

# REVIEWS

Joshua Gessler, the man behind Worrytrain, does not make music that could accurately be described as obscure or experimental. There's nothing on his self-titled debut that you wouldn't find on You Forgot It In People (in Gessler's quieter, folksier moments) or Ag?s Byrjun (when he goes all glacial). So, while Worrytrain's music may never burst forth into the Top 40 airwaves, Gessler is far from the only guy who's doing what he's doing. That point ignores two key facts. First, Gessler's work is reminiscent of Broken Social Scene and Sigur Rós without the aid of vocals. When, in "Downism", he captures the same sense of icy majesty that typifies Sigur R? there are no Hopelandish vocals, let alone English. When Gessler hits the same warm, inviting tone that BSS do, he does it by allowing his guitar (and his mandolin, and his piano, and his synthesizer, and his percussion instruments) to speak for itself. There's certainly far more to those acts' success (and the success of their many peers and imitators) than singing, but you'd also be hard-pressed to argue against their importance in the groups' respective formulae. As the recent BSS B-sides collection Bee Hives made clear, the group is a lot less engaging sans vocals. Second, and more impressively, we can't ignore the fact that Gessler, working mostly alone, has captured the spirit, if not the precise sound, of two very different groups. While both acts rely to some degree on the richness of their instrumental compositions to create and sustain moods, that's the limit of their similarity. Worrytrain proves that it's not an unmanageable divide. Gessler has no problem going from warm, intimate folk to cold, spooky ambient isolation, and back again; as "Flying High On Wounded Wings" shows, it's sometimes just a matter of adding warmer-sounding percussion to an otherwise bleak soundscape. This is what makes Gessler so unique -- not his individual songs, which, taken individually, don't sound drastically different from what other artists are doing, but the context in which they exist, both in relation to each other and to the broader musical landscape. Gessler takes risks, creating electronic music that doesn't stick to a single, prevailing theme or mood. On Worrytrain, those risks pay off handsomely."

**Matthew Pollesel@Splendid**

"...the music of Worrytrain displays not only a quality that is amplified, but one of transience as well. He is able to acutely express his form of truth and subjection through very little?and of course, sometimes, very much. Geisslar's uncanny ability to meld the urgency of noise and frenetic percussion with the unsettling beauty and comfort apparent in late 80s chamber pop is truly one to which admiration and gratitude is deservedly due. Where Sam Shalabi brilliantly showed how a noise-infected record could convey moments of decisive pop sensibility and even unparalleled beauty with The Pink Abyss ; Geisslar has done the same for rock music. Geisslar has offered no less than a rock album, which has subsequently proven to have much more depth. Perhaps it is due to its lack of angst-ridden, whiny vocals, or because of its decidedly dark and majestic approach that makes Worrytrain's creation so utterly grand (this holds even more truth when one considers the shockingly simple method of composition which he practices). Nevertheless, Geisslar has produced something memorable, and fully capable of greatness if given such an opportunity. There may be moments of uneasy truncated recapitulation and overuse of frantic cymbal work that work against Geisslar; however, these moments are few and in between, and are all about treading that fine line noted before, carefully separating dissonance and beauty?a daring and inspired Yin and Yang so often crossed and re-crossed without any noteworthy results. Worrytrain has tiptoed gorgeously on this line, carefully and ambitiously; and now I can only hope he keeps his balance"

**Kevin Chong@brainwashed.com**

"If you were ever lost in a dream, submerged within unconsciousness, it would sound something like worrytrain, the moniker Joshua Gessler has been recording under for the past two and a half years. The music is muffled, almost smothered under layers of atmospheric sounds, interlaced with the occasional flitter of life in the form of a guitar or mandolin string, distorted enough to be distinctive but recognizable.

The album begins with plucky mandolin strings on "Terminal Sunshine" while musical waves lap the licks, building like grey clouds over an ocean when it begins to sound as if the underlying dissonance might just be vacuum cleaners, a sound that fits curiously well. Later, the track ""Via Mandoline Rally" sounds like an instrumental by the Cure as heard through the haze of a Prozac overdose whereas other tracks, like "Heaven Ice Spread Downward" and "Downism" have a shadowy glimmer than reminds one, or at least this reviewer, of quiet stylized movies, like Lost in Translation or Blade Runner. With the ethereal nature of the record there's no one song that towers over the rest, which is the point, really, as the music floats in and out of focus, wisping from one track to the next, parts of a single cohesive unit. It is difficult to describe the music, as it is ambient and atmospheric, but not overpowered by electronic pulses. Rather, worrytrain's music sounds like the soundtrack to a bizarre movie of the mind, the fluid captured essence of daydreaming made audible and organic. It might seem simplistic to say so, but either you like it or you don't. It's a nice CD to put on for background music when you want to keep people guessing; is that folk music you're listening to? Irish? Ambient? The answer is a resounding yes/no/all-of-the-above-yet-still-something-different.

