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VANTGARDE metal *Classics*



1987 - 2000

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Nexus Polaris

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Animatronic

ARCTURUS
Disguised Masters

IN THE WOODS...
Strange In Stereo

SAMAEI
Eternal

SOLEFALD
Neonism

DØDHEIMSGARD
666 International

PECCATUM
Strangling From Within

OPETH
Still Life

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Aghora

FLEURETY
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RAM-ZET
Pure Therapy

FANTOMAS
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www.avantgarde-metal.com

AVANT-GARDE METAL

A Brief And Incomplete History Of An Ongoing Experiment

Experimental metal, or what we on this website call avant-garde metal, strives to cross self-imposed borders and throw off the shackles of convention. As a genre, metal is unusually volatile and forward-thinking—some will scoff at this suggestion, but if you consider how far it has come since NWOBHM and thrash, you'll see what I mean.

Most of this change has been incremental: a little faster, heavier, uglier, more complex, etc. In trying to be more extreme or less accessible, metal bands continuously, almost pathologically, one-up the bands that came before. But avant-garde metal bands take a different approach. Instead of playing faster or slower, an experimental band will look outside the genre itself, attempting to locate sounds and aesthetics from elsewhere, ultimately creating music that doesn't quite sound like metal but is too heavy to be anything else.

There is no avant-garde sound and it isn't a genre. Anyone with talent and creativity can do it simply by availing themselves to the wider world of music, both popular and academic. Music is far too

wonderful a gift to squander on musical schematics and tried and tested formulas—the best composers and

musicians don't simply replicate the sounds handed down to them, but make

them their own. Avant-garde metal takes this notion to the extreme.

From the 1980s to the 1990s

In the 1980s, truly experimental metal bands were few and far between. Thrash and heavy metal bands generally advanced by changing tempos, using more complex time signatures or increasing the distortion. But there were some important formative bands that pushed the limits. In 1987, Swiss thrashers **CELTIC FROST** released the heady "Into the Pandemonium" to a then largely confused audience; the album featured pop, industrial, classical and Modern elements never before heard on a heavy metal album.



Celtic Frost were followed by fellow Swiss countrymen **CORONER**, who combined thrash with jazz and industrial elements, pushing a sound that was more abrasive and technical than much of what came before it. Coroner and the archetypal American death metal band Death had a significant influence on the bands of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

Meanwhile, grindcore exerted a strong influence in the United Kingdom, with experimental industrial-grind bands **O.L.D.** and **GODFLESH** building on Napalm Death's violent ambience, developing in the process a new kind of grind with dancey techno beats and sludgy industrial rhythms. These two bands helped inspire both the bleak dub soundscapes of **SCORN** and the hectic free jazz grind experiments of NYC composer **JOHN ZORN** (Painkiller and Naked City) in the 1990s.

Zorn's own work would lay the foundation for hyper-eclectic pastiche bands like **FAXED HEAD**, **SECRET CHIEFS 3** and **MR. BUNGLE**.



Throughout the nineties, these bands (with composer Trey Spruance as the

anonymous figure linking them) combined death metal and grind with every other conceivable genre (jazz, pop, country, contemporary classical, soundtrack, exotica, punk, Persian folk music, surf rock, big band, funk, hip hop, electro, industrial, etc.) in impossibly entertaining ways—so eclectic they were, the metal itself largely disappeared.

In other parts of the United States, thrash/death metal bands **ATHEIST**, **CYNIC** and **BELIEVER** introduced significant jazz fusion and

progressive rock sounds, creating extreme metal with unusually melodic richness and harmonic depth, even going so far as to introduce "positive" lyrics into a genre traditionally given to machismo and misanthropy. In Austria, **DISHARMONIC ORCHESTRA** released "Not to Be Undimensional Conscious" in 1992, an album that introduced jazzy funk-inspired bass lines and silly surrealist lyrics to grindcore. These bands would inspire other technical, jazz-inflected metal bands, including **MESHUGGAH** and **EPHEL DUATH**, right up to the present.

The international thrash and death metal scenes produced several avant-garde bands throughout the nineties, including **SEPTIC FLESH** and **ON THORNS I LAY** (Greece); **MISANTHROPE** and **STILLE VOLK** (France); **ELEND** (Austria); **PAN-THY-MONIUM** (Sweden); **THE 3RD AND THE MORTAL** (Norway); **ORPHANED LAND** and **PEOPLE** (Israel); and **NEUROSIS** (United States). While none of these bands sounded like one another, they were unified by the same commitment to unrestrained creativity and the simple fact of their unclassifiable nature.



Black Metal Insurgency

The Norwegian black metal explosion of the early 1990s revolutionized metal to the extent that even its earliest, most primitive practitioners could arguably be called avant-garde. Atmospheric bands

like **EMPEROR** added spacey synthesizers and Romantic melodies to super-fast metal while the more rustic sounding Ulver (still in their infancy) equalized the flute/acoustic guitar/hymn to metal ratio. Viking metal bands like **ENSLAVED** went even further, adding piano lines and

later psychedelic rock to the heroic formula laid out by Bathory in the late 1980s.

All of this was very interesting, but more interesting was what it inspired in the latter part of the 1990s. Several bands who started in the black metal scene quickly abandoned it for more adventurous terrain. For example, after tiring of folk and balls to the wall black metal, **ULVER** began tampering with electronics, trip hop and ambient music. Their 1998 take on Blake's romantic prose poem, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," broke all the rules of black metal, creating a daringly expressive sound in the process.

Several Norwegian black metal bands sought to put their own strange spins on

metal music. Some bands adopted elements of jazz and post punk (**FLEURETY** and **VED BUENS ENDE**); others took a theatrical, almost operatic turn (**ARCTURUS**, **ATROX** and **PECCATUM**); some went industrial (**THE KOVENANT**, **RED HARVEST** and

DODHEIMSGARD) while others embraced a fey 1970s aesthetic (**IN THE WOODS**). My personal favorites are **SOLEFALD** and **BEYOND DAWN**. Solefald seized upon the pastiche style of Mr. Bungle, but without ever abandoning the rough metal undercurrent—their lyrics are among the



most inventive in metal music. Beyond Dawn started with a dark Swans-like atmosphere before embracing classy electro-pop.

Black metal's influence was global, and bands across the world would follow a similar path. One band that was noticeably weird from the beginning was Japan's **SIGH**. Sigh was not merely content to play their thrashy style of black metal in a vacuum, but instead saw fit to incorporate a whole slew of outside influences, including disco, funk, country, old school heavy metal and impossibly strange, analog sound effects. Sigh is not merely a black metal band, but fits within the broader spectrum of Japanese experimental music (including the Boredoms, Acid Mothers Temple and Melt Banana).



One of the most productive avant-garde metal scenes emerged from the Austrian black metal movement. Even pure black metal stalwarts like **ABIGOR** and **SUMMONING** are strange and otherworldly by the standards of the genre; Abigor specializes in chaotic, atmospheric arrangements, while the Summoning duo composes long, repetitious, trance-inducing songs.

Avant-garde metal bands **KOROVAKILL** and **ANGIZIA** take things much further with ridiculously punchy songs rooted in industrial and vaudeville/musical theater respectively. If black metal kicked off a tremendously productive outpouring of metal experiments, its effect on folk metal was particularly pronounced. Swedish folk-metal projects like **OTYG** and **VINTERSORG** pushed the limits of both metal and Swedish folk music with

jaunty arrangements and traditional instrumentation. Finland's **FINNTROLL** fused indigenous humppa music with beer-swilling black metal, while the now-defunct **EMPYRIUM** (Germany) brought romantic hymns and pastoral music to bear on black/doom metal. Folk metal bands, including **ORPHANED LAND** (Israel) and **HANTAOMA** (France), continue to flourish throughout the metal world.

The 21st Century

Avant-garde metal has not slowed down; in fact, it has only continued to evolve and expand. Bands like **KAYO DOT**, **JESU**, **ISIS**, **DIABLO SWING ORCHESTRA**, **SLEEPYTIME GORILLA MUSEUM** and many of the bands covered above continue to explore the outer limits of experimental music, creating heavy music without rules or self-imposed limitations, creating unique sounds simply because they can and must. These are the bands that this website was designed to commemorate, celebrate and inspire.



Metal evolves with baby steps; avant-garde metal bands are the random mutations that make the process interesting, fun and worthwhile to me. I raise my beer to ya all.

JAMES SLONE



1980s

CELTIC FROST

Into The Pandemonium



Release: 02.11.1987

Label: [Noise Records](#)

Avantgenre: Avantgarde Metal

Duration: 39:24 (excl. Bonustracks)

Origin: Switzerland

Official site: <http://www.celticfrost.com>

TRACKLIST:

(Note: I Have Reviewed The Remastered CD Version From 1999, With 5 Bonus Tracks. Of These Tracks, I Chose To Discard All But Track 4, And Therefore The Tracklist Beneath Does Not Represent The Review Above, As Track 12-15 Did Nothing To Enhance The Listening Experience.)

1. Mexican Radio
2. Mesmerized
3. Inner Sanctum
4. Tristesse De La Lune
5. Babylon Fell (Jade Serpent)
6. Caress Into Oblivion (Jade Serpent II)
7. One In Their Pride (Porthole Mix)
8. I Won't Dance (The Elders Orient)
9. Sorrows Of The Moon
10. Rex Irae (Requiem)
11. Oriental Masquerade
12. One In Their Pride (Re-entry Mix)
13. In The Chapel, In The Moonlight
14. The Inevitable Factor
15. The Inevitable Factor (Alternate Vox)

Having nothing better to do during a five hour lunch break from school, I thought

I could give a shot at reviewing one of the most irreviewable albums ever. *Into The Pandemonium*. 20 years after its conception, it still stands as the creative apex of one of the most important extreme metal bands ever. After vomiting forth the darkest metal album of the eighties - *To Mega Therion*, the best pre-Oslo black metal album - Martin Eric Ain returned to the Frost, and together with Tom G. Warrior and Reed St. Mark they decided to push the boundaries as far as possible. All Celtic Frost releases seem to have sprung out of the deepest anguish and personal pain, as does *Into The Pandemonium*, which must have been a terrible nuisance to create; it is not surprising that it back lashed into whatever you would call *Cold Lake* some years later.

Anyhow, *Into The Pandemonium* is still a major fuck off to the suffocating genre conventions metal is still plagued by, even though the efforts here from our favourite Swiss export opened up many paths for the decades to follow. Opening an album with a cover is not kosher, and the choice of an upbeat new wave song about being lost in Mexico would still today be questioned and frowned upon, so I suspect many metalheads have reacted quite negative back in these days. "Mesmerized" is a deep red suggestive little thing, haunting with its decadence and Tom's trademark moan. If you ask me, I would say that this is where gothic metal began, another genre's blood on their hands. The rather slow moving fashion is continued by the two "Jade Serpent" songs, with their dark melancholy infused with Oriental mysticism evoking images of lush decadent gardens filled with incense. Even though songs like these were the foundation of avantgardistic metal, I cannot think of any works similar to this masterpiece, despite these two decades. The approach - yes, perhaps, but not the specific sounds. Celtic Frost are the H.P. Lovecraft of metal.

Another always very important part of Celtic Frost was (and is still, actually) the use of art music. The horn and timpani arrangements of *To Mega Therion* are here blooming out into all their majesty; from the lamenting "Sorrows Of The Moon" and its French counterpart, to the

ominous string quartet modernism of the mighty "Rex Irae". I cannot think of any metal band using classical music in this manner before Frost did, and very few since. Tom's lyrics continue in tradition of Celtic Frost - sorrow-filled poetic visions of majesty, corruption, vanity and pride, bringing doom and loss of life and power; the fall of everything, all set in a fantastic suggestive environment that could be as much about Dune as Sodom and Gomorrah. If *To Mega Therion* is silver and steel, then *Into The Pandemonium* is marble and sand.

Even though a song like "Inner Sanctum" showed very well that they still could pump out bludgeoning thrash metal, the lyrics are still partly taken from a poem by Emily Brontë - a proof why Celtic Frost still in my opinion eclipse all competition. They dared being intellectual, even pretentious, transcending the simplicity of beer and denim. They tried "*to be different, to be something new*" (Thomas G. Fischer, 1986), for "*there are more feelings to express than just aggression and destruction*" (Martin Eric Ain, 1987).

These quotes sum up what *Into The Pandemonium* is about, and it is for this reason Kerrang! described it as "*the most avant-garde album that will ever be released [sic]*" which is true, at least in a metal context, seeing what came before it. This is the mother of all avant-garde metal (including early Voivod!).

Into The Pandemonium might not be the best and most consistent of Celtic Frost's work - *To Mega Therion* usurped that jewel throne aeons ago - but for the sake (which is not mere) of its aspirations, its creativity, its daring progress, it deserves a place in the heart and record collection of everyone, as well as a 66 metre tall golden statue of the power trio of all power trios; our antediluvian gods and celestial dominators, Celtic Frost. What does he say? **UH!**

aVoid

VOIVOD

RRRÖÖÖAAARRR



Release: 1986

Label: [Noise Records](#)

Avantgenre: Avantgarde Metal

Duration: 38:08

Origin: Canada

Official site: <http://www.voivod.net/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Korgull, The Exterminator
- 02 - Fuck Off And Die
- 03 - Slaughter In A Grave
- 04 - Ripping Headaches
- 05 - Horror
- 06 - Thrashing Rage
- 07 - The Helldriver
- 08 - Build Your Weapons
- 09 - To The Death

To give you a certain feeling for the time this album was released I went into the local library and got hold of old newspapers. 1986 was when Canada got beaten by France 0:1 in a soccer game, Reagan and Gorbachev meet in a house in Iceland, Bon Jovi releases 'Slippery when wet', the Top Gun soundtrack hit the streets, Elton John did 'Nikita' and blood reigned for Slayer. 'Voivod' is polish for 'Landeshauptmann' (engl. 'governor') and their choice of name represents their approach to music.

This is the house where Gorbachev and Reagan met by the way:



The album itself was actually re-recorded/mixed in 1985, but I will spare you with further details of that era (Rock me Amadeus, anyone?). The cover has a tank that looks left and reminds me of drawings metalheads do in school when they are bored.

This is the worldfamous Falco-impressario Hans-Peter Gill:



I feel weird reviewing the gods of Avant-gardemetal, for I never really listened to them back in my days, I've only had this weird vinyl picture disc where there was one Voivod song on it but unfortunately I can't find it anymore.

This is the where I went to school,



here I lost my virginity,



and this is the first 10 euro I held in my hand:



All in all I can safely say and see that this album has its moments and I adore the title and some of the lyrics.

Jonny Lignano

VOIVOD

Nothingface



Release: 1989

Label: [MCA Records](#)

Avantgenre: Avantgarde-Metal

Duration: 44:18

Origin: Canada

Official site: <http://www.voivod.net>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Unkown Knows
- 02 - Nothingface
- 03 - Astronomy Domine
- 04 - Missing Sequences
- 05 - X-Ray Mirror
- 06 - Inner Combustion
- 07 - Pre-Ignition
- 08 - Into My Hypercube
- 09 - Sub-Effect

Whilst most reviewers try to keep a constant pitch between reviewed thing and oneself, I take offense on that kind of behaviour and try to change the world. For that reason please find below my letter to the Merriam-Webster Inc. in my

quest to change the world to the mentioned better place.

In 2007 emails can't change the world anymore.

Jonny Lignano

Jonny Lignano
Blücherstrasse 4
6020-Innsbruck/Austria

Merriam-Webster, Inc.
47 Federal Street
P.O. Box 281
Springfield, MA-01102
United States of America

Innsbruck, August 15th 2007

Dear Madam/Sir,

Subject: Missing word in your collection

I was staggered when I did not find the word *Voivod* in your reputable dictionary. Whilst English is not my mother language, I happen to check your resources three or four times a day when writing album reviews for some heavy metal internet postmodern web speed page that resides at avantgarde-metal.com.

'Voivod' are kind of the godfathers of Avantgarde Metal, kind of like what Marlon Brando is to 'The godfather' series, kind of like what lysergic acid diethylamide is for Timothy Leary. That being said, I strongly suggest, no wait, I strongly urge you, hold on, this should sound better: I beg you to add the word 'Voivod' into your grandiose collection of English words. May I suggest something like this?

