

## Brainwashed - X-TG, "Desertshore"

Written by John Kealy

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Beginning life as a Throbbing Gristle album back in 2007, this cover album of Nico's *Desertshore* has had a tumultuous life. Its four parents went through a divorce when Genesis P-Orridge left the group in 2010 before unexpectedly losing Peter Christopherson a month later.

### *Desertshore*

was Sleazy's baby but Chris Carter and Cosey Fanni Tutti have done their best to foster it and give it the chance it deserved. The end results are unsurprisingly mixed, the range of guest vocalists that have replaced P-Orridge are varied in background and skill which has not served the source material well but taken as a whole with its sister albums,

### *The Final Report*

and

□□□□□□ (*Faet Narok*)

, this is as good an ending to Throbbing Gristle/X-TG as possible as well as being a fitting tribute to Sleazy and his work.

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X-TG's version of *Desertshore* starts strongly with Antony Hegarty's rendition of "Janitor of Lunacy." Antony gets deep into the role of Nico, capturing the haunted beauty of her words in his own unmistakable way. The music is a amorphous swell of cornet, organ, and that heavy bass throb which betrays the origins of this group. Followed by Blixa Bargeld's first (of two) outstanding performances, "Abschied," I am thinking that this is going to be one hell of an album. Bargeld brings a completely different emphasis to the piece and makes the words his own. Combined with X-TG's fine interpretation of the music, retaining the melody but completely redesigning the mood, this is a standout track on *Desertshore*. Furthermore, they prove that this is not a fluke on his version of "Mütterlein," where Bargeld's voice and the abrasive backing track come very close to the best moments of TG Mk.II, indeed there is even a flash of the same energy and excitement that runs back to even Throbbing Gristle's "Discipline."

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Yet, *Desertshore* takes a significant turn for the worse with Sasha Grey's appearance on "Afraid." Nico's original is a masterpiece of poised tenderness but Grey manages to deliver it in such a morose, deadpan way as to destroy the power of the song completely. Grey's voice is too dreary even for a Nico song! Similar Gaspar Noé's "Le Petit Chevalier" seems superfluous, especially considering his voice is buried under a lot of processing. While I understand the appeal of using non-musicians who are like-minded in terms of their approaches in other media as it has worked well for them in the past (such as Throbbing Gristle's use of appropriated recordings and Coil's collaborations with Judy Dench and the anonymous person on "Who'll Fall"). However, Noé seems to be lost here and Grey confirms for me that music is not her forté.

These disappointing moments are balanced by the other performances. In particular, Marc Almond's attempt at "The Falconer" is superb. It does not hurt that "The Falconer" features the best version of Nico's music by Chris, Cosey and (possibly?) Sleazy. Out of all the guests, he and Antony plunge furthest into Nico's psyche without aping her vocal style; though occasionally Almond sounds like he is channelling Nico through his own vocal chords. This eerie effect is enhanced by a double-tracked harmony with himself, reminiscent of P-Orridge's singing along to a guide of Nico's original vocals during *The Desertshore Installation* recordings.

Cosey also gets close to the spirit of Nico on "All That Is My Own" and "My Only Child," without sounding like she is just copying the original recordings. These two tracks sound closest to Chris and Cosey/Carter Tutti and are propelled by their distinctive rhythms, the former has a sharp edge to it whereas "My Only Child" has a light, warm glow at the centre of it. Both pieces are good but unfortunately do not reach the same dizzying heights as the originals or the better tracks on this album.

The album closes with a new song by X-TG, "Desertshores," which is more of a redux of Nico's album than an entirely original work. Multiple voices ask for us to meet them on the desert shore, reinforcing the idea of a desert shore being more than a geographical idea but the interface between this life and the next. While the preceding tracks feel like the completion of unfinished business, "Desertshores" is instead a direct farewell to and from Sleazy (whose voice is also included in the work). The other voices are all friends of Sleazy, all wishing to meet him again.

While I am glad to finally hear *Desertshore* it is not the album it could have been. Between Sleazy's death, Genesis P-Orridge's departure, the variance of the guest vocals and the amount of time that has passed between the early sessions and its release, it was always going to be

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difficult to fully deliver on *Desertshore*. Especially when it will be compared to not only a perfect album by Nico but the epic Throbbing Gristle box set of *The*

*Desertshore Installation*

. Though, such is life, and Chris and Cosey have done a tremendous job on completing what must have been a tough, emotional work for them. If Sleazy was here, I am sure he would have been pleased.

samples:

- [Janitor of Lunacy](#)
- [Afraid](#)
- [The Falconer](#)