

IKE

A SECOND

Originally released back in 1982 on Factory America, Ike Yard's debut full-length has been one of those rare records which rightfully lingers in the cultural consciousness as a very cool influence to reference, yet somehow remains perplexingly underheard. That is a damn shame and I hope this latest reissue from Superior Viaduct wakes some more people up to Ike Yard's incredibly forward-thinking moment of white-hot inspiration, as these NYC No Wavers deserve to be every bit as revered as their similarly out-of-step peers Suicide. Granted, Suicide definitely wrote better songs than Ike Yard, but Ike Yard were on an entirely different trip altogether and their aesthetic has aged beautifully in the ensuing four decades. In fact, if some Brooklyn band released this exact album today, I am positive that it would be all over "Best of 2020" lists and it would not be because of retro nostalgia: Ike Yard perfected their strain of tough yet arty minimalism so spectacularly that it still feels cutting edge today. Obviously, shades of this foursome's stark, bass-driven grooves can be found all over the darker, heavier side of contemporary techno, but that is not why this album deserves to be heard: it deserves to be heard because it still holds up as an absolutely killer album today.

[Superior Viaduct](#)

The first time I heard this album (alternately known as *A Fact A Second* due to the cryptic cover art), I had a very hard time wrapping my head around the fact that Ike Yard was a full band rather than just one or two guys with some pedals, a drum machine, and a primitive sampler. Part of that is obviously due to the aggressively minimal nature of the music, as these six songs are so single-mindedly focused on the groove that everything else seems like an afterthought (I like to imagine that guitarist Michael Diekmann spent the bulk of his time during shows expectantly waiting to contribute a single string scrape or similarly non-musical bit of texture). Beyond that, however, it simply seems wildly improbable that four separate people could have possibly been on this same futuristic wavelength at once. It seems safe to say that Ike Yard were probably influenced by their contemporaries in the No Wave milieu and pioneering industrialists like Cabaret Voltaire, but those other artists feel self-consciously experimental in a way that Ike Yard does not: this album feels like an almost supernaturally assured artistic

Brainwashed - Ike Yard

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 16 August 2020 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 August 2020 07:12

statement by a band that knew exactly what they wanted to do and executed that vision with surgical precision. These songs all feel chiseled to diamond-like perfection and deftly avoid anything that might feel dated, clumsy, derivative, or indulgent by today's standards (or any standard, really). Viewed uncharitably, one could argue that Ike Yard achieved that feat by simply excising just about everything that makes music feel like music. In particular, vocalist Stuart Argabright seems especially devoted to that approach, as his rare contributions consist entirely of a few lines of cryptic, deadpan spoken word. Somehow, however, that all suits the band's weirdly lurching and blurring robot funk perfectly. While other bands on Factory were awkwardly figuring out how white people could be plausibly funky, Ike Yard were already imagining what dance music might sound like in an entirely post-human world (and nailing it).

The centerpiece of the album (and probably of Ike Yard's career as well) is the tensely simmering second piece, "Loss." Over a stumbling off-kilter beat, percussive-sounding guitar harmonics, and a dubwise bass line, Argabright blankly delivers a monologue that fades in and out of focus amidst fitful snare eruptions and chopped, sputtering squalls of sampled voices. I am especially fond of the chopped voices, as it sounds like a strangled radio transmission is constantly threatening to overpower the song, yet keeps disintegrating before it can succeed. The other five songs could have probably benefited from a similar twist, but in general the grooves are muscular and alien enough to hold up without any kind of leftfield stab at a "hook." The opening "M. Kurtz" fares especially well in that regard, as its shambling rhythm feels simultaneously ridiculous and brilliant, as it calls to mind a cartoon tuba jamming with a broken, disjointed drum machine pattern. Despite that unpromising foundation, the addition of Argabright's mumbled vocals and Kenny Compton's insistent bass line somehow transform those seemingly disparate parts into something that seems weirdly cool and purposeful. My other favorite piece on the album is "Kino," but the only real difference between the better pieces on the album and the more forgettable ones is merely the degree to which the band flesh out their skittering and stumbling grooves. "Kino" features some moaning, atmospheric guitars; other songs are essentially just bass, drum machine, and mumbled vocals. To Ike Yard's eternal credit, however, that machine-like repetition coupled with splashes of snare drum violence is usually enough to make a compelling song, even if the band seemed to have an almost willfully self-sabotaging approach to rhythm: aside from "NCR," every single song feels like a deliberate attempt to conjure up a groove so erratic, bizarre, and awkward that non-spasmodic dancing is nearly impossible.

Lamentably, Ike Yard broke up in 1983 before they got a chance to record a second album, which actually seems entirely appropriate to me: after distilling post-punk to its most muscular and stark extreme, it is hard to imagine where they could have gone next. Also of note: being this crazily far ahead of the curve tends to be financially ruinous, though the band must have had a significant enough following to attract the attention of Factory (Ike Yard was their first American signing). There is a happy ending though, as more than two decades later, three-fourths of the original band reformed for a considerably more prolific second act (including several remix EPs featuring fans like Regis and Tropic of Cancer). Nevertheless, this original full-length still calls to mind the famous Brian Eno quote about *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (not many people bought that album, but the few who did all started bands of their own). It also improbably reminds me of a review I once read of Prong's impressively ugly *Beg to Differ*

Brainwashed - Ike Yard

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 16 August 2020 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 August 2020 07:12

that proclaimed that it sounded like a scarier version of Metallica that got into beer bottle-eating contests with skinheads. Thankfully, Ike Yard sounds nothing like any era of Metallica, but this album begs a similar analogy: this is what Jamaican dub would probably sound like if it had emerged from a bombed-out, post-apocalyptic squat in Berlin rather than sunny Kingston. It may not be a perfect album, as its hookless monochromatic minimalism inherently makes all the songs sound similar to one another, but none of that matters because the aesthetic itself is so singular and wonderful. Few albums deserve a high-profile reissue and a chance at a second life as much as this one.

Samples can be found [here](#) .