

Brainwashed - Triple Burner

Written by Jon Whitney

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Harris Newman is one of the most diverse guitarists to emerge in the last 10 years and Bruce Cawdron is most notably known as the drummer for Godspeed You Black Emperor. Together they've both played as Esmerine with Beckie Foon of Silver Mt. Zion, and without her, the duo has released their first album as Triple Burner.

[Madrona](#)

Their debut album sounds more like one continuous performance: like a concert in various movements. It starts quiet—very, very quiet—and from the first real full song, “The Wherewithal,” it seems as if this duo is going to head down a more languid Esmerine-like path: with Cawdron bowing the marimba to the serene notes of Newman's guitar. Things are still calm by the start of “Roundabout” but they build in volume, intensity, and pace, with Cawdron fully engaged in the hand and malleted percussion. By the song's end the duo are blazing at a lightning pace, and the energy is maintained more or less throughout the rest of the disc.

I don't know if Bruce is playing the plastic spoons at the beginning of “Bride of Bad Attitude” but this song is a distinct turning point in styles for Harris. Whereas before the guitar playing was more in line with the sort of new folk sounds coming out of people's guitars like James Blackshaw or Ben Chasny, “Bride” looks south of the Mason-Dixon line, with a Kentucky Bluegrass tinge, and by the next song, “Wall Socket Protector,” the train-like snare drumming from Cawdron matches the piercing slide guitar in a very Mississippi Blues manner.

Although the serenity returns for the most of the nearly 14 minute “The Pulse of Parc Ex,” it sounds as if Bruce has built his drum set up, piece by piece, with either cymbals or cymbal-sound producers (you can never tell with this guy). The song naturally progresses between the quiet and more moderately paced playing, never quite getting out of hand, leading naturally into the closer “Regresso,” which echoes “Wall Socket Protector” with a much more complete drumset in the hands of Bruce.

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Newman and Cawdron are excellent players but they clearly work well for each other: Newman's playing is fantastic but a guitarist needs something more to make the sound a little more full without becoming a complete distraction. With the flood of new folksters it's becoming hard to keep up but thankfully Newman doesn't look like he's planning on getting lost in the shuffle. It's a perfect time now to catch up with Esmerine and Newman's solo releases (see [Strange Attractors](#)) and those lucky enough to live in the Northeast US and Canada can catch them on the road in the next few weeks.

samples:

- [Roundabout](#)
- [The Bride of Bad Attitude](#)
- [Wall Socket Protector](#)