

## Brainwashed - Janek Schaefer, "Lay-by Lullaby"

Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 09 February 2014 21:34 - Last Updated Monday, 10 February 2014 00:46

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*Lay-by Lullaby* is at its core a companion piece to Schaefer's installation work *Asleep at the Wheel*, which functioned as a call to social awareness that can be lost through the constant movement of modern life symbolized by the repetitive act of automobile travel. This album, however, emphasizes the opposite sensibility. It results in a muted, almost hallucinogenic series of calm compositions that revel in the repetition.

[12k](#)

This lengthy album trades mostly in sparse, pensive tones and light, crackling passages of static and blurred radio transmissions. "Radio 101 FM" and "Radio 102 FM," for example, stick with bare arrangements of expansive tones mixed up with the occasional sound of a passing motor vehicle. The latter has a simple two-note progression that makes for a slightly more melodic, musical feel throughout.

On "Radio 105 FM" and "Radio 106 FM," Schaefer employs some excellent crackling static that does an exceptional job of replicating the sound of tires on asphalt, and both pieces strip the overall mix down to an infrequent, low register tone as opposed to the album's other, more relaxed elements. The automobile symbolism also appears distinctively on "Radio 111 FM," where the analog electronics hum away like an idling car engine.

Other pieces focus much more on the conventional, electronic parts of Schaefer's art. "Radio 103 FM" has a more conventional synthesizer sound, and one with a 1980s digital keyboard sheen to it. "Radio 110 FM" features effective string-like electronic flourishes that open it in a more clearly dramatic fashion, although the closing minutes are more meditative textures than

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film-score intensity.

Mixed in with the light tones and melodies is a collection of field recordings taken from London's M3 motorway, the occasional revving engine or passing vehicle making for a slightly jarring interruption that adds dynamics, but does not at all distract from the sound as a whole.

This fits with the disc's aesthetic perfectly: Schaefer's gentle gliding melodies and hushed bits of static emulating the hypnotic feel of late night driving with the only illumination coming from an occasional street light or the moon in the night's sky. Just as things become too peaceful, a passing vehicle shakes the driver awake to begin the cycle once again.

It is this interjection of the motorway recordings that gives *Lay-by Lullaby* its distinct personality. That is not to say that Janek Schaefer's ambient electronic work is not effective on its own, quite the contrary. His tastefully understated melodies and textures are brilliant on their own. But here, the way they mimic the hypnotizing repetition of night driving with the interrupting recordings of passing cars is what makes this a brilliantly effective album.

samples:

- [Radio 102 FM](#)
- [Radio 106 FM](#)
- [Radio 110 FM](#)