

Brainwashed - My Cat is an Alien, "Psycho-System"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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The Opalio brothers are certainly no strangers to uncompromising, indulgent mindfuckery, but their latest effort is extreme even by their own standards. Stretched out across six discs, Roberto and Maurizio use their weird arsenal of homemade instruments and detoured toys to create an absolute monolith of abstract psychedelia. Simultaneously nightmarish, overwhelming, and inspired, *My Cat is an Alien* have concocted an epic, brain-frying bad trip like no else before.

[Elliptical Noise](#)

In the realm of crazily ambitious and dauntingly long albums, *Psycho-System* is very much akin to something like LaMonte Young's

The Well-Tuned Piano

rather than a run-of-the-mill pile-up of new material: this is simultaneously a very narrow and a very deep album. Like Young, the Opalios essentially plunge so unapologetically deeply into their theme of choice that it gradually becomes something of a transcendent experience.

Perhaps "one theme exhaustively explored" is a bit of a reductionist view in this case, but I think it probably provides the clearest possible view of what the duo set out to do. While the nebulous theme in question certainly evolves a lot of the course of the set's nearly 4-hour running time,

Psycho-System

feels much more like a single enormous, slowly evolving epic than six discrete shorter pieces.

Structurally, most of *Psycho-System* can be reasonably classified as drone, but with the caveat that it generally sounds quite...well...alien. There is definitely a strong "outsider art" bent to the proceedings, as many of the sounds that the brothers generate feel uncomfortably artificial, queasy, and dissonant, like someone is horribly abusing a battery of modular synthesizers. In actuality, however, it is hard to say quite what the Opalios are using to generate their otherworldly racket at any given time, as their extensive list of instrumentation includes such eccentricities as modified electronic devices, "alientronics," and a space modulator.

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Notably, however, that list also includes items like a self-made double-bodied string instrument, a handmade pocket harp, and an antique zither. Again, I have no idea which of those Maurizio is using at any given time, but there is recurrent, prominent use of a rattling stringed instrument that sounds like a koto throughout the album and *that* is what makes the whole thing work.

Those clear, sharp, and melodic passages are the perfect foil to the rest of the album's swirling, bubbling, buzzing, and humming otherness.

Psycho-System

always sounds unique, but it is at its best when its spacier, lysergic tendencies come together with its more timeless, human ones.

Not every song adheres to that vague template though. The most notable divergence is "Delirium," which combines Roberto's eerie wordless vocals with distantly clattering percussion and a hissing rumble to achieve an impressive degree of Kubrickian cosmic horror. Another interesting aberration is "Bipolarism," which marries strangled-sounding guitar-like noise with insistently chirping electronics, though it later reaches an impressively crunching and cathartic percussion crescendo. While the two pieces sound nothing alike, they *do* share a common trait in that they are much more minimal and space-filled than the rest of the album. I have no idea of that was a deliberate sequencing choice or not, but the presence of two extended oases of differing density and texture makes the rest of the album's claustrophobic, hallucinatory maelstrom much more effective and listenable.

Notably, *Psycho-System's* six pieces were all recorded in real-time single takes over a three-day span, which surprised me: there is *a lot* going on here and it all feels very deliberate. That goes a long way towards explaining the length though, as it takes a long time for just two loop-happy musicians to assemble the kind of snowballing unearthly racket that the Opalios have unleashed upon the world. Whether or not this set would have been better if it were greatly shortened by overdubbing and aggressive editing is difficult to say. It probably would be much more listenable and accessible, but I did not have much trouble making it through all six discs and I think the experience probably benefits a lot from being so exhausting and overwhelming.

Verdicts like "good" or "bad" seem irrelevant for an effort like this, which I think the Opalios understood perfectly when they were making it: *Psycho-System* comes with a warning sticker indicating that the album could potentially cause a psychotic break with reality with high volume and prolonged exposure. That is a remarkably apt description of my own experience, I think—MCIAA definitely delivered what they set out to do. Obviously, something this massive, difficult, and indulgent is probably unlikely to win the duo many new fans, but any curious aspiring psychonauts out there may rest assured that this is about as "outer limits" as music gets. Also, I am pleased to report that my own psychotic break with reality does not seem to have been permanent.

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Samples:

- [Hallucination](#)
- [Catatonia](#)
- [Enlightenment](#)