

Brainwashed - Belong, "October Language"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 29 April 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 30 April 2018 12:12



Originally released in Carpark back in 2006, Belong's debut album has quietly become a something of an enduring underground shoegaze classic. This latest reissue from Spectrum Spools was actually the first time I heard *October Language* though, which is somewhat remarkable given that I am a fan of Turk Dietrich's current work as Second Woman and I was already casually familiar with Belong from their more song-based follow-up on Kranky.

October Language

bears no significant resemblance to any of those other albums at all though, nor does it bear much resemblance to any other album in the shoegaze canon, as Dietrich and Mike Jones conjure up a gorgeous ocean of shimmering and roiling guitar noise that feels like it is emanating from a broken and possibly haunted radio. Obviously, the never-ending stream of "lost classics" being reissued on vinyl these days is a numbing minefield of dubious claims and underwhelming experiences, yet

October Language

is the real deal, fleetingly capturing a unique vision that is equal parts rapturous and enigmatically eerie.

[Spectrum Spools](#)

I suspect a large part of the reason that this album feels like such a wonderful and ephemeral confluence of forces lies in its curious assemblage of participants. While Mike Jones' post-Belong activities are a mystery, it is certainly fascinating that Dietrich eventually left swirling, rhythmless seas of dreamy guitar noise far behind to focus on complex and incredibly precise percussion experiments. Equally noteworthy is the participation of Telefon Tel Aviv's Joshua Eustice, who contributed to some of the album's strongest pieces. One intriguing feature of *October Language*, however, is that it is impossible to ever see where anyone's individual playing or personal aesthetic asserts itself, as all traces of melody or songcraft are deconstructed and dissolved into a churning and shimmering dreamscape. It is quite interesting to try to imagine how some of these pieces initially took shape and similarly diverting to guess at the influences that led Jones and Dietrich towards their radical transformations, as

Brainwashed - Belong, "October Language"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 29 April 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 30 April 2018 12:12

October Language

is very much a studio creation (most of the heavy lifting definitely took place at the production stage). It is probably safe to say that the shadow of Fennesz looms over this album as a major inspiration though, as

October Language

hits a similar aesthetic of stuttering, distressed, and sun-dappled melodicism. I suppose that makes this album a necessary autumnal counterpoint to

Endless Summer

in some ways, but beneath all the warmth, billowing chords, and soft hiss runs a deep undercurrent of aching beautiful sadness and ruin. Those darker, more enigmatic moments tend to be album's most haunting pieces, like the submerged, slow-motion warbling of "I'm Too Sleepy...Shall We Swim?" and the corroded and quivering rapture of "Who Told You This Room Exists?" It takes a light touch to get that balance just right and Jones and Dietrich seem to nail it whenever they try, which is a bit surprising given that the duo are also quite fond of howling, gnarled roars of guitar noise ("The Door Opens The Other Way").

The album's centerpiece is unsurprisingly the title one though, as "October Language" beautifully expands the expected swirl of shimmering guitar noise with some lazily melodic slide guitar. Again, Jones and Dietrich employ a very light touch, as the poignant glissandi adds an additional layer of emotional depth without emerging far enough from the roiling, hissing drones to disrupt their fragile, dreamlike spell. While several of the aforementioned pieces also stand out as clear highlights, it bears mentioning that the rest of *October Language* is uniformly excellent, as the baseline vision of warmly beautiful shoegaze drones dynamically filtered through disruptive lappedness is wonderful enough without any additional twists or layers (even if it is nice when they happen). The more distinctive pieces simply provide variety and stand as recognizable landmarks along a slow-moving and lysergic river of engulfing and richly textured drone heaven. In fact, Belong's knack for intriguing textures plays a crucial role in making *October Language*

the uniquely compelling album that it is. Jones and Dietrich evoke an immersive and womblike environment of layered guitar bliss as well as anyone, but their work has a precariousness, unpredictability, mystery, and depth to it that takes it to a completely different level. While always quite lush and lovely,

October Language

is eternally on the verge of escalating to an overwhelming roar, plunging into a submerged echo of itself, or being torn apart by crackling and stuttering tears in its fabric. It walks the finest of lines, achieving a kind of frayed and flickering heaven that never quite teeters into chaos, nor does it ever cohere into an unthreatened idyll. It is beautiful like heartache is beautiful; a complicated swirl of dark and light emotions and memories far more intense and affecting than mere bliss.

Notably, the physical versions of *October Language* come with a download card for the three bonus tracks that comprised the extremely limited

Brainwashed - Belong, "October Language"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 29 April 2018 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 30 April 2018 12:12

Tour

EP, which was recorded in 2005. That is presumably a treat for Belong completists (if they exist), but that EP's primary appeal lies in how it contrasts with

October Language

(recorded in 2004), as it illustrates how delicately all of the various threads needed to balance to yield such a brilliant album. Aesthetically, the

Tour

EP replicates almost the same vision as

October

, yet it lacks all of the necessary bite and vibrancy that might have made it similarly striking. As such, it is pleasant but largely unmemorable. Part of me is inclined to attribute that to the fact that the

Tour

EP songs were probably rough cuts/sketches exclusively for fans, yet Belong never fully recaptured the singular alchemy of

October Language

ever again (though they released a few promising vinyl EPs in its wake). Obviously, plenty of people love the follow-up, 2011's

Common Language

, but that album genuinely sounds like the work of an entirely different band:

October Language

was a one-time event that no one has ever been able to replicate. In fact, it has been glibly described elsewhere as "

Loveless

sans the songs," which is certainly an apt description. It is not quite a perfect one though, so I will boldly attempt my own concise summation with "a lovelorn Christian Fennesz on vacation in Twin Peaks." I am not sure that fully conveys the essence of this release either, but the take-home message is clear: this is an exceptionally great album. I am ashamed that it needed to be released three times before I finally realized that.

Samples:

- [October Language](#)
- [I'm Too Sleepy...Shall We Swim?](#)
- [Who Told You This Room Exists?](#)