

## Brainwashed - Insect Factory, "Work"

Written by Craig Dunton

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Unsurprisingly, this newest work from Maryland's Jeff Barsky is cut from a similar cloth as his recent works, such as his split record with Earthen Sea from 2014. To be clear, this is a very good thing, as it is clear that *Work* again emphasizes his judicious use of effects and processing on understated guitar work. Because of this, he is able to hit that difficult sweet spot between novel sound treatments while still retaining the instrument's natural sound. As a result of that careful production and performance, *Work* is a beautiful, complex record that demonstrates his skill both as a performer and as a sound artist.

### [Insect Fields](#)

As I have mentioned in previous reviews, Barsky's work as Insect Factory is remarkable because he manages to avoid that pitfall of over-effecting his guitar work into an indistinct mass of noise, yet enough so that the album often bears little resemblance to the instrument. This ends up being abundantly clear from the opening moments of "We're All Just Here for the Money." The shimmering melodies that appear early on sound more traditional, but the synth-like pulses are distinctly alien in comparison. By the end, the piece is a complex structure of interlocking layers of playing and treated loops, but one that retains a sense of form and order.

That does not mean that *Work* never sounds like a guitar-based record, of course. For "Junk Machine," (featuring Chris Brokaw on additional guitar) the vibrating strings are up front and bathed in a nicely metallic (yet natural) sheen. From this, however, Barsky and Brokaw expertly weave in electronic accents and processing, and a more electronic-tinged melodic segment in the second half just serve to enrich the already strong piece. The brief "Cigarette" is also more guitar-centric, being just shy of three minutes of mostly naked guitar playing, albeit in weird and unconventional ways.

The two lengthier pieces are where this record excels. "Slow Oxygen Loss" again features markedly guitar-like sounds, mostly taking the form of long, spacious harmonics that help propel

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the piece forward. However, restrained use of what could be radio static and electronic processing fills the piece out extremely well, keeping it sounding dynamic and ever evolving. The second half has Barsky shifting the structure to a more rhythmic one, with heavy use of clipped and echoing guitar notes. It builds to a chaotic, panicked climax that is extremely appropriate given the title of the piece.

The 17-minute concluding "Sleep Instruction" is not too dissimilar, also beginning with a pairing of static heavy noise and submerged melodies. The changes here are a bit more understated in comparison compared to what preceded, with most of them taking the form of variations on hushed melodies and loops, coming together with a more placid and relaxed sound. Towards the conclusion, Jeff rolls back the layers of noise, leaving the skeleton of weird melodies and digital processing to conclude the album in a bizarre, yet beautiful manner.

With *Work*, Jeff Barsky again shows his exceptional ear for unconventional guitar sounds, using the instrument in ways it was never intended but never losing sight of the core sounds it can create. Thus, he has given this record an exceptional sense of depth and refinement, making for a sound that is adventurous, yet still engaging and enjoyable from beginning to end.

samples:

- [Slow Oxygen Loss](#)
- [Junk Machine](#)
- [Sleep Instruction](#)