

## Brainwashed - Manchester Bulge, "2001-2012 Retrospective"

Written by Creag Dunton

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It seems like any American city (or even large-ish town) has at least one local noise band. Perhaps it is the ubiquity of the Internet or a handful of Wolf Eyes and Merzbow albums that received some significant hype and distribution, but what was once a style that was baffling to most is on par with punk or hardcore as far as local representation goes. Manchester Bulge, hailing from Fargo, North Dakota, preceded this American noise band explosion (or sloppy outburst, depending on perspective) though, dating back to 2001. This collection captures a band at the forefront of what somehow managed to become a scene and makes for an excellent window into one town's premiere noise project.

### [Black Ring Rituals](#)

Admittedly, for something that covers a span of just over a decade, the sense of organization or structure to *2001-2012 Retrospective* is confounding at best. There is no clear timeline of when these various pieces were recorded, and the titles themselves are ambiguous to say the least. The small included booklet does give some insight into the project overall and features some nice photography, but it is best to take things in at face value rather than look for a deeper underlying concept.

Most of the material spread across these three tapes was captured live, and that definitely shows. Dying tape motors and wobbling electronics give "Tromittar" a fun, haunted house vibe that is furthered by an indistinct far off clatter and the occasional monstrous growl. Everything stays mired in an appropriately low fidelity murk and, even with some melodies rising up near the end, it continues to sound more than just a bit off. "MB Track 1 PT2" continues with the ghostly feel, with clanging synth stabs cutting through bent synth string passages.

Other facets of Manchester Bulge's sound are a bit looser and less bleak in nature. Sputtering sounds, toy piano, and bursting electronics define most of "Barn" in a simple, yet pleasant outburst of noise. "10/8 MB12" is another shambling mélange of sound: stuttering noises and mangled computer data tapes set the stage for something that sounds like a keyboard found in

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the forgotten backroom of a Goodwill warehouse, covered in cobwebs and spider eggs, but somehow manages to still work and therefore is a viable instrument for Manchester Bulge.

The third tape in this set is the one that comes across as the strongest and most focused, however. Toy organ tones and jackhammer like electronics end up making "Upfront" almost melodic in some sort of twisted way, with a nice psychedelic edge to it. Both "Meth Lab" and "MB2" feature Manchester Bulge working with tapes, via erratic sputters, backward noises, and wobbling pitches and tones. The latter also excels with a bit of banging metal and shimmering, nervous electronics at its end. The flip side of the tape excels with "MB Live Raven", with its opening of a noise standby: the buzz and feedback of what sounds like a bass amp. Even with the harsher sounds used, there is a nice sense of space throughout, allowing all of the elements to shine, even if they are buzzing, brittle electronics that sound about to fail at any time. It builds to an almost prog rock climax of harshness and depth before collapsing wonderfully.

I have always been a fan of these sorts of releases. Having never been to North Dakota and, if I had, I would likely not be going to some small noise house show; this collection gives me an almost ethnographic overview of such a scene. Manchester Bulge's is Fargo's longest running noise project and, while different than ones I have encountered, it features that same universal sense of experimentation and actual fun that can be had within such a band. As with any band doing this type of release, there are a handful of less engaging or meandering moments here and there, but, warts and all, it is a fascinating snapshot into the career of a local noise band.

Samples can be found [here](#)