Main Entry: Voivod

Function: biographical name

Voivod, early 1980ies up to now, Canadian demi-gods & composers; composed enormous quantity of church, vocal, and instrumental music including "Rrroooaaarrrr!", "Nothingface", "The Outer Limits", etc.; greatest composers of Canada (yes, that's right screw Lavigne, Adams and Dion altogether)

Thank you for your time, I am looking forward for your hopefully positive reply. Of course my advice above is totally free of charge.

Yours faithfully



Jonny Lignano

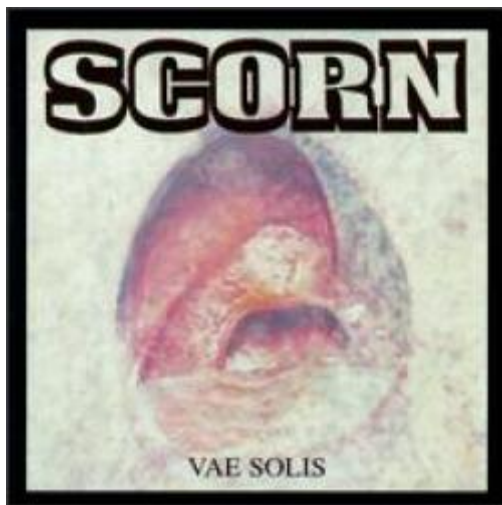
PS: Voivod's album, *Nothingface* has got one of the greatest cover arts, is extremely splendid in it's expression and deals with nothing less than the world as such. Musically.

early

1990s

SCORN

Vae Solis



Release: 1992

Label: Earache

Avantgenre: Grind House (get It?)

Duration: 1:15

Origin: United Kingdom

Official site: <http://www.mickharris.net/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Spasm
- 02 - Suck And Eat You
- 03 - Hit
- 04 - Walls Of My Heart
- 05 - Lick Forever Dog
- 06 - Thoughts Of Escape
- 07 - Deep In - Eaten Over And Over
- 08 - On Ice
- 09 - Heavy Blood
- 10 - Scum After Death (dub)
- 11 - Fleshpile
- 12 - Orgy Of Holiness
- 13 - Still Life

Napalm Death, aside from creating the grind genre, are also noteworthy for having spawned several important solo projects. The original members fanned out on their own, creating unique aural spaces to ply their extreme trade. Mick Harris' contribution to this abundant out-

put was Scorn, a project that retained a harsh grind ambiance before jettisoning the violence in favor of haunting dub soundscapes.

"Vae Solis" kicked things off, a brutal hammering attack out of the Killing Joke playbook with Harris's pounding industrial grade beats, buzzsaw guitars sharp enough to cut steel (courtesy Justin Broadrick), and Nick Bullen's pulsating bass and nauseatingly lethargic vocals. The only thing that could make this album any sicker would be blastbeats and squawking free range saxophone- for that, see Painkiller, Mick Harris's delightfully painful collaboration with John Zorn and Bill Laswell.

"Vae Solis" is noisy and repetitious in a classic industrial mode, but retains a pop catchiness, a certain punk groove that makes it almost seem musical. There are moments of near silence scattered like detritus across the album's total war wasteland, dark ambient moments of near horror garnished with creepy samples. As the album progresses, the beats become more danceable. "On Ice" is as catchy as anything composed by Ministry, warmed over with a programmed synth line straight out of New Wave.

The album hints at a Napalm Death that might have been if the band had abandoned political anger for aggressive introspection and sordid atmospherics. It's ugly, like a bloated corpse in a filthy public restroom, but it's absolutely hypnotic, deliriously sick and twisted, and in its own grimy way, a gem.

James Slone



DISHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Not To Be Undimensional Conscious



Release: 1992

Label: [Nuclear Blast](#)

Avantgenre: Surrealistic Avantgarde Death Metal

Duration: 36:01

Origin: Austria

Official site: <http://www.disharmonic.com/>

TRACKLIST:

01. Perishing Passion
02. A Mental Sequence
03. Addicted Seas Of Missing Pleasure
04. The Return Of The Living Beat
05. Groove
06. Idiosyncrasy
07. Like Madness From Above
08. Time Frame
09. Mind Seduction

The early 1990ies have been the golden years of death metal. 1992, as the trend had reached its culmination, Disharmonic Orchestra shocked their fans with one of the most subversive albums that death metal has ever seen. Already the surrealist cover-artwork demonstrated their breaking with the ordinary metal standards. And the band photo showed those three guys posing with toys and teddy bears. Just one cliché remained: the album was produced in the legendary Sunlight Studios, address no. 1 for european death metal bands.

Compared to their debut "Exposition-sprophylaxe" this album brought a radical change in style, mainly based on the complex lines of drums and bass. The drumming of Martin Messner is superb.

It's extremely groovy and innovative, with uncountable breaks and off-beats. Also the bass acrobatics of Herwig Zamernik (later also known for his other band Naked Lunch) are unique. Just the guitar work and the death-vocals of Patrick Klopff remain rather straight and keep the album rooted to metal. Like the artwork, also the lyrics are very surrealist and far away from the usual metal stuff.

Their old fans probably just found two songs of this album acceptable: "Like Madness From Above" and "Mind Seduction". These remain relatively conventional and bear lots of grind-parts. All other songs are very individual. Just listen to the great opener "Perishing Passion" (which also became the motive for one of the coolest metal-shirts ever), "The Return of the Living Beat", which mixes fast grindcore with a rather stupid funk-rap-part or the atmospheric, repetitive instrumental "Time Frame". More than any other death metal album, "Not to be Undimensional Conscious" is avantgarde at its best! Be sure to have this in your collection!

Chrystof



THE 3RD AND THE MORTAL

Sorrow



Release: 1993

Label: Head Not Found

Avantgenre: Murky Gloom Doom

Duration: 20:28

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://mortal.info/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Grevinnens Bonn
- 02 - Sorrow
- 03 - Ring Of Fire
- 04 - Silently I Surrender

Looking back on the early years of The 3rd and the Mortal, it's not that easy to see why they were considered so groundbreaking,

but that's only because of the host of bands that arrived in their wake, emulating with varying degrees of success their meandering, murky guitar sound, adventurous song structures and accessible but technically proficient female vocals-provided here by the indispensable Kari Rueslåtten, sounding sad, distant and peerless.

An EP, "Sorrow" introduces their early doom metal sound, with a muddy production accenting drooping guitars and reining in cackling feedback. Reverb laden melodic lines draw equally from shoegaze wall of sound and navel gazing doom. Kari's vocals rest squarely on the subtle and complex bass lines, anchored to the rhythm in a sea of distortion, crying out from a place of emotional and musical isolation. The title track breaks with the rest of the album with classical

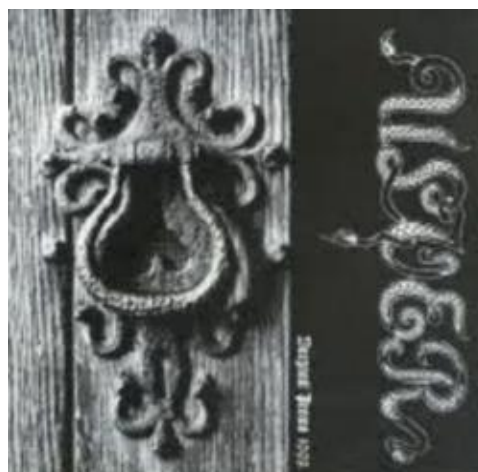
guitar and unusually sullen vocals, having a more medieval courtly love sort of atmosphere.

With their epic compositions and unusually noisy, darkly psychedelic sound, The 3rd and the Mortal would influence several acts, laying the groundwork for bands as disparate as In the Woods and The Gathering. It all starts with "Sorrow."

James Slone

ULVER

Vargnatt



Release: 1993

Label: Self-released / Bootlegged

Avantgenre: Jazz-tinged Folksy Black Metal

Duration: 28:00

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.jester-records.com/ulver>

TRACKLIST:

- 1. Her Begynte Mine Arr...
- 2. Tragediens Trone
- 3. Trollskogen
- 4. Ulverytternes Kamp
- 5. Nattens Madrigal
- 6. Vargnatt

First, you must forgive me. I do not own any official copy of this first Ulver release; not the original self-released cassette, nor the hastily sold-out 10" released by The End in 2002. My version is the bootleg cassette Ondes Triumph, complete with the rehearsal cassette from the same year (way better than that Immortal-"split cd", yet still lame). The rehearsal-side is a low-volume in-

strumental take on the Vargnatt tracks, with the addition of "Enser Du Vinter" and Celtic Frost cover "Babylon Fell". That's about it.

Ulvers seminal (and only) demo release is however a fancy statement that the early Norwegian black metal scene truly was a creative climate for aspiring and daring musicians. Ulver especially, as they have proven their unicity over and over again these last 14 years. Vargnatt is to me one of their most innovative releases, along with the Blake album of '98 and Blood Inside of '05.

They are here as always fronted by Kris "Garm" Rygg, who was an astounding and multifaceted vocalist already at the tender age of 17. He ranges from the enchanting whispers of the acoustic track Trollskogen (almost superior to Kvelds-sanger), to the spiteful gnarls and eerily haunting howls of the title track, to the operatic falsetto of Tragediens Trone... Quite out of tune, but fitting perfectly to the raw passion of this necrotic masterpiece.

The guitarworks are as inspired, with folk-like acoustic guitar leads, at points jazzy chords, intertwined with gothrock melodies and primitive Hellhammer riffing. Czral's percussion is a shaky embryo that would become Written In Waters some years later; odd beats with strange yet groovy fills, backbeats, all reaching far beyond your ordinary metallic styles. (Note the cowbell, awesome!) Vargnatt is the primeval quintessence of Ulver's Trilogie; the satanic energy, haunting yet calm beauty and and romantic melancholy of the mighty Norwegian Forests, and those who dwell there in. An inspiring soundtrack for a solemn and hateful stroll through the woods at dusk (make that pine or fir, not whimpy birch).

aVoid

CYNIC

Focus



Release: 1993, 2004

Label: Roadrunner

Avantgenre: Utopian Fusion

Duration: Reissue - 72:31

Origin: United States

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Veil Of Maya
- 02 - Celestial Voyage
- 03 - The Eagle Nature
- 04 - Sentiment
- 05 - I'm But A Wave To...
- 06 - Uroboric Forms
- 07 - Textures
- 08 - How Could I?

Bonus Tracks:

- 09 - Veil Of Maya (2004 Remix)
- 10 - I'm But A Wave To... (2004 Remix)
- 11 - How Could I (2004 Remix)
- 12 - Cosmos
- 13 - The Circle's Gone
- 14 - Endless Endeavors

"Focus" (1993) is a kind of milestone for extreme metal. If you wanted ten metal albums placed in a time capsule of Greatest Moments in Metal History, Cynic would be a no-brainer. This website specializes in the experimental, the cutting edge, and the outright weird. Cynic certainly qualifies for inclusion, being one of the earliest examples

of a metal band that embraced all three traits with equal zeal. Calling "Focus" progressive metal is too limiting. It spawned a whole new subgenre: extreme metal fusion. Jazz metal bands like Ephel Duath, as exciting and innovative as they are, simply would not exist without Cynic's revolutionary work here. After circulating tapes as a technical death metal band in the Floridian mold, Cynic signed to Roadrunner and dropped "Focus" on the unsuspecting world. I remember hearing it when it came out and being absolutely floored. Here was this insanely intense combination of unremitting death metal, otherworldly jazz fusion, and weird New Age ambiance (Robert Venosa, the surrealist painter,

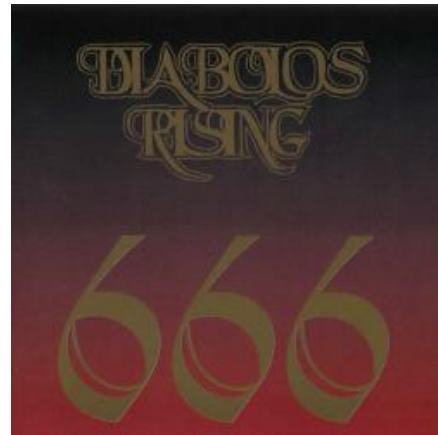
created the eye catching cover), that screamed excess, but somehow avoided disaster by being inexplicably good. Even with the oddball vocoder chanting that would have ruined a lesser band, the musicianship carries the day. Jason Gobel and Paul Masvidal's guitar playing alternates between jagged death metal thrashing and delicately arranged synth guitar lines that sound like ocean tides and light waves riding on ether. Sean Malone's punchy fusion bass operates with a mind of its own; conversing with Sean Reinert's stop-on-a-dime percussion, but always with its own voice. All these players, each with their own unique take on the material, somehow mix it together into tight little three minute songs.

Cynic sounds like a train running off its tracks into the ocean and instead of sinking somehow floats on the surface. OK, that simile sucks, but it's the best I could come up with to describe this impossibly fluid music, which really does sound like death metal careening into spiritual bliss, a kind of new age Morbid Angel that put away the Cthulhu in favor of Indian philosophy and ecological spiritualism. If that sounds horrible it's because it should. And yet it isn't. By tapping into something "positive" and utopian, Cynic turned death metal on its head and opened up the stubborn genre to new areas for exploration. Even today, "Focus" is an eccentric piece of work, reaching far and wide for sounds that defy every expectation death metal comes prepackaged with. Cynic have recently reformed for a reunion tour, and prior to that re-released "Focus" with what remains of their would-be follow up, "Portal." If they decide to record new material there is little doubt that it will be good by any standard. But their work on "Focus" was a radical breakthrough, something new and exciting that changed the rules of the game, a true one-off metal classic.

James Slone

DIABOLOS RISING

666



Release: 1994

Label: [Osmose Productions](#)

Avantgenre: Ritualistic Industrially-Satanized Metal

Duration: 34:42

Origin: Greece / Finland

Official site: <http://none>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Genocide
- 02 - Dinum Sabbati
- 03 - Give Me Blood Or Give Me Death
- 04 - Satanas Lead Us Through
- 05 - Sorcery-Scientia Maxima
- 06 - 666
- 07 - x-ī-Ōō

Released back when Osmose Productions was a purveyor of eclectic and well respected quality underground music, including such bands as Pan-Thy-Monium, Rotting Christ, Masters Hammer, Dark Tranquility and many more, this release is no exception. It is a cooperation between artists of differing locals but of a similar musical and undoubtedly theological mind set. This CD possesses a clinically dark quality having the straight forward simplicity and production of an industrial album with the aesthetics of, what was at the time, the Satanic black metal underground.

The musical backbone that makes up Diabolos Rising comes from the mind of Magus Wampyr Daoloth of Necromantia (and other Greek bands, too numerous to mention here). By taking the framework of drum and guitar composition from the likes of Ministry and KMFDM, and then mixing it with keyboards remi-

niscent of some 80's horror movie, he managed to create an album that coalesces the personae of Black Metal with the precision of Industrial quite well. The production is clean and polished with atmosphere provided by the ever-present sound of droning keyboards which gives it an almost palpable evil ambiance. There is a somewhat subtle Mediterranean, or even middle eastern, flavor through many songs and when juxtaposed with the technological aspects make it easily adaptable for use as either a soundtrack to "Bladerunner" or "The Last Temptation of Christ".

The vocal delivery is provided by the second half of this electronic project, Finland's Impaled Nazarene spokesman, Mika Luttinen. Taking into consideration the practice he had on the industrialized track "Gott ist Tot" off of Impaled Nazarene's release "Ugra Karma" it seems only appropriate to have Mika as the voice of this incarnation. As one might expect the majority of vocals have that Imp. Naz. tone and forcefulness, with many of them having added effects heightening the industrial feel. Added to that are a handful of spoken parts which help accentuate the ritualistic elements of the music.

As for the lyrical content (also written by Daoloth), with a title like "666" one can make obvious assumptions. Of course not without it's sense of Satanic irony, track 6 being literally 6min and 6sec of silence for Satan.

