

Brainwashed - Robert Haigh: Discipline and Space

Written by Lucas Schleicher

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Robert Haigh's 30 year long musical career has spawned an impressive and uncommonly diverse catalog of sounds. He has released records under his own name, as Truth Club, Sema, Fote, and as Omni Trio, collaborated with Nurse with Wound, and recorded multiple drum 'n' bass club anthems, some of which were inspired by Philip Glass. His work has been released by labels such as United Dairies, L.A.Y.L.A.H., Crouton, and Dom, and his music has even appeared in video games like Grand Theft Auto 3 and Midnight Club 3. He is currently completing a trilogy of solo piano records for Siren, of which *Anonymous Lights* is the most recent. Robert recently took the time to talk to Brainwashed about his past work, improvisation, collaborations with Nurse with Wound and Hafler Trio, the role of silence in music, and much more.

Lucas Schleicher: Who are you, where are you from, and how would you describe what you do?

Robert Haigh: My name is Robert Haigh. I was born in Yorkshire, England and I lived in London for many years. I now live in Cornwall.

Simply put, I create music. But in a way (and at the risk of sounding cheesy) it's truer to say that I uncover music. Everything comes out of a degree of improvisation.

LS: Are you currently working on any non-musical projects?

RH: I don't really have the time at the moment.

LS: When did you begin writing music? What was your first release and who released it?

RH: As a teenager in the mid '70s I was in a rock group in South Yorkshire. I wrote songs, played guitar, and even sang!! We also did covers of Bowie and the Velvet Underground. My first release was as Truth Club on the *Hoisting the Black Flag* comp released by United Dairies.

LS: How did you meet Steven Stapleton and become associated with United Dairies?

RH: In the early '80s I worked with Trevor Reidy (Truth Club/Fote/Monochrome Set) at Virgin Records in a basement off Oxford Street in London. It was a bit of a gathering place for post-punk/experimental musicians. Steve worked just down the road in a little artist's studio and he used to hang out at the shop.

When the manager was out we would play all of *Chance Meeting* over the shop's sound system and drive all the customers out. Steve was interested in what we were doing and asked us (Truth Club) to contribute a track for *Hoisting the Black Flag*.

LS: Who else showed up in that Virgin Records basement? Did any other notable projects emerge from there?

RH: Jim Thirlwell (Foetus) worked at the shop for a while. He hooked up with Steve, too. Just about anyone doing interesting stuff in London passed through that basement at some point. And a few Australians too.

LS: Tell me a little more about Truth Club. How long did it last and who was involved (besides Trevor Reidy)?

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RH: Initially it was just me and Trevor, but later we invited a few others to help out. Deborah Harding did vocals and clarinet, Trefor Goronwy (later of This Heat) played bass. We stayed together for about a year and a half. We supported a few bands around London, including Cabaret Voltaire, Clock DVA, This Heat, and The Associates.

LS: And how did your Sema project begin? Who was involved with that and what was the impetus behind it? What about Fote?

RH: Sema was just me. I wanted to do something more atmospheric, more layered and textured, without the constraints of a group format.

Fote was the Truth Club without Trefor Goronwy. We made two EPs.

LS: What was it about tape collage and atmospheric sounds that appealed to you? How were you drawn away from rock 'n' roll?

RH: The album that introduced me, and turned me on to an alternative way of hearing music, was *The Faust Tapes*. In an attempt to promote the group, Virgin put the album out at 50 pence and my sister (who's a few years older than me) went out and bought a copy.

She hated it and gave it to me. I wasn't so sure at first (I was about 14 at the time), but I only had a couple of albums in my collection so I persevered with it. After a while I found it compelling. It opened up a whole new way of hearing and thinking about music. I was especially drawn to the juxtapositions (discordant sounds alongside melodic, etc.).

LS: Are there any plans to re-release your early records? If not, why not?

RH: Unfortunately all the master tapes for those releases are lost.

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On a winter's day, the landscape is a mix of green and white. The snow is not deep, but it covers the ground in a thin layer. The trees are bare, and the sky is a pale, uniform grey. The overall mood is one of quiet solitude.