

These New Puritans – Hidden (2010)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Time Xone*
02. *We Want War*
03. *Three Thousand*
04. *Hologram*
05. *Attack Music*
06. *Fire-Power*
07. *Orion*
08. *Canticle*
09. *Drum Courts-Where Corals Lie*
10. *White Chords*
11. *5*

Arranged By – Jack Barnett, Ryan Lott Bass Clarinet – Kamil Doležal Bass Trombone – Petr Čihák Bassoon – Tomáš Frantis Choir – New London Children's Choir Clarinet – Aleš Hustoles, Tomáš Hustoles Clarinet, Bass Clarinet – Katie Emma Black Conductor – Robert Brauner Conductor [New London Children's Choir] – Ronald Corp Contrabassoon – Jackie Hayter, Pavel Rytina Directed By [New London Children's Choir] – Alex Gibson Drums [Drum-kits], Tom Tom, Taiko, Tamborim, Chains, Art Direction, Design – George Barnett Drums [Roto-toms, Rocket Toms], Handclaps, Flintlock, Tamborim, Electric Guitar – Thomas Hein Flugelhorn – Hynek Doležal Flute [Alto] – Robert Heger French Horn – Katie Pryce, Pavel Jirásek, Zdeněk Vasina Horn [Baritone] – Jiří Novotný Mbira – Ryan Lott Performer [Knife] – Tom Loffman Piano, Piano [Prepared] – Faith Leadbetter Trombone – Vit Korinek Trombone, Bass Trombone – Mark Rudland Trumpet [Roto-trumpet] – Guglielmo Baldini Tuba – Daniel Trodden, Lumir Maryška Vibraphone, Glockenspiel – Hugh Wilkinson Vocals, Programmed By [Programming, Beats], Keyboards, Drums [Toms, Marching Drum], Electric Guitar, Synthesizer, Gong, Taiko, Handclaps [Clapping], Performer [Chains], Noises [Foley Techniques] – Jack Barnett

A friend used to say that Miles Davis' "On the Corner" was his battle music, because aggressive percussion and dense sonic blasts came in handy whenever he needed to get psyched up.

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Should Miles' experimental opus ever lose its luster on him, I'm going to recommend Hidden as its steroid-charged replacement. The second album from UK art-rockers These New Puritans, Hidden is a riddim-heavy barrage of machine gun drums and dissonant tonal clang. A forward-thinking synthesis of seemingly disparate musical influences, the album expands on the ground broken by their 2008 debut Beat Pyramid, adding layers of tribal percussion, avant-garde composition and further electronic sheen. Hidden's sense of ambition rivals records like Primal Scream's Xtrmntr, and its refined sense for rhythmic menace would make it a fitting soundtrack for activities such as a rugby match, marching into enemy territory or a Klingon dance party.

Bandleader Jack Barnett has said that his intent with Hidden was to cultivate a sound that was something like "dancehall meets Steve Reich." And while any neat little algebraic formula for music is bound to go somewhat astray, it's a remarkably apt summary of the album's agenda. There's something simultaneously populist and avant-garde about it, as if Reich's "Drumming" ensemble marched offstage and started a frenzied street parade.

This two-faced quality of the record also has a historical register, in which ancient elements get vacuumed up by a Frankenstein futurism. "We Want War" sets the stage with an absolutely thunderous taiko pound augmented by syncopated digital skitter. Its brutal insistence seems to suggest that if we want war, it's because it's in our blood, coursing with primal rage. The emotional tone here bears a resemblance to Radiohead, particularly the paranoid boom-shacka of "Idioteque." But while Radiohead chart the anxieties of powerlessness faced with global disaster, These New Puritans are on the offensive, having heavily militarized their sound and aesthetic, group-chanting lyrics to songs titled "We Want War," "Fire-Power" and "Attack Music."

The album's uncompromising style can test your endurance. Sometimes Barnett's compositional prowess seems to get the better of him, rendering a track or two a bit top-heavy with baroque progressive tendencies, largely manifest as a kind of unholy alien choir sound ala Magma. For the most part though these prog elements are surprisingly well-wedded to the global militant low end, as on "Attack Music," which stitches bursting drums, bassoon and group chants into what sounds like an M.I.A. tune beamed from space. While Hidden comes front-loaded with unsettling gems like "We Want War" and "Three Thousand," it loses a bit of steam towards the end, with extra drum work-outs and orchestral compositions. Then the darkly catchy "White Chords" appears, with Barnett tossing out ominous sci-fi imagery like "I've got white chords running through my body" over mournful harmonies and breakdance beats. No accident that this number's buried towards the back end, as it's clear that Barnett's more interested in challenging listeners' expectations than soothing them with a sweet little hook.

---William Rauscher, residentadvisor.net

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