

Brainwashed - The Holy Circle, "Sick With Love"

Written by Creag Dunton

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On their most recent release, it would seem that The Holy Circle—Erica Burgner-Hannum (vocals, synths), Terence Hannum (also in Locrian, synths), and new member Rob Savillo (guitar) taking the place of drummer Nathan Jurgenson—are refining their sound into something more unique. The gauzy, lush synth production and vocals are still prominent, with a sound rooted in the traditions of early dark synth pop, but *Sick With Love* sees the band drawing from a wider variety of influences, making for their most accomplished work to date.

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With this new EP, The Holy Circle have been describing themselves as "goth mom rock" and, while somewhat facetious, is not far off the mark. This is largely the result of Burgner-Hannum's vocals becoming more diverse and nuanced. Her style and delivery are not far removed from a multitude of female fronted mid 1980s adult contemporary pop, while the music remains anything but. For example, the vocals on "Free and Young" would fit in on any mainstream radio station circa 1987, but the primitive drum machine and Hannum's buzzing synths, the whole is a lot different. Once Savillo's processed guitar hits, which by the end gets an anemic distortion that would fit nicely on The Cure's *Pornography*, and there are lot of disparate styles that still manage to work well together.

Another unlikely tinge to the overall sound of *Sick With Love* is contemporary Christian rock, which comes through more subtly via the vocals and arrangements. Having grown up in the same region of deep Central Florida as Burgner-Hannum, I know how ubiquitous the stuff was and probably still is (even though I always avoided it as much as possible), so it was interesting to hear it pop up in such an unexpected context.

The trio offers up variations on this formula, with the same elements being heard throughout the tape's all too brief six songs. For example, the vocals on "Lovely One" are not only a bit lower in the mix, but also closer to a more conventional style with regard to the music. Atop a snapping drum machine, the lush synth pads and reverb drenched guitar trade off the focus,

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and the entire mix has a rawer edge to it. Comparatively, "Glass" is more on the experimental spectrum, with a more ambient mix and unconventional drum programming. With the ambient electronics and chorus heavy guitar, there's a distinct early 4AD sheen to it, while overall staying completely contemporary. There is a similar mood to "Fever Break", with lowercase drum sounds and far away guitar and synth pairings, which contrast nicely with the up front vocals and melodic synthesizer appearing at the end. Bookended by two short pieces, "Moorland Loneliness" with its shimmering synths and prominent vocals, and "Midnight Hush" being a wall of sound and distortion, the whole cassette has a brilliant sense of structure and flow.

While I certainly enjoyed The Holy Circle's first EP and full length, *Sick With Love* comes across as the band solidifying their sound and identity. By adding guitarist Rob Savillo, their sound is becoming even more fleshed out and diverse. What I found especially entertaining was that juxtaposition of styles, with synth heavy gothic influenced material being what I listened to mostly in my middle/high school days, and the adult pop sound being what I was trying to avoid hearing at the time (and admittedly do not necessarily love today, but I have a greater appreciation for it). Given the band members and I are roughly the same age, I do not think this was at all coincidental. But personal experiences aside,

Sick With Love

is an exceptionally strong EP of memorable melodies nicely balanced with experimentation and abstraction, and its too-short length simply has me looking forward to whatever comes next.

[Samples Available Here](#)