

## Brainwashed - Lawrence English concert at Landmark, Bergen, October 22, 2017

Written by Duncan Edwards

Sunday, 29 October 2017 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 November 2017 03:39

---

A quiet Sunday night in Bergen, Norway, was enlivened by the electronic compositions of Lawrence English. Following a short set of mostly original songs by Brigid Mae Power, with her impressive haunting voice and spirited guitar accompaniment, he transformed the intimate Landmark venue into a bewildering and unique landscape. English advised everyone to get out of chairs and lay on the floor, or on several low couches, instead. This encouraged a truly relaxed and meditative openness to deeper listening.

Using effect pedals, mixer, and computer, English played "Another Body" and "Liquid Casket" from his record *Wilderness of Mirrors* and also "Object of Projection" and the rest of side two of his 2017 album *Cruel Optimism*. During the performance it was hard to know how much time was passing. Thunderous pummeling tones and sounds reminiscent of overtone singing and metallic distortion seemed to chamfer the walls almost to the point where I began to consider the structural integrity of the building.

Earlier that day I thought about English's album *The Peregrine*, borne of his fascination for J.A. Baker's 1967 book of the same name, an obsession which has seen him buy and send at least 100 copies of the book to various people, including Werner Herzog (who incorporated it on the essential reading list at his film school). Perhaps that is why parts of the set conjured, for me, a flock of birds imbued with freedom and rugged vulnerability racing back and forth across an autumn sky.

The combination of my horizontal position and the multilayered evolving sounds produced some powerful image associations in my mind, including colors. At one point the musical density dropped down into a pool of blue. Then, after another plunge in volume I saw more yellow and green, as if reaching a quiet meadow after a hard trudge through a region of darkness and blight. I felt waves crashing against rocks and huge ice particles colliding amid the Rings of Saturn. At other times there was a feeling of being in motion, as if speeding smoothly through eternal time and space.

Exciting to be transported by sound to such landscapes, but you would not want to be banished permanently there. On this night, Lawrence English perhaps offered a cautionary mood albeit with the strong reassurance that people may still come together in, as he put it, "sound solidarity". If he intended to warn of forces unleashed on Earth by inaction, greed, willful ignorance, or evil, then he succeeded. It was an impressive concert, a welcome awakening, with comfort laying beneath a disturbing terrain.