Along with a few disparate projects, such as the Cold Meat Industry releases, this is one of the earliest examples of individuals from the Black metal underground delving into electronically based music, pre-dating the exploration of many of their contemporaries by a number of years. Which makes this a must for anyone interested in such Black metal/Industrial amalgamations and deviations.

MvH

UNHOLY

The Second Ring Of Power



Release: 1994

Label: Dunno, Yet

Avantgenre: Santaclosthrophia

Duration: 53:41

Origin: Finland

TRACKLIST:

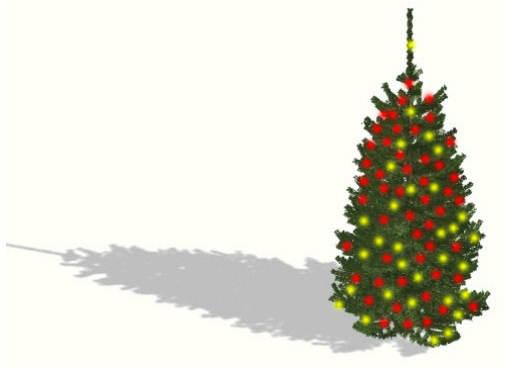
- 01 - The Second Ring Of Power
- 02 - Languish For Bliss
- 03 - Lady Babylon
- 04 - Neverending Day
- 05 - Dreamside
- 06 - Procession Of Black Doom
- 07 - Covetous Glance
- 08 - Air
- 09 - Serious Personallity Disturbance
And Deep Anxiety

Most of the time I only review things I like. I guess people who review restaurants also only order (not only when testing) stuff they like. 'Unholy' has a great name for a christmas-review where I will decorate some christmas trees, strongly influenced by each song of the album.

As usual, this is an exclusive for



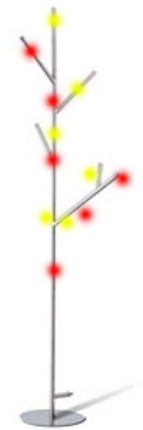
Song 1:



Song 2:



Song 5:



Song 3:



Song 4:

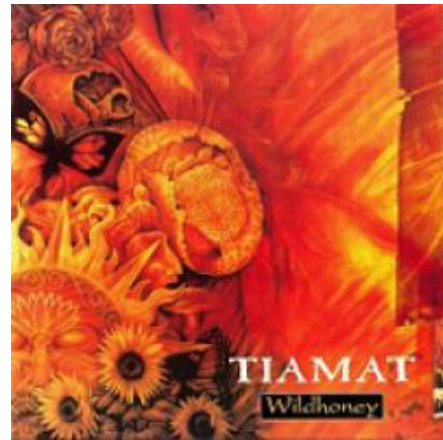
Song 6:



Song 7:

TIAMAT

Wildhoney



Release: 1994

Label: [Century Media](#)

Avantgenre: Drunken Psycho Gothic Metal

Duration: 42:08

Origin: Sweden

Official site: <http://www.churchoftiamat.com/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Wildhoney
- 02 - Whatever That Hurts
- 03 - The Ar
- 04 - 25th Floor
- 05 - Gaia
- 06 - Visionaire
- 07 - Kaleidoscope
- 08 - Do You Dream Of Me?
- 09 - Planets
- 10 - A Pocket Size Sun

Song 8:



Song 9:



Jonny Lignano

Ah, 1994. Those were glorious times. It was the year when I started to seriously listen to Metal, and one of the best years to pick from an embarrassment of riches. I remember MACHINE HEAD debuting with "Burn My Eyes", PANTERA releasing their best album "Far beyond Driven", PARADISE LOST steering towards the ingenious "Draconian Times" (I know, not that these music styles have so much in common but let me dwell in nostalgia for a while) and TIAMAT- well, bringing a big surprise with this instant classic Gothic Metal album. And I mean Gothic METAL, not this easy listening dancing-fairies-stuff which is so popular nowadays- a genre which I thought extinct except for maybe THE VISION BLEAK, but that's another story.

But this is not only a superb Gothic Metal album; if it was, I'd leave it like that and go reviewing something else. To try to describe this album to someone deaf would result in the following: Make him empty a whole bottle of absinthe while internalizing the works of Dalí, then finish him off with magic mushrooms. The resulting dream would surely resemble "Wildhoney"...

The first track "Wildhoney" serves as a calm Intro and prepares the beginning of "Whatever That Hurts", a slow, creepy and menacing track with a great clean guitar line and almost tribal-like drums. "The Ar" springs forth of this song with a pitch black atmosphere, threatening choirs, heavy guitars and some keyboards- at this point this drug-driven nightmare manages to pull you down into a black hole vortex with an incredible dark mood, while the conjuring voice of Johan Edlund is floating above all. "25th floor" lets you resurface slowly, and the dream changes from a nightmare to something more friendly in "Gaia", giving you a little glimpse of warmth. Slow drums, moody keyboard background and a more benign, clean Johan Edlund with even some guitar solo.

"Visionaire" though gets more aggressive again, keyboards disappear in favour of an again heavy guitar duetting with a clean guitar. This time Edlund sounds almost conjuring and there is a feeling as if TIAMAT are preparing to get as evil as in the first part of the CD- but this change does not occur; instead, in "Kaleidoscope" and "Do You Dream Of Me?", it gets really surreal. Only Keyboards with weird tunes, and a gloomy clean guitar while Edlund, half whispering, half speaking, leads through this part of the dream. This sounds like walking through a field of flowers under a black sky... The instrumental "Planets" invokes the width of space with only effects and guitars, and then "A Pocket Size Sun" starts and resembles the chaotic and weird but somehow calm parts of the dream shortly before you awake. This song builds up a tension, starting only with drums, clean guitars and a dissonant harp (?) and ends with something

what could be a jam session of very talented musicians when, at the peak of it, you suddenly awake, leaving only traces and irreal pieces of what was experienced a moment ago...

Luckily there is no hangover after this, just the feeling that you have listened to one of the best Metal albums of the nineties. Avant-garde? Yes, at that time for sure, and even today a little. Unique? You bet- this one is a timeless masterpiece.

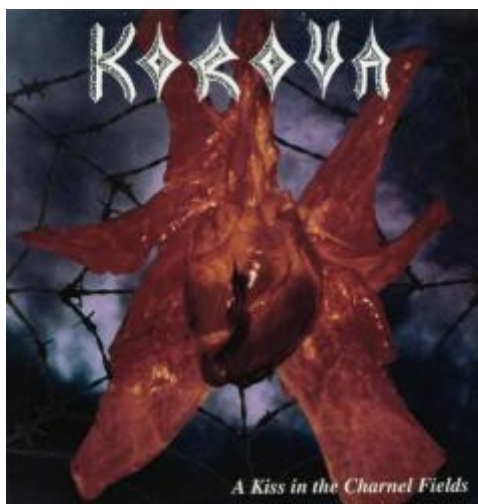
Tentakel P.



1995

KOROVA

A Kiss In The Charnel Fields



Release: 1995

Label: [Napalm Records](#)

Avantgenre: The Fruit – The Darkness –
The Evil

Duration: 41:36

Origin: Alps

Official site: <http://www.korovakill.com>

Late eighties – early nineties, Austria. Let me clarify the international context first: this was a period of exceptional creativity in the domain of extreme metal. These were the days before the internet, the days of real underground music, whose originality was deprecated by all existing official metal magazines, the days where small isolated regional scenes established contact among each other through tape-trading. While in Austria Disharmonic Orchestra or Pungent Stench were beginning to gain international recognition thanks to innovative releases through Nuclear Blast Records, in most parts of the country musicians and the public were still clinging to heavy, thrash or hardcore 5 years behind the times. The burgeoning black metal movement was looked down upon. Abigor had only released demos so far, quite conventional ones, by the way. This was a time when Darkthrone were

only known to a handful of people – Korova among them. Whether they saw in *A Blaze in the Northern Sky* the confirmation of their existing convictions regarding atmosphere over vacuous brutality will remain conjecture, but a fruitful one nevertheless: so far, violent music had been death metal exclusively, roughly in the form of two tendencies – the organic harshness of the Scandinavians, the technical brutality of the Americans.

All of this has to be kept in mind for any future judgement. I refuse to tolerate the amalgamation of Korova under the avant-garde movement that would soon develop out of black metal. The obvious references (Arcturus, Ved Buens Ende, what have you) have to be brushed aside – those came much later. What we have here, however, is a truly independent development.

The fact that their name was imposed on the group in its early days by a fan of Kubrick's film version of Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* is not important at all. Nothing on this record points back to the early thrash/punk origins of the band. They are veterans of the Austrian extreme scene along with those cited above, with the only difference that their sound did not catch on immediately. Locally, however, the group had numerous opportunities to test their work in front of an audience long before the release of this first album (early 1995): the bulk of the work had been written as early as 1992. The production may not do justice to the album (which partly may have been the reason for both the critics' and public's failure to grasp the importance of this release), with a limited amount of tracks alternating a multitude of instruments (the engineer who recorded the album in 1994 was not used to that particular sound and was confronted with a density he was unable to master), but the music still stands out today as well ahead of its time. To combine such elaborate parts, both rhythmically and harmonically, with memorable phrases, riffs and melodies into immediately comprehensive structures and inventive instrumental textures was a visionary feat. The music is a torrent of harsh violence, complex and

limpid at the same time, driven forward by an exceptional drummer who has since proven his versatility, and whose admission to the group one year prior to this recording had propelled them to a state of grace. The album features an extensive use of keyboards, acoustic instruments (timpani, mandolin, violin) and female vocals, long before those elements became a trend for backwards oriented copycats.

Korova's main composer, a left-handed guitarist playing a right-handed guitar upside down (just like Atheist's Rand Burkey), used this apparent anomaly to obtain inimitable chords. His compositional skills and idiosyncrasies outshine most of his contemporaries. His learned use of such diverse elements as dissonance (diminished or augmented chords on heavily distorted guitars were not heard much since Voivod) or troubadour music, or the invention of a unique guitar sound (have a listen at the opening riff of "Entlebt in tristem Morgenblut"), every single aspect of this work must be called pioneer.

At any rate, Korova's legacy by far exceeds their official reputation. Take the whole tone scale riff that appears in "Lachrydeus Mittelgard" (02:14, 03:42), for example. Then listen to Misanthrope, *Visionnaire* (1997), track 6 (00:43, 01:27, 05:59, 06:44), then Ram-Zet, *Pure Therapy* (2000), track 3, opening riff. The alert listener will find other significant instances. They were true originals. Numerous passages immediately recall other avant-garde metal bands; many pave the way for *Written in Waters* (carefully plough through "Awakening from Perpetual Contemplation"), yet all of it had been written years before Ved Buens Ende was formed and the world had heard about Arcturus, who were certainly not doing any bold stuff at that time, by any standards.

Korova's frontman always delivered an unbelievable and unique stage show. Fellow Austrians Dornenreich would not be where they are today had they not had the chance to see Korova perform in concert – the early live antics of Dornenreich's vocalist were a mere pale copy, and all his attempts at vocal experiments were suggested by Korova's inventions.

Whether a concept album or not (maybe with the exception of tracks 7 and 9, which seem to have been added due to the need to release a full-length album that could be recorded quickly with the new line-up – track 9 was originally intended for an unreleased side-project), we are dealing with a very cohesive record. Korova managed to create a multiform, idiosyncratic universe, baroque, visceral, encompassing more than just the music – take a good look at the cover artwork or

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Intro: Der Weltenbrand / Das Kreuz Und Der Metzenapfel
- 02 - After The Fruits Of Ephemeral Pulchritude
- 03 - Lachrydeus Mittelgard (Slåhan Fôntagr Inn Awêpi)
- 04 - Entlebt In Tristem Morgenblut
- 05 - Intro: Im Teich Erlischt Ein Bächlein
- 06 - Awakening From Perpetual Contemplation (Yellow Mahogany Tomb I.)
- 07 - Latin Dreams In Turpentine
- 08 - Nordsciltim - In The Filth Where All Cull Perambulates Pain
- 09 - Sålømh, Des Teufels Braut
- 10 - A Kiss In The Charnel Fields

at the vocalist's custom-carved guitar. Any sort of reflection on the lyrics be left to the listener. Let it just be said that the images of primeval violence and declining beauty conjured up in those morbid tales of demise are of a much more interesting nature than what had been known so far through the aesthetics of death or doom metal or through what would soon become the standard mode of expression of the newly born Norwegian black metal scene. Long before the trend to write lyrics in the native tongue, Korova dared to draw on languages other than English. The riposte is easy against the convenient criticism regarding the use of too many languages as a preposterous display: there is a point! This is no mannerist toying around: on both the musical and textual level, a careful selection was applied to determine which parts were to be sung in which language. Italian in the operatic passages, Gothic and its barbaric sound for the evocation of an archaic heathen world (if not earlier, than at least simultaneously, but above all, *independently* of any similar Norwegian tendencies), Middle High German in an exalted hom-

age to the heroic verse of Romance, yet the bulk of the album in German and English, and all of it tightly melded together into one florid, hyper-baroque and simultaneously revolutionary, radically modern language. To pick only one, the German text of "Entlebt in tristem Morgenblut" attests the craftsmanship of an original lyricist well versed in the art of poetry, who would move even further with the indispensable but still unreleased *Echowelt*.

And the voice! This voice, protean yet incredibly coherent, shifting from operatic chants to soaring barbaric screams, mastering all stages from growls to shrieks, at times sanguinary, solemn, or agonizing, with echoes of Celtic Frost or a King Diamond in a murderous frenzy, still seeks its peer today.

3 words: Akran – Riqis – Unpiup

mang tsze

OPETH

Orchid



Release: Summer 1995

Label: Candlelight Records

Avantgenre: Epic Dusky Forest-Prog

Duration: 65:31

Origin: Sweden

Official site: <http://opeth.com>

Fallen leaves crackle beneath determined steps through an October aurora of forest on the edge of a rolling, sunset-painted field with a single, ancient dead tree that sends the soul above a cloudy

azure abyss; you fall gently, emerging on a frozen moor overlooked by a pale countenance that turns marrow into ice as you run with four wolves onto a candlelit, shadowy hill, to find what lies there; you find that track 1 has ended. One down, six to go...

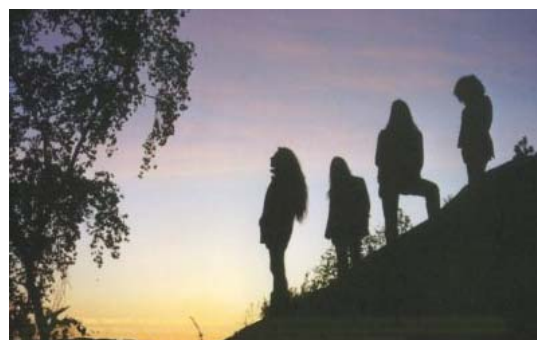
Opeth's debut "Orchid" never left avant-garde territory because it still sounds like nothing else. Each song (save for two interludes) is a woven tapestry of exquisite harmonized guitar via Mikael Åkerfeldt and Peter Lindgren, doomy yet swift, mixed with medieval acoustic tomes and Johan DeFarfalla's equally sophisticated and folky/jazzy bass. Anders Nordin keeps the others' movements driving forward with relatively simple but highly effective percussion, while minstrel Åkerfeldt sets free chilling howls and crystalline sung/whispered images.

The most commonly-noted (and perhaps only) fault for which this disc is criticized is general interchangeability of riffs and discontinuity between them. Somewhat true, but each is a scene, and together they form a journey, and as seven they form a grandiose portrait of a distant, archaic land. It's midnight mist in which the perfumed fires of autumn and the withered winds of dusk have been captured. And it's not even remotely black metal.

