

## Brainwashed - Boduf Songs, "Abyss Versions"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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It has been roughly four years since the last Boduf Songs album (2015's *Stench of Exist*), but Mat Sweet is finally back with his seventh full-length. There are few artists who are as tirelessly focused on exploring a narrow stylistic niche as Sweet, so it was fairly easy to (correctly) predict what A

*byss Versions*

would sound like: hushed vocals, slow-motion arpeggios, seething tension, and quiet intensity. However, the details are always a surprise and I was especially eager to hear this particular release, as its predecessor felt like an inspired creative breakthrough that added a bit more color and rhythmic dynamism to the Boduf Songs' vision. Perversely though,

*Abyss Versions*

does not build upon those particular innovations and instead makes a hard turn in the opposite direction: more understated, more intimate, more austere (though there are a pair stellar exceptions at the end of the album). Despite that turn even deeper inward,

*Abyss Versions*

is yet another characteristically fine album, as Sweet unveils a solid batch of new songs that brood, creep, and smolder in all the right ways.

### [Orindal](#)

I am always fascinated by serious artists who keep returning again and again to roughly the same territory, as it is often rooted in an enigmatic fixation rather than a lack of vision (though there are loads of artists that fall into the latter category). In the case of Boduf Songs, Mat Sweet calls to mind a Nick Drake-esque folkie who is plagued by nightmarish Lovecraftian visions of existential horror rather than depression. It is easy to imagine that Sweet reluctantly closes his eyes every night and plunges into scorched and post-apocalyptic shadow world that he is forever damned to chronicle through Boduf Songs. I am sure that is not the actually case, but I am equally sure that Sweet would keep recording his bleakly haunted songs even if no record labels had any desire to release them. Thankfully, some do (in this case, Orindal) and *Abyss Versions*

brings a fresh batch of hushed and dread-soaked ruminations into the world. It would be a mistake to say that Boduf Songs has not evolved, however, even if the arc has not exactly been a linear one. Every Boduf Songs album is guaranteed to provide some shade of occult-tinged gloom, but the execution can vary quite a bit: some previous albums were centered around

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fingerpicked acoustic guitars and some have sounded heavily influenced by doom metal.

### *Abyss Versions*

lies somewhere in between those two poles, as most of these songs are built from simple drum machine patterns and slow-motion, minor key arpeggios of ringing, sustained notes. There is a lot of compelling activity happening in the shadows though, as Sweet inventively augments his whisper-soft dirges with everything from watery, indistinct piano motifs to more grinding and hallucinatory experimental flourishes. In that regard, Sweet is a tragically underrated artist, as his more outré twists remain true to his understated and elegantly controlled vision and rarely get a chance to be the focal point.

Aside from the throbbing bass, grinding drones, and robotic voice of the instrumental "Behold, I Have Graven Thee," the eight songs of *Abyss Versions* are generally variations of the same simple structure. As such, the degree to which I like a song tends to be intimately intertwined with how compellingly Sweet twists his stark template. That is not a dig, as his core aesthetic is an appealing eerie and melodic one without any added augmentation, but I do prefer the occasions where Sweet attempts to transcend his self-imposed constraints a bit (this project *is*

seven albums deep, after all). "Unseen Forces and How To Use Them" is the strongest example of an archetypal Boduf Songs piece, as a quiet, understated vocal melody unfolds over a languorous web of chiming arpeggios and a popping, clicking drum machine beat that sounds like it may have had a previous life as a sexy R&B slow jam. Eventually, it blossoms into a crescendo of sorts, but it is a tightly controlled catharsis, manifesting as a more fluid groove embellished with murkily brooding synth tones. The opening "Gimme Vortex" gamely manages to pare that formula down even further by excising any attempt at a beat or groove, but the better pieces tend to be the ones that add new elements rather than subtracting familiar ones. Sweet saves those for the end of the album, which culminates in the one-two punch of "Sword Weather" and "In The Glittering Vault, in the Flowery Hiatus."

Both pieces take somewhat similar trajectories, as they open in fairly skeletal fashion and gradually become fleshed-out with subtle psychedelic touches and elegantly nuanced arrangement tweaks before erupting into propulsive grooves. In the case of "Sword Weather," that transformation comes as a bit of a surprise, as it builds to a beautifully melodic and chiming false crescendo before the bottom drops out, the drums kick in, and a smoldering outro coheres. "Glittering Vault," on the other hand, comes right out of the gate with a rolling bass and drum machine groove and then simply becomes an even better one once Sweet sneakily piles on layers of melodic guitars and percussion enhancements.

Notably, both pieces highlight traits that I often take for granted with Boduf Songs: Mat Sweet has unquestionably carved out a distinctive aesthetic and written some excellent songs over the years, which is a great reason to care about his work. On a deeper level, however, he has an almost superhuman lightness of touch and a peerless mastery of the art of the slow burn. By metaphorically painting with a palette that is made up entirely of shades of black, Sweet has created a sensory vacuum where simple splashes of color, texture, or melody can make quite a deep impact on the emotional shading and cumulative power of a piece. Moreover, the degree of patience, control, and unerringly fine judgment on *Abyss Versions* is truly something to behold. While part of me greedily wishes there were a few more songs as wonderful as "Sword

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Weather" and "Glittering Vault," it is clear that Sweet had a very deliberate arc in mind for this album and that it could not have unfolded any other way: the fireworks are wonderful precisely because the build-up to them was so expertly manipulated. Whether or not this Boduf Songs album contains the strongest batch of individual pieces is difficult to say, but it is certainly a strong candidate for the most focused, sharply realized, and complete statement that he has yet released.

Samples can be found [here](#) .