

## Brainwashed - Uman, "Chaleur Humaine"

Written by Duncan Edwards

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In 1992, 8-bit samplers were cutting-edge gear. This reissue of *Chaleur Humaine* by French siblings Danielle and Didier Jean, shows Didier's use of a sampler to reshape and project his sister's voice into a memorable, magical-sounding dream world with barely discernible hints of doom under the glossy enveloping surface. At times it is reminiscent of the tracks "Alsee," "Criminie," "Bruma," and "Wask," on Nuno Canavarro's

*Plux Quba*

(1988). Very different albums in some senses, but in a wildly imperfect analogy, the recognizable voice parts on

*Plux*

are like Elizabeth Fraser hiccuping through tubes in an Yves Tanguy surrealist painting whereas

*Chaleur*

resembles Virginia Astley and Sheila Chandra harmonizing with helium-high hedgehogs in a symbolist landscape by Marc Chagall.

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A poem recurs throughout *Chaleur Humaine* in a variety of languages, including English, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew, and Vietnamese: "It's this force, almost animal, warm, like a kiss, fresh like the morning dew, that we call human warmth" but not even that can derail this sultry cinematic music. Wordless vocalizing is used as glitchy percussive punctuation and haunting backdrop. Spoken word combines with splashes of metallic synth, angelic and robotic gibbering, as Didier digitally accelerates, delays and reverses sound sources to create an ambient landscape across which the imagination may travel. I felt I was in a futuristic sound sauna one minute and the next was at the wheel of a car, filmed from above, speeding across deserts, gliding over bridges, and easing through streets ablaze with neon nightlife.

No parts of this album should be skipped, and I'm not picking highlights here so much as listing examples. At just over six minutes "Memoire Vive" is perhaps the cornerstone of the recording, the proof in the pudding, meringue light/spotted dick substantial. It is as sleek and sensual as

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Air and Brigitte Bardot collaborating for a Bond movie theme. Other songs are brilliantly brief (the icy eroticism of the title piece runs at just 1.40). I think of this record less in terms of rainforest and meditation and far more as a bright yet brooding sci-fi soundtrack. God knows it would have livened up the dull as fifty shades of dystopia *Blade Runner 2049*.

Didier uses spare flourishes of piano and brass to great effect, and the combination of strings with his treatment of Danielle's voice at the start of "Human" have an aching melancholic overdrive similar to more recent compositions by Max Richter. Soon enough, though, UMAN ditch that for a breezy, pseudo-swing, like elevator music for an elevator capable of rising out the top of a building into the clouds.

The melody of "Cordes Sensible" flickers like low setting sunlight in a car driver's eyes, then the track glides into a propulsive rhythm and drops in a deeper bass sound. It's almost in *Moon Safari* territory. "Maelstrom" has reverse breathing which I like to imagine sucks the lazy "New Age" music tag into a cup and throws it out of that speeding car. Since the duo are environmentally conscious let's also imagine it lands neatly in a recycle/reuse bin.

Surely no one will trot out a list of more recent artists and claim that *Chaleur Humaine* evolved music (that cannot even seriously be argued for

*Plux Quba*

), but it truly is a strange and lovely milestone on the analog-digital road. UMAN call themselves "harmony architects" and while they have created a fine musical structure here, part of their original inspiration may have been to encourage planet-wide unity. This is not possible through overt messages, but keep in mind the subliminal effects of music. Parts of the album gave me a daydream of Kubrick's evolved planet-sized baby at the end of *2001*

and I reimagined the mega-infant sweetly warbling a dreadful warning

. Yes, it was only Didier manipulating his sister's voice on a forgotten recording.

Our planet has changed since 1992, and while human warmth is one thing, global warming is quite another. If Earth now resembles a vehicle pulling onto an irreversible road to hellish heat death, this beautifully innocent and irrelevant record can be a heavenly note in the glove-compartment of that prophesy. And if there are to be water wars, then (to misquote a hit man from the film *In Bruges*) "if UMAN have got the Vietnamese, I'm definitely fighting on their side."

[samples available here](#)