

Brainwashed - Manorexia, "Dinoflagellate Blooms"

Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 07 August 2011 20:31 - Last Updated Monday, 08 August 2011 00:29



J. G. Thirlwell's Manorexia project is perhaps the most idiosyncratic in a career of idiosyncrasies. As both a specifically solo project and one in which traditional structures are an afterthought, it excels in both the realms of modern composition and pure chaos. Those strengths are magnified on this album, specifically with the inclusion of a 5.1 surround sound mix on DVD, which one of the most creative and effective uses of the format I have yet heard.

[Ectopic Ents.](#)

Ever since getting my surround sound receiver I have been interested in this format, but too often it has become a novelty more than anything truly captivating or creative. What seems like the perfect panacea for counteracting the prevalence of file trading has seemingly fallen flat. Major record labels have used it mostly to pad out overpriced collector's editions, contracting journeyman engineers to go in and play with the master tape to create something that has little to do with the original artist's intent. Smaller labels, meanwhile, have mostly ignored the technology entirely, opting to instead embrace more difficult to copy formats like cassette tape as their middle finger to MP3 leeches. Many of the 5.1 albums I've heard just don't feel "right" in my opinion, with one exception being the Trent Reznor remixed version of *The Downward Spiral* which, regardless of opinions of Nine Inch Nails, showed just how strong the format could be, given the right amount of attention and creativity.

Dinoflagellate Blooms is also another high water mark for surround sound releases, perfectly suited for a format that uses five channels rather than the standard two. From the opening moments of "Cryogenics," I knew it was going to be a good disc. Initially pushing the stringed and plucked instruments to the front, while keeping the heavier, low register stuff in the back, creating an unsettling balance. Erratic, heavy horn blasts that resemble a trumpeting elephant pan around the room, as do rattling percussive blasts. It also gives that .1 part of 5.1 a work-out, blasting out a sonic-boom level bass outburst here and there.

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"Anabiosis" is an industrial symphony, putting aggressive stabs and what sounds like guitar swirling around the mix, combining deep strings and dramatic horn blasts with quiet, wheezing moments of unnatural origins. All throughout it constantly develops and changes, never losing its cinematic intensity but conveying a variety of moves.

"Krzystl" goes right for the jugular when it opens, pushing sharp, violent static out of every channel that made me wonder at first if my receiver was breaking down, but only briefly. Between that and manic, chopped speech fragments that pan around, the infrequent quiet moments being quickly ruined by aggressive crashes and bangs, it an ugly, but thoroughly enjoyable piece of dissonance.

The middle tracks are surprisingly more restrained, working with more restraint than the opening pieces. "A Plastic Island in the Pacific" doesn't really throw everything and the kitchen sink into the piece, but instead works with a spacious, but uneasy creepy vibe. Tones drone away, broken up by deep bass thuds, but menace never seems far away.

"The Perfect Patsy" goes back to the sweeping drama of the earlier pieces, characterized by muted strings that drone away, while the back channel are subtleties underscoring the main sounds. There feels like the urge to explode into the theatrical chaos from before, but it never quite happens.

"Kinaesthesia" goes back to the restrained tension, with demonic growls and sinister feedback panned around the room aggressively. Ominous ambiences, air raid sirens and bizarre sonic twitterings, eventually relenting only to leave a dark bass drone to remain. The closer "Struck" ends the album like it began, with messy percussive blasts and wheezing horns. With pounding orchestral chaos in the front and sound effects in the back, it's another piece that really takes advantage of the disorientation that 5.1 surround can bring. The bombastic, massive sound of the piece actually belies its relatively quiet ending, closing the album with surprising peace.

While the included CD presents the album in traditional stereo, *Dinoflagellate Blooms* feels like it was intended to be heard in 5.1, and thus I focused on that part of the album. The stereo version is no slouch by any means: Thirlwell could likely be putting his work out on nearly inaudible wax cylinders and it would still be captivating. The extra depth that the additional channels give makes a great composition even greater.

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samples:

- [Krzystl](#)
- [The Perfect Patsy](#)
- [Struck](#)