, and snarling noise while the rest of the piece calmly and quietly moves forward as a languorous reverie. It is a brilliant balancing act, adding visceral bite to the piece's more melodic and tenderly human core while allowing enough space for each fresh eruption of ferocity to be felt deeply. Naturally, once I became entranced by the sheer depth and craftsmanship of "Every Little Detail," I began to notice and appreciate similar small-scale flashes of inspiration through the rest of the album. In that regard,

Trials and Tribulations

does not fully catch fire until its second half. The pleasures of the first half are a bit more overt and expected, though they are still pleasures. For example, the opening "Far From Spring" is a mournfully heaving and undulating thicket of moaning, sliding, and squealing strings.

Elsewhere, "The Chaos of Illusion" is a wonderfully stark and brooding bit of industrial ambiance, as the duo's overlapping spoken voices murmur over a throbbing and reverberating bed of machine-like clatter and hum.

While it is probably fair to say that "Every Little Detail" is decisively the album's strongest moment, the final four pieces are cumulatively on a similar level, as they add up to quite an impressive hot streak. "At the Bottom of the Night" is the most unexpected and straightforward of the bunch, as it is a gorgeously warm and dreamlike swirl of lush chords and floating vocal melodies without a trace of violence to be found. The following "Pipe Talk" partially returns to more expected industrial fare, but the hollow, churning pulse is interspersed with an innocent-sounding dialogue sample that sounds like two people flirting at a county fair. Elsewhere, "Infinite Emptiness of a Heavy Heart" is an especially strong example of Hoffmeier's genius for making dissonant and ugly experimental music feel perversely melodic and structured, as the howling chaos beneath her voice is held together by a wobbly, lurching bass line and glimmering synth motifs occasionally blossom into welcome splashes of color. The closing "Nice" also simultaneously flirts with and subverts noise convention, as its crackling textures and howls of feedback coexist with a bittersweetly lovely synth melody. Also, the foreground is occasionally overtaken by a drifting recording of Hoffmeier blissfully singing "As Tears Go By" to herself (though not always remembering the lyrics). Such playful touches may not seem all that radical, but they are very effective when wielded wisely. Sanes and Hoffmeier intuitively grasp a crucial truth that eludes a lot of similar artists: catharsis and raw power make a much deeper impact when balanced with some human warmth and vulnerability. Contrast, balance, space, and lightness of touch are all woefully underappreciated elements of great art and all can be found here in the proper amount.

I occasionally see artists from the Posh Isolation scene dismissed as "industrial-lite" (or whatever) and it always makes me want to throttle someone, as Hoffmeier's recent work (along with a couple of earlier Croatian Amor albums) is exactly the sort of thing that rekindles my oft-flagging interest in the noise milieu. I am sure someone will soon arise to prove me wrong, but plenty of noise artists have already taken visceral brute force and editing mastery as far as they can go, so there is no real need to try to replicate those achievements (and plenty of artists are already doing exactly that anyway). No one needs another purist artist dogmatically

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worshipping Whitehouse, Merzbow, or SPK. With albums like *The Drought* and *Trials and Tribulations*

Hoffmeier is not making a more accessible version of a beloved underground subgenre so much as she is injecting it with new vitality by pulling in cool touches from elsewhere and shaping them to fit her needs. As much as I appreciate the scope of her vision, however, the true beauty of Hoffmeier's recent work lies primarily in its execution. The sounds are vivid and given plenty of space to breathe, no ideas ever overstay their welcome, and all of the harmonies and nods to conventional structures converge and shift with fluidity and elegance. There is no point on

Trials and Tribulations

where Sanes and Hoffmeier explicitly betray any of their more wide-ranging influences, nor do the more melodic and song-like elements ever feel forced or unnatural: the pair make incredibly layered and complex soundscapes feel organic and effortless. This is a hell of an headphone album.

Samples can be found [here](#) .