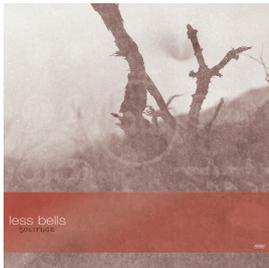


Brainwashed - Less Bells, "Solifuge"

Written by Eve McGivern

Sunday, 02 August 2020 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 02 August 2020 12:45



All music has varying levels of emotional intensity, but some music is made just for this purpose. Hence the debut from Less Bells, the ethereal project of violinist/composer Julie Carpenter. Inspired by the desert sparseness of Joshua Tree, *Solifuge* — a word derived from "Solitude" and "Refuge" — is a lush neoclassical work crafted with a wide array of both electronic and acoustic instruments, resulting in an ambient journey that is unexpectedly not as meditative as the description suggests.

[Kranky](#)

Less can be more, and a weaving of violin, cello, voice and synth (and yes, bells) supply that concept, providing an abundant orchestral soundscape that serves to draw in listeners with subtlety rather than salience. Having scored for a surprising number of TV series and documentaries, Carpenter understands how to best match sound with image to reinforce a story. This background is reinforced on *Solifuge*, a title that also refers to "sun spiders" or "wind scorpions" of the class Arachnida and found mostly in desert climates. The cover sports a photo representing the dryness of such a climate, and is mirrored by song titles such as "Desert" and "Golden Storm." Either interpretation of the album's title may, or may not, be what the artist intended, but the beauty of any good story is in open interpretation by the reader.

When I have taken long drives through the southwestern United States, I find my journey is two-fold. There are times when I don't pay much attention to the landscape, instead viewing it as a seemingly non-stop barren landscape through which to pass through. At other times, I have paused to truly take in the beauty of the teeming, yet often concealed wildlife, a subdued landscape that belies the assortment of wild, untamed flora and fauna within. Such a two-sided analogy is perfect for the sounds within; a complacent and gentle intimacy of that environment is evident about halfway through the album before it takes a wilder turn. Gentle effects make way for unnerving atonal experimentation. The layers of this work make it incredibly suited for

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vinyl.

Carpenter has commented that many of the compositions on *Solifuge* are "inspired by August monsoons rolling in over the mountains, others by clear, starry nights." Her grasp of compositional elements provide a rollercoaster of emotions: a fading cello that leaves a feeling of emptiness ("Desert") contrasted with a mood of joyful wonder ("Golden Storm"). "Milwaukee Protocol" is the longest track on the album, affording it time to build towards a sense of dread and dissonance from serene beginnings, becoming claustrophobic before beckoning a sweet release at the end. The musical journey is controlled with her mastery of composition, like a magician conjuring up an illusionary landscape, leading the traveler to an unknown destination while still allowing space to wander and get lost.

[Samples available here.](#)