C. L. Edwards

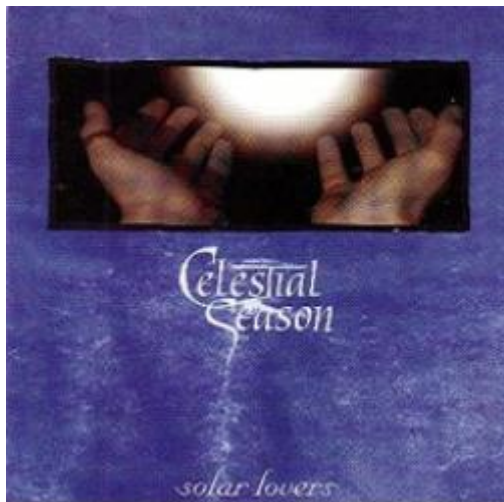
TRACKLIST:

- 01 - In Mist She Was Standing
- 02 - Under The Weeping Moon
- 03 - Silhouette
- 04 - Forest Of October
- 05 - The Twilight Is My Robe
- 06 - Requiem
- 07 - The Apostle In Triumph



CELESTIAL SEASON

Solar Lovers



Release: 1995

Label: Metal Blade

Avantgenre: Romantic Doom Death As
Played By Dutch Stoners

Duration: 48:05

Origin: Netherlands

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Decamerone
- 02 - Solar Child
- 03 - Body As Canvas
- 04 - Soft Embalmer Of The Still Midnight
- 05 - Will You Wait For The Sun?
- 06 - The Holy Snake
- 07 - Dancing To A Thousand Symphonies
- 08 - Vienna
- 09 - Fandango
- 10 - The Scene Of Eve
- 11 - A Tune From The Majestic Queen's Garden

Ah, "Solar Lovers." Hands down my favorite doom metal album ever, "Solar Lovers" is the gem in the Celestial Season crown. Resting between the too ornate debut album and the extravagantly drugged excesses of the latter albums, it strikes the balance between crushing emotional doom and groovy psychedelia—did I mention it's also my favorite stoner rock album? The tension between the two styles, one heartfelt and moving and the other heavy and excessive, make it beautiful, entertaining and seriously ideal for a pint of Belgian ale (yes, I know they're Dutch band) and a joint stuffed with the best BC bud. It helps to be in love too.

Left over from more My Dying Bride influenced days are two violinists, but they don't just play in the three note style that was and remains all the rage in metal, playing instead some very beautiful solos and somber chord progressions, complimenting the heavy guitars without overpowering them. The violins are also employed in folksy instrumentals, accompanying acoustic guitars and springy dance rhythms. But mostly they're there to add a rainy ambiance to the heavy plodding guitars and wild 1970s style heavy metal solos.

The lyrics, growled, spoken and whispered, revolve around deep, perhaps too deep love, flying in the face of a genre more infatuated with love lost. The lyrics are all about falling, falling into someone, falling into green leaves, falling in love. But they're also about those moments when you look into a lover's face and know that your finite happiness can't last because ultimately death brings us all back the earth. It's all so beautiful that it makes me want to dance with tears in my eyes, to paraphrase Ultravox, whose "Vienna" the band covers to soaring success, bringing a rocking bohemian flavor to a sentimental favorite.

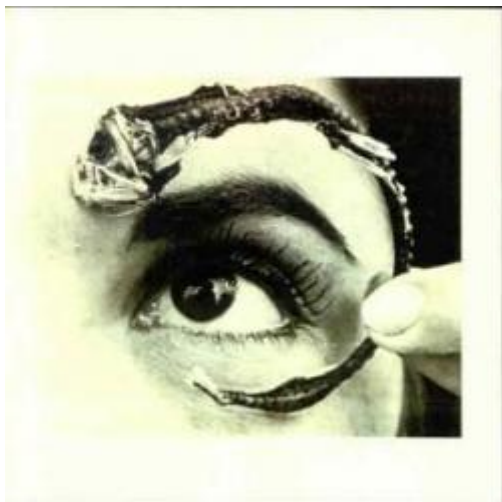
It's this romantic heaviness tinged with sadness but mostly joy, as well as the typical Dutch emphasis on the sensual and the hedonistic that really sets the album apart from the other doom death mopes of the time. Following "Solar Lovers," Celestial Season dropped the violins, increased the bong hits and fully embraced the stoner rock that was always latent in their sound. They may have a following in the European stoner rock crowd (or maybe not, I don't know), but to me, "Solar Lovers" will always be their great timeless album. Oh well, all things end, lover, c'est la vie.

James Slone



MR. BUNGLE

Disco Volante



Release: 1995

Label: Warner Brothers

Avantgenre: Soundtrack From A Banned
Exploitation Film

Duration: 68:37

Origin: United States

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Everyone I Went With High School With Is Dead
- 02 - Chemical Marriage
- 03 - Sleep (Part II): Carry Stress In The Jaw
- 04 - Desert Search For Techno Allah
- 05 - Violenza Domestica
- 06 - After School Special
- 07 - Sleep (Part III): Phlegmatics
- 08 - Ma Meeshka Mow Skwoz
- 09 - The Bends
- 10 - Backstrokin'
- 11 - Platypus
- 12 - Merry Go Bye Bye

Mr. Bungle's "Disco Volante" is a sophisticated collage of popular music genres. The primary difference between "Disco Volante" and its self-titled predecessor is the overall tone. If the debut was a facetious celebration of depravity, the second is extremely dark, convoluted, and comparatively introspective.

The songs are bereft of overt form or order, organized loosely into self-contained sections, each one a piece of madness unto itself. Where else in the mid 1990s but a Bungle or John Zorn piece could you hear frenetic bebop fully integrated into raging death metal mayhem? Or lounge music taking it easy next to War-

ner Bros. style cartoon music, with a dash of hardcore punk and klezmer thrown in for good measure? The density of each song is staggering.

The lyrics are hilarious, with extremely dark subject matter malevolently imposed on satirically banal music. Mike Patton growls, croons, intones, screams and beautifully sings. On the pseudo Italian collage, "Violenza Domestica" Patton's voice dances between romantic whispers, a paranoid accusatory tone and full on shouting. The whole thing provides a depressingly interesting simulation of, you guessed it, domestic violence.

Disco Volante is the dark heart of Mr. Bungle's discography, a dreadful, dissonant note sounding out between the comic shtick of the first album and the poppy refinement of the third. It both lampoons and celebrates the genres it exploits, with compositions that are more film-like and visual than conventionally musical. Unpredictable and complex to the extreme, the album is one very wild, very nightmarish experience.

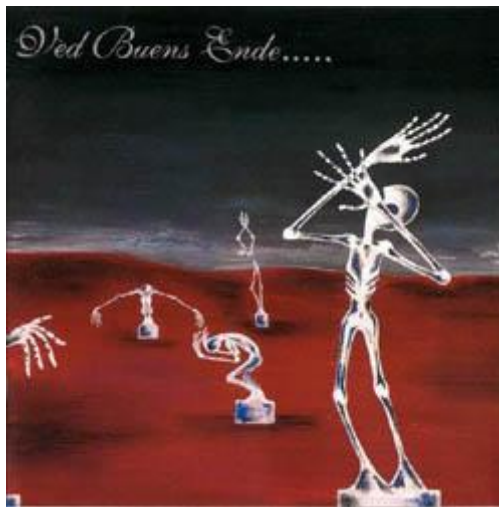
Note: this review is edited and considerably reworked from the original, which can be found at <http://www.smt-reviews.com>

James Slone



VED BUENS ENDE...

Written In Waters



Release: 1995

Label: Misanthropy Records

Avantgenre: Fuzzy Dreaming Avant-Garde
Jazz/Rock Metal

Duration: 57:08

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/vedbuensende>

TRACKLIST:

01. I Sang For The Swans
02. You, That May Wither
03. It's Magic
04. Den Saakaldte
05. Carrier Of Wounds
06. Coiled In Wings
07. Autumn Leaves
08. Remembrance Of Things Past
09. To Swarm Deserted Away

Ved Buens Ende ("at the rainbow's end" in Norwegian) is/was the brain child of Carl-Michael (Eide, a.k.a. Czral & Aggressor, also of Aura Noir, Cadaver, Dødheimsgard + various projects), here together with Vicotnik (see interview on this site) and Skoll (Arcturus and Ulver). Ved Buens Ende was discontinued in 1997, then reformed by Carl-Michael with a new line-up as Virus in 2001, releasing the strange swinging album *Car-heart* in 2003, then morphing into Ved Buens Ende in autumn 2006, remorphing back into Virus six months later. They released only two records as Ved Buens Ende; demo/EP *Those Who Caress The Pale*, and this.

Sometimes, a few times a decade, some-

thing special happens. A trinity (sometimes with appendixes) gathers, uniting in harmonious vibrance. They open gates to completely unrestrained creativity, embarking on voyages down unheard paths of musical expressions. For example,

Birmingham, late 60's: Iommi-Butler-Ward. Mid/late-80's, Zürich: Warrior-Ain-St.Mark, Florida: Azagthoth-Vincent-Sandoval. Mid-90's, Oslo: Ved Buens Ende.

There is a poetic genius in these nine pieces, in all their simplicity. Except for the strange violin-piano-accordion misuse on a few tracks, the band keeps to a voice-drums-strings setting, leaving all unnecessary dabbling with synthesizers and samples behind. Carl-Michael's flowing melodic drumming - those aren't beats, they are melodies; technical, but never showing off, switching from typical Norwegian grinding to peculiar rock beats through smooth polyrhythms. His British crooning, sorrowful, slightly yet delightfully out of tune vocals... Vicotnik's grim screeches and ever-changing guitars - from the raw BM riffage in "Den Saakaldte", through disharmonic chords to the jazzy and pop-like melodies of "Autumn Leaves"... Skoll's fluent bass-lines wandering rumbling about, yet never without an aim or goal, using the tonality (or lack thereof) as much as (or more than) his six-stringed counterpart.

Every musical element dances and whirls in a perfect symbiosis, in perfect balance. The production is far from the neo-standard of their fellow countrymen, reminding you more of the warm fuzz progressive rock embraced its listeners with during the 70's. With a bit more reverb and distortion, of course. And Carl-Michael's lyrics... dark and eloquently dreaming, beautifully enigmatic symbolic poetry even worth reading without the music, as surreal and haunting as Lisa Myhre's cover painting.

...Much can (and should!) be said about *Written In Waters*, much more than above. And even though my tongue might seem brown from Oslo-based rear ends, I cannot stress the utter magnificence of this album. Ved Buens Ende were so ahead of their time, that it is not until a

decade later that bands are trying to use tonality and melodicism as they did in 1995, and so far none I have heard have gone beyond sounding like paying tribute. If you can get only one Norwegian album (poor soul!), it should be *Written In Waters*. Forget Darkthrone, Mayhem, Satyricon. Forget Ulver, Arcturus, Fleurety (or wait, perhaps not...). This is the only album you need. It was magic, and it still is, twelve years later. Shining like an amethyst in the autumn night.

aVoid

FLEURETY

Min Tid Skal Komme



Release: 1995

Label: Aesthetic Death /
Misanthropy Records

Avantgenre: Black Metal Rock

Duration: 44:45

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://folk.uio.no/sveineh/fleurety/>

Min Tid Skal Komme (1995) is like black metal run through a post punk filter, with rock breakdowns surfacing amid long stretches of caustic black metal fury and a groove oriented sensibility pervading throughout. While Alexander Nordgaren's guitars and vocals are amply distorted, the rhythm section- Per Amund Solberg on bass, Svein Egil Hatlevik on drums- hammer out some jazz-inflected rock beats straight out of a Television album. Songs are long winding affairs, but suggest cityscapes as much as they do

mist shrouded forests, grimy and electrically charged.

Acoustic guitars are used to introduce a more somber, relaxed mood, sparsely phrased and gentle like "Trespass" era Genesis before the torrent returns with the invasive ugliness of an industrial accident. Marian Aas Hansen contributes her voice, sometimes sounding stereotypically gentle and girly per the requirements of the genre. But she also has a great rock voice, technically proficient, cold and commanding, adding a restrained touch of torch seduction to what would otherwise be a growl fest. Revolutionary at the time of its release and pretty new sounding now, the album is a nearly perfect synthesis of post punk cool and black metal power.

James Slone

TRACKLIST:

01. Fragmenter Av En Fortid
02. En Skikkelse I Horisonten
03. Hvileløs?
04. Englers Piler Har Ingen Brodd
05. Fragmenter Av En Fremtid



MI SANTHROPE

1666...Theatre Bizarre



Release: 1995

Label: [Holy Records](#)

Avantgenre: A La Carte Blanche Et Noir

Duration: 01:07:10

Origin: Frenchland

Official site: <http://www.misanthrope-metal.com>

TRACKLIST:

01. Gargantuan Decline
02. Courtisane Syphilitique
03. 1666... Theatre Bizarre
04. L'Autre Hiver
05. Pirouetting Through The Gloom
06. Aphrodite Marine
07. Medieval Embroidery
08. Mylene
09. Trumpets Of Hypochondria
10. Schattengesang
11. La Derniere Pierre

If I were a gardener I would listen to this album constantly. I guess I would even get myself an ipod, upload this album and listen to it from the early morning, when inspecting the garden to the evening whilst looking at the day's work. If I were a truck-driver I would not listen to this album all day long. Probably only once a day, preferably whilst having lunch in my truck whilst parking next to a highway and having cheap fun with an expensive prostitute. Or the other way around. If I were a policeman I would definitely try to listen to the album at least once a week, preferably on weekends, where the time spent would most definitely be my best time. I would also try to convince my fellow policemen to listen to the album as often as possible. I

might even write short emails via the intranet to convince other policemen of the geniality of this album. If I were a caveman, you know, those brave man and woman who constantly work in caves to dig coal or diamonds, I would try to convince the corporation to play this album in the elevators that brings us up and down to and from daylight to the bottom of the mines. If I were a rich man, I would spend all my money on merchandise from this band. Even the rarest and most bizarre pieces (broken drumsticks, broken guitar strings,...) would be collected by me by any means possible. Even by selling my body if it had to be done.

If I were a simple album reviewer that listens to music all day long, I would quit writing about music and would become either a gardener, a truck-driver, a policeman, a caveman or a rich man. Literally.

After I wrote this review, I was told that the singer is the label-boss of Holy Records, so to say, an important man. Please bear in mind (well, not literally) that this album is gorgeous.

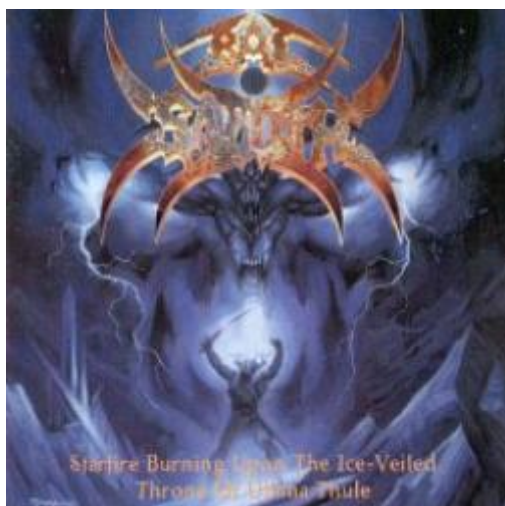
Jonny Lignano



1996

BAL-SAGOTH

Starfire Burning On The Ice-Veiled Throne Of Ultima Thule



Release: 1996

Label: Cacophonous

Avantgenre: Savage Bloodsoaked Wars Of The Far Far North Metal

Duration: 57:36

Origin: United Kingdom

Official site: <http://www.bal-sagoth.co.uk/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Black Dragons Soar Over The Mountain Of Shadows (Prologue)
- 02 - To Dethrone The Witch-Queen Of Mytos K'un (the Legend Of The Battle Of Blackhelm Vale)
- 03 - As The Vortex Illuminates The Crystalline Walls Of Kor-Avul-Thaa
- 04 - Starfire Burning Upon The Ice-Veiled Throne Of Ultima Thule
- 05 - Journey To The Isle Of Mists (Over The Moonless Depths Of The Night-Dark Seas)
- 06 - The Splendour Of A Thousand Swords Gleaming Beneath The Blazon Of The Hyperborean Empire
- 07 - And Lo, When The Imperium Marches Against Cul-Kothoth, Then The Dark Sorceries Shall Enshroud The Citadel Of The Obsidian Crown
- 08 - Summoning The Guardians Of The Astral Gate
- 10 - In The Raven-Haunted Forests Of Darkenhold, Where Shadows Reign And The Hues Of Sunlight Never Dance
- 11 - At The Altar Of The Dreaming Gods (Epilogue)

"Starfire Burning" was my first foray into the pulp fantasy universe of Bal-Sagoth. Somehow a college radio station in Las

Vegas got a hold of a promo and put it into heavy late night rotation. And let me say, "The Splendour of a Thousand Swords Gleaming Beneath the Blazon of the Hyperborean Empire" was one hell of an introduction.

