

Brainwashed - Nodding God, "Play Wooden Child"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 12 May 2019 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 May 2019 18:59



Over the last few years, House of Mythology has become a vacation home of sorts for David Tibet, as he keeps returning there for one unique and ambitious side project after another. This latest divergence finds him teaming up with Andrew Liles for a very quixotic undertaking indeed: an album sung entirely in a dead language (Akkadian, one of Tibet's many deep interests). Given that, I had no doubt at all that it would be one the year's strangest and unapologetically indulgent releases, but I was still unprepared for how truly bizarre it ultimately turned out to be. Suffice to say, there is nothing else out there quite like *Wooden Child*, as it feels like an especially unhinged prog opus that took a darkly phantasmagoric turn leading far from any recognizably earthly territory.

[House of Mythology](#)

Both Andrew Liles and David Tibet have had long and colorful histories in underground music's dark fringes and collaborated many times before through Current 93, but this project marks a violent break with both reality and my own expectations that seems to have come from nowhere (or at least from an entirely different dimension than ours). Given Tibet's regular characterizations of his past work as a series of "channelings," it is perhaps possible that the band's enigmatic and imaginary third member The UnderAge Shaitan-Boy played a very large role in this album's direction. Just about anything is possible with this otherworldly and eccentric union. More likely, however, the pair just took the more deranged and hallucinatory edges of Liles' work and used that as a mere jumping off point for a deep plunge into the infernal, lunatic abyss that lies even further out. Perversely, however, Liles and Tibet make a point of stating that "pop" is one of their primary inspirations for this project (along with stars and cuneiform, of course), which is a riddle that I am doomed never to fully unravel. Given that there is plenty of colorful and imaginative misinformation lurking elsewhere in the album's description, it is possible that the duo made that statement purely in jest. Yet it actually seems weirdly sincere despite ample suggestion to the contrary. In a broad sense, there truly *are* unlikely "pop" elements pervading this entire album, as every song is built on tightly structured synth arpeggios. However, those elements are so abused and transformed by mind-warping effects, pitch shifts, and Tibet's heavily processed and demonic vocals that "pop" is among the furthest terms from my mind as I subject myself to Nodding God's relentless and candy-colored sensory overload. The finished project feels "pop" only in the sense that it is akin to being terrorized by a malevolent jack-in-the-box.

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Attempting to differentiate the individual songs on *Wooden Child* is mostly a fool's errand, so the opening "Trapezoid Haunting" essentially lays out the template for the entire album: a warped and demonic-sounding voice intones unrecognizable words in an unfamiliar language over a tensely bubbling synth pattern. Occasionally, Tibet's actual, unprocessed voice will sneak in for a short phrase, or a brief crescendo of disorienting effects will erupt, but the overall effect is a distinctly inhuman one that feels like an unholy and vaguely futuristic Möbius strip. It would be similarly apt to liken the album to an evil fun house or a darkly lysergic maze though, as each piece is just enough like every other piece to make me feel like I am trapped in a nightmarish loop, but just different enough to make it seem like the ground is constantly shifting underneath me. While an especially cool or striking motif fleetingly appears from time to time, it never sticks around long enough to make any one piece feel distinctive or unique. Rather, it feels like I am experiencing an eternal recurrence that grows steadily more hallucinatory and unnerving as I hope for any escape or solid ground in vain. There is no respite to be found. Ever. Given Tibet's exacting approach to Current 93, that insistently escalating sense of visceral discomfort and disorientation has to be intentional, but it is quite a curious path to choose. I suspect there is no one else that would consider "what would a classic Tangerine Dream album sound like if I was drowning in a lake of fire?" a viable or desirable aesthetic. Nevertheless, Liles and Tibet nail that target with remarkable accuracy and force again and again on *Wooden Child*.

Amusingly, I had to turn off this album while I was writing this review as it is such a relentless and unhinged assault that it became absolutely impossible to think clearly. As such, *Wooden Child* is a damn hard album to love, though it is also a powerful and unique artistic statement. In fact, it feels like a grotesque inversion of Current 93: all of Tibet's characteristic humanity and poetry has been pointedly erased, as have any vestiges of traditional music's simple, melodic beauty. Instead, Nodding God unleash an abstract miasma of merciless electronic patterns mingled with the twisted voices of the damned. I am tempted to call *Wooden Child*

"the sound of the void" because it feels that way when compared to Current 93, but it would be far more accurate to describe it as immense, harrowing, and overwhelming rather than as an emptiness. In that regard, perhaps the stars truly are one of Nodding God's biggest influences, as this album is akin to a psychedelic supernova that is burning too bright and unfolding too fast to be controlled or sustainable. That unbroken intensity ensures that

Wooden Child

is unquestionably the most difficult and outré of any of Tibet's recent endeavors, but it is also one hell of a memorable release that does not resemble anything else in his (or anyone else's) discography.

A preview of the album can be found [here](#) .