

## Brainwashed - Leider, "A Fog Like Liars Loving"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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This is the debut album from a Berlin-based foursome dedicated to performing the works of Malaysian-born composer/trombonist Rishin Singh. Notably, Singh is also a member of Konzert Minimal, which is a modern classical ensemble dedicated to performing compositions by the Wandelweiser collective. In a 2016 *New Yorker* profile of the Wandelweiser milieu, Alex Ross noted that one recurring theme in their work is a "ghost tonality never achieves stability; it will frustrate those who expect one chord to lead logically to another." Singh's own vision shares a lot of similar stylistic terrain, as

*Loving* is nothing if not ghostly (and creepy (and unsettling)). It resembles an alternate universe version of Low in which they were a chamber music ensemble that listened to a steady diet of nothing but Jandek, Scott Walker,

*Marble Index*

-era Nico, and warped old folk records played at the wrong speed. That said, Singh definitely has an unusually sophisticated sensibility regarding dissonant harmonies and the entire album has an eerily nocturnal, dread-soaked, and somnambulant feel that is uniquely Leider's own. Purportedly, the album also features an "understated gallows humor," which is also an achievement of sorts, as Singh has managed to cultivate a strain of black humor so bleak that even I often have a hard time detecting it.

### [Beacon Sound](#)

I never would have guessed on my own that this album was written by a male trombonist, as the most prominent threads that run throughout these songs are the dual female vocals of Annie Gårdlid and Stine Sterne, the moaning strings, and the curdled, murky flutes. All are abundant in the creeping fog of dread and hanging dissonance that is the opening "The Weeping Wound," but the quartet's blurred gloom is also imbued with a sense of insistent (if glacial) forward motion by a simple drum machine pattern. Ironically, it is often that minimal drum machine element that determines how well a song works, as the compositions themselves are so purposely wraithlike and alienating that even the slightest rhythm feels like a welcome injection of life and physicality (akin to a still-beating heart faintly thumping within a corpse). When that beat disappears, Leider approximate a traditional folk ensemble from an earlier era that has been exhumed, reanimated, and handed rotted, mis-tuned instruments...and then asked to envision what *The Wicker Man* soundtrack would sound like if it had been an Ingmar Bergman

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film. That said, one of those beatless pieces is arguably the album's bleakly compelling centerpiece, as "Great Expectations" transforms a few lines of Dickens into a menacing dirge that erupts into a visceral, squealing catharsis. "Colder Underground" is another dirge/highlight, calling to mind a time-stretched Celtic folk ensemble accompanied by a slowly beating heart. It even has a hook, as the repeating refrain of "do you find it funny?" is surprisingly catchy and also feels like the final thing I might hear before being murdered by a coven of forest witches. I suspect I would probably like the rest of the album considerably more if it were less relentlessly dour (it makes for difficult entertainment), but Singh's focused vision feels like a promising success as art, as I can easily imagine an installation based on this album being a macabre sensation at a contemporary art museum.

Samples can be found [here](#) .