The song possessed a pulverizing brutality, fast, heavy and grindy, pure metal mayhem. And yet, when it slowed down and the synths came to the forefront, the music took on a soaring heroic quality that elevated it to peaks of pompous perfection. And then Byron's voice intoned "My warriors, a legacy today shall be wrought with our blades..." And as if that wasn't enough, Byron then proceeded to portray another character, the song's evil antagonist, in another, far more insidious voice. On one level it was incredibly nerdy, Robert E. Howard by way of Forgotten Realms, but on another, it was total head music, forcing the listener (i.e. me) into Byron's strange universe whether they wanted to be there or not.

This is the kind of album that should be preceded with a THX sound effect. It's big, the production as thick and heavy as a pint of imperial stout. The band is firing on all cylinders. Jonny Maulding's drums are full on death grind, blasting away and only slowing down for pounding breakdowns and cymbal rides, especially when his keyboards take center stage—in these parts, the drums are a perfect compliment, tight, powerful and martial. The keyboards, of course, are the first thing about Bal-Sagoth that stand out, adding orchestral power to Chris Maulding's guitar lines, which alternate between epic heavy metal and pulverizing blackened death metal.

The whole point of the thing of course is to deliver Byron's ornate language and ridiculously convoluted war story, which plays out like the coolest Warhammer campaign ever waged on a tabletop. When not rasping, his voice seems to emanate from ancient depths, by degrees oracular and imperious. His lyrics are bleak, and so is the music, unusually so. Since "Battle Magic," the band has sought a more upbeat sound, but "Starfire Burning" is darkly inspiring, cold as a glacier and just as impenetrable. It's fun

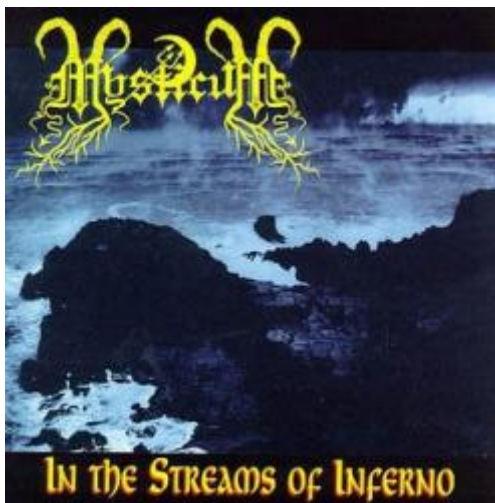
and escapist, but carries the melancholic conviction of a Conan story, by turns blood soaked, desultory and elegiac.

Fans of later Bal-Sagoth may be shocked by the grim atmosphere and utter heaviness of the band's second outing, but it shouldn't be missed. It remains the brooding epicenter of the Bal-Sagoth discography. Now, I'm off to down some beers and fight Seattle yuppies to their dishonorable deaths with my mighty +3 broadsword of de-gentrification. Many hails, metal brothers!

James Slone

MYSTICUM

In The Streams Of Inferno



Release: 1996

Label: Full Moon Records

Avantgenre: Digital Extreme Inferno Metal

Duration: 36:35

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.myspace.com/mysticum>

If someone would start a competition to point out the most evil and grim avant-garde Black Metal band of all time, Mysticum would be one of the top favourites to win the price. I mean, these guys were signed by the mighty father of all Norwegian vampires, Mr. Euronymous, himself, on Deathlike Silence Records. Who of those wanna-be-

evil-worshippers of today is able to claim something just close to this? Secondly, the sound on their debut "In the Streams of Inferno" is even more high-pitched and invidious than the guitar-razorblades on "Nattens Madrigal". Thirdly, these guys support the "Never stop the madness"-campaign which supports the use (or abuse, as you like) of hard drugs. Shall I go on? No, I think we can all agree, regardless how much of this might be slapstick, "In the Streams of Inferno" is a damn cult release. Back in 1995 the psychos around vocalist and guitarist Prime Evil were the first to combine ingredients of harsh, cold and merciless Industrial (mainly digital drums and various samples) with the sharp and ugly sound of True Norwegian Black Metal. If you take in consideration that this is the one and only official album till today, you get an idea of how intense the material must be, as the band was able to influence a whole generation of angry avantgarde-metal musicians just with one output. Soon after, the fruits of this unholy motherhood could be tasted on masterpieces like "666 International" or "With no Human Intervention".

Today, more than one decade after the release, it is hard to analyse this album. With an unemotional and sober approach one has to come to the conclusion, that this is crap and not worth one penny. The sound is rather dilettantish, the electronic drums are blustering without any kind of creativity and the keyboards annoy with their common tone and melody themes.

On the other hand, and now we leave the spheres of rational reception, the atmosphere on "In the Streams of Inferno" is simply magic. The artistic coolness of Mysticum combined with the rather evil and possessed vocals, spreads a poisoned spirit, which is in these times, where extreme metal has become nothing more than cheap mental fast food, a welcome revelation of the sick and poisoned genesis of Norwegian Black Metal. Mysticum's music should be hence labelled and evaluated as a relict of music history. A metal

TRACKLIST:

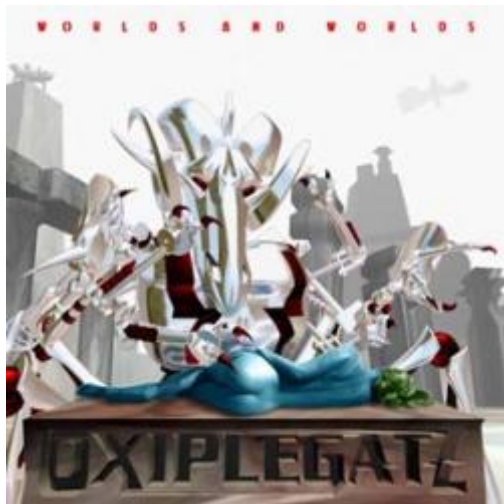
- 01 - Industries Of Inferno
- 02 - The Rest
- 03 - Let The Kingdom Come
- 04 - Wintermass
- 05 - Crypt Of Fear
- 06 - In Your Grave
- 07 - Where The Raven Flies
- 08 - In The Last Of The Ruins We Search For A New Planet

record which is old fashioned, musically unspectacular and trashy, but in the same time represents a bridge between two important evolutionary stages of extreme metal.

Polygon

OXIPLEGATZ

Worlds And Worlds



Release: 1996

Label: Fairytale Records / Season Of Mist

Avantgenre: Metallic Tales From Distant Worlds

Duration: 38:02

Origin: Sweden

Official site: <http://tinyurl.com/2yqydu>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Battle Of Species
- 02 - First Contact - Conflict
- 03 - Aftermath
- 04 - Quest
- 05 - Graveyard Dream
- 06 - Usurpers
- 07 - The End Is Nigh
- 08 - Abandon Earth
- 09 - Journey

After his activities in THE GROTESQUE and AT THE GATES, Alf Svensson decided to work with some previously unreleased material, which ended in the albums of OXIPLEGATZ (named after a creature in a Donald Duck magazine). The one man "band" never fit into a certain genre, it's Death Metal, it's Black Metal, it's a mix of many styles – describing all details of OXIPLEGATZ's music is as tricky as trying to escape from a

super massive black hole. "Worlds And Worlds" is the second of three outputs (a review of the third album "Sidereal Journey" can be found here), and deals also with the aspects of future and what dangers will await homo sapiens stellaris out there. The songs vary in style and lyrics, each representing a single world of this acoustic solar system.

"Worlds and worlds, their destiny lies to be conquered." (Quote from "Abandon Earth")

Sometimes Alf's voice is accompanied by his sister Sara, who is a good addition to this album and underlines the slow-tempo-parts in a unique way. On the other hand some songs have a very aggressive metal feeling, where the drum computer tries to accelerate to warp speed. Even an old song found its way onto the album: "Graveyard dream" was written by Alf for THE GROTESQUE, but never recorded before. The last three songs represent my favourite part of "Worlds And Worlds", calm and with clean vocals and sometimes even without guitars and drums, only synthesizers and the voices of Sara and Alf, music for dedicated stargazers who often look up to the sky and ask themselves what's going on in the endless depths of the void. One negative point is the sound. Sadly it could be better because of the lack of much budget back in 1996. Nowadays for sure it would be easier to give this album the technical strength it deserves.

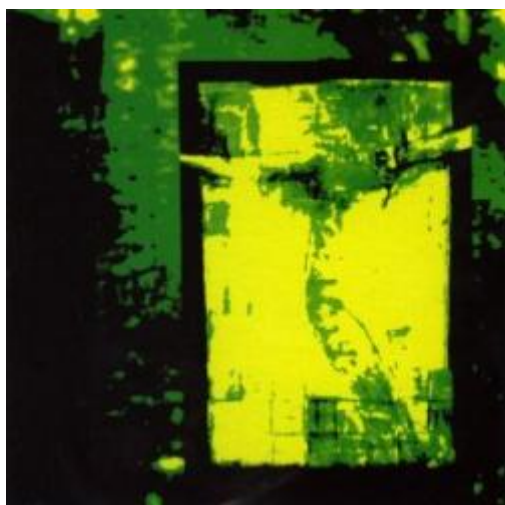
This band has ever been dedicated to the unknown of the final frontier, to things beyond the borders of imagination. If you want to explore new horizons, give this album a try and take part on this journey to the universe of OXIPLEGATZ.

Bernd



PAN-THY-MONIUM

Khaoos And Kon-Fus-Ion



Release: 1996

Label: [Relapse](#)

Avantgenre: Raagoonshinnaah Rock

Duration: 34:23

Origin: Sweden

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Battle Of Geeheeb
- 02 - Thee-Pherenth
- 03 - Behrial
- 04 - In Remembrance

"Khaoos And Kon-Fus-Ion," Pan-Thy-Monium's awkwardly titled and far too short finale, is like an inexplicably fun sledgehammer to the head: brutal death metal in the nineties Relapse mode with hectic song structures, wild baritone sax squawking, NYC hardcore breakdowns, progressive rock interludes played with airy guitar tones, extended blues solos in the Stockholm death metal style, non-sensical gurgling, funky bass lines and some new age keyboards. In other words, it's a pretty good time with a beer or two.

Really, it's pretty much par for the course with the band's other obscure work, though a bit more in-your face, drawing on some of the straight to the point extremity of the "Dreams II" EP, with fast, heavy riffs to keep heads banging. What it all comes down to is the entertainment factor, and here the band is off the scale.

I would talk about Dan Swanö's well documented involvement with the otherwise anonymous band, but it's not particularly useful to frame it that way. Ultimately, Pan-Thy-Monium's inspired death metal wackiness provides its own context.

James Slone

ARCTURUS

Aspera Hiems Symfonia



Release: 1996

Label: Ancient Lore Creations

Avantgenre: Emotional Technical
Black Metal

Duration: 41:27

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/arcturusnorway>

TRACKLIST:

- 01. To Thou Who Dweldest In The Night
- 02. Wintry Grey
- 03. Whence & Wither Goest The Wind
- 04. Raudt Og Svart
- 05. The Bodkin & The Quietus (...To Reach The Stars)
- 06. Du Nordavind
- 07. Fall Of Man
- 08. Naar Kulda Tar (Frostnettenes Prolog)

Could a metal album be soft, like the murmur of a snowflake landing on the ground? Could a distorted strumming give the feeling of that frozen wind, crushing at one's bare face? What about black metal, the extremist edge of a branched genre who's loaded with extremism – shall we forever listen to hymns of hate and slunder [slander], fast as flies, penetrating stubbornly through blunt and gurgled sounds? Until the mid 90's, most

of these questions were left without unequivocal answers, and "Aspera" constituted an appropriate answer.

Arcturus's debut album went out in cold 1996 after two EP's that included experiments in forging unique sounds, blended of industrial and traditional BM. "Aspera" proved that the BM genre is wide enough to include also modest works such as "Aspera", all wintry Norwegian romance, but also breaking the conventions of the mainstream BM. At first glance, Arcturus might be seen as yet another Norwegian scene supergroup, due to two of its members: Hellhammer, the famous Mayhem (and some other countless bands) drummer and the vocalist Garm, also in Borknagar and Ulver at the time being. In many cases, the high turnover of musicians in the Norwegian bands made the impression, as a new band comes in spotlight, that it's just another side project. The significance of Arcturus is measured also in the consolidated work, and the listener can feel it's a work conceived by a band and not by a bunch of mercenaries.

One of the BM subgenres dedicates its creation affinity to its natural surrounding, such as the early period of Ulver and Borknagar. Their albums were based on traditional BM, yet slower, with folk elements. With some influence from these acts (and with the same frontman in both of them...), Arcturus created mid-tempo BM that emphasizes both enchanting atmosphere and craftsmanship. This achievement allowed the band to become the spearhead of the generically musical experiments, to speak the nature through music.

Labelling this album as "wintry" only, would be injustice, because this image brings automatically worn metaphors of rain falling harshly on windows, facing the listener's sad gaze, wrapped in blankets and mourning the loss of his / her lover. Wrong. In this album, the listener

wrapped himself in a coat, adding scarf and boots, went on a journey through the northern winter and his phenomena, described gently like a pencil sketch.

Possible that the album is a glorification of the season and the feeling it lights in the human heart, and in general of the spectacular costumes which the magical Norwegian nature wears for the coming of winter. I can say that the album is somehow a blackish, symphonic and Scandinavian version of the wonderful Empyrium debut "A Wintersunset..."

The album contains 40 minutes of music, divided into 8 songs, of gentle and contemplative work of art, so exceptional in the scenery of the typical musical BM efforts at the time. The first prominent characteristic, attributed to the BM legacy, are Garm's vocals, which rush between traditional screaming to crystal clear singing. The second characteristic is Hellhammer's professional drumming, perfectly adequate to the work's demands, if in dreamy speed outbursts (like in the opening track), softened double-bass and slow drum beatings – to those who are used to fast drumming in the vein of Marduk. It's obvious that only a virtuoso like Hellhammer could perform his unique role like few others can, and restrain yearning for blast-beats etc.

The difference that separates "Aspera" from other standard BM albums becomes clear also in the weight of the innovative keyboards work. In a genre in which the keyboards are usually only as a background or taking over the music, here they take the lead indeed, whereas the guitar is pushed aside a bit – however, they keep the metallic character, which creates a rich and harmonic mixture. Moreover, the excellent production and the sharp and clear sound grant each instrument the maximal expression ability. Easily, the keyboards could be swallowed by his accompanies and hurled into dough or submit to the typical Norwegian sound, which is known as "caves'



sound". It proves Arcturus as an intelligent band, with unrestricted boundaries, ready to explore sounds beyond the known and convenient.

To many acts in the BM world adhered the image of amateur musicians, only capable of playing two-chord songs. Arc-turus is built from skilled and inspired musicians, each in his sphere: beside Hellhammer, there's Sverd, master of keyboards, which displays progressive and neo-classical influences. August the guitarist also doing a great job (for example, his solo in "fall of man", is an absolute masterpiece). In addition, half of the lyrics are written in Norwegian, but reading the English ones with the translated texts (one can find them on the internet, since the album contains only the opening track lyrics), reveals that they focus on the nature and astronomy, and of course on the spectrum of forlorn feelings, courtesy of winter. The lyrical difference is one of the characteristics of Arcturus throughout its years of creation, and always suits the musical developments.

The album is made with total solidity, without boring or disappointing songs. However, three of them shine above the rest like the morning star: mentions before, the first song, "To Thou Who Dwell-est in the Night" is shining grey magic, also quite romantic, in which the combination between the screaming and clean vocals projects itself as if it was a dancing troll on a snowy hill, along with a deep-voiced choir. The third song, "Du Nordavind", brings forth a touch of Norwegian folk and warms like singing in front of a bonfire. Afterwards comes along "Fall of Man", perhaps the peak of the album, showcasing perfect technical skills that can break some hearts with its melancholy.

