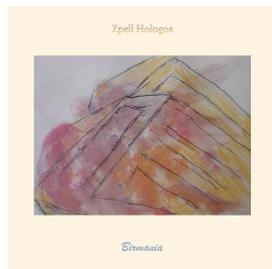


Brainwashed - Zpell Hologos, "Birmania"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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This is the debut of a new project from Babe, Terror's Cláudio Szynkier, who has apparently undergone quite a dramatic creative upheaval over the last couple years. Then again, it is quite hard to tell what would constitute expected terrain for an artist who seems to seamlessly bounce between being a killer techno producer and channeling Morton Feldman-esque neo-classical abstraction. Nevertheless, something radical is definitely happening with Szynkier, as he is following 2020's acclaimed departure *Horizogon* with a pair of fresh and different departures: *Birmania*

is intended as the companion piece to an intriguing feature-length film set for release next year (*A Princesa de Rangoon*

). The film's unique premise ("apparitions, mystical presences and lost stories from São Paulo and Rangoon are discovered over the course of a summer in the future") provides some helpful insight into the unusual vision that guides

Birmania

, as Szynkier is deeply interested in both how civilizations rise, fall, and transform and how traces of the past haunt the future. Of course, Szynkier is also the hapless sufferer of a chronic ear problem, so perhaps filmmaking and a softer, more abstract strain of music is primarily an ideal way to remain creatively vital without subjecting oneself to seismic bass and thumping kick drums. In any case, Szynkier is an increasingly fascinating and unique composer and

Birmania

is a fitfully wonderful album. While not every piece quite hits the mark for me, the ones that do can feel quite revelatory.

[Self-Released](#)

The first of the "quite revelatory" pieces on *Birmania* is the opening "Mandalay Moulmay," which begins as a disorienting and haunted-sounding classical piano performance in which melodies seem to constantly overlap and drunkenly stumble into one another. It calls to mind a more melodic Morton Feldman due to its murky dissonances, but also feels like a sublime feat of dissolving loop architecture. Amusingly, it additionally sounds like curdled, rotted, and

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deconstructed cover of "What a Wonderful World," which is darkly appropriate for these times. As it unfolds, however, things grow steadily more surreal, as pitches and speeds start unexpectedly shifting and synth/rave elements starts to bleed in or blurringly intrude. For the most part, I am less keen on *Birmanian's* futuristic elements than I am on Szynkier's artfully frayed and distending string and piano themes, but the gorgeous synth break at the center of "Mandalay Moulmay" was the hook that first drew me into the album, so I suppose Szynkier's instincts are probably solid.

The following "Cocokyoun" is another highlight in a somewhat similar vein, though the blearily descending piano melodies feel more like the haunted ballroom territory of *The Caretaker* this time around. Again, the blurring intrusions of artificiality (the synths) are an interesting choice, but they increasingly feel like they serve an important role texturally (and they always serve a role conceptually, given the album's theme of interweaving past and future). The overall feel is akin to a film loop of a classical piano performance that gradually starts getting snagged and burning up until a gnarled backwards string motif supernaturally fades in for an unsettling finale. To my ears, the most perfectly realized piece on the album is "Pyapoon," which feels like a dusty 78 of a piano/harp duet is eerily smearing, dissolving, unraveling, and fading in and out of focus. And then it seems like Tangerine Dream's *Phaedra* suddenly crash lands in the middle of it all, which is definitely not something I anticipated. Once it recovers from that shockwave, "Pyapoon" continues its original trajectory towards a fever dream crescendo of heaving, churning, and time-stretched classical loops. While those three pieces feel like the strongest ones on the album to me, the remaining ones are all in a similar vein and the same themes continue to appear throughout the album. As such, *Birmanian*

is quite an absorbing whole and a great headphone album rather than a collection of discrete individual pieces. It also feels like the sort of album that is too weird and singular to have an unconflicted opinion about, which probably means that Szynkier is doing something very right. I suspect I just need to catch up to whatever wavelength he is currently on, as he seems to be nearly peerless at constructing sad, beautiful, and soulful loop collages when he sets his mind to it.

Samples can be found [here](#) .