

Brainwashed - Mattin, "Songbook #7"

Written by Creag Dunton

Sunday, 31 March 2019 09:58 - Last Updated Monday, 01 April 2019 11:40



As the latest installment in his *Songbook* series, Mattin continues building from the concepts of those that came before, namely recording in a live setting with a variety of collaborators. This time the set was recorded at the Digging the Global South Festival in 2017 and is quite a politically charged recording, with Mattin drawing from two events early in the 20th century and what he sees as the parallels to the current resurgence of fascism in Europe (and by extension the rest of the world). Sprawling and challenging, the final product is anything but impenetrable though, and Mattin does a perfect job presenting the concept without ever sacrificing the music.

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During my first listen to *Songbook #7*, which was done intentionally without consulting liner notes or any other textual information, I was rather taken aback by the applause at the end. As a whole, the album sounds far too controlled and structured to have been a live piece. This does not mean that it is an overly restrained record, however. There is plenty of chaos and noise to go around, but it was the abrupt stylistic shifts from piece to piece (and even within each section) that came across as almost too drastic or dramatic to be in a live setting.

Songbook #7 is broken into seven pieces, the first six of which are right around seven minutes long (see a pattern?). Mattin constructed the performance based around the first seven months of 1917 in revolutionary Russia, and the anarchist Germaine Berton, who murdered the leader of the far right French Action League in 1923. Drawing parallels to the world a century later, he recontextualizes these events; one at the macro-societal level and one at the individual, into a similar set of present day conditions that, thus far, have not been associated with a similarly drastic response.

His spoken word narration opening each section (titled for a month in 1917, January to July) ties the pieces together, but each stands alone as well capturing different styles fitting Mattin's intent with the record as a whole. Mattin's harsher noise background is the most prominent to be heard, from the wall of digital noise that opens "January," the engulfing layers of static on

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"April," and swirling passages in "May." The layers of electronic sound, provided by Moor Mother and Farahnaz Hatam, augmented by sampler work from Lucio Capece, Marcel Dickhage, and Cathleen Schuster, vary dramatically throughout, keeping a strong sense of variety amidst the chaos here.

There are less synthetic moments here as well: Capece's clarinet outbursts on "February" and the deconstructed jazz rhythms by Colin Hacklander on "March" make for some organic signposts in an otherwise electronic swamp. Hacklander's drumming also gives propulsion to the thrash punk tinged parts of "February" and the sustained noise of "April" as well. Besides that the use of spoken word throughout also gives a bit of humanity within the swirling electronic storm. Mattin, Dickhage, and Schuster all provide text, and "June" sticks out as a meta-exploration of the album's themes via direct conversation about the topic as it is ongoing.

Mattin's texts may make the underline themes clear throughout *Songbook #7*, but it is the structure and dynamics of the record that solidify this most. Aimed as a pointed critique of how various anti-fascist movements are attempting to accomplish their goals, the sprawling chaos of the sound, jerking and jumping from one sound to another, encapsulates this lack of focus perfectly. The more conventional sounding punk outbursts on "February" and "July" that feature Mattin's shouting vocal work come across as intentionally ineffectual: he is obviously angry, but the actuality comes across as him practically screaming at a wall. These two elements capture that critique of political efforts well: there is rage and good intentions throughout, but they are unfocused and therefore unable to accomplish much, especially when compared to the Russian revolution and Germaine Berton's actions over a hundred years ago. The final product is as ugly as the political climate Mattin is critiquing, but in the best and most fascinating manner.

[Samples Available Here](#)