To everyone who desires BM to be all magic and designation, to everyone who wishes to travel in Norway without leaving home and to everyone who adores good music without labels, I'll offer this special album.

Jobst

AMORPHIS

Elegy



Release: 1996

Label: [Relapse Records](#)

Avantgenre: Folkish Intelligent Softdoom

Duration: 56:35

Origin: Finland

Official site: <http://www.amorphis.net>

TRACKLIST:

01. Better Unborn
02. Against Widows
03. The Orphan
04. On Rich And Poor
05. My Kantele
06. Cares
07. Song Of The Troubled One
08. Weeper On The Shore
09. Elegy
10. Relief
11. My Kantele - Acoustic Reprise

Through a panoramic view of the world's folk metal scene, one can recognize most of the bands under the umbrella organization known as 'Scandinavia'. A reasonable explanation to this phenomenon can be found in the roots of the proud Viking legacy, still echoing in the scene. This legacy appeals as an almost biblical inspiration to many musicians, who flood the genre with ongoing tales about Odin and his rowdy friends in Valhalla, seasoned with almost – "happy" keyboards and "ho-ho" choirs. The antithesis to the fashionable Vikingism stands as most of the folk musical works in the country that's not Scandinavian in the deep meaning of the term – Finland. The Finnish folklore is based on the pagan

background before the Christendom era and is embodied through an important cultural and mythical layer – the Kalevala. This is an anthology of folk songs that passed from father to son throughout generations and deals mostly with the adventures of the ancient gods. Simultaneously with the gathering of the Kalevala, joined together the Kanteletar: a cycle of more than 700 songs and ballads, describing the life of the ancient Finns, their beliefs and observations, their daily customs, their relation to nature and their joys and sorrows.



Some Finnish bands found their influence in the Kalevala and traditional music, but none of them managed to blend these influences together with grace and uniqueness as the most important band in the Finnish metal scene ever – Amorphis. In my humble opinion, there isn't another Finnish metal act (and those outside Finland who elevate from Amorphis are rare), who melted a genuine love of its national traditions to sounds, based upon such a rich mixture: folk, doom and death metal, progressive rock and psychedelic etc.

One should remember that Amorphis started as a doom-death band, and the seeds of continuous musical evolution, which reached its blossom in "Elegy", are demonstrated in their previous albums. New band members have brought fresh

spirit to the group with energetic drumming and mesmerizing keyboard work. But the major difference was adding Pasi Koskinen's clean voice full time next to Tomi Koivusaari's growls.

The album also differs itself musically with sharpening of the musical agenda: the significant prog-rock and psychedelic grew, as the band's doom-death orientation formulated into a mutation of soft doom, rhythmic and toothless. The traditional influences stood clear, through the folk melodies and the textual basis of the Kanteletar. As his ancestors, "Elegy" is also a concept album, correspondent with Finland's pagan glory days. Yet the texts reflect the simple and daily side of the northern land beyond the twilight of the gods. All this, without diminishing the original poetic quality and gentleness, since the members have realized that they're dealing with genuine poetry. The album contains 11 songs, drowned with unordinary arrangements, as far as it concerns dealing with folklore assets. The listener faces a meticulous display of genres, embroidered with sensitivity and accuracy.

The album opens like a snowstorm with "Better Unborn", displaying perfectly Amorphis' genres' feast of genres: oriental sitar playing (and so Finnish!), growing stronger until the song bursts – the psychedelic guitars, the metallic background, the folk riffs – the natural way in which all these ornaments are entwined together is almost incomprehensible. It's obvious that this is a work by sensitive and attentive musicians, mainly because the challenge of blending the world of yesterday with the present time. In general, it's fascinating to observe and be impressed by the interpretation given to each song, if in faster rhythms, like "Against Widow" and "On Rich and Poor", or in the beautiful ballad "The Orphan", that opens with melancholy speck and ends with rain of hope scraps. Amorphis didn't fear combining other strange elements, such as the quiet folk beat (that it's almost tango!) and afterwards a 20-second dance bridge, breaking into guitar solo in "Cares", a song that at first listening seems confused and detached. After some investigating, one must respect the band's courage, what may

have lifted many metal fans' eyebrows, wondering if the band had gone amiss. Sadly, not every average metal fan understands that this is complex and multi-faced music that reflects complex and multi-faced culture. The name of the album had not been chosen in vain – this is an elegy to a lost world.

Not easily one can point for weaknesses in the album. However, the songs settings' may be considered a weakness, for the album opens fast with the 5 most rousing songs, and its energy goes out towards the end. Nevertheless, the last song keeps the listener with the sweet longing that only another listening can liquefy. The fifth song, "My Kantele", is by far the best song on the album and keeps the proper ending: it reprises acoustically with sitar and gentle drums that deliver night of northern lights, in a tight and exciting performance. In addition, in spite of the success of the two vocalists working together, Koskinen's vocals fit perfectly to the music, and indeed, in future albums he'll be the sole vocalist.

Amorphis' music built magnificently, on surface and deep inside: not only from the fine musical essence, but also from its ability to trickle into the heart's eaves trough and engrave its feelings on its walls. It's music of love – of Finland, of past and future, of people and above all, of music itself. Lifted on the spiritual uplifting from the album, the Finnish magic goes on and on.

Jobst



1997

BETHLEHEM

Sardonischer Untergang Im Zeichen Irreligiöser Darbietung



Release: 1997

Label: [Red Stream](#)

Avantgenre: Ruhrpott Metal

Duration: 44:19

Origin: Germany

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/bethlehemasyllum>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Durch Befleckte Berührung Meiner Nemesis
- 02 - Du Sollst Dich Töten
- 03 - Gestern Starb Ich Schon Heute
- 04 - Teufelverrückt Gottdreizehn
- 05 - Tote Weiße Mader
- 06 - Nexus
- 07 - Luftstehs Ibläh
- 08 - Als Ich Caulerpa Taxifolia Erbrach
- 09 - Tod Ist Weicher Stuhl In Gar Fleischlos' Gift

Bethlehem's masterpiece "Sardonischer Untergang im Zeichen irreligiöser Darbietung" (in short: S.U.I.Z.I.D.) from 1997 is one of the strangest spawns, which ever arose from the German extreme metal underground. Thousands of bands (not worth the bytes to name them) tried to get into the universe of human agony, but never reached the oppressive atmosphere of this orchestra.

After "Dark Metal" and "Dictius Te Ne-care", this record carries the listener deeper into the world of the nightmarish visions of Jürgen Bartsch. His words are really worth listening to, although it seems impossible to find the right key to decrypt his impressions from the omnipresent Alexanderwelt:

"From a watery devotion/awakened in the respect of the trinity/The apple juice is lending/ the strange horror/ one odd inherited burden/" (From "Tote weiße Marder")

Quite a lot reviewers labelled the lyrics as nonsense and interpreted Bethlehem as kids fooling around with the music business. But in the year 2008, after two more great albums dealing with the same embittered emotions, one must discover a stringent concept, a deeper world behind the printed letters. A successful interpretation depends on the listener's ability to abstract and transform thoughts of a sick soul into one's own thinking and especially feeling.

Of course lyrics like "Luftstehs' Ibläh" should not be analysed through a demure reception, but especially with the sick humour of this track the band dissociated from the "serious and depressed" Black Metal underground, which, at the latest with the release of "Dictius Te Ne-care", adored the suicidal collective as the new Messiah.

The song structures are quite abnormal. "Teufelverrückt Gottdreizehn", for example, starts with the reading of the lyrics. In the background we can hear several strange sounds like bells, the ticking of a wall clock and subtle piano jingle. After three minutes all hell breaks loose with one of Matton's non-reversible guitar riffs and a powerful drumming. All in all, talking about the songwriting, this is the most dynamic composition, and even though this feeling does not really fit the apparently fragile personalities, it is also the most aggressive track. Especially when the tempo is slowed down and Marcus Kehren is spitting out, what could be described as the lyrical leitmotiv ("Liebkosender Wahn..."), one has the feeling to listen to the devil himself, who is in a rather choleric state of mind.

Marco Kehren`s ability to succeed the superior Rainer Landfermann is stunning. Its all history. The album was released over one decade ago. But for me it is important to remember albums like "S.U.I.Z.I.D", because they broke through invisible barriers and created a totally new approach towards extreme metal. Even though on the one hand the codex is rather strange and sometimes even childish, it seems also that this band was closer to what they proclaimed ("You shall kill yourself"), then any of their followers.

For me this album is like a good old medicine from grandma`s times. Keeping me healthy in times of the virus.

Polygon

SEPTIC FLESH

The Ophidian Wheel



Release: 1997

Label: Holy Records

Avantgenre: Hellenistic Alien Esoterica

Duration: 51:33

Origin: Greece

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/septicfleshband>

Septic Flesh have had a somewhat sporadic output over the years, but have found the time to put together an unusually strong discography. Some of their best and oddest material emerged from their brief collaboration with Natalie Rassoulis, whose sharp, classically

trained voice added a haunting edge to their already esoteric sound. The only proper album from this period is "The Ophidian Wheel," an outstanding example of Greek death metal and arguably the band's best work.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Future Belongs To The Brave
- 02 - The Ophidian Wheel
- 03 - Phallic Litanies
- 04 - Razor Blades Of Guilt
- 05 - Tartarus
- 06 - On The Topmost Step Of The Earth
- 07 - Microcosmos
- 08 - Geometry In Static
- 09 - Shamanic Rite
- 10 - Heaven Below
- 11 - Enchantment

The basic Septic Flesh sound is in full force: brutal chugging death metal with heavy metal guitar leads and ample post punk/goth rock atmosphere, complete with space age synthesizers and guitar tones so crisp and clean you could bleach your socks in them. As usual, all these components carry a certain hard-to-pin-down non-western flavor, though the overall sound is probably more Mediterranean than Asian.

They've always had a slight twinge of the epic and the exotic, somewhat reminiscent of the "oriental" excesses of Siouxsie and the Banshees and the apocalyptic theatrics of the Fields of Nephilim, though heavier and hookier than either band per the metal mission statement.

The two things that make the album really stand out in their discography is the bigger production (before "The Ophidian Wheel" the band was plagued with a generally muddy sound) and Rassoulis' voice, which isn't weak, "feminine," or sappy in the way so many goth metal sopranos are. Instead, it's a strong, willful and somewhat chilly voice, and she uses it as an oppressive weapon and a purely musical instrument, sometimes high and mighty and at other times, rhythmic and ritualistic, always slightly alien sounding.

The style melds well with the lyrics, which are all about classical Greek esoterica, hedonistic sexual cults and new age aliens, a melding of ancient history,

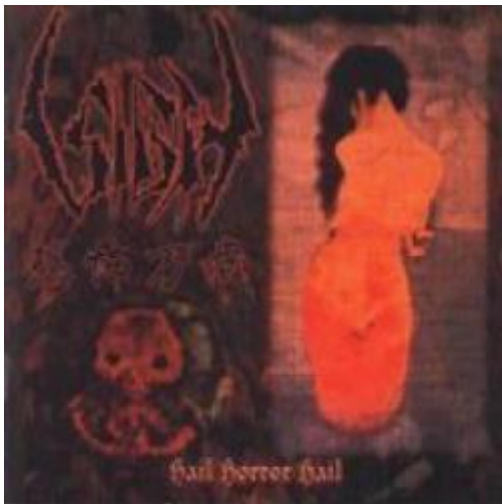
fantasy and science fiction. The cover, which features an original painting with serpents, snake men and what appears to be a cosmically inclined gray alien, summarizes its contents pretty well. Septic Flesh has always been a strange band, bringing ponderous lyrics and oddball experimental approaches to what amounts to extremely kick ass metal.

"The Ophidian Wheel" remains the best working example of this band's highly unusual style.

James Slone

SIGH

Hail Horror Hail



Release: 1997

Label: [Cacophonous Records](#)

Avantgenre: Lucid Shadow Dream

Duration: 51:33

Origin: Japan

Official site: <http://sigh.gospel-virus.net/>

This was my first encounter with SIGH. And a formative one. An album which starts deceptively "normal", but ends as a soundtrack to some drugged horror film. The title Track, at the same time the opener, starts as some kind of a Heavy-Metal song with scolding vocals; nothing out of the ordinary. So, around 2:30 of that track you are completely unprepared when being dragged out of this

song to a sound-track to what could be a homecoming-scene in some kind of movie, just to be shoved back into the same song again. At that point your reaction

would probably be a "huh?", but save your puzzlement for later... This happens many times during "Hail Horror Hail".

"This album is way beyond the conceived notion of how metal, or music, should be. In Essence it is a movie without pictures; a celluloid phantasmagoria. Accordingly, the film jumps, and another scene, seemingly unconnected with the previous context, is suddenly inserted in between frames. Every sound on this album is deliberate, and if you find that some parts of this album are strange, it isn't because the music is in itself strange, but because your conscious self is ill-equipped to comprehend the sounds produced on this recording."

This statement is written on the back the CD, and truer words have never been spoken by a band about their own work. "12 souls", for example, starts with happy scene involving a dog (associations to ULVER's "Capitel III : Graablick Blev Hun Vaer" might be intended), goes forth with a pure horror-metal piece so dark and menacing it gives you goose-bumps, which resumes after a short jazz-club scene, then converting to a chase which ends in the jazz-club again. Which is, in the meantime, filled with demons. If that's hard to follow for you, dear reader, I have succeeded in describing the album to you. This album jumps so fast through moods and styles it sometimes aches; it leaps clawed in your face while a second later it rubs your back caringly. And it invokes pictures of a film which is not there, not unlike DIABOLICAL MASQUERADE's "Death's Design". An average of six or seven different moods in a "song" is not out of the ordinary here. But there are straighter songs as well; among them my favourite song "42 49" and the calm "Invitation to Die" (which features flamenco-guitars and baby-cries), both with an undescribable dark and at the same time light atmosphere.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Hail Horror Hail
- 02 - 42 49
- 03 - 12 Souls
- 04 - Burial
- 05 - The Dead Sing
- 06 - Invitation To Die
- 07 - Pathetic
- 08 - Curse Of Izanagi
- 09 - Seed Of Eternity

And then there is "Pathetic" – you know what, why discuss Amy Winehouse for the next 007-titletrack? Let SIGH do it! They have already done it with this song. "Curse of Izanagi"'s beginning sounds a bit like the (very) old SKYCLAD... Damn, I just recognized that Mirai DOES sound a bit like Martin Walkyier. Without the lisp, that is.

Now, this is not easy listening. The mood-changes are not smooth, mostly they surprise you right in the middle of a part; they are hard, edgy, and indigestible. You have to be ready for this one. Well, maybe not ready, but receptive. To conclude this, I will do a Jonny-Lignano-Rip-off to show you the formula that is SIGH:



Tentakel P.



Human Hand in the right Hand – Human Leg in the left Hand!

ANUBI

Kai Pilnaties Akis Užmerks Mirtis



Release: 1997

Label: Danza Ipnotica Records

Avantgenre: Avantgarde

Atmo-Sophisto-Metal

Duration: 54:06

Origin: Kaunas, Lithuania

Official site: <http://www.martynasmeskauskas.net/>

Anubi was formed in 1992 in the city of Kaunas which is situated on the confluence of River Neman and Neris in the middle of Lithuania.

Anubi. When I say this word, I associate it with the Egyptian god of mummification and embalming, widely known as Anubis or Inpu. Conclusion to this; the lyrics - although spoken in Lithuanian - are about death-related themes and mythology. The logo of the band comprises three things: a pentagram, an inverted ankh-cross which functions as a "standard", Christian inverted cross at the first sight. There are also two horns which can symbolize the Devil. However, it can be a reference to the coat of arms of Kaunas as well – and let me say that this meaning would be the nicest thing I've ever seen in the world of symbols of bands.

Seeing the cover, an avantgarde movement comes to my mind, and its name is expressionism. The whole artwork deals with elementally strong colors, thoughts and emotions. On the front you can see a land with pine trees and with the shining white moon over the blood-red sky.

This is definitely not the first thing you will notice.

