

Brainwashed - Michael Gira & Cian Nugent

Written by John Kealy

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Commanding the stage in a manner few others are capable of, Michael Gira played a stormer of a gig tonight. The set criss-crossed his career as he played songs from Swans, The Angels of Light and his various solo albums. This was one of the best performances I have ever seen him do; he seemed more at ease than usual and this fed into his playing. However, it was far from a relaxing evening as Gira's songs ploughed through the extremes, both positive and negative, of human emotion.

4 April, Dublin, Ireland.



Cian Nugent's solo set saw his fingers dance around the fretboard like a Sufi Dervish dancer. His precise, eloquent and flowing style is always a treat for the ears but he seemed particularly on form this evening. Performing a few instrumental pieces on his acoustic, the notes lit up the room and it was easy to get lost in his playing. These pieces were geared more towards an Eastern form with just a hint of blues thrown in for good measure. To finish off, he switched to electric guitar and sang. While it was not as much my cup of tea as the rest of his set, it was certainly a lovely bit of music and set the scene nicely for Michael Gira.

One of the most striking aspects of Gira's performance was the volume. Usually one man and an acoustic guitar relies on melody and harmony alone to win over a listener but Gira uses

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rhythm and loudness to exert his presence on the room. That is not to say his songs are not pleasant to listen to at a lower volume but unlike his solo recordings (and even previous solo performances I have witnessed), he played with an intensity that almost matched that of Swans last year. When he strummed his guitar, I could feel it in my chest. When he bellowed, I could feel the air move from the speakers. This is not your normal singer-songwriter concert.



"Jim" and "Eden Prison" sounded as heavy as the Swans versions, both were much fuller than the intimate home recorded versions too. Live Gira inhabits the songs in a way that is absent from his solo albums. He was not a man singing the lyrics; he was a man living the lyrics. Delving further back into his repertoire, he gave a stunning rendition of "Blind" from his classic solo album *Drainland*. Although I have heard this song in various guises throughout the years, this version was easily the definitive one. Whether it was hear-a-pin-drop atmosphere of the venue or all down to Gira's capacity as a performer it is hard to say but it was an experience to say the least.

When Gira announced he was playing a song from the second Angels of Light album, *How I Loved You*

, I deeply hoped it would be "Evangeline" which has been and still is my favorite song that he had penned. My wish came true and it was stunning. Those moments when the hairs stand up on the back of my neck come less and less frequently these days but "Evangeline" did its magic. This effect was to be repeated later in the evening with an encore of "God Damn the Sun," which, to me has become the definitive solo Gira song (as much as I loved "Evangeline," I did keep aching for the backing vocals and extra instrumentation of The Angels of Light). This was the sheer emotional power, dead pan delivery and crushing rhythm that defined Gira's career distilled into a few minutes of music.

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someone who Swans fans deem not hip enough/too hip (delete as applicable) to grace one of their beloved band's albums.