

## Brainwashed - "Black Mass Rising"

Written by John Kealy

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Blending psychedelia, occultism and a YouTube sense of filmmaking, Shazzula's *Black Mass Rising* is an arduous yet rewarding trip through the borderlands of the mind. With no dialogue and no plot, she shows us a procession of vaguely related tableaux all presented with one of the best soundtracks I have heard in years (featuring pretty much every band I would consider essential when it came to doing a soundtrack for a film called *Black Mass Rising* ).

### [Black Mass Rising](#)

A bit like a reverse *Wizard of Oz*, the film starts in color before switching to black and white halfway through. The first half is split into a number of sections, initially a mirrored image split down the center of the screen creates geometric and Rorschach-esque patterns all to the sound of "Durga," a shimmering new piece of music by Master Musicians of Bukkake. More occult-styled imagery develops through the color section with a beautiful pagan-looking woman standing around looking mysterious. Later, pentagrams and skulls capture the vibes of Dario Argento's *Three Mothers* trilogy before a drug-addled haze takes over as abstract colors become faces and faces become shifting pulses of light and images of landscapes are overlaid with footage both alien and familiar.

Sylvester Anfang II take the previously laid back sounds and add a sinister edge to the mood, mirroring the ritualistic imagery appearing on the screen. The transition from color to black and white (from "The Rising" to "The Black Mass") is charted by Mater Suspiria Vision, whose own

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aesthetic fits in extremely well with the mirrored Satanic imagery. From here on to the end of the film, the visuals and the music become much heavier. L'Acéphale's "Passing into Sleep" provides a muted but terrifying accompaniment to one of the starker parts of *Black Mass Rising*; high contrast footage of a woman walking into water which looks like a woodcut come to life.

Shazzula wears her influences on her sleeve and shades of Kenneth Anger, Ira Cohen and Derek Jarman are very much evident. While the film lacks the ground-breaking originality of those filmmakers, *Black Mass Rising* is not a second rate copy of the masters. The spirit of adventure is present in Shazzula's use of a camera phone as her recording method of choice; granted I was wary at first when I saw that it was not "properly" filmed, but it honestly looks fantastic and a good image remains so whether it is on a high end phone or a high end dedicated video camera (in this case anyway). The always at the ready nature of a camera phone allowed Shazzula to take inspiration as it came to her and the throwaway nature of the digital footage reminds me of the aforementioned legendary directors' use of 8 and 16 mm film as they were cheap and easy to acquire.

My only criticisms are that it could be edited down somewhat as a few of the passages seem to be stretched out in order to include more music rather than being integral to the work. Secondly, the occult and Lovecraftian references are a touch heavy handed in places and *Black Mass Rising* could very easily be viewed as being faux-experimental hipster fodder. However, for the most part it manages to steer clear from being a derivative work and even if the imagery was not engaging (and for the most part it does capture the eye), the soundtrack is worth the price of purchase alone. Aside from the groups described above, there are also pieces by Bobby Beausoleil, Kawabata Makoto, and Aluk Tudolo included in the film. All the musicians are extremely sympathetic to the aesthetic and aims of the film, capturing the vibes in the images and expressing them as sound. Needless to say, I am looking forward to the 3LP release of the soundtrack in due course.

So while *Black Mass Rising* may be a little bloated and overlong, it was a trip worth taking. That said, I do not see myself sitting down often to watch it in its entirety but I will definitely be putting it on to listen to while dipping in and out of the visuals.