The first one you will surely realize is the presence of Death on the cover holding the eyes of the Moon in his hands; the album title is generally translated to "*When the Death shalt close the eyes of the Full-Moon*". And listen; it's quite hard to recognize but yes, there is Anubis next to the Grim Reaper. On the back there is the Hooded again with a bird – probably a raven or a crow standing on his shoulder. Inside the booklet there is a larger painting showing Death again with his infamous scythe in front of a blue and purple dominated scene. Beside this, there are various drawings inside it. The reasons I am telling you all is to inform you about the concrete details giving an overall picture. And the more important one is that Lord Ominous – the vocalist, the personification of the creative force behind the band actually created the whole artwork. This is a sort of rarity in today's world. However, beside the fact that Lord Ominous was a talented "inter-artist" (he painted lots of pictures), it also signals that the album and the artwork is fully created with devotion.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Savo Kelyje
- 02 - Kai Pilnaties Akis Užmerks Mirtis
- 03 - Mirtis
- 04 - Kai Pilnaties Akis Užmerks Mirtis II.
- 05 - Gyvenimo Kritima Dovanosim Krankliui
- 06 - I Nauje Galybe
- 07 - Ir Saule Neteko Savo Puses Veido
- 08 - Ozirio Adventas
- 09 - Folklorine Daina Apie Mirti
- 10 - Iš Tuštumos I Akmens Tyla
- 11 - Tarp Akmens Ir Veidrodžio

The CD contains 11 movements. The average length of each song is around 4-5 minutes, although there is *Folklorine Daina Apie Mirti* which not even reaches the 1 minute-length. To contrast this; the ending *Tarp Akmens ir Veidrodžio* is over 15 minutes! The intro-like first song arrives with church organs giving it a gothic feeling but as the vocals appear the gothic atmosphere is already gone. Saxophone and disharmonic melodies accompany the Lithuanian chanting. The title song, *Kai Pilnaties Akis Užmerks*

Mirtis starts with minimalistic riffs at a mid-tempo. Quickly the keys approaching with rhythms and melodies

which seem to be amusingly spontaneous at the first time. The piano reminds me of the music of Antheil and Poulenc. The vocals are both clean and harshly growled, the latter are filled with rage, and the former are similar to a priest doing a ceremony. Later we become ear witnesses of a bass solo.

This album is often considered to be a post-black metal album. But when I say post-black metal I think of speed and harsh, technical things. In this case it is much more; the CD is full of surprises. One of these is the medieval feeling created by bass guitar playing.

This (the medieval atmosphere), contrary to the overall production; is not a rare thing seeing the hordes of black metal bands trying to resurrect the values and spirits of the » *dark medieval times* «. At this point, an Italian band came to my mind, one of my personal favorites: *Evol*. They were clearly a unique spot in the medieval/atmospherical black metal genre. Anyway, they didn't use saxophones. But

Anubi did. Before you think of some grand saxo-solo or

anything, let me make one thing clear: although saxo is often used, the band managed to play effects and ambient-like sounds rather than some saxo-king-black-warrior wannabe production which would have been surely annoying. It would have destroyed the "Anubi spirit". The next surprises are the funky, tube-sounding key solos summoning a tropical feeling for a moment. Folky violin comes with the almost tribal-like drum playing and the singing of the wise Elder. I see everything when I close my eyes; the blazing camp fire surrounded with elders, the pine trees surrounding them, the black sky with the white, shining moon surrounding everything.

This is the vision *Kai Pilnaties Akis Užmerks Mirtis II*. gives me. After this dream the next song, *Gyvenimo Kritima Dovanosim Krankliui* might scare you away with the bursting shriek in the beginning. But if you don't listen to it, you will miss the somewhat psychedelic guitars that can be heard in this track. The keys are tinkling under the clean singing. Surprise after surprise; the symphonic arrangements of *I Nauja Galybe* make



the song deeply filled with emotions. Ultra light, minimal guitars open the next chapter sounding so elegantly with the soft keys; the whole *Ir Saule Neteko Savo Puses Veido* is much closer to an ambient influenced post-rock song than anything else. This is not post-black metal anymore and I'm glad to experience it. My words don't represent anything, one must listen to it and devote himself to this sophisticated perfection.

Too bad that every good thing lasts for a few moments – we can say. The case of this great avantgarde band is not exclusion. Like stars on the night-sky, Anubi's name is on the dead band's list. The reason is filled with pain and sorrow. Lord Ominous, known as Martynas Meškauskas in the civil life died in a sailing accident on Lake Michigan on the 30th of March, 2002 with the age of 28. R.I.P.

(Note that the tracknames are wrong because the site doesn't support some Lithuanian characters. You can find the correct ones on the official website.)

revon

OPETH

My Arms, Your Hearse



Release: 1997

Label: [Candlelight Records](#)

Avantgenre: Holterdipolterrock

Duration: 01:02:45

Origin: Swedia

Official site: <http://www.opeth.com>

Ladies and gentleman, again, a premiere: in my ongoing efforts to reduce the number of verbs in music journalism this is the first review that puts all the verbs separately! Yo!

This album *1 very conceptual, for someone who *2 not *3 to Pink Floyd I *4 it *5 like Pink Floyd. Song number four *6 some very kinky guitars and *7 very sophisticated. Not in an intellectual way (thank god) but as a very neat intro to song number five, which *8 like Ernst Juenger *9 to enemy trenches. I *10 the otherwise very straightforward (good) homepage of the band *11 the lyrics of this album.

Number seven *12 some horrible *13, *14 at 1:40 it *15 like decent (before black album) Metallica but *16 everything but the girl (not the band). Number eight *17 some fresh *18 (from i.e. Hades) and the double bass *19 [ligetiesque](#) (I, sort of, *20 that adjective). The rest of the album *21 so-so.

*1: is; *2: does; *3: listen; *4: 'd say; *5: sounds; *6: has; *7: sounds;

*8: sounds; *9: sneaking; *10: wish; *11: would quote; *12: has; *13: singing; *14: beginning; *15: sounds; *16: lacks; *17: regains; *18: singing; *19: is; *20 made up; *21: is;

Jonny Lignano

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Prologue
- 02 - April Ethereal
- 03 - When
- 04 - Madrigal
- 05 - The Amen Corner
- 06 - Demon Of The Fall
- 07 - Credence
- 08 - Karma
- 09 - Epilogue

ARCTURUS

La Masquerade Infernale



Release: October 1997

Label: Music For Nations/Misanthropy

Avantgenre: Apocalyptic Vaudeville Metal

Duration: 45:11

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/arcturusnorway>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Master Of Disguise
- 02 - Ad Astra
- 03 - The Chaos Path
- 04 - La Masquerade Infernale
- 05 - Alone
- 06 - The Throne Of Tragedy
- 07 - Painting My Horror
- 08 - Of Nails And Sinners

"La Masquerade Infernale" was and remains a tremendously influential album. Arcturus was largely responsible for popularizing a more theatrical strand of atmospheric metal, and "La Masquerade" was the band's defining statement, a grotesque and vaudevillian sort of music that retained a certain metallic vigor despite its art rock inclinations. Musically, it plays like a subdued, opium dazed version of the debut album, dizzying and loopy, complicated without being machinelike, trading in growls for yowls.

Each song is like its own little voyage into uncharted waters. "Master of Disguise" is convoluted prog rock with a modernist dissonance and unpredictable

structure. "Ad Astra" sounds like a tango from another planet- in it Arcturus put the drone of a steam engine to good use as a hypnotic rhythm and then buries it in a lush string arrangement that builds into a tremendous otherworldly ambience.

"The Chaos Path" is like vaudeville for perverts, with repetitive carnival music over a turgid metal riff broken by flights into quasi-oriental string music and ending in a drum n' bass break beat. The Edgar Allen Poe adaptation, "Alone," is a thunderous rock anthem with a weird twist reminiscent of Faith No More, slamming you with a catchy assortment of heavy riffs before veering into supped up epic grandeur.

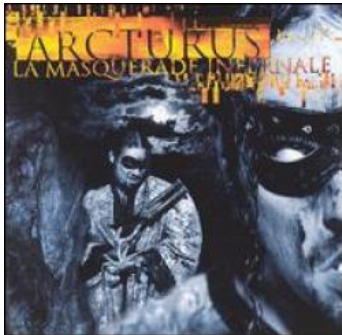
The latter part of the album is slow and winding, with a stronger emphasis on atmosphere and considerably less on experimentation. It's good, but a little disappointing in light of the first two thirds, which sound like a radical manifesto, or a Borges story re-conceptualized as music, eerie inward-looking mental landscapes punctuated with monumental hard rock riffs that can seem, if only for a second, like the unfurling course of human history.

Imbued with a heavily romantic flavor, the album explores the outer shores of the gothic, with a somewhat literary take on Lucifer and the fall of man, painted over with the mad histrionics of a Grand Guignol performer. Two Arcturus vocalists, past and present appear on the album, Garm (Ulver) and Simen Hestnaes (Arcturus); Garm provides a reassuring rock flavor, a little sloppy and in your face, and Simen a high vibrato that seems to beckon at the apocalypse.

All of these factors converge in an album of startling originality. When it came out it was characterized by many a confused metal critic as pastiche ala Mr. Bungle, but Arcturus actually infuse and synthesize the sources into a single strange sound, one that straddles theatrical excess and straightforward metal purposefulness in a way that was largely unheard of at the time. Whatever one might say about it now, "La Masquerade

Infernale" was an unqualified breakthrough.

James Slone



Avantgenre: Lucifer's
Circus Of Avantgarde Doom Metal

How on Earth do you write a review of an album that is not only one of the most revered masterpieces of the ever so arbitrary genre of Avant-Garde Metal, but also a standing member of your own top three all-time favourite albums; a review that is fair to one of the, according to many, best records ever? I battled this question for some weeks, and realised that all I could do was to give the story from my perspective only.

I have been returning to these 45 minutes of Heaven (or was it Hell?) since I first heard the absurd and infernal merry-go-round ride that is "The Chaos Path" sometime during the first autumn of this century, this album becoming a steady companion throughout my adolescence. When reality became too dull and loathsome, there was Arcturus, transcending through spheres of astral immensity, opening gateways to esoteric and decadent wisdom (to the teenage me, at least).

I remember skipping classes, wandering about the city at sundown, admiring the few 19th century buildings there are left, the snow falling thick and silent upon the empty town, the street lights colouring the white crystals velvet orange, in soft contrast to the deep blue skies. My walks always ended at the public library, for hours delving deep into the writings of the dark and mysterious I could find - Poe, Lovecraft, Blake (switching sometimes from Arcturus to Ulver), Baudelaire, Kafka, and the likes... The carnevalesque buffonery and eloquent

satanic horrors of G. Wolf's lyrics were the perfect soundtrack to my pretentious escapades, howling sophisticated mockery not only at the cross, but at everyone conforming to set standards, chained by boredom and normality. I mean, to which romantic dreamer doesn't the thought of the Devil as both a mourning loner and plotting trickster appeal?

The musical mastery on this album is practically flawless. Even though flying through various styles, from blastbeats to drum'n'bass, from the organ grinder of the town fair (how menacing is not "Painting my Horror"?), to the church organist at the High Mass ("Of Nails and Sinners" keep sending shivers down my spine to this day), Arcturus never derails from the defiant spirit of the Masquerade. Carl-August Tidemann's (now in Winds) magnificent solos sweep across the night sky, accompanied by Sverd's astral keyboard manouvres. The Wolf might be accused for singing out of tune - which he certainly does - but I still consider this one of the highlights of our favourite Trickster's career; theatrical deep-end bleating, as guttural as it is untraditional. Simen Hestnæs (Borknagar, Dimmu Borgir) does his first Arc-turian performance, which is also his career's zenith. Not to forget Knut M Valle and Skoll/Hugh James Stephen Mingay, who's rumbling, at points unheard-of riffs create the backbone of this Infernal feast. And yeah, Hellhammer does his work swell as well. By the way, did I mention that they have crammed a cornetist, a flautist (AiwariKiaR of Ulver and <code>) and a string quartet into the studio?

La Masquerade Infernale is a revolutionary Hell draped in velvet and silvery stars, a landscape of golden masks and arabesques, with the Devil of a 1000 faces hiding behind every corner, never to reveal His true identity. In the Darkness, which is the sheep, and which is the Goat? You will never know... (and to those who possess the original Music For Nations edition; have you found the secret?)

aVoid

ENOCHIAN CRESCENT

Telocvovim



Release: 1997

Label: [Woodcut Records](#)

Avantgenre: Wood-at-night Metal

Duration: 41:52

Origin: Finland

Official site: <http://www.enochian-crescent.com>

Starting with a deceptively crappy first song - which must have been taken from some unreleased demo - this album fires satanic Black Metal missiles with technical and deadly precision. At least Black Metal is the base of all this - ENOCHIAN CRESCENT have no fears of contact with all other subgenres of metal which they blacken in their own specific way. Whether it might be heavy-Metal-like guitar playing, all styles of uttering lyrics in any conceivable way other than actually singing, Death-Metal riffing and even calm piano-parts - ENOCHIAN CRESCENT unite it all on "Telocvovim".

Although the band hails from Finland their lyrics are - besides english - only partial finnish. I recall reading in an interview with Wrath, the vocalist of EC, that some of their lyrics are in Enochian, a language induced to humans by angels. Wrath stated in this interview that he got his lyrics induced and has not written them himself. Combine that with the statement that EC rarely play live due to the reason that the good man lives a live experience as a ritual where he ends up cutting himself so badly he can't possibly play two days after an-

other and you know EC take their satanic approach seriously. Make of that what you want. But there is no denial that there is a certain shamanistic, if not trance-like, spiritual edge to the music of EC. And that is what makes them so special in my eyes: Wrath's vocals are among the most widely varied, dedicated Black Metal vocals I have ever heard. On top of that, EC's melodies are simply not of this world. Sometimes you hear parallels to ...AND OCEANS' strange disharmonies (with whom EC shared the drummer Grief) - these are melodies which make this album some kind of a ritual and add a big deal to the avant-gardistic moments of this record.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Kun Ihmisliha Itki
- 02 - Closed Gates Of Tomorrow (The Cold Harvest)
- 03 - Crescentian
- 04 - Under Autumn Trees
- 05 - Amma I Piad Sa Madriiix
- 06 - A Wolf Among Sheep
- 07 - A Dream Of Basaltic Submarine Towers Of Titanic Proportions And Nightmare Angles
- 08 - Afar (The Age Of Dust)
- 09 - When Tears Run Dry
- 10 - Bonedancer
- 11 - Black Flame Of SATAN Burning

The best example would be the alien, dreamlike melodies on "Amma I Piad Sa Madriiix". I have never heard anything as surreal and dark as this before with such simple measures. THROES OF DAWN would be another guess sometimes, and Bingo - we have members of them in EC as well (reeks of incestuous norwegian conditions here...). And last but not least, the varied drumming of Caer Hallam Generis (also known as Kai Hahto, ex-ROTTEN SOUND) does its best to make "Telocvovim" interesting - and succeeds.

If you want a spiritual satanic experience performed with technical skills (seldom enough in Black Metal), run into the woods at fullmoon and don't forget to bring your copy of "Telocvovim" with you. If you are lucky enough to catch one, that is. The most recent info I have is that "Telocvovim" is sold out.

Tentakel P.

STRAPPING YOUNG LAD

City



Release: 1997

Label: [Century Media Records](#)

Avantgenre: Industrial Thrash Power Metal

Duration: 40 Minutes

Origin: Canada / USA

Official site: <http://www.strappingyounglad.com/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Velvet Kevorkian
- 02 - All Hail The New Flesh
- 03 - Oh My Fucking God
- 04 - Detox
- 05 - Home Nucleonics
- 06 - AAA
- 07 - Underneath The Waves
- 08 - Room 429 (Cop Shoot Cop Cover)
- 09 - Spirituality

With this one it's hard to know where to begin. How about "the heaviest finest angriest slab of cyber metal ever"? This record came, conquered and remained on the throne. It pretty much defines what can be accomplished with the proper amalgamation of extreme metal and industrial music (along with Ministry and Red Harvest, of course).

