

Brainwashed - Pumice, "Persevere"

Written by Matthew Spencer

Sunday, 08 November 2009 06:41 - Last Updated Sunday, 08 November 2009 16:12



As a format, singles accommodate brevity better than wistfulness. As Pumice, New Zealand's Stefan Neville takes a different path. In *Persevere*, he performs as if he had an entire afternoon to burn. His drowsy style is charming, but it is Neville's economy as a musician that really holds this record together.

[Soft Abuse](#)



As soon as the needle drops, *Persevere* begins its steady but insistent evolution. Side A, "The Dawn Chorus of Kina," gushes forth in a churning stew of wobbly bass tones and distorted strumming. It sloshes around for a minute or two then disintegrates into a series of stuttering, atonal guitar chords. Neville shifts the mood yet again, ending the piece with muted tom-tom thuds and clean-toned picking.

Neville mellows out on the flip-side. The two songs are covers, the first from folk-singer Michael Hurley, the other from the NZ punk band The Axmen. Both are built around a spindly acoustic guitar and Neville's sonorous voice. He sings slowly and without much inflection, as if he was just awakened from an all-night cough syrup binge. The songs accommodate his style well. The closer, "Pacific Ocean" exudes beach-town ennui but still ends the record in a vibrant mood. As the song burns away, resonant organs and multi-tracked vocals merge into a final burst of dynamism.

What is most striking is how little movement is apparent in these songs. Neville's shambolic style masks their internal progression. Only when they end is it obvious that change has actually happened. *Persevere* sneaks into the brain. It is easy to mistake it for a batch of run-of-the-mill bedroom recordings, but there is plenty to mull over beneath its blasé exterior.