

Brainwashed - Coolies, "Master"

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Coolies started out in the late 1990s, a trio of school friends from South Auckland, NZ, making a homemade-punk noise. After a first spurt of activity they lost a couple of drummers, released hardly any music, and seemed to have gone silent. This brief new album captures their gleeful, raw, energy on a reel-to-reel recorder.

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At this point, Coolies might be seen as an antipodean “garage” equivalent of No Age; albeit less adept at self-promotion and with a little of the spirit of Crass and the Slits mixed in. *Master* documents their past four years in 27 minutes; going for the throat on each song and displaying little affection for polish on studio pieces and the two live tracks (“Shift” and “Pull the Trigger”). Instead, the onus is on scuzzy spontaneity as guitar feedback, propulsive yells, and uncluttered drumming and bass playing adhere to a still-charming DIY aesthetic. Some songs, such as “Holiday” and “Let’s Pretend” are more obviously melodic and airy than other pieces (for example “Ghost Baby” and “Searching”) which have a manic, suffocating feeling.

In 2005, original members Tina and Sjonel were joined by new drummer Stefan. The trio still has an abrasive quality and tension derived from crunching guitar, howling vocals and thudding percussion. It's a sound which to some extent echoes the “boredom” ethos of late-1970s UK punk and more recent US-based “lo-fi” garage groups. Timing is everything, and maybe this is now the Coolies' time.