Opening with a flooring but short intro in "Velvet Kevorkian" which segues into the face-ripping "All Hail the New Flesh", the record quickly and explosively establishes its sound and identity. The song that follows up the intensity another notch is the headbanging anthem "Oh My Fucking God". Thrash (and some Death/Grind) riffage layered with all manners of samples and synths, backed

by the rhythm section from hell (how can you go wrong with Gene Hoglan on drums?) races along, all topped off with some of the most original vocals in metal (Devin Townsend is a phenomena unto himself, going from tough guy vocals to screeches and screams to heart wrenching wails and singing, all in the same song and all suitably reverbed).

It is a winning mix, especially when the brutality is contrasted by slower, more atmospheric and intensely emotional sections, where the synths, guitars and vocals make a strangely ambient melodic mix creating a wall-of-sound that became Devin's trademark. Another ace of the band is the lyrical content, which is angry and direct (to the point of almost being punk/hardcore) and clearly understandable, thanks to the amazing production job (courtesy of Devin himself, with engineering by Daniel of Meshuggah fame).

All the songs here are killer, catchy and epic at the same time (something which is very hard to achieve). They flow seamlessly and the sequence makes perfect sense. As Devin has repeatedly stated in interviews, it is his catharsis and it shows. Many of the themes here are developed further on subsequent SYL and DTB releases, but none comes close to the sheer insanity of this record. The Cop Shoot Cop cover is a great choice and brings variety to the record, while still sounding like a SYL tune.

All in all, this is one of the top metal releases of all time, and still sounds as refreshing and vibrant today as the day it was released. If you haven't had the pleasure, pick it up today for a truly cerebral yet vicious metal experience.

Suleiman

THE DILLINGER ESCAPE PLAN

The Dillinger Escape Plan (EP)



Release: 1997

Label: Now Or Never

Avantgenre: Gorgeoustrophic Melodic Analie

Duration: 15:21

Origin: USoA

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/dillingerescapeplan>

Guitars and Flangers are great. Beginning one's review with a sentence like "Guitars and Flangers are great" is also great. The greatness would soon diminish if I continued citing the previous sentence in the following sentence and it would seriously harm the idea of reviewing an album. Especially such a great piece of contemporary music that is currently playing in my foobar-player and has been downloaded legally off the interweb for backup-purposes.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Proceed With Caution
- 02 - I Love Secret Agents
- 03 - Monticello
- 04 - Cleopatra's Sling
- 05 - Caffeine
- 06 - Three For Flinching (Revenge Of The Porno Clowns)

The six songs pretty much sound the same when listened to with one ear but enormously grow when the number of ears is increased. The song lengths range from one minute and three seconds to three minutes and twelve seconds

onds and totals in fifteen minutes and twenty one seconds. Time that is spent well when using both organs. Using not only the ears but also the eyes and the brain ("Brains!!!!") as well, this is what I saw when I re-viewed the 6 songs (from left to right):



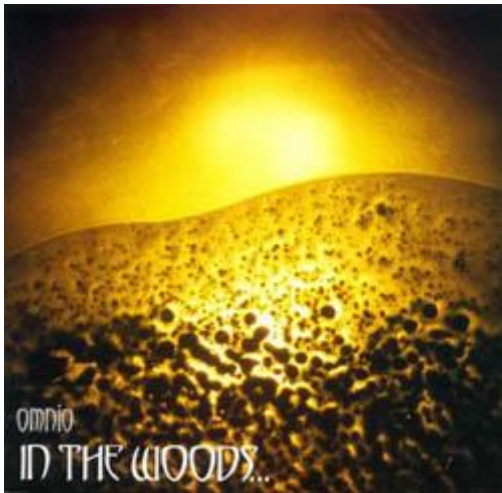
Dillinger Escape Plan uber alles.

Jonny Lignano



IN THE WOODS...

Omnio



Release: 1997

Label: Misanthropy Records

Avantgenre: Wood

Duration: 01:03:08

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/inthewoods666>

If I were a director (or as the French say: metteur en scène) I'd use each song of this album for the following scenes (in different movies). Fortunately I am not Michael Haneke, who is well known for using sound very carefully in his movies.

Scene one, 14:50: Scene where the hero takes revenge by slaughtering the entire force of evil but suddenly realizes that he has lost his voice, being a hero and an opera singer this results in deep depression. He then walks alone on a beach, has some flashbacks of the great cakes his grandmother used to make exclusively for him and then the camera fades to the horizon and credits are shown.

Scene two, 7:10: Scene where the female star, being a successful business woman in New York comes home and finds the kitchen in a total mess. She then leaves her apartment abruptly and uses her cell phone.

Scene three, 3:37: Scene where a little girl that used to be a little girl in her former life strolls through an empty school building.

Scene four, 5:57: Scene where the actors all wear black costumes, pretend to listen to a Brahms concert in the Musikvereinssaal but are all deaf. And tattooed.

Scene five, 8:10: Scene where a guy with Aids laughs manically at a first-aid-kit that is attached to the wall at an airport full of people.

Scene six, 12:03: Scene from a porn movie where the masks are all played by bad actors. They all perform well from a pornographic point of view.

Scene seven, 11:43: Scene from a documentary about the history of alpinism, where actors dressed like 1890 talk about the differences of ropes.

Jonny Lignano

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - 299 796 Km/s
- 02 - I Am Your Flesh
- 03 - Kairos!
- 04 - Weeping Willow
- 05 - Omnio? - Pre
- 06 - Omnio? - Bardo
- 07 - Omnio? - Post



ANGIZIA

Das Tagebuch Der Hanna Anikin



Release: 1997

Label: Napalm Records

Avantgenre: Beauty And The Beast

Duration: 44:30

Origin: Austria

Official site: <http://www.angizia.com>

When I first listened to a song of this beautiful novella I felt a little bit messed up. I thought about Middle Age Fun Metal or the alike. But from another angle of view I soon realized that this is meant to be serious classical theatrical piece forming a Russian-oriented trilogy. All musical elements I love got combined in this album. I first didn't really notice how complex all these parts sounded mixed up in one entity. But I knew the person behind this project was actually me in the body of Michael Haas. It was my thoughts my feelings, my taste, my ideas. That's the reason why it became my all time favourite album more than 8 years ago. Angizia really changed my life

not only on how I see and feel music to-day, but also personally because I met the singer after many years of being a big fan and have a child with him now. For me it was a Cinderella Story come true.

The piano plays the leading role in the songs which are quite lengthy but very diverting. At no point I get bored. Cedric Müller is a fantastic piano player and deserves much respect for being a second Mozart. There are electric guitars which add some Metal to the scene and make the album Avant-garde. The focus was put on contrasting dramatic female (Irene Denner) and male vocals (Christof Niederwieser), which add a very distinctive touch to the sound of Angizia. Also, classical chant combined with some clean but drunken vocals, cries and shouting can be listened to throughout the album. The whole CD emanates romance, passion, insanity, desperation. In my head a whole lot of stories form into a big pond of devotion to this piece of art. There are not enough words to describe this work so I will stop here and encourage you, yes YOU, to buy this album quickly before it is sold out!

Katja Honeywine van de Barrel

TRACKLIST:

1. Kapitel I: Mein Schalltrichter Summt Memmenhaft Ein Totenlied
2. Kapitel II: Spätherbst 1832. Das Spinnrad Ist Ein Memoirensignal
3. Kapitel III: Vom Spiel Der Leisen Fragen. Wie Schäle Ich Den Augapfel?
4. Kapitel IV: Zwiesgesprächniederschriften - Ein Vermummtes Trauerspiel
5. Kapitel V: Die Elenden Skribenten Von Bach Und Wolkenkuckucksheim
6. Kapitel VI: Die Fieberschauer Eines Betrunknen Schwarzen Schmetterlings

- I: Die Rhapsodie Vom Bleischaden Und Dem Stückwerk.
II: Serjoscha? Und Dreht Um Die Schurrende Spindel Den Leidelichen Faden.
III Und Tierisch Kleinlaute Schmachtfetzen Leierten Masshalten Und Geschmack.
IV: Blaue Schlotterbodeninsekten Und Der Ingrimm Eines Vogelbeerbaumes.
V: Die Notitz Von Mutter Wohlgestalt. Es Starb Eine Eintragung Am 16. Oktober.
VI: Innerer Monolog über Die Komödie Und Den Nutzen Des Komischen Geistes.

1998

BEYOND DAWN

Revelry



Release: 1998

Label: Misanthropy

Avantgenre: Malaise Metal

Duration: 52:37

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.beyonddawn.com>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Love's (Only) True Defender
- 02 - Tender
- 03 - Resemblance
- 04 - Stuck
- 05 - Three Steps For The Chameleon
(How To Seduce Modesty)
- 06 - I Am A Drug
- 07 - Breathe The Jackal
- 08 - Life's Sweetest Reward
- 09 - Chains
- 10 - Phase To Phase

"Revelry" is pretty bleak in a subdued kind of way, a post black metal doom album with a subtly experimental bent and an expressive rock sensibility.

The album's a little like a more metallic late period Swans, but with glum trombone lines evoking a southern noir atmosphere when the grinding white noise of the guitars lets up. When the distortion quiets, the guitars relax into simple arpeggios and Espen Ingierd (aka Espen Weltschmerz) and backing vocalist Kate Havnevik are allowed to dominate the record with their morose, distressingly

detached singing styles. The drums provide a plodding backbeat that has more in common with trip hop than Scandinavian metal, a rainy day dirge beat for the isolated sad bastard ambiance that permeates the music.

The album is bleak, but never oppressively so, content to linger on the edge of depression rather than drowning in it. Beyond Dawn was always a little too thoughtful for the histrionics of Katatonia and a little too expansive for the extremity of doom death. They always seemed destined to move beyond the limitations of genre, and so they did with 2003's "Frysh."

"Revelry" is easily the band's best work from the more abrasive but creatively energetic pre-"Frysh" period.

James Slone

OXIPEGATZ

Sidereal Journey



Release: 1998

Label: Seasons Of Mist

Avantgenre: Technical Sci-fi As Conceptualized By Tim Rice

Duration: 41:46

Origin: Sweden

"Sidereal Journey" is the third, final, and best album from Oxiplegatz, Alf Svensson's short lived post At the Gates solo project. It's a strange little album, with outsized ambition, comprised of one epic song divided into thirty-three short

tracks. The sound is generally metallic but diverse, falling somewhere between blast-beat mayhem per early ATG, upbeat symphonic rock, Broadway musicals, waltzy spring time music, and weird Modern dissonance, with a heavy emphasis on the weird.

TRACKLIST:

01. A Black Hole Is Swallowing The Sun...
02. They Learned Of Its Existence...
03. For Persistence...
04. Bringer Of Obliteration...
05. Into Nowhere...
06. For Persistence...
07. So It's Our Final Hour...
08. The Light From The Perishing Sun...
09. Ahead - The Universe !
10. No Longer Will We Be The Meek Ones...
11. How Could We Ever Know...
12. Head For That Star...
13. As One Surveys This Ocean...
14. The Iondrive A Silent Vibration...
15. Several Planet In Orbit...
16. Enemies !?
17. Once More Proven - We Are Not Alone
18. Lightspeed - Flunge Into Hyperspace
19. No Clue To Where This Jump Is Taking Them...
20. Breathless...
21. Turning Up The Power, Accelerating Again...
22. This Time Passage Was Violent...
23. Rings, Spread Like Rippled Water...
24. They Stare Unblinking...
25. Eternal Night...
26. How Many Worlds...
27. These Beings Failed And Perished...
28. Ahead Once More...
29. This Journey Has Taken Us...
30. The Moon Was Land In Orbit...
31. Can This Be What We Hore For...
32. Teraform - Alter The Enviroment...
33. And So One Day The Sleepers Waken...

The lead guitar is highly original, winding like a neurotic snake over really long chord progressions and snap-happy programmed percussion. The synths provide warped "futuristic" experimentation (think the "Bladerunner" score on a budget and you get the gist). Guitar lines fizzle into hyperactive blast-beats which suddenly transform into waltzy music ready-made for figure skating in the Rhineland - all of this madness is unified under Alf's seriously deranged story about space survival.

The lyrical bent of the album is first rate science fiction with a hard "S"- no Millennium Falcon shooting around the Galaxy at the measly speed of light in these lyrics. This is genuine science fiction about a theoretical life form seeking out new planets to terraform after a nearby

star destroys their home world. Alf growls, but also employs a low nasal voice to tell the oddball story, accompanied by Sara Svensson, whose more refined voice lies somewhere between a Tim Rice songbird and Annek van Giersbergen.

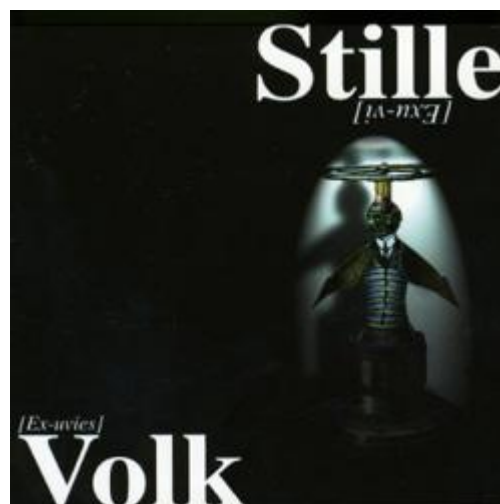
Sidereal Journey is death metal for those who like invention over pretension and ambition over budgets. With its flat production and high eccentricity, any possibility of it finding a popular audience is next to nil. This is for weirdo metal connoisseurs exclusively- you know who you are! And you know you must have this album.

Note: this review is edited and considerably re-worked from the original, which can be found at <http://www.ssmt-reviews.com>

James Slone

STILLE VOLK

Ex-uvies



Release: 1998

Label: Holy Records

Avantgenre: Folk Hybrid

Duration: 43:13

Origin: France

The French-Occitan folk outfit Stille Volk's second album "Ex-uvies" is one strange, beautiful hybrid. The eccentric Pyrenees folk sound is still present, but worked over with a whole assortment of outside influences like prog, death metal, industrial, noise, and psychedelic rock. This time out, rock percussion and heavy bass lines form the backbone of the mu-

sic, and a prominent role is reserved for the electric guitar.

The songs vary greatly, each song driven by its own internal logic. The first song, "Zoopathia," has a psychedelic pop vibe, with subtle rock guitar and percussion, a folksy hook, and an unexpected left field finale. The next two tracks, "Ténébrante azure" and "Chimères" are pastoral songs filtered through rock textures, electro beats, and broken metal guitar lines. The beautiful "Selena Koronna" is a guitar and woodwind driven song in the traditional style, while its companion piece, the fun "Luna Mecanica," cuts a bloody swath through epic folk rock, death metal, industrial, and the noise outlying these genres. The band follows this pastiche with the obnoxiously aggressive electro-metal-folk slog "Théâtrophone abscons." The final proper song, "Exuvie bizarre" is a buffet of progressive rock, melodic metal, and sonorous traditional music.

"Ex-uvies" is a curious experience, a marriage of the rural with the urban, the ancient with the contemporary. It is also surprisingly dark. It's like hearing traditional music severed from the place of its origins, broken down and reassembled for a modern audience wholly alienated from the wilderness. Every time I listen to it I get this jarring, contradictory image of pastoral fields superimposed on a postindustrial cityscape.

Note: this review is edited and considerably reworked from the original, which can be found at <http://www.ssmr-reviews.com>

James Slone

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Zoopathia
- 02 - Ténébrante Azurée
- 03 - Chimères
- 04 - Selena Koronna
- 05 - Luna Mecanica
- 06 - Théâtrophone Abscons
- 07 - Exuvie Bizarre
- 08 - Dans l'...

KOROVA

Dead Like An Angel



Release: 1998

Label: [Napalm Records](#)

Avantgenre: Asylum Groove Fever

Duration: 52:09

Origin: Austria

Official site: <http://www.korovakill.com>

Flies are the Cameras of God. Invisibly connected to the intertemporal Frequency of their collective Data-Memory, they are watching from every Corner since Millions of Years, dragging all Seen within them, and if we dare to listen, they buzz their Films into our Dreams...

Back in 1998 – I must have been fourteen years old – I was already suffering from a quite strict idea of what mysterious and pushing-the-