

Brainwashed - Abul Mogard, "And We Are Passing Through Silently"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Hot on the heels of his appearance on last year's *In Death's Dream Kingdom*, Abul Mogard returns to Houndstooth with a collection of his work as an unlikely remix artist. Of these five lengthy pieces, I was only familiar with the one from Fovea Hex's

The Salt Garden II

, as his reworkings of songs by Nick Nicely and a pair of Houndstooth artists (Aïsha Devi and Penelope Trappes) somehow eluded me. The beguiling centerpiece of the album, however, is an entirely new work that reimagines Cindytalk/Massimo Pupillo's sublime *Becoming Animal* project. All of the chosen pieces suit Mogard's aesthetic beautifully though, adding up to an album that is more like an unexpectedly strong and song-based follow-up to

Above All Dreams

than a collection of one-off works that were never intended to coexist. Naturally, this is easily Abul Mogard's most accessible release to date, but I was pleasantly surprised to discover that it is also one of his best too.

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I would love to someday hear an Abul Mogard remix that enlivens a beautiful Fovea Hex song with frenetic breakbeats and party horns, but Mogard in remix mode is almost indistinguishable from Mogard performing his own work at this stage of his career: everything he touches is elegantly stretched into a warmly languorous reverie of blurred and frayed chord swells. For the most part, nearly all of these songs fell quite close to that territory before Mogard even started working his signature magic, so his sorcery largely lies in transforming traits that already existed into something a bit more expansive, radiant, and subtly hallucinatory. The sole exception to that trend is the unexpected opener, which is a somewhat radical overhaul of a piece from Aïsha Devi's 2015 debut album. Notably, Devi's *DNA Feelings* was all over "best of 2018" lists last year, but Mogard was apparently into her years before that, which is very amusing and endearing if his purported identity as a retired Serbian factory worker is true. The original version of "O.M.A" is a warped, distinctive, and fairly experimental twist on soulful and seductive dance music. The remixed version, on the other hand, is almost unrecognizable, as Devi's voice melodically floats through lush, billowing chords like a beckoning Siren's song. Also, Devi's voice is arguably not even the focal point of the piece, as it drifts in and out while a slow-moving and spacey synth motif establishes itself as the heart of it all. It is a truly lovely piece of music, but so is everything else on the album. "O.M.A" just happened to travel a bit

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further to get to its final destination than the rest of its peers.

Penelope Trappes' brooding "Carry Me" winds up in roughly similar aesthetic territory, but Mogard skillfully manipulates the textures to evoke a slow-burning and ghostly melancholy, emphasizing the ominous throb of the bass notes and imbuing the chords with a colder, more corroded edge. As great as first two songs are, however, the album's most impressive stretch does not come until the one-two punch of Nick Nicely's "London South" and Becoming Animal's "The Sky Is Ever Falling." Both seem like such a perfect fit that it almost seems like it was predestined for them to wind up here. The original "London South" is a beautifully droning and dreamlike bit of bittersweet pop brilliance and Mogard wisely leaves that structure and mood almost entirely intact, opting to merely transform the scale, building it into a gorgeously ragged, warmly enveloping, and aching dreamlike epic three times as long as its source material. Becoming Animal's aesthetic is perhaps even more fundamentally aligned with Mogard's, as he merely excised the samples from their "Doorway to the Sky," replaced the simmering guitar noise with billowing dark clouds of synth chords and allowed Gordon Sharp's tenderly gorgeous vocals unfold exactly as intended. One could definitely argue that Mogard's remix is merely polishing up a diamond a bit, but it does benefit from the polishing, as the slow-building intensity is a bit more effective and nuanced here (not surprising, given that the original was recorded live at Café Oto).

Amusingly, the one piece that I already knew and liked quite a bit before hearing the album (a reworking of Fovea Hex's "All Those Signs") turned out to be the least of his remix achievements, though it is an appealingly understated and intimate performance. At its core, "We Dream All The Dark Away" is a fundamentally rapturous piece of music, as Mogard marries Clodagh Simonds' simple, lovely vocal melody to a similarly simple and lovely organ motif, elevating the piece into an even more sublime work of tender beauty. Unfortunately, the piece then sprawls out and meanders for over twenty minutes, greatly diluting its impact. Hopefully someone will someday do a remix of the remix, isolating and expanding upon its early brilliance (though it would admittedly take some serious guts to leave Brian Eno's choral contribution on the cutting room floor). That said, it is still an intermittently gorgeous piece—I just did not expect to be blindsided by so many pieces that were even better. Aside from the remarkably high standard of quality, *And We Are Passing Through Silently* is also a bit of a revelation for so seamlessly transforming Mogard's heavenly drones into something approaching pop music. The addition of vocals to his vision feels perfectly natural, organic, and right and absolutely none of the crucial essence is sacrificed in the process. With pieces like "London South" and "The Sky is Ever Falling," Mogard makes it seem like he has been doing remixes forever and that it is exactly what he was supposed to be doing all along.

Samples can be found [here](#) .