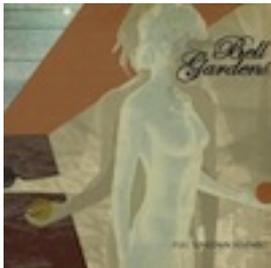


## Brainwashed - Bell Gardens, "Full Sundown Assembly"

Written by John Kealy

Sunday, 04 November 2012 10:53 - Last Updated Monday, 05 November 2012 07:41

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After a terrific debut EP in 2010, Bell Gardens finally return with a full album of mostly new music. As usual, the musical arrangements are lush and saturated with beauty as Brian McBride and Kenneth James Gibson try to recreate the moods and sounds of the golden era of pop studio recordings without using the typical computer-based short cuts and technological workarounds that have become *de rigour* for modern studio work. The end result is a triumph of song writing, musicianship and integrity, highlighting just how good humble songs can be without the need for following trends or to be striving to be the next big thing.

### [Southern](#)

Despite the deliberate avoidance of software and samples, Bell Gardens manage to begin the album with a very modern sounding take on the classic pop song. Following some gorgeous slide guitar on "Clinging to the Almost," there is a sudden move into the sort of chord progressions that I would associate with Stars of the Lid or McBride's solo work. Though Stars of the Lid never sounded like this; the movement and the atmospheres are social, joyous and bright unlike the introspective, contemplative twilight textures of Stars of the Lid. I thought they had nailed it on *Hangups Need Company* but they have upped their game considerably on Full Sundown Assembly.

The first couple of times I listened to "Differently Tonight" I felt that the lyrics, though performed perfectly, were a bit clumsy. Now, after becoming more comfortable with the album as a whole, I admit I feel differently. The lyrics are so simple that they seemed too obvious but I realize now that is what makes the song work so well. This deceptive simplicity runs throughout the rest of *Full Sundown Assembly* with songs like "Bobby" and "Nowhere" sounding like the best bits never recorded by Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young or Brian Wilson.

The highlight of the album is "Through the Rain," which also featured on the duo's *Hangups Need Company*

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EP from 2010. Here is the closest they come to sounding like The Beach Boys, the vocal harmonies are rich, layered but as light as they air they are made from. In fact, this is probably the best-crafted song I have heard in a long time as absolutely everything about it is balanced, tasteful and moving. It is a sheer delight to listen to and even though it has already been released, I will not argue with its inclusion here.

In recent years, Bon Ivor and Fleet Foxes have tried to capture this sort of vibe in their respective careers but Bell Gardens truly school them in how it should be done. McBride and Gibson have created stunning bursts of warm, joyous harmonies that, while indebted to great artists such as Phil Spector and Jack Nitzsche, burst with a life beyond retro pastiche. This is masterfully played pop music that references but expands on this nostalgia, much like Tindersticks did in the '90s with their take on Nancy and Lee, John Barry and Serge Gainsbourg (though Bell Gardens give the 'sticks a run for their money on "South"). With *Full Sundown Assembly*

McBride and Gibson have created masterfully played pop music which is a much needed ray of sunshine on these dark autumn mornings.

samples:

- [Clinging to the Almost](#)
- [Nowhere](#)
- [South](#)