

Brainwashed - Espen Lund, "Aetonal"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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It has admittedly been quite a long time since the theatricality and ferocity of proper black metal held any allure for me, but the genre has certainly birthed quite a few fascinating mutant strains in the drone and psych realms over the years. The latest one to blindside me is this blackened drone leviathan from Norwegian trumpet visionary Espen Lund. Gleefully mangling the sound of his hapless trumpet is hardly new territory for Lund, but this album (his third) takes that approach to an ingenious extreme. As Lund himself put it, "The trouble with amplifying instruments that don't want to be amplified is the amount of feedback produced. On this album, the thought process was to incorporate the feedback and make it an integral part of the music." While I do believe that modest quote is factually correct, *Aetonal* instantly makes it feel like an almost cartoonishly massive understatement, as Lund and his ring of straining amplifiers unleash a crushing, snarling, and blown-out nightmare that is absolutely unrecognizable as a trumpet. If I heard this album completely blind, I would absolutely think I was hearing some killer Surface of the Earth, Campbell Kneale, or Southern Lord album that had somehow eluded me.

self-released

The opening "As Above, So Below" slowly rolls in like an moonlit fog enveloping an ancient Druidic ritual before dissolving into a brief, simple trumpet solo. And then all hell breaks loose, as the piece erupts into a roiling, ritualistic, and treble-ravaged channeling of recent Skullflower. It is a wonderfully face-melting assault (particularly for a lone trumpet), but it also surreptitiously evolves into something almost meditative (think "Sunn O))) as the house band at a Tibetan Buddhist temple"). Next, "For a Thousand Tongues to Sing" takes a somewhat similar path, approximating a doom metal band attempting to mimic a bagpipe ensemble, but then a war horn heralds a transformation into something best described as "sci-fi tribal meets a trippy '70s synth album being played through a noise band's gear." *Aetonal* does not truly catch fire until the grinding horror of the third piece, however, as "Speak Into His Good Eye" gleefully mashes together animal-like howls, maliciously weaponized feedback, machine-like rhythms, and an imagined duet between a calliope and rusty Ferris wheel in a nightmarish abandoned

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amusement park. "The Creator's Voice" then steals the show, initially resembling a doom metal band soundtracking slow-motion footage of an avalanche, but ultimately passing through some mind-meltingly phantasmagoric stages such as "the world is burning and molten metal is dripping from the sky" and "a howling robot Tyrannosaurus just turned up and seems mad." It feels like the sort of scorched earth blow-out that nothing could follow, yet the closer is yet another stunner, ingeniously evolving from shrill, shimmering drones to "a terrifying feedback demon just materialized" to an unexpectedly beautiful and smoldering comedown. Generally, *Aetonal*

is great because Lund and his trumpet unleash something resembling an absolutely essential masterpiece of late '90s New Zealand noise guitar, yet a few pieces hint at something more transcendent, like a faint rainbow appearing in the wake of an apocalyptic storm. That said, it also sounds like a copy of the

Necronomicon

mysteriously turned up at Lund's studio with a bookmarked page titled "Summon A Drone Album So Unholy That It Will Kill God."

Aetonal

is a towering achievement.

Samples can be found [here](#) .