

Brainwashed - Pass/Ages, "Taken Underneath"

Written by Creag Dunton

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Consisting of two thirds of the band Ars Phoenix, namely Jonn Gauntletier and Caitlin Grimalkin, it is not overly surprising that there are a lot of similarities between the bands. Both are equally synth heavy and rife with memorable hooks. However, the two are distinct projects, with Pass/Ages mining somewhat darker, distorted territories in comparison to the slightly more up beat Ars Phoenix work. Never are the moments of catchiness far off, however, resulting in a tape that is rough and experimental, yet as memorable as any pop record out there.

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The tape opens on a high note with "As It Rises". Lead by a distorted, dirty synth and pleasantly rigid drum machine, the melodic elements that are added contrast perfectly. With the rhythmic section offset by ghostly synth pads, wobbling leads, and Grimalkin's vocals, the blending of light and dark is perfectly achieved. "When the Sky Ignites" is a similar blend, with the vocals treated more and the addition of some excellent throwback syndrum passages.

"Materialize Me" is another great example of the somewhat harsher tendencies of Pass/Ages. The drum machine is bombastic and distorted, and the vocals are mixed to the front and less effected. With the addition of vintage string synth passages, the complete package is a great one. The mix may be sparser, but the thumping bass line of "Possession" balances out the 1980s keyboard leads that result in some extremely catchy melodies.

Other significant portions of this tape feature Pass/Ages opting less for distortion and more for heavy reverb as the primary feature. The ethereal layers of "Taken Underneath" and the complex melodic passages result in a splendidly executed bit of dark pop. There may be some prominent snappy rhythms on "How Much Did You Take?", but its hard to not focus on the beautiful electronic melodies and buried vocals just barely peeking out from the wall of reverb. On both "Asphodel" and "Cavalcade", the duo dial the tempo back into much lower BPMs, but in the process make for two dramatic, anthem-like works of lush production and big, rich synthesizer passages.

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The influences on Pass/Ages are clear and rooted deeply in the 1980s, but one of the strongest things about *Taken Underneath* is how it sounds, from a production standpoint, entirely contemporary. Instead of an intentionally retro aesthetic, the duo takes the inspiration from the era, but no conscious attempt to mimic anything too specifically. The production also has just the right amount of DIY grime though. By no means is it amateurish, but it lacks the unnatural sheen that would strip it of its unique sound.

Taken Underneath is an extremely memorable, distinct album that is a fitting continuation of the Ars Phoenix legacy.

[Samples Available Here.](#)