

## Brainwashed - Ponytail, "Themes For Cops"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Samuli Tanner has a suspicious and inscrutable way of doing things. Most notably, the band name, album title, and cover art here are all suggestive of ugly, misanthropic scuzz rock (definitely not oddball hip-hop influenced experimentalism from Finland). Then the album opens fairly straightforwardly (for about 30 seconds anyway), before quickly plunging down a rabbit hole of splintered surrealism. Also, this album is only one very long track, unless you buy it from him on tour, in which case it is 27 extremely short ones. Many of the tracks have police-themed titles, but I'll be damned if I can decipher any sort of thematic relation to the music. I am decidedly flummoxed.

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Ponytail is the solo project of one-half of Helsinki dubstep team Clouds (I thought I had never heard of them, but then I recognized their track from the most recent DJ/Rupture album). Clouds are cleanly produced, structured, melodic, and heavily indebted to Jamaican music. Ponytail is conspicuously none of those things. This is likely due to Tanner's singularly eclectic inspirations: Charles Mingus, punk, and proto-industrial provocateur Pekka Airaksinen. And, of course, Finnish agrarian folk music (which Tanner's family has been involved with for many generations). Being a particularly ingenious and creative fellow, Tanner does not overtly borrow anything from the aforementioned artists; he merely plunders their aesthetic philosophies and applies them to his own ideas.

*Themes For Cops* is a pleasing and compellingly strange album, but it is very difficult to describe a constantly shifting and fragmented 34-minute song. The only consistency is deep bass and dubstep/downtempo hip-hop drums. Only the fact that they are there, of course. The actual rhythm/bass line tends to segue into something new every minute or so. Sometimes it is danceable and locks into extremely ephemeral groove, but more often it sounds like I am listening to a dubstep tape that has been through a washing machine. Fuzziness, odd wavering, warping, and off-kilter lurching abounds. Not in a bad way though- more in a Boards of Canada/William Basinski kind of way.

Tanner's musical palette is, to make a gross understatement, rather varied. Electronic glitchy coexists with violins, accordions, lounge-y farfisa, neo-classical piano, and pop song snippets. Making experimental music with a wide array of source material is not especially unique at this point, but Tanner does it in a particularly unclumsy fashion and largely avoids self-indulgence (and conclusively avoids pandering to listeners). As alluded to earlier, nothing sticks around long enough to achieve any sort of lasting beauty or funkiness—*Themes* is more like fever dream in which a torrent of striking moments (ranging from sublime to crazy to unsettling) deluges the listener. It is unlikely that anyone will ever say that this is their favorite album or anything, but Ponytail certainly will elicit much more inner commentary like "Hmm. that sounds cool.", "Was that snippet from a freaking Ladyhawke song?!?!", or

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"Woah- what the hell is going on here?!" than his contemporaries.

*Themes For Cops* compellingly makes the argument that you can get away with just about anything if you throw in some drums. Many of the ruined and corrupted sounds here would be perfectly at home on a much more listener-hostile and uncompromisingly harsh album, but are rendered strangely palatable in this context. Tanner has made a surprising and engrossing album- I vastly prefer this to his parent band.

Samples:

- [Excerpt One](#)
- [Excerpt Two](#)
- [Excerpt Three](#)