

Brainwashed - Ecstatic Sunshine/Lucky Dragons, "Friendship/Trip 02"

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As part of the split series by the Baltimore label Wildfire Wildfire, this single gives two exciting examples of fluid electronic songcraft. By different means, both groups evoke feelings of retro-futuristic goodwill by combining digital composition with analogue musicianship.

[Wildfire Wildfire](#)

For a band, nothing can be more fruitful, or more dangerous, than attempting reinvention with every release. While constant change can be a sign that a group lacks basic aesthetic principals, there are a few that can maintain a distinct personality through every genre they work in. From the drum-less punk of their debut *Freckle Wars* to the shimmering guitar-scapes of last year's *Way*, Ecstatic Sunshine has become one of those groups. Now playing solo under that moniker, group founder Matthew Papich has used the recent shakedown to concentrate on guitar and electronics in equal measure. Even when his instrument is heavily processed, Papich's guitar tone has a bright, crystalline clarity. On "Easy is Right" he plays a simple, echoing riff that serves as base for obtuse, seemingly random synth tones. The bright, taffy like globs of sound push themselves into the foreground, threatening to but never burying the underlying guitar. The song drifts pleasantly along, undulating in pitch until the each sound element is gradually unraveled.

On the flip-side, "Take Turns" by Lucky Dragons is much more muted and organic. The song begins with a simple melody plucked out on a thumb piano. After a few measures, the notes quickly pile on top of each other, snowballing into pentatonic, gamelan like arrangements. Shakers, mouth trumpet, and muted voices join in the chatter. The song feels like some animistic rain-chant, but it never becomes raucous or loose. Each instrument stays firmly rooted in its pre-programmed position. What's exceptional is that were it not for the artificial precision of the playing, you would never know the song was constructed electronically.

What unites the two songs is creative use of electronic instrumentation. Rather than letting their working methods determine the aesthetics of their music, the two artists use their tools in unexpected ways. Solo guitar music can be overly sober and technical, but Ecstatic Sunshine makes it bright and relaxed. Lucky Dragons so successfully blend native instruments that the whole process sounds natural. Though this single is a brief entry in each band's catalogue, it neatly condenses what is appealing in both.