

## Brainwashed - Jérôme Chassagnard, "(f)light"

Written by Simon Marshall-Jones

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Jérôme Chassagnard is one half of French electronic/ambient act Ab Ovo, along with Régis Baillet. As a solo act, though, he has released two previous albums on Ant-Zen, 2005's *Empreintes* and

last year's

*Mouvements*

. His latest,

*(f)light*

, highlights his eclectic mix of styles and influences, from ambient to electronica, and from hip-hop to drum n bass. This third album, this time on the German Hymen label, underscores Chassagnard's ability to blend all these disparate styles together into one seamless and effortlessly soaring whole.

### [Hymen](#)

Bringing together such a wide range of influences successfully requires some doing, however, the Frenchman possesses a sure and deft touch. There's nothing obtrusive on show, everything just flows, naturally, silkily and smoothly. Each of the pieces grows organically, as if just a simple seed has been nourished and left to see what it eventually produces. In fact, there is more than a trace of The Future Sound of London's *Lifeforms* album about it (as well as FSOL's side-project Amorphous Androgynous), simply in terms of how musical ideas are explored, and how they spark off yet new ones. From all these ideas come new forms, each eager to show themselves off. A good example of this approach is track three, "Circle of Memories." Starting off in a quite abstract ambient manner, the piece segues into flowing keyboard chords, before a simple rhythmic figure coalesces to form a backbone and glue the elements together. The tune keeps on building, the percussion assuming more of a solid skeleton on which to hang things, adding strength and structure along the way. Despite being tinged with a slight melancholic sadness, "Circle of Memories" is nevertheless uplifting, projecting a distinct sense of hope.

Another good example comes a few tracks later in the form of "Alternate Reality." Yet again, this particular piece demonstrates the power of constructing an apparently complexly-layered track from simple beginnings. Once more rhythm emerges from abstraction, on which is laid a simple but memorable keyboard riff. The track takes off when the beat hits its stride, imparting a similar feeling to the one elicited by "Circle of Memories"—the difference here though is that this one lifts off into the stratosphere. I distinctly got the feeling that I was wafting on breezes and floating in a clear azure sky listening to this one. Uplifting indeed.

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"Snowflake" creates a different mood altogether, the abstractly ambient staying for most of its duration. Furthermore, this is the polar opposite of uplifting, with an unsettling frisson thrilling through it. Ice-cold keyboard sweeps dance around staccato icicle guitar, while distant choir-like voices peek through the glaciation. These voices float in and out of the consciousness, appearing like the occasional glimpse of something welcoming through the sheeting blizzard. Similar feelings of psychic disturbance prevail in "Resonance," but here the song is injected with a rhythmic urgency helping to propel it along. Percussive and vocal breaks here and there highlight the feeling of psychological fracture-lines opening up, adding significantly to the discomfort.

My personal fave track is the one that closes the album, simply called "Light." Indeed this is a prismatic gem of a piece, the synthesized bell-tones raining cascade-like around one's head and ears. The best way I can describe it is like a frozen garden emerging butterfly-like from its chrysalis of ice. The tiny crackles and cracks as the ice melts are perfectly encapsulated in those ringing tones. After the various moods on display on the rest of the album, this closes proceedings down nicely, and is an excellently judged piece, simultaneously being a beautiful way to end the album as well as leaving us on an uplifting note.

This album is quite astonishing in its breadth, in both style and mood. Chassagnard is something of a sonic alchemist, taking an element from here and an element from there, and completely transforming them in the process. The results are ten nuggets of glittering gold, whose multi-faceted surfaces and depths sparkle and reflect brilliantly in the light. I just let myself sit back and bathe in the warmth of that reflected light.

samples

- [Circle of Memories](#)
- [Snowflake](#)
- [Light](#)