

## Brainwashed - Patricia, "Maxyboy"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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This solo project from Max Ravitz has long fascinated me, as he has proven himself to be a fitfully brilliant techno producer over the years, yet his formal albums do not always play to his strengths. As a result, there is no telling where and when a brilliant new song will surface or whether that particular aesthetic will ever be revisited. And then there are occasional surprises like this latest release, wherein Ravitz unabashedly devotes himself to crafting woozy, hook-heavy dance music that will unavoidably be described as "AFX-style acid techno." Obviously, it would be hard to pick a more obvious influence than Richard James, but the idea of a non-willfully difficult Richard James who is perfectly content with crafting conventionally enjoyable hooks and grooves admittedly holds quite a lot of appeal. And it would be a mistake to paint Ravitz as an unimaginative or derivative artist: *Maxyboy* just happens to catch him in an atypically nostalgic and synth-centric mood (which certainly befits his recent relocation to North Carolina to work for Moog). Whether or not this poppier throwback side of Ravitz's vision sticks around is anybody's guess, but there is no denying that he is very good at what he does and *Maxyboy* is an unusually strong and varied collection of songs.

### [Ghostly International!](#)

In 1995, beloved punk trio Jawbreaker followed the darkly cathartic *24 Hour Revenge Therapy* with their cleanly produced major label debut

*Dear You*

. Predictably, a huge number of their fans felt betrayed and the band broke up in the wake of the resultant backlash. Within a few years, however, many of those same fans gradually realized that

*Dear You*

actually featured a remarkable number of Jawbreaker's best songs and the album eventually came to be regarded as something of an improbable, misunderstood classic. It is probably safe to say that Ravitz's fans did not have quite as extreme of a reaction when they first heard

*Maxyboy*

, but the difference between this release and previous Patricia releases is similarly dramatic and significant. I was especially struck by the magnitude of that transformation when I revisited last year's excellent

*Heavy Merging*

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EP last night, as songs like "Balance Acid" masterfully combine a woozily lo-fi production aesthetic, elegantly buried hooks, and a very rhythm-focused compositional approach. With *Maxyboy*

, Ravitz polished up the production and took his vision in a more overtly melodic direction just like the hapless Jawbreaker...for the most part. That said,

*Maxyboy*

is too elusively varied to fit most generalizations, which makes me wonder if the true shift may have simply been from Ravitz's usual recording set-up to something more akin to his more stripped-down live set-up. Regardless of how he recorded these ten pieces, however, it is abundantly clear that Ravitz approached this album with great focus and exactitude and that he also composed some of his strongest hooks to date. Sometimes he focused more on beats and sometimes he focused more on melodies or textures, yet every single song on

*Maxyboy*

is tightly constructed, effectively paced, and entirely free of unnecessary clutter. In the case of lead single "Downlink," Ravitz managed to focus on seemingly everything at once, as the piece is an impressively sophisticated assemblage of intertwined moving parts from start to finish.

While I admittedly gripe about the current climate of synth fetishism a lot, it is still a delight to hear the textural virtuosity that an artist can unleash when they are in complete command of their gear, as melodies that vibrantly sizzle, bubble, and smear tend to be far more compelling than ones that do not. The opening "Dewpoint" is especially wonderful example of that phenomenon, as an arpeggiated pattern beautifully simmers and snarls beneath a tender chord progression, occasionally intensifying into blurring, ragged, and streaking catharsis. And then Ravitz unveils a lovely and poignant descending melody for a final crescendo. It is difficult to overstate how much such attention to craftsmanship matters, as Ravitz's best songs all share a vivid dynamic intensity, a constant sense of forward motion, and a genuinely satisfying compositional arc. In a similarly acid-tinged vein, "Dr Oetker's Ristorante" is a feast of bleakly slow-moving chords, skittering rhythms, and vibrantly gurgling and squirming bass patterns. To be fair, it resembles classic AFX more than anything else on the album, but it is equally true that it would have easily been a highlight of any AFX release it appeared on. Elsewhere, the closing "Ctenophora" is another notable piece, as Ravitz opts to go beatless for a sublime and hallucinatory synth reverie of beautifully juxtaposed twinkling and oozing textures. Those highlights are just the tip of the proverbial iceberg though, as *Maxyboy* packs enough other pleasures to feel almost like a singles collection, as I am especially fond of the propulsive and infectiously hooky "Crushed Velvet" and the nuanced rhythmic tour de force of "Myokymia." In fact, Ravitz only truly misses the mark once, as relentless kick drum thump of "Dripping" feels quite leaden compared to the album's other songs (and its jazz-inspired chords never quite blossom into anything more).

As always, my impulse is to try to rank *Maxyboy* within the larger context of the Patricia discography, but it feels too much like a one-off detour for that to feel appropriate. While it is probably Ravitz's most accessible and immediately gratifying album, the more understated and veiled melodies of earlier Patricia releases are a bit better suited to long-term listenability. That said, it is tough to hear a piece like "Crushed Velvet" and imagine any way that Ravitz could have possibly improved upon what he did. And if Ravitz wants to release a loving homage to classic early '90s techno in 2020, I am certainly not going to complain (and I cannot think of

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another current artist catering to that specific strain of nostalgia more skillfully than he does). Plenty of bands have been cannibalizing late '70s/early '80s post-punk for the last four decades and it has occasionally yielded some wonderful results. With

*Maxyboy*

, Ravitz achieves a similar feat—it certainly is not Ravitz's most distinctive album, but it may nevertheless feature the most enviable hit-to-miss ratio of anything he has released to date. While I am (unobjectively) hoping that the next Patricia album will be more of a middle ground between Ravitz's Opal Tapes fare and this release rather than an increasingly Moog-y continuation of this arc,

*Maxyboy*

is convincing evidence that Ravitz's execution is only growing more assured and dazzling with each major statement.

Samples can be found [here](#) .