

# Chris Corsano and Bill Orcutt: Brace Up!

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Daniel Bromfield

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It's a hell of a risk to put a picture of a live gig on the cover of your studio album. The energy of so many great bands is lost amid the scheduling and spit-shining and ticking time-and-money clock of the studio that "you have to see 'em live" has become a cliché. Playboi Carti got away with putting a picture of his own backflip on *Die Lit* because it encapsulates not only the energy of the record but of 2010s rap itself, where moshing and stage-diving are taken to the extreme. And Bill Orcutt and Chris Corsano get away with it on *Brace Up!*, which at its best resembles a free improv abstraction of the sweatiest punk gig of your life.

*Brace Up!* is a tribute to DIY scuzz and busted amps and all the loving accoutrements of the basement concert culture with which these less-than-superstar musicians are well-acquainted. Both parties involved are formidable live performers; look up footage of either Orcutt's '90s band Harry Pussy or Corsano's gigs with wizard-bearded saxophonist Paul Flaherty. It's surprising Orcutt and Corsano haven't made a full-length studio album together yet, but they've released a few limited-edition live tapes. Perhaps they were afraid the energy of a live show wouldn't be replicable in the studio, but within seconds of *Brace Up!* it's clear few albums are likely to do a better job of capturing what it feels like to totally surrender yourself to a loud, fast rock 'n' roll band.

That's in spite of *Brace Up* containing almost no linear beats and no vocals save for Orcutt's distant, feline exhortations, which resemble the grunts of the no-less-aggressive Bahamian guitar master Joseph Spence. This is mostly a friendly boxing match between, as one track title puts it, "Amp vs Drum." They're not just competing to see who can be the loudest. It's like each one is trying to drive the other to maximum levels of excitement, and instead of sudden start-stop shifts, the tracks typically begin with big ringing low notes and drum rolls before coming apart and disintegrating into an avalanche. When the songs come to their crashing ends, we can almost feel how pumped they are to start up again.

This music might not strike you as restrained, but the two musicians give each other a lot of room to breathe. For all his fury, Orcutt uses little distortion or reverb, and his electric tone isn't all that different from his merciless attacks on acoustic instruments on albums like *How the Thing Sings*. Instead of chords he prefers little flurries of notes in start-stop clusters, using his bottom string as a bass that resonates continuously as he shreds on the high strings. And Corsano favors toms over cymbals; much of what he's doing essentially amounts to drum

rolls. The overall effect is a sort of lattice. Every individual sound is distinct, though you'd be forgiven for missing most of them given how quickly they fly by.

Once the initial shock of the record's tumbling power subsides – once you've braced up – it rewards deep listening. It can be clever and even subtle in the way of a great jazz album. Listen to how Orcutt works a bit of "Amazing Grace" into "She Punched a Hole in the Moon For Me." The way Corsano will go into a straight-up 4/4 beat for just a few tantalizing seconds and let it dissolve back into amorphous drum rolls. Listen to *Brace Up!* alongside a straight-up bit of bashing like the Stooges' "L.A. Blues" and it's obvious how much more regimented this music is. Its goals are nobler than to overwhelm us with volume. It wants to give you interesting, intellectually engaging music, and it wants you to go apeshit to it. Considering that most bands only want one or the other, that's something to celebrate.