**Michael Diaz@1340 Magazine**

Destroy the Wall Street Sundial marks Worrytrain's (AKA Joshua Gessler) third album. And yet, having reached the point where many artists start to run low on ideas, you only have to hear the development of the wondrous opener "City of Shade" to realize this album has all the creative ambition of a debut. But more than that, the album demonstrates Gessler's experience and confidence in terms of music production, in particular the dynamics involved in creating polymorphic instrumental pieces. Whether we're talking about the deliberately over-distorted drums of the opener, or the inclusion of various found sounds throughout the album, it is clear we are dealing with something truly original. In fact, the artist which Worrytrain most recall through its electronic textures and shoegazey guitars is electronic pioneer M83. Both could be (and I'm sure frequently are) described as 'cinematic'; their shimmering ambient movements conjure up a blissful nostalgia or visceral paranoia, which would certainly work well as soundtrack material. But just as illuminating are the differences between the two projects. Where M83 often seems veiled by its high production, loop based approach, Worrytrain feels very direct and immediate. I guess the best analogy for the difference in feel is that of quantizing sound. M83's music feels like it has been ordered to fit perfectly to a particular tempo. The result is that the music is very clean, but cold. (This is not intended as a criticism; the clean/cold combination perfectly suits M83.) Worrytrain, on the other hand, allows layers of tracks to form a more organic mesh, one which feels more improvised and well, human. One compelling factor regarding this album however, particularly given Gessler's recurring thematic concern (the end of the world), is the sense of optimism, or even euphoria laced throughout the album. Alongside the foreboding darkness, which I would guess we can largely assume to be a result of the global mechanics of late capitalism, there is a very powerful sense of optimism and liberation, which echoes the sentiment expressed through the album's title. This desire for change is expressed predominantly through the twin emotions of fear and energetic wonderment. Taking "The Storm is Now" for example, we find the drums recalling a train of liberation, speeding across a landscape of tension and fear, ending with a chaotic collapse of some kind. Without wishing to labor the point, it really feels at times like you're part of a post-apocalyptic movie. But where ordinarily you'd expect a bombastic soundtrack to the classic 'good versus evil' setup, here Gessler focuses mostly on subtler things. In the tracks which form the bulk of the album we are treated to the spectrum of emotion from the night before the attack, of a soldier on lookout waiting for the first signs of inevitable conflict. There is no definite Hollywood conclusion to this unwritten narrative in the sense of which side wins; we are instead left to consider the losses on the dark epic "Chain Length Cathedral," and the 'you can't go home again' feel of the ambivalent (and perhaps ironic) "Homeward Arching Strings." "Inalu" and "Barrier in Foundation" carry this sense of inevitable duality to the album's conclusion, but in doing so allow it to form a sort of redemption for the listener. Whether this is in the sense of a finality, an afterlife or perhaps justification is anyone's guess, but it is certainly an appropriate and powerful conclusion, especially considering the album's eschatological theme; you can almost see the credits rolling as the electronic sounds undulate and twinkle around you. This is not to say that the album is flawless however. It suffers from being overly stretched out and unfocused in the mid-section and includes the anomalous and lengthy "As Black as War Water," an experiment which seems designed to offset the listener, but becomes more of a distracting irritation. It seems likely, especially considering its title, that the track is intended to depict the horror of war itself, as something of a kernel to the album and its narrative. Unfortunately, the fact that this track feels so at odds with the rest of the album, particularly given its position at such a crucial point, makes it difficult to engage fully with the album as a whole. It seems a shame that this is the case, especially considering it could have been largely avoided by simply omitting a select few tracks from the final selection. I should end by saying that partly due to its unusual approach and production style, this album may well require some work from the listener. Unlike M83 it isn't always immediately clear what Joshua Gessler is up to, but it's for this very reason that it's worth persisting with. Once you start to click with it you'll realize why it was not only worth the effort, but why it'll be well worth keeping an eye on releases from Worrytrain in the future.

**Alan Miles**

Dès que ce premier album de Worrytrain répand ses effluves sonores, on comprend qu'on vient d'entrer dans un univers musical particulier, rare, exigeant et profondément influent, celui d'un jeune musicien américain, Joshua Gessler attelé à son œuvre depuis le début des 00's.

