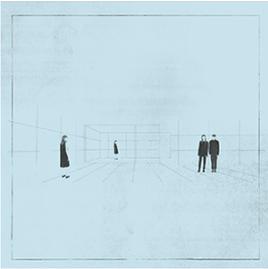


Brainwashed - Marker

Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 22 October 2017 19:07 - Last Updated Sunday, 22 October 2017 21:58



It is hard to not feel twinges of nostalgia on Marker's self-titled debut. The stiff drum machine beats, the lush synthesizers and chorus-heavy guitars call to mind a number of bands without ever actually sounding like them, feeling like a fitting devotion to a style without ever trying to copy its most notable practitioners, resulting in a warm, alluring album that has managed to sneak under the radar this year.

[Medical Records](#)

Ok, admittedly it is a bit hard to ignore the Cocteau Twins vibe throughout: a very similar guitar sound, rigid, programmed rhythms, and largely indecipherable vocals. Although in this case, sole member Mike Wilkinson's words are just often so low in the mix (and bathed in effects) to be perceived almost as just another piece of instrumentation, which works very well within the album's hazy, gauzy atmosphere and reverb-heavy production.

Opener "Identification of a Woman" encompasses this sound very well: echoing synthesizers lead, later matched with chiming guitar and intentionally stiff beats. Wilkinson's vocals are processed and so far off in the mix to sound more like that of a ghost than anything resembling human. The dirgey pace and melodic bass that propel "What You Do To Me" admittedly resemble The Cure's "Faith" more than just a little bit, but goes in a different direction, becoming (surprisingly) even more morose and depressive as the song goes on.

"Nothing New" is another case where the benefit of a strong, melodic bass lead takes the forefront, with the guitar and keyboards fleshing out the echoing mix. The vocals are far off, but the distinct TR-808 beats (idiosyncratic cowbell and all) make it a standout piece. Flipping things around, "The Memory" has Wilkinson emphasizing the guitar; more melodic than textural this time, and letting the bass take a back seat. The arrangement especially builds nicely, coming into dramatic swells for the chorus.

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The vocals are not always so buried, however: on "Now I Know What You Really Think" they are even decipherable at various points, complemented by bigger, heavier rhythms and thick reverb throughout. The same goes for "Pale Silver," where the vocals are more in the foreground, mixed with a bit more distortion on guitar and keyboards, with a nicely chaotic chorus section.

A lot of *Marker* is a gloomy mope (in a good way), but the few times Wilkinson goes in a slightly more upbeat direction, it stands out powerfully. "A Problem With No End" ends up leaning more on the electronics, saturated with a tasteful amount of distortion, with an equal emphasis on the vocals. It is still a bit dour, but its faster tempo makes a significant difference. The same holds true for album closer "Follow It Down": shimmering, unpredictable guitar is balanced out by a more taut rhythm section, and the echoey, expansive vocals ends the album on a more upbeat note.

One shortcoming with Marker's debut is that the atmosphere is almost too strong, making for a record in which songs end up blurring together at times. However, most of the album is strong, making for some very catchy, memorable pieces of gorgeous melodies and rigid rhythms. Considering it is Mike Wilkinson's first album, however, the strong moments distinctly outweigh the lesser ones, resulting in a wonderful record of electronically tinged shoegaze.

samples:

- [Identification of a Woman](#)
- [A Problem With No End](#)
- [Pale Silver](#)