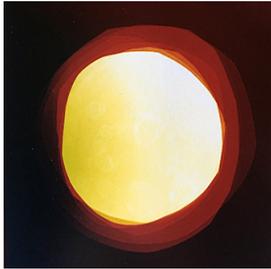


Brainwashed - The Holy Circle

Written by Creag Dunton

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Locrian is still an active band, but vocalist/keyboardist Terence Hannum has added another side project to his roster: The Holy Circle. Featuring his wife Erica Burgner-Hannum on vocals and Nathan Jurgenson (Screen Vinyl Image) on drums, the project could not be more different than his other recent one, the anti-fascist Axebreaker ([recently reviewed](#)). With The Holy Circle the mood is much more peaceful and elegant, with an emphasis on melody and songwriting, but maintaining that experimental edge Hannum is known for.

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First, it cannot be ignored that *The Holy Circle* sounds extremely inspired by The Cure circa 1981 (and a bit of 1982, sans that trio's violence). This is immediately apparent on the opening "Paris": galloping, tom-heavy drumming and lush, yet slightly dissonant string synthesizer arrangements bear a distinct resemblance to the sound of Faith. However, Burgner-Hannum's vocals are significantly different than anything Robert Smith warbled out, so the final product is a different beast entirely, with a heavy sense of melody and just the right amount of edge.

The drumming/synth sound is a consistent thread throughout the album, but it never results in something akin to a tribute act. On "Early Morning," Hannum's synth sits in just the right amount of murk, with Jurgenson's drumming expanding from a metronomic opening into a more complex arrangement, it makes for an excellent balance of pop and experimentation. Similarly diverse is the initially stripped-down "Shut Out," which begins with little more than a pulsating slow synth sequence. Before long the mix is fully fleshed out with drums and vocals, coming together as one of the lushest moments on an album full of them.

At other points on the album, the needle leans more in the pop direction. The more upbeat, multi-tracked vocals of "Hearts Called" give a bit more light to the album. Driven by a more piano-type lead, there are contrasts with a bit of noisy synth, but the strong, snappy snare that kicks in keeps it buoyant. "The Refugee" may be a slow paced song, but the shimmering layers of synthesizers that build up, giving a nice variation to the sound, mixed with Burgner-Hannum's

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extremely expressive and powerful vocal performance result in one of the album's highlights: a sense of grandeur and power unlike any other.

The album's closer, "Basel," ends the album on a similar note to how it began with "Paris": big, booming drums and upfront synthesizer work again make it clear what the primary influences are on The Holy Circle's sound. However, what makes it obviously unique is the shifting structure the trio uses, from an initially stripped down opening into an epic conclusion, it manages to pair regal beauty with a catchy, memorable structure that seems to just tease for future work.

Having only issued a cassette EP and a single song on the 7" preceding *The Holy Circle*, this trio have already solidified themselves as experts in a modern revival of the classic 4AD sound, but bearing that as an influence, rather than an imitation. From Nathan Jurgenson's expressive drumming, to Terence Hannum's melodic, yet occasionally harsh-edged synth work, to Erica Burgner-Hannum's distinctive, beautiful vocals, The Holy Circle is a band strictly of the present day. The perfect balance of the familiar and the fresh, it is an exceptionally captivating album.

samples:

- [Paris](#)
- [The Refugee](#)
- [Basel](#)