

Diminished Men – Damage Mécanique

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While books have blurbs that likely indicate whether or not you want to read them, records are altogether less pitch-orientated in their physicality, which, back in the day, used to make sifting through vinyl in shops and at record fairs an exercise which was a measure of one's attitude to risk. Sometimes you'd take a punt on a record because you'd heard of the band and they sounded interesting, others, you'd go by the label or the cover or something.

Some traders – and this is something Jumbo records in Leeds still do – is put a short summary on a sticker on the PVC sleeve the record is stored in.

The virtual equivalent, for me, is scanning press releases. No way can I listen to everything I receive, let alone write about it, and some nights my inbox feels like flicking through boxes of records, unsure of what I actually want to hear until I find it. And lo, as I wander, aimless and befuddled, fatigued from another day of corporate chairpounding to keep the roof over my head and the bills paid, I stumble upon *Damage Mécanique* by Diminished Men. I've never heard of them, but on reading the pitch, I felt as if this was the thing I needed but didn't know I needed until I found it.

Drawing from elements of film noir, psychedelic exotica, experimental rock, deviant surf and musique concrète, Diminished Men refocus their influences into something entirely unique. Collaged with menacing electricity, the raw materials are broken up and reassembled in their crude private facility. The group has spent more than a decade crafting their style and have established themselves as an integral part of Seattle's underground music scene.

*Their latest record, *Damage Mécanique*, thrusts the listener into a malfunctioning industrial sci-fi soundscape. Trance inducing guitars beckon with haunting wails, high-tension wires spin and spit with a crackling hiss. Circular kosmische*

rhythms and anxiety-drenched beats destroy and rebuild around fractured melodies and noise. The band oxidizes and melts into experimental post-punk and acousmatic environments as hypnotic groove and vertigo copulate in cinematic assemblage.

And there's no question that they've got pedigree: drummer Dave Abramson is also a member of Master Musicians of Bukkake, Spider Trio, and has collaborated with Eyvind Kang and Secret Chiefs 3 among many others.

As 'Double Vision' crashes in amidst clattering, explosive percussion and dingy bass, I'm hauled by the collar into the realms of early industrial in the vein of Test Dept and Perennial Divide, and instantly, I'm home, knowing that this was indeed what I needed. It's sparse in terms of arrangement, but dense in terms of sound, and it's abrasive, rhythm-orientated, loud, heavy, and batters away at the brain.

It may seem counterintuitive to suggest that when your thoughts are in a mangled disarray and your focus is no-existent that the answer lies in music that bashes you round the bonce from all directions at once, but for me, at least, it's infinitely more beneficial than any kind of chillout shit or ambient – although amidst loping, rolling rhythms, 'Wet Moon' conjures a shimmering ambience of sorts, while pointing towards esoteric oddity.

'The Maze' confuses and confounds with its daze-inducing cyclical riff and motoric beats which are pure Krautrock, evaporating into a mist around the mid-section of its six-and-a-half minute duration that sees it build through a jazzy post-rock segment before tumbling back into that nagging, dislocated groove – and it's a nagging dislocated groove that dominates the wig-out weirdness of 'Panopticon'. It's likely of help to no-one to comment that it sounds like Murder the Disturbed but with the wild sax of These Monsters, but there it is: obscure post-punk collides with obscure jazz-infused noise rock, and it's a corking way to end the first side of the album.

If 'Axial Tremors' suggests rock excess played at a crawl, then it's equally dragged out via some expansive jazz expressions into the realms of darkness. 'Silver Halides' brings a bold, brawling swagger to a cautious and subdued party of picked guitar introversion, and the final piece in this mismatched musical jigsaw, the six-minute 'Spy' hits the groove and drives it out of the door – while the door is still closed. Just as they clearly know how to make an entrance, they obviously understand the importance of a memorable exit.

There's no particular or overt theme which unifies *Damage Mécanique*, and nor is there really anything that's obvious stylistically speaking, as the album tosses a whole load into the mix and feels, in many respects, quite introspective in its influences and inspirations. There are, however, strong and unusual contrasts in evidence, with doomy bass and twanging desert rock working in tandem to forge a unique sonic experience., alongside, well, you name it. Quirky, atmospheric, *Damage Mécanique* is odd, but also compelling. It could be just the album you need, too.