

Brainwashed - Matmos, "For Alan Turing"

Written by Jonathan Dean

Sunday, 24 September 2006 16:00 - Last Updated Friday, 08 December 2006 19:33



This tour-only 3" CD is a postscript to Matmos' recent *The Rose Has Teeth in the Mouth of the Beast*, a masterpiece of audio portraiture that paid homage to queer heroes. This three-song EP continues the theme, taking as its subject the mathematician, philosopher, cryptographer and homosexual martyr Alan Turing, and featuring the vocals of David Tibet as well as sounds sourced from a functioning Enigma Machine.

[Vague Terrain](#)

It's easy to see why Matmos would be interested in the life and work of Alan Turing; as academics and electronic musicians, the duo utilizes the kind of "thinking machines" that Turing first conceptualized. Turing was a codebreaker working for British intelligence during World War II, and was instrumental in breaking the coded messages created by the Nazi Enigma Machine. Matmos were allowed access to a working prototype of the Enigma Machine by the mysterious Cryptography Research corporation, which they recorded and use as raw sound material for the first track on the EP. A further layer of coded signification is contributed by a complex piano melody, a hyperkinetic fugue that travels frenetically across the ivories, encrypting itself into a dizzying chaos that trips along with the clicks, whirrs, ratchets and clinks of the Enigma Machine. Matmos seamlessly organize all of this encrypted chaos into the sort of crunchy, textured techno for which they are known. Although the methods used to produce the track are appropriate to the subject, Matmos also achieve the impressive feat of making the music seem as if it unstuck in time, curiously reminiscent of the WW2-era atmosphere and aesthetics in its own austere, nostalgic way.

The second track features David Tibet of Current 93 reading aloud from some Turing's more mystical-sounding writing ("The universe is the interior of the light cone of creation" and "The exclusion principle is laid down purely for the benefit of the electrons themselves, who might be corrupted and become charges or demons if allowed to associate too freely"). This seems an especially appropriate job for Tibet, as he is clearly interested in that ambiguous middle space between mathematics and religious philosophy, as evidenced by

Brainwashed - Matmos, "For Alan Turing"

Written by Jonathan Dean

Sunday, 24 September 2006 16:00 - Last Updated Friday, 08 December 2006 19:33

his extensive use of Pascalian gnosticism on Current 93's *All The Pretty Little Horses*. Tibet repeats Turing's sayings mantra-like, allowing their mysterious beauty to set in over time, as Matmos compound each syllable with layers of digital and analog arpeggiations, against a warm backbone of swelling organs before the track begins to dissect, mutate and recombine Tibet's vocalizations into an enigmatic tangle that even Turing might have had a hard time decrypting. The effect is chilling and icily beautiful, a welcome respite from the mannered acoustic backdrops that we've been hearing Tibet's vocals accompanied by for more than a decade. In fact, this sounds like what I'd have liked to hear from a new Current 93 album, rather than the fascinating but turgid mess of

Black Ships Ate the Sky

. Reportedly, Matmos are remixing a track from

Black Ships

, and I'm very interested in hearing the results.

The EP ends on a lilting note of melancholy with Mellow Candle's Clodagh Simonds (of recent involvements with Fovea Hex and Current 93) tackling the well-known traditional Irish folk song "Molly Malone," the sad tale of a beautiful fishmonger. Matmos utilize the refrain of the song ("Cockles and mussels, alive, alive oh") as a cue for object sampling, utilizing sounds made from shellfish in the mix on this sublimely beautiful track, made only more ravishing by the doubling and tripling of Simonds' vocal at unexpected intervals. Haunting counter-melodies are created between the vocal layering and the funereal strings that form the melodic bedrock of the song. The significance of this song is given in the liner notes of the EP: "Faced with an imminent trial on charges of gross indecency, Alan Turing insisted upon playing [the song] on the violin for the police officers who came to his home to take his statement." The track is a lovely and elegiac way to commemorate the genius' untimely death by his own hands, forced by the government into unorthodox hormone treatment in an ill-conceived attempt to "cure" his homosexuality.

This EP is another winner by Matmos, who should really think about packaging these three tracks along with the Japan-only track from *The Rose Has Teeth* ("Kendo for Yukio Mishima") for general consumption by the public, and not just those lucky enough to get a copy at their recent shows.

samples:

- [Enigma Machine for Alan Turing](#)
- [Messages from the Unseen World](#) (Featuring David Tibet)
- [Cockles and Mussels](#) (Featuring Clodagh Simonds)