

## Brainwashed - Distance Machine

Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 17 November 2019 10:47 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 November 2019 19:32

---



As Gog, Michael Bjella has developed a rather expansive catalog of bleak, heavy music, largely centered around guitar, noise, and extremely dark moods. On 2015's collaborative record with Robert Skrzyński, *Black Box Recordings*, he shifted his focus to more abstract, noisier fronts. For his debut release as Distance Machine, he has mixed up the plans a bit more. Things are still oppressively dark for the most part but in a subtler, ambient context that reference classic works of the style while still showing Bjella's own spin on it.

### [Cloister Recordings](#)

Throughout this self-titled tape, Bjella chooses to work largely from a palette of sampled strings and bassy electronics, coming across in many ways as a throwback to the early days of dark ambient. Hints of early Lustmord and solo works from Mick Harris and James Plotkin emanate from poorly lit cavernous walls of sound that Bjella is composing from within.

Slow, bowed strings sounds open "The More Severe the Initiation the More Sacred the Dance," solidifying the sound into a very dramatic one. Bjella layers strings on top of one another, building into a dense film score like atmosphere that is a little too commanding to function in that capacity. He uses the full 16+ minute duration to allow the darkness to unfold. Strings are paired with swirling electronics and more abstract, unrecognizable bits that eventually closes on a haunting, ghostly note.

The mood does not stay as monochromatic throughout, however. "Lorri & Tess" features him stripping back some layers of the mix, allowing a bit more room to breathe amidst the heavier tones. Overall though, there is not as much darkness to be had here, with some actual gentle, delicate moments that pass through. By no means is it a relaxed piece of music, but it does show a drifting, less oppressive approach to Bjella's style.

## Brainwashed - Distance Machine

Written by Creaig Dunton

Sunday, 17 November 2019 10:47 - Last Updated Sunday, 24 November 2019 19:32

---

The final piece, "Send Us More Chuck Berry," in some ways is like a hybrid of the two preceding compositions. Throughout a span of 18 minutes he reintroduces the darker tinges, more understated and weaved throughout pleasant building waves of sound. The heavier bits are present, but restrained, and as the sound becomes denser, this gloom becomes more pronounced. He also takes multiple opportunities to pause, and then restart the piece with a slightly altered arrangement. It becomes a repetitive, yet captivating motif throughout.

There are certainly similarities in *Distance Machine* to Michael Bjella's other work under his own name and as Gog, but the shift to dark ambient sounds makes for a distinct identity. The feeling is entirely contemporary, but I certainly felt some influence (direct or indirect) from the short lived isolationism genre in the mid to late 1990s. As a fan of that from its inception, which was during my formative high school years, there was a warm bit of nostalgia for me throughout the bleak layers of sound. Even without my personal bias, however, it is an excellent piece of music from beginning to end.

[Samples Available Here.](#)