On est tenté dans un premier temps de lancer des comparaisons du côté de Labradford, One Mile North, July Skies, Stars of The Lid, Greg Davis, RF, voire Cinq ou Third Eye Foundation mais en même temps on sent également de profondes forces souterraines à l'œuvre, une silhouette et une identité semblent émerger, comme dans certains œuvres de Harold Budd, Richard Youngs ou même Arvo Part, de même sur les photographies, Joshua semble posséder la même grâce et les cheveux noirs qu'un Nathan Amundson (Rivulets).

On pourrait aussi tenter de rapprocher Worrytrain d'un style, le cataloguer ambient, new age, drone, expérimental, voire shoegazer mais encore une fois là on ferait fausse route car il y a quelque chose d'intrinsèque à sa musique qui le distingue instantanément, c'est que Worrytrain reste toujours infiniment humain, sa musique a beau être sombre et désespérée, exquise, éthérée et sublime, elle n'en reste pas moins toujours relié à notre échelle émotionnelle, abandonnant tout excès, immédiatement identifiable et intégrable, oscillant de la rêverie à la médiation profonde, de la béatitude à la mélancolie poignante, de l'austérité jusqu'aux palpitations de la vie, du cœur jusqu'à la transcendance.

Bien qu'étant sombre, sa musique laisse toujours un filet de lumière et d'air frais oxygénant, il fait froid mais juste pour que l'air gelé nous maintienne éveillé, nous vivifie, hors de toute perspective délétère, de même à de multiples occasions, nous est offerte la possibilité de nous réchauffer et de nous purifier les poumons par de longues inspirations d'un air pur sous des cieux radieux.

Dix plages en quarante minutes, Joshua reprend à son compte le format d'un album pop / folk ou rock traditionnel même si son expression l'amène dans d'autres dimensions, on peut réinterpréter ce découpage traditionnel comme une supplémentaire preuve d'ouverture et une volonté d'accessibilité vers une œuvre à la profondeur pourtant hors du commun.

L'album ouvre sur "Terminal Sunlight", des rayons de soleil horizontaux aux ombres longitudinales et étirées, de superbes cascades de cordes, guitare et mandoline, pleuvent sous des nappes éthérées à travers lesquelles pointeront bientôt des étoiles. Un espace ample se dessine sous nos yeux à travers lequel on marche d'un pas ample et le corps allégé.

Mais déjà "Flying High On Wounded Wings" se révèle plus sombre, un ciel de pluie, des trombes d'eau qui se déversent tandis que le soleil n'apparaît que par quelques rayons qui frappent le sol ça et là à travers le paysage, comme un dieu en campagne déversant sa rage diluvienne sur terre. Mais venues de profondeurs, des vagues de mélancolie nous assaillent et comme seule pause, on plonge notre regard vers le ciel en un ultime espoir d'échappatoire, vers l'éther scintillant et ses harmonies qui guident les marins en mer, "Today I Saw An Angel..Today I Saw A Satellite". Avec "Heavens Ice Spread Downward", Worrytrain baigne dans les eaux sublimes de One Mile North, Harold Budd et Labradford avec une grâce équivalente.

"Via Madoline Ralley" est alors comme un petit chemin de traverse qui file en pente à travers les frondaisons pour aboutir à une large clairière, d'une beauté champêtre affolante avec sa mandoline exubérante et intimiste. A l'opposé, "Downism" évoque des fonds marins, ou une caverne de glace au cœur d'un glacier immense, cathédrale de glace à la surface humide, aux stalactites immenses et aux jeux d'une lumière quasiment minérale. "Goodbye Northern Lights" évoque une mer calme mais où la ligne d'horizon fusionne complètement avec un ciel chargé de nuages pluvieux, un bateau voile au vent dérivant dans l'immensité gris-bleutée comme une caravelle en plein ciel.

Beaucoup de sensations hivernales sur "London Fog & Burning", le froid qui pique le visage, des brumes accrochées aux arbres et qui ne décolleront pas de la courte journée, un feu de bois autour duquel quelques-uns s'affairent, se réchauffant, cuisinant, quelque chose d'ancré profondément dans le passé humain. Le feu et l'hiver, fondamentalement complémentaires et antinomiques à la fois.

Acalmie et apaisement en apesanteur léthargique sur "Cold Sleepwarm Sound" qui nous emmène vers la dernière plage, comme un retour au monde où l'on reprend conscience et l'on se réveille au milieu des marais, "Waking Up In The Marsh", un retour à la vie à la lumière.

Joshua offre ici un premier album merveilleusement texturé et construit, témoignant d'une sensibilité hors du commun mais surtout d'une capacité à transcender ses inspirations et ses compositions. L'avenir le démontrera ou pas mais il y a tout lieu de penser qu'ici émerge quelqu'un de terriblement important.

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