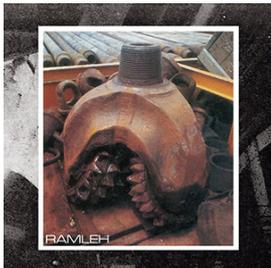


Brainwashed - Ramleh, "The Great Unlearning"

Written by Creag Dunton

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Following their last work, the lengthy two CD *Circular Time*, the double record *The Great Unlearning*

features core Ramleh members Gary Mundy and Anthony Di Franco again staying largely in rock mode, but comparably bringing a bit more of their noise history back into the fray. With an expanded roster of both drummers Stuart Dennison and Martyn Watts, as well as long time collaborator Philip Best and his Consumer Electronics partner Sarah Fröelich, the final product is their most varied, fully realized work to date, blending their guitar focused sounds with the early electronic experimentation from the band's inception.

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Given how much of their work since 1990's *Grudge for Life* (excepting 2009's *Valediction* and *Guidelines*

from 2011) has been guitar-centric, it was not too surprising that most of this set is more in their rock style. Compared to

Circular Time

, however, a bit of the early power electronic days creep in, with the guitar/bass/drum arrangements being seasoned with some harsh electronic and production. These contributions, largely the result of Best and Fröelich's synth contributions, give an edge that separates

The Great Unlearning

from their other guitar material, although the balance leans more into music than noise, unlike the structured noise devastation of something like "Valediction VI."

The side-long length of opener "Futureworld" encapsulates the band's prog and krautrock influences perfectly, with a feel not far removed from their 1995 album *Be Careful What You Wish For*. Leading off from a sustained guitar drone and fuzzed out bassline, cymbals and synths punctuate what is really a pleasant, hypnotic bit of ambient repetition. Guitar and synth shimmer beautifully over the stripped down rhythms before a bit over the halfway mark, where Watts' drums and Mundy's guitar becomes a bit more forceful. It is a glorious transition, and the entirety of the piece may be one of Ramleh's most beautiful works to date.

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For "The Twitch" and "Your Village Has Been Erased", the band locks into their most conventional rock style to date. Both songs recorded as a trio (Dennison/Di Franco/Mundy), the emphasis is on mostly standard production, from the guitar to the drum sounds, with more effects than electronic use. With most of the vocals done with Mundy and Di Franco in unison and with distinct vocal treatment, the overall style is along the lines of the *Switch Hitter/Machines of Infinite Joy* 10' from 2009. Both are great songs, however, I do tend to prefer Ramleh vocals less aggressive and more in Mundy's self-described "wounded elk" style.

This older feel comes through a bit more on the closing "Natural Causes". The vocals may still be double tracked, but as a whole the song is more depressive, and with the fuzzed out bass and guitar, it feels like a perfect throwback to the bleak psychedelia that colored their entire career. "No Music For These Times" also stands strong with its 1970s hard rock tinged sound (replete with cowbell no less!), but the washes of synth and rigid, almost mechanical drumming make it clear that this is Ramleh, and I really enjoyed hearing this less recognized influence on their work to come through.

The more abstract, noisier Ramleh is throughout *The Great Unlearning* as well. "Blood Aurora", with layers of noise synth by Best, Fröelich, and Di Franco cast atop a rudimentary drum machine, puts the emphasis on Mundy's bleak guitar melodies weaved throughout. "Procreation as an Imperialist Act" is similar, with its wet electronics and oddly spacy elements, and the gloomy guitar echoing throughout. These drum machine based compositions are not all that far removed from Di Franco's JFK project, but with the psych elements and Mundy's guitar instead come together as a nod to the early 80s Ramleh sound (albeit with much better production). "Religious Attack" also features the layered vocals, pummeling electronics, and a pounding drum machine, but the final product is one that is more abstract than overly harsh.

Like 2015's *Circular Time*, *The Great Unlearning* is another massive release from Ramleh, though a bit more concise as a double record, rather than a double CD. While *Circular Time*

was definitely a rock album, this one features the band further merging their two styles. On the whole it works as a perfect culmination of the project's sound, from the ultra low fidelity tapes of the early 1980s, into the dense noise rock of the 1990s to the polished production of today. In just short of 80 minutes,

The Great Unlearning

manages to summarize everything that has made Ramleh so brilliant for the past four decades, and hopefully a hint as to what will come next from Mundy and Di Franco in the future.

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samples:

- [Futureworld](#)
- [No Music for These Times](#)
- [Procreation as an Imperialist Act](#)