

Brainwashed - Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe, "Timon Irnok Manta"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 16 December 2012 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 17 December 2012 00:09



Lichens' Robert Lowe has always been a rather singular artist, but this latest effort is unusual even by his standards. Although it takes its inspiration from the British sci-fi series *The Tomorrow People*, its futuristic overtones are contained within a framework that seems far more indebted to raga, drone, and other sacred and ancient sources. It is certainly an original vision, but the actual content is not quite strong enough to support Lowe's endless, mantric repetition.

[Type](#)

Image

Timon Irnok Manta consists of essentially just one piece, the nearly 20-minute "M'Bondo," but the B-side features a differing version reconfigured from the same building blocks. The first version of "M'Bondo" initially has a lot in common with the recent glut of space-y analog synth homages that are currently in vogue, as the piece is built upon a sustained, slowly flanging drone. As it evolves, however, the aesthetic becomes a bit more strange and fractured, as an unusual rhythm coheres from a shifting, stuttering note and a host of pops and crackles. At some point, it begins to sound like some sort of digitized percussion locks into the groove, but it feels bizarrely clipped and flat, like everything was chopped out except for the attack.

Melodically, the sonic foreground is gradually overtaken by dense, endlessly repeating synthesizer patterns. Unfortunately, that turns out to be almost the full extent of the piece's evolution and it is complete around the 10-minute mark. There are certainly some superficial developments after that point, like an occasional chord change, some swells of coloration, and a host of fluttering beeps, but they do not take the piece anywhere particularly interesting: there are never any strong hooks, there is no impressive climax, and it all feels alienatingly inhuman and devoid of character...and then it all fades out. Perhaps that might have been exactly what Lowe set out to achieve, but to me it just sounds like someone hit an imaginary preset on an expensive synthesizer labeled "futuristic raga played by robots."

Brainwashed - Robert Aiki Aubrey Lowe, "Timon Irnok Manta"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 16 December 2012 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 17 December 2012 00:09

Thankfully, the slightly shorter "dub" version is a bit more compelling right from the beginning, as it is built upon something that sounds like a ghostly human chant. There are also repeating snatches of other voices, which make me wonder if some of the "synth parts" in the first version were actually Lowe's vocals processed into utter unrecognizability. Regardless of whether "M'Bondo (Version)" is a pulling back of the veil or merely a more humanized take on the same themes, it is definitely the more affecting and eerie of the two pieces. Lowe changes a few other elements significantly as well, offering a different synth pattern and emphasizing rhythm a bit more, but his recurring spectral moan is what changes the whole feel of the piece.

Curiously, I have seen this album hailed as one of the best of the year by one or two people and it makes me wonder what they could possibly be hearing that I am not. Lowe certainly had a few unusual ideas and brought together some disparate stylistic threads, but they do not ultimately amount to something that warrants repeating for half an hour with only subtle variation. *Timon Irnok Manta* feels much more like an early sketch for a single promising song than an innovative, fully formed work.

Samples:

- [M'Bondo](#)
- [M'Bondo \(version\)](#)