

Brainwashed - My Disco, "Environment"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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This Australian trio first appeared on my radar with 2015's somewhat polarizing and aptly named *Severe* album, which stripped away all of the more conventional post-punk elements of their sound to leave only a beautifully chiseled and pummeling strain of minimalism. I suppose most My Disco albums have been a bit polarizing though, as the band have undergone a series of transformations since their early days as a math-rock band and not every fan has wanted to stick around for the next phase. With *Severe*, however, it felt like My Disco had finally found a truly distinctive niche that felt like their proper home.

Environment

happily continues to explore that same vein, yet takes that aesthetic to an even greater extreme, replacing surgical brutality with an ominous, simmering tension and dissolving any last traces of the band's more "rock" past. It is hard to say if

Environment

quite tops

Severe

, but it is very easy to say that it is another great album from an extremely compelling band.

[Downwards](#)

Listening to *Environment*, it is difficult to believe that My Disco were ever a band with clearly defined roles like "drummer" and "guitarist," as they seem very much like an entity that has almost transcended conventional instrumentation entirely. In the opening, "An Intimate Conflict," for example, the trio's palette is reduced to just a thick electronic throb and the sounds of scraping metal. Even Liam Andrews' vocals diverge from traditional territory, as his fitful and indecipherable monologue is enveloped in a squall of distortion and reverb. The insistently pulsing and brooding atmosphere actually calls to mind the power electronics milieu, but My Disco depart from that aesthetic by opting for deadpan cool and unresolved tension rather than misanthropic catharsis. A far more visceral and explosive side of the band certainly exists, but it has been completely exiled to the accompanying remix album, leaving

Environment

to exist as an unwaveringly focused tour de force of restraint and understated menace. It is also quite an intriguing experiment in stark minimalism, as "Hong Kong 1987" explores a similarly constrained palette of throbbing bass drone mingled with enigmatic metallic scrapes, though it augments that foundation with a ghostly ascending melody. The brief "Equatorial

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"Rainforests of Sumatra" goes to an even greater extreme, taking away everything except for a bass drum and some ritualistic-sounding metal percussion. If I did not know that I was listening to My Disco and someone told me that it was a field recording from a Tibetan funeral or something instead, I would not question it for a second.

The best songs on *Environment*, however, are the ones where My Disco combine their arsenal of unsettling creaks and throbs with some semblance of consistent rhythm or sense of forward motion. The best of these more conventionally song-like moments is probably "Rival Colour," which augments a half-sinister/ half-sensuous bass throb with an "evil woodpecker" percussion motif that sounds like something I would expect to hear shortly before being murdered by cannibals in a dense, foreboding jungle. The closing "Forever" is a similarly brilliant feast of darkly seductive menace, as a tribal-sounding hand-percussion motif moves unrelentingly forward amidst drizzling rain and Andrews' hushed promises (or threats) that he will wait. Notably, it features the sole moment of volcanic release on the entire album, as there is a howling and gnarled squall of guitar noise shortly before the song dissolves entirely to leave only the lingering sounds of the rain in its wake. Given the quiet intensity and brutally spartan nature of album, however, any glimpse of violence or hint of an imminent eruption is impressively magnified in power. Consequently, I would be remiss if I did not single out "Act" as yet another highlight, which improbably manages to wrest a remarkable amount of brooding intensity out of a single densely buzzing tone that slowly flanges and snarls. I think there are at least three songs on this album constrained to a single repeating or sustained note and all of them are great. That is quite an impressive feat to pull off repeatedly.

As wonderful as it is, however, "Act" does highlight *Environment's* sole minor flaw: Andrews is a vocalist of very few words. In many cases, it feels like he is using simple repeated phrases in an ingenious way, evoking an unnerving obsessiveness and escalating sense of dread. Other times, it just feels like the lyrics were kind of an afterthought. "Act" falls into that latter category. For the most part, however,

Environment

is a hell of an album and an extremely cool vision executed beautifully. I cannot think of many other bands that so skillfully blur the lines between artistic rigor, tight songcraft, and sounding like they would probably stab me with a broken bottle if I looked at them wrong. Late-period Disappears has also earned a place in that illustrious pantheon and they are probably the closest kindred spirit here, but

Environment

sounds like the blackened framework that would remain if someone set the

Era

album on fire. I mean that in the best way possible, as I cannot praise this album's high points enough. At their best, My Disco wield space absolutely brilliantly, creating a vacuum in which every single sound makes a deep impact. Moreover, the band do an incredible job at creating and sustaining a bleakly beautiful and unwaveringly heavy mood without a single lapse or misstep.

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is the perfect negative image of a great post-punk album, draining away all the color and heightening the contrast to transform the previously familiar into something eerily spectral and nearly unrecognizable.

Samples:

- [Act](#)
- [Rival Colour](#)
- [Forever](#)