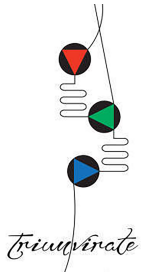


Brainwashed - Carter Tutti Void, "Triumvirate"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 29 September 2019 10:30 - Last Updated Wednesday, 02 October 2019 07:01



This second studio album from the wonderful union of Chris Carter, Cosey Fanni Tutti, and Nik Void is a bittersweet affair, as the trio have announced that it will be their final release. I dearly wish that was not the case, as this beloved project never quite reached its full potential. That said, *Triumvirate* does display some significant evolution since 2015's *f(x)* though, as Chris Carter's grooves have never been more vibrant or dynamically inventive. Characteristically, however, the trio's songwriting efforts essentially begin and end with that achievement, so almost none of these six pieces ever fully transcend the feeling of a jam (though they are certainly tightly edited jams). That incredibly constrained aesthetic continues to frustrate me, as

Triumvirate's narrow focus on repeating that formula with slight variations unavoidably yields diminishing returns regardless of how delightfully explosive and kinetic that formula can be. As such, *Triumvirate* essentially offers a welcome and somewhat more dancefloor-focused repeat of the project's previous pleasures, yet misses the chance to go out with something a bit more memorable and extraordinary.

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For better or worse, it cannot be said that Carter Tutti Void are inconsistent, as the project's fundamental template has not wavered much at all over the course of their eight-year existence.

Much like the live *Transverse* and the studio-recorded *f(x)* before it, *Triumvirate* is another series of Chris Carter grooves embellished by the pedal-stomping, dual-guitar sorcery of Cosey and Void. The tone of the project, however, is not nearly as static: in hindsight,

f(x) now feels like a transitional release in which the clanking and gnarled Gristle grooves of *Transverse*

began to morph into more pulsing and driving fare à la Chris & Cosey/Carter Tutti. With *Triumvirate*

, that transformation is arguably complete, as these six pieces feel like a stripped-down Carter

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Tutti album swirling with echoing and hallucinatory scrapes and moans. Unfortunately, that transition from shambling industrial soundscapes to taut, sensuous synthpop did not come with a corresponding increase in melodic or harmonic content. As such,

Triumvirate

feels like a great Carter Tutti album with a very important element conspicuously absent: there are no chord changes (or even chords) and even the most melodic bass lines remain locked in largely unchanging loops. This feels like pop music, but without any verses, choruses, transitions, or sense of ever building towards anything more—each piece is just a single theme that unfolds for six or seven minutes, then stops. The closest thing to an exception is "T 3.5," which features enough of a structured vocal motif to at least feel like a deconstructed dub-version of something that was once a fully formed song. For the most part, however, Carter Tutti Void feel like a trio who brought all their best ideas to a session, yet discovered that an imaginary fourth member (in charge of bringing all of the crucial melodic framework) had to cancel.

For his part, Chris Carter seems impressively hellbent on overcoming that obstacle almost single-handedly and it is his dexterous beat-juggling that makes *Triumvirate* a compelling listen despite its flaws. In a few cases, his efforts miraculously prove to be enough, as the rhythms in "T 3.2" and "T 3.3" have enough relentless forward momentum and constant dynamic transformation to make me forget that there is not much else happening. The latter is my favorite piece on the album, as Carter deftly adds, subtracts, and alters percussive elements as his throbbing, burbling rhythm barrels relentlessly forward through a maelstrom of groaning metallic and sci-fi-damaged sounds from Tutti and Void. Carter's rhythmic ingenuity goes beyond seamlessly altering cymbal patterns or changing textures though, as the tempo and intensity of the piece organically transform as well, imbuing it with a wonderfully visceral and satisfying arc. The opening "3.2" is a bit less rhythmically nuanced, but it compensates by featuring a burbling sequencer pattern that disappears and reappears throughout its duration. Beyond that, it is also quite a delightfully improbable marriage of stomping, clapping dancefloor thump and spaced-out guitar psychedelia. I am also quite fond of the aforementioned "T 3.5," as it gradually builds from a lurching quasi-industrial crawl to an infectiously fluid and pulsing groove. Moreover, it features some of Void and Tutti's most varied and compelling onslaughts, as the pair unleash a host of strangled bleeps, burned-out riff fragments, shuddering strings, and phantasmal reverberations. I am definitely impressed with the depth and breadth of the sounds those two are able to wrest from their gleefully misused guitars. Not many guitarists could make it through an entire album without running out of interesting scrapes, rattles, and snarls if that was (nearly) the full extent of the palette they allowed themselves.

I should note here that I do genuinely like this album, in case that is not clear from my earlier grumbling. I am always more critical when it comes to artists that I love and watching such artists come maddeningly close to producing a masterpiece is always rough. And I would definitely count *Triumvirate* as an instance of a missed masterpiece, as there were countless times over the course of the album where I was nagged by the thought that a song could be so much better if there was even something as simple as a chord change. Every single performance on this album is great, but all of that effort would have been so much better spent in service of songs with some hooks or any kind of melodic framework at all. Obviously, time was likely a major issue, as all three artists were working on solo projects (among other things),

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but it just seems like such a missed opportunity for the swansong of this great project for this to be yet another set of jams rather than something more substantial. On the bright side, at least they are damn good jams—while the broad strokes definitely feel like variations on a very familiar theme, the trio's attention to detail and small-scale textural and dynamic shifts makes for compelling deep listening. Still, I sincerely hope that this is not actually the last time that this trio surfaces, as this project has produced some of the most vital and inspired work from Chris and Cosey in years. Barring a reunion, I will grudgingly settle for Chris Carter bringing this same level of rhythmic intensity to whatever he does next. In any case, this project is going out with a flawless three-album hot streak of strong releases, even if this one exasperatingly brims with the promise of something even greater.

Samples:

- [T 3.2](#)
- [T 3.3](#)
- [T 3.5](#)