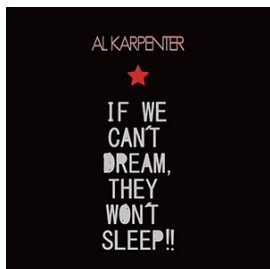


Brainwashed - Al Karpenter, "If We Can't Dream, They Won't Sleep!!"

Written by Creag Dunton

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Al Karpenter's debut album is one of those that feels perfectly aligned with the present day. With performers hailing from the Basque region of Spain, Japan, and Berlin, the entire world's state of disarray is fully represented in the broken electronics, erratic garage rock, and full on unhinged punk styles. It is entirely unpredictable: a massively disparate backing band supporting Karpenter's erratic, rambling vocal style that is a ceaseless mix of frustration, paranoia, and anger, but it all makes sense and—while it may not be a casual experience—it is a gripping one.

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Karpenter and crew: a backing band made up of Bilbao, Spain's preeminent experimenters (Mattin, Joxean Rivas, and María Seco), early Fushitsusha drummer Seijiro Murayama, Lucio Capece, and Chie Mukai waste no time in getting weird. Right from the onset, the opening title song is all massive bass, garage guitars, and erratic drum machine loops. With some shifting tempos and intentionally jarring stop/start moments, there is an endearing, and intentional sloppiness throughout. Later on, the crew transition things to more menacing spaces, with Karpenter's megaphone like vocals and shrill electronics giving a greater heft to the proceedings.

That psychedelic tinged garage punk vibe is probably the most consistent thing on here, and is also prominently featured on "Sing the Battle Hymn!" as well. Fading in with a lofi 60s rock mood, it quickly erupts into full automatic drumming and broken guitar squalls. On "No Face" a similar guitar sound bursts out here and there, but in this case it is more of an added flavoring to dreary improvised percussion and elongated strings by Mukai, making for one of the few meditative moments on this otherwise blasting record.

Other songs on *If We Can't Dream, They Won't Sleep!* lean a bit more into the electronic end of the spectrum. With Karpenter's voice and Mattin's electronics leading the way, the subterranean bass and skittering cymbals, "Pow'r" resembles an extremely bastardized take on

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Miami Bass. That is at least until the jazzy sax of Capece and improvised percussion from Rivas and Murayama shift into focus. Even with Karpenter's spoken word and rigid rhythms, album closer "Riot & Roll!!" is another electronics heavy piece of sputtering rhythms and synths, bass guitar, rigid rhythms, and Karpenter's far off frustrated yelling.

For me, the high water mark of the album is the side one ending "If They Sleep..." The up front drumming and jazz-laden outbursts with Karpenter's bizarre re-interpretation of the Stooges' 1969, lyrically updated for 2019, capture frustration and disgust perfectly. Samples, surging electronics, and a multitude of rhythms intertwine for something that feels simultaneously spontaneous and composed. For its entire shambolic opening, however, the second half makes for an accurate reading of free fusion jazz with just the right amount of noise and absurdity to be had.

As a debut, Al Karpenter's *If We Can't Dream, They Won't Sleep!!* is certainly a difficult one to categorize. At times sounding completely unhinged and random, and at others something that is actually carefully planned and structured, it is challenging to say the least. But regardless, he and his backing band use this to create such an amazing sense of tension, frustration, and confusion that just makes perfect sense. With some pure strain psychedelic guitar workouts and noise outbursts that add a sense of both terror and fun, the album is sprawling and all over the place, yet given how 2020 has been thus far (and is likely to continue), it is the perfect sound for the times.

[Samples Available Here](#)