



IRASCIBLE MUSIC



BRNS (BE)

Album: Sugar High

Label: Yotanka

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Web: <https://www.brns.be/>

EPK: irascible.ch/de/releases/brns/sugar-high

When asked to describe the feelings and circumstances surrounding the making of their wily sophomore album, the three members of Brussels-based BRNS (pronounced “brains”), cite a general desire for change—as well as the relative exhaustion from years of non-stop touring—as motivating factors. “We had been on the road for over 3 years after our last record,” says bassist Antoine Meersseman, “When we started writing again we all wanted to renew ourselves, a revival. We wanted to surprise ourselves in the process.”

The ten tracks on *Sugar High*, BRNS second proper full-length record, reflect not only the band’s unpredictability as songwriters (bringing to mind the likes of SUUNS, Yeasayer, and Cloud Nothings), but their prowess as multi-instrumentalists, no doubt the result of playing hundreds of shows over the past five years. Since releasing their debut EP, *Wounded*, in 2012—a released bolstered the breakout success of early single, “Mexico”—the band rarely took breaks, gigging endlessly across Europe and logging two tours in Russia, in addition to making jaunts to SXSW and Iceland Airwaves. After releasing *Patine* in 2014, the band—then operating as a four piece—spent the better part of the next three years on the road, building on the momentum of their live show. By the time 2016 rolled around, it became clear that everyone needed a break.

“Our previous records were made in between shows or on small breaks between tours,” says guitarist Diego Leyder, “It seemed important this time that we really take our time and change the way we did things. Because of that, *Sugar High* really sprang from the collaboration. The basic ideas for the songs came from everyone. After we’d have 30 or 40 seconds of music to work with, we’d share the song and look at it as a team. Together we would build the songs out of these little pieces. It was probably the most fun we’ve ever had making music together.”

Recorded over the course of several weeks at various studios around Brussels, (“The longest we’ve ever spent time recording,” says Leyder, “All of our previous records were done in under 10 days.”) with the assistance of friend and engineer Tommy Desmedt, the ten tracks on *Sugar High* are some of the most sonically adventurous the band has ever created. Lead single “Pious Platitudes” is a synthy slow build, pushed along by a chugging bass line, ripping drum fills, and synth sounds that might have floated away from a Grandaddy or Beck record from the 90’s. In addition to boasting a gooeey, *Eraserhead*-esque monster birth music video, the song contains some of the records most evocative lyrics: *Something’s coming, something’s near, oh, don’t you hear?* Such questions pop up all over the album, which is filled with both a palpable yearning (“We

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fell in love but our hearts were ill, We thought they'd crack...”) and a series of missed connections (“*We’re all dead wherever we go/Damn right, and now we know/God damn, it’s all your fault/Next time you go alone*”). Despite the nihilism creeping into the edges of the lyrics—“*Take your time / Chew it over /Give way to Evil*”—the record is buoyed by the vibrancy of the music, swerving between shimmery pop tracks (“The Rumor” “The Missing” “Forest”), expansive slow burners (“Ishtar” “Damn Right”), and songs that flirt with a kind of electrified psychedelia (“Sarah” “So Close”). Zig-zagging between different moods and textures, the listening experience of *Sugar High* offers a kind of subdued euphoria—catchy in all the right ways, but sonically ambitious enough to invite repeat headphone listening.

“On *Sugar High* we wanted production to not be as swollen or as thick sounding,” says bassist Antoine Meersseman. “This lets the melodies shine through, and for simpler and smaller riffs to have a bigger place, which kind of got lost in the mix on the previous records. We really wanted this record to breathe. We didn’t want the record to sound nostalgic. We wanted openness. In the past we would pick songs that were almost ceremonial, liturgical. Instead, this time around a song like ‘Ishtar’ sounds mysterious and maybe a little disturbing without sounding sad. Other songs don’t sound happy *or* sad, which was kind of the goal. The feeling is somewhere in between.”

Per vocalist and drummer Tim “Clijsters” Philippe, the range of sounds and moods on *Sugar High* is the direct result of the band loosening the reins on their own creative process. “We gave ourselves a lot more freedom with this record to bring whatever we individually came up with to the table,” he says. “We each brought bits and pieces. We constantly asked ourselves: How do we wrap up this song? How can we better arrange this part? What new thing can we bring to it? As a result the record goes in a lot of crazy directions. It’s more dynamic and has more character. We really just wanted to bring out more color. We wanted to evoke a variety of different feelings, but not necessarily just sadness or gloom.”

“In hindsight you see flaws and want to not make them again,” says Meersseman, “So everything we didn’t do on *Patine*, we ended up doing on this record. I think that *Sugar High* has a touch and feel that is closer to our earliest recordings. A lot of time has gone by since then. Everything comes full circle in the end.”

For a band whose hallmark has always been a kind of emphatic sonic adventurousness (and whose visuals have never shied away from being charmingly and/or alarmingly surreal), *Sugar High* meets what is already a high benchmark in terms of experimentation and outright catchiness. “I think when you write or create something, it’s always a reaction to what you did before,” says Leyder. “You go on the same path and you try to explore it more, or you do something different. That’s what we did.”

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BRNS are:

Tim "Clijsters" Philippe (Drums, Lead vocals) Antoine Meersseman (Bass, keys and backing vocals) Diego Leyder (Guitars, keys and backing vocals)

Sugar High track listing:

The Rumor

Pious Platitudes

Ishtar

The Missing

Damn Right

Encounter

Sarah

Forest

Sunday Afternoon

So Close

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