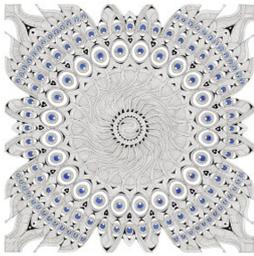


Brainwashed - Dean McPhee, "Fatima's Hand"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 27 September 2015 00:00 - Last Updated Saturday, 03 October 2015 09:30



Dean McPhee has been eerily quiet for the last few years, releasing nothing since his 2011 debut LP (*Son of the Black Peace*) on Blast First Petite. With *Fatima's Hand*, he resurfaces in the familiar environs of Hood Faire, the label he co-runs with Sam McLaughlin and Folklore Tapes' David Orphan. Musically, however, little has changed: McPhee basically picks up right where he left off, quietly and languorously crafting sublime solo electric guitar reveries that sound like absolutely no one else.

Fatima's Hand

is not exactly more of the same though. While McPhee's evolution is unquestionably a slow and nuanced one, his latest work burrows deeper into untraveled terrain as his assimilation of disparate influences such as dub and Moroccan Trance becomes increasingly fluid and seamless.

[Hood Faire](#)

My favorite Dean McPhee piece has long been the title piece from his debut *Brown Bear* EP, as it unexpectedly dissolves into a ghostly afterimage of itself at the halfway point, which then eerily hangs in the air for the rest of the duration. The reason I bring that up is that

Fatima's Hand

opens with a similar, if a bit more subtle, bit of hallucinatory delay magic. Aptly titled, "Smoke and Mirrors" weaves a clean, melancholy melody over a bed of ringing arpeggios and a ghostly haze of blurred and looping repetition. The melody itself is quite nice, but it is the quivering infinity of the hall of mirrors-style feedback loop that elevates the piece into something more moving and transcendent. Of course, McPhee's curse is that such moments of genius are extremely subtle and require some serious patience and attention to fully appreciate. Such traits are in short supply these days, so an album like this is likely to attract a small cult of

Brainwashed - Dean McPhee, "Fatima's Hand"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 27 September 2015 00:00 - Last Updated Saturday, 03 October 2015 09:30

connoisseurs at best. Dean McPhee is an artist who is singularly and unapologetically at odds with the zeitgeist.

That has always been the case with McPhee's work though and, to his credit, he has only doubled-down on his aesthetic and continued to evolve along his lonely path to guitar nirvana.

Fatima's Hand

is essentially Dean McPhee at his most defiantly "Dean McPhee": pure, unhurried, exotic, and artfully tinged with a touch of unreality. At its best, this album is basically an imaginary opium den for the ears, as Eastern modalities gently unfold in a soft-focus haze and time loses all meaning. None of McPhee's melodies ever quite leap out of the stereo to demand my attention, but they are not supposed to. It is far more important that Dean avoided any false or clumsy moves that might disrupt his woozily shimmering spell, which he did beautifully. Dean's greatest artistry lies in how seemingly effortless, egoless, and natural these five pieces feel, like they just flowed out of his guitar without any intended structure or artifice. Of course, creating such an illusion is anything but effortless, which goes a long way towards explaining why Dean McPhee albums are so few and far between.

Aside from "Smoke and Mirrors," the other stand-out piece is the somewhat divergent "Effigy of Clay," in which Dean unexpectedly taps his distortion pedal to unleash a slow-burning solo. While that is a radical move within the context of the rest of the album, it is essentially just another way for McPhee to create a hanging fog of quivering bliss: the solo is more of a gently oscillating drift of sustain and feedback than anything resembling a melody or cascade of notes. It almost feels as though McPhee experiences time on a completely different scale than other humans, albeit in an otherworldly and mesmerizing way rather than a boring way (that is an important distinction). The title track is also quite nice, boasting a more robust pulse and melody than some of the other pieces. Such things are not what I look to McPhee for, but they are certainly welcome when they appear. The real appeal of *Fatima's Hand* lies in the unbroken mood of languid, gently rippling exoticism that McPhee is able to maintain for an entire album. It is admittedly an understated and quiet pleasure, but it is nonetheless a very genuine and singular one.

Samples:

- [Effigy of Clay](#)
- [Fatima's Hand](#)
- [Smoke and Mirrors](#)