

Brainwashed - Liberez, "All Tense Now Lax"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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John Hannon is truly a man after my own heart, as his Liberez project recaptures an urgency, adventurousness, mystery, and revolutionary spirit that has been largely missing from underground music for a very long time. In some respects, *All Tense Now Lax* picks up right where 2013's stellar

Sane Men Surround

left off, bringing back both vocalist Nina Bosnic and an unholy mélange of bludgeoning junkyard percussion and Greek/Eastern European violins. In other ways, however,

All Tense

is quite different, largely abandoning any quieter moments of ethnographic forgery in favor of a heavier, pricklier, more anarchic, and more collage-damaged assault.

[Night School](#)

The beauty of Liberez is that it is studio project devoted to one man's distinct vision and that that man (Hannon) has the time, patience, gear, and ability to bring it to full fruition. As a result, Hannon and his small group of collaborators sound like an impossibly good band sometimes, throwing together juxtapositions, unusual ideas, and unexpected variables in a way that no ordinary band could. Well, maybe they *could*, but it would likely not sound nearly as explosive, visceral, and off-the-rails as Liberez. One piece that highlights those traits beautifully is "Grateful Family," as Pete Wilkins' half-tribal/half-industrial metallic percussion and Bosnic's phlegmatic spoken-word vocals are blasted by strangled, gnarled, distorted violins and plunging bass, somehow escalating to a violent cacophony without losing any of the quieter bits. The following "419 Chop Your \$" takes things even further, spicing the broth with locked-groove female vocals; distorted and inhuman male vocals; electronic crackles and disruptions; and what seems like an entire Greek traditional music ensemble.

Remarkably, that same trio are also responsible for the title piece, which marries a melancholy piano theme to something that sounds like a singing bowl or glass armonica. Those unlikely instruments are further augmented by some smoky, dub-damaged horns later in the piece, but the real beauty of "All Tense Now Lax" lies in how discreetly warped and soft-focus it all is: the percussion and piano remain clear throughout, yet a host of indistinct field recordings and

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sundry other sounds flutter around the periphery. Also, Bosnic's half-heard vocals seem to emerge from unexpected places at unexpected times, overlapping and oddly panning while never quite being fully intelligible. The overall effect is masterfully hallucinatory without ever being conspicuously so—it somehow just feels organically smeared and woozy. That is a hugely difficult illusion to pull off.

That said, the single most striking aspect of the *All Tense Now Lax* is simply how skillfully it harnesses controlled chaos into a bulldozing display of power and how Hannon's production talents enable just a few people to sound downright apocalyptic. Nowhere is that more apparent than on the pummeling "Grease The Axles," which somehow sounds like Crash Worship jamming with an extremely angry incarnation of The Mekons: a speaker-shredding firestorm of brutally pounding drums and furiously sawing violins. "How Much For Your Brother?" is similarly bludgeoning, resembling a folk dance crashed by early Einstürzende Neubauten and a very insistent elephant wielding a megaphone and a distortion pedal. I do not think that I can reasonably ask for more than that.

If *All Tense Now Lax* can be said to have a fault, it is solely that Hannon does not seem terribly concerned with writing hooks or actual songs. Or maybe he is, but is even more concerned with destroying them: when melodies appear, they are quickly ravaged; when vocals appear, I always feel like I am half-asleep and just catching mysterious snatches of dialogue from the other side of a wall. I am perfectly fine with that though, as Hannon absolutely excels at mood, texture, power, and artfully nuanced mindfuckery. Also, Liberez truly sounds like no one else. I may not remember individual songs after the album has stopped playing, but that does not make it any less of a bracing and compellingly innovative listening experience when it *is* playing.

Samples:

- [Grateful Family](#)
- [419 Chop Your \\$](#)
- [Grease The Axles](#)