

## Brainwashed - Basic House, "Caim in Bird Form" & "Oats"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 17 November 2013 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 18 November 2013 18:44

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Stephen Bishop is best known as the man behind Opal Tapes, but he also releases some very deviant and noteworthy music of his own as the deceptively named Basic House. While both of these albums were released in 2013, they take Bishop's otherworldly wrongness in two very different directions. *Caim in Bird Form* is the much weirder (and arguably more unique) of the two, but the more recent *Oats* compensates for its comparative lack of derangement by incorporating a heavy noise/industrial influence that yields some impressively brutal results.

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*Caim* has one of the more eerie and wrong-footing openings in my recent memory, as Bishop takes the hackneyed trope of using film dialogue to a bizarre extreme with "Aspirin Telepath." Aside from some murky, throbbing synths, the piece is little more than a tense monologue pitch-shifted and taken wholesale. Then that is followed by "I Found U," which opens with a crackling, near-incomprehensible answering machine message. That message ultimately gives way to something resembling music, but just barely: it features only looped swells of static, a repeating hollow thump, and some uneasy echoing and machine noise. It is certainly a very sparse and minimalist piece, but it is also quite an enjoyable one, recalling some sort of deep subterranean or sci-fi twist on The Loop Orchestra's mad brilliance.

While part of me hoped the album would continue to sound like an enigmatic radio transmission from deep space forever (or just listening to late night television on lots of hard drugs), the album arguably begins in earnest with the third piece "I Don't Remember Acid." At the very least, it feels structured and has a clear beat/rhythm of sorts. Bishop's "songs," however, are not techno/dance in any conventional sense—rather, they are a ruined, rusted, sickly sounding, and grotesque caricature of the genre. Everything sounds scratchy, queasy, and anemic. That is, except on the rare occasions when it does not, such as with the bassy, spaced-out dub

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techno anomaly of "64 Bummer."

While that piece is reassuring in that it shows that Stephen could competently make something more straight-forward if he felt like it, I am (predictably) far more impressed with his more outré excursions, like the blearily dissonant haze of "Field 0.08" or the shivering rhythm in "Ultra-Misted" that gradually degenerates into backwards-sounding whooshes. Or the beat in the title track, which basically sounds like someone rhythmically sharpening a long knife.

My favorite piece, however, is the closing "TV Illness," which sounds like it appropriates the same string piece used in Severed Heads' "Wonder of All the World." Bishop takes that beautifully melancholy piece in a very different direction though, as it sounds like it is fitfully reverberating through a cavernous parking garage. It makes for a very hallucinatory and bittersweet listening experience, which is happily reprised as "In Illness Form," a remix by Scuba Death (the sole real difference being the addition of more hissing and a metallic machine-noise rhythm).

If *Caim* can be said to have a flaw, it would be that the individual pieces are all based on a few simple, repeating motifs—the sort of thing that other musicians might see as little more than studio experiments or the beginnings of something larger. That did not bother me at all though, as they cumulatively form one hell of a bizarre and unique album. Also, anything more elaborate or musical would have ruined my pleasing illusion that these are field recording collages made by a serial killer or madman hiding in a sewer: *Caim* works so wonderfully precisely because of Bishop's unwavering commitment to his broken, crackling aesthetic of cryptic dispatches. Stephen certainly recorded some great individual pieces, but Basic House's brilliance lies far more in how it sounds than in the actual beats and notes being played.

Samples:

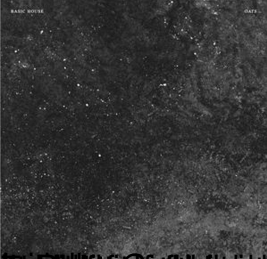
- [Field 0.08](#)
- [Ultra-Misted](#)
- [TV Illness](#)

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