

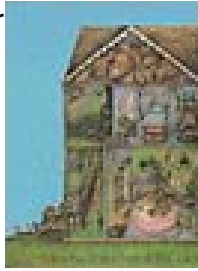
## Brainwashed - JAN DUKES DE GRAY, "MICE AND RATS IN THE LOFT"

Written by Jonathan Dean

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[Breathless](#) This is the long overdue CD reissue of one of the most mythical, sought-after



albums from the British progressive folk scene of the early 1970s. Right up there with classics like Comus' *First Utterance* and Simon Finn's *Pass the Distance*, Jan Dukes De Grey's 1971 LP *Mice and Rats in the Loft* is a brilliant work of psychedelic folk with a seething undercurrent of malevolence. Apparently having learned a lesson from the artistic and commercial failure of their first LP, 1970's *Sorcerers*

on the Nova label, the duo of Derek Noy and Michael Bairstow enlisted drummer Denis Conlan, and quickly disposed of all notions of pop songcraft to which they might have initially aspired. Instead, they recorded the distinctly uncommercial 19-minute sidelong "Sun Symphonica," a breathtaking, dynamic work of epic genius, fusing together at least five separate musical movements into an unfolding narrative that begins with a hippie paean to the sun and proceeds through progressively darker and more twisted realms. The instrumental bridges are brilliantly conceived, referencing the medieval idiom popular in British folk of this period, but impregnating it with an energy that smolders with intensity and immediacy. Effortlessly wielding 12-string guitar, violin, cello, flute, clarinet, recorder, harmonica and a dizzying assortment of percussion, the trio plays with all the poise of an experienced jazz ensemble, but produces something altogether heavier and more psychedelic, as if Amon Düül II had restricted themselves to acoustic instruments and decided to compose a soundtrack to *The Wicker Man*

. As the "Sun Symphonica" trudges on through its many moods and phases, it gradually becomes clear that a distinctly pagan formula is at work, and the solar imagery is quickly eclipsed by its more primordial counterpart: the devil in the form of dead, bloated corpses covered with maggots rotting under the intense noonday sun. By the 15-minute mark, the track is a swirling maelstrom of simmering instrumental fragments flying around the stereo channels in a lunatic dance, as the "sunshine" mantra returns once more, where in a savage irony it has been transformed into a terrifying hex. Unfortunately, the album never again reaches the maniacal heights of Side A, but where it does go is nearly as fascinating. "Call of the Wild" utilizes the voices of all three band members to create dizzying vocal harmonies in a song which celebrates the savage nature of man, and advocates the expression of inner, suppressed primalisms. By the halfway mark, the song experiences a radical break with structure and turns into a seething echo chamber of wicked guitar improvisation. The final track is also by far the strangest, the eight-minute title track, which creates a hypnotic whirlpool of electric fuzz guitar over which Derek Noy narrates in great detail a ritual human sacrifice with a zeal that would set H.P. Lovecraft's hair on end.

*Mice and Rats in the Loft*

is uneasy listening at its finest, and Breathless' first-ever CD reissue does an admirable job of reproducing the cover art in their foldout digipack. The booklet contains new liner notes by David Tibet, which should come as no surprise, as the influence of this album can certainly be felt in Current 93 efforts such as

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*Thunder Perfect Mind*

and

*Tamlin*

. Anyone interested would be advised to pick up a copy of this limited reissue before this masterpiece fades back into obscurity once again.