

Brainwashed - Soft Kill, "Dead Kids, R.I.P. City"

Written by Eve McGivern

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Homelessness is driven by many things, but it has one thing in common: everyone who is afflicted is human. With this recognition comes both a feeling of cold reality and an expectation of change. The latest from Portland's Soft Kill—a city that has one of the highest homeless populations in the United States—was forged through their personal encounters with the youngest “lost” denizens of the city. *Dead Kids, R.I.P. City* lays out stark, confronting tales of addiction, bravery in abandonment, and hope amongst loneliness through luminous soundscapes and lingering melodies. What followed is their most complex yet accessible release yet, a richly human and mournful album from a band already associated with melancholy.

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My experience stepping into this release was a bit like cueing up The Cure's *Disintegration* for the first time, anticipating what would come after the initial introduction before being dragged fully under by the lush, orchestral waves of synths and guitars. Yes, that's a pretty big statement, and while *Dead Kids, R.I.P. City* doesn't have the immediate impact of an opening track like “Plainsong,” the album is similarly filled with a soaring sound of warm synths, layers of guitar reverberation, incurably catchy melodies, and familiar comfort of post-punk bass tones. Far from being a substitute for obvious comparisons, underneath the dark lustre lay vocalist and lyricist Tobias Grave's frank dialogue about the realities of trauma, addiction, and death on the streets.

The spectre of such dark things haunt the very fabric of the album, exuding a hopelessness that manages to come out the other side, sparking powerful recognition of the matters at hand. Songwriter and singer Tamaryn shares vocal duties on “Floodgate,” emitting a anguished cry in remembrance of loved ones, lost and forgotten like pieces of refuse in Portland's streets: “*This flood has taken things / This god has grown tired / Tired of loving me / This voice / This voice just leave it be / Of all the things I deemed were down to bury me / I lay here underground* .” In an impassioned message shared by Tamaryn, she issues a rallying cry for those forgotten:

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"The gates are open. The underworld rises and now we all know the rich want us dead. Not just the fringe outsiders and junkies, all of us ."

A rich musical assortment is available here. Choir Boy's Adam Klopp's vocals on the darkly catchy "Matty Rue" add a dreamy feel to the already shimmering guitar sounds. Majestic synths and a danceable hook belie a rue of a lost young soul: *"He's in trouble now, the city's growing colder. / He's in trouble now, whispers in our ears / cannot strangle fear, cannot hold back these tears / It all just means the shame, it makes you shiver.*

"Magnus Opus "Oil Burner" offers waves of distortion wrapped in droning rhythms, offset by interludes of quiet balladry. The album achieves a one-two gut punch in closer "I Needed the Pain" using only piano, violin and acoustic guitar, offering a first-person look at surviving alone.

Synthesizers still feature prominently in Soft Kill, but guitar and rhythm section are given more presence this time, hopefully expanding their reach beyond fans of darker genres. The drums are clearer, the fidelity is richer, composition more varied, with a wider assortment of guitar tones at play. Producer David Trumfio (Wilco, Built To Spill) surely helped provide the band's most solid production to date, further perfected by fabled mastering engineer Howie Weinberg (The Cure, Nirvana, and scores of others). *Dead Kids, R.I.P. City* is a huge leap forward in an already impressive sound catalog from Soft Kill, and fans across multiple genres should find something to enjoy.

[Sound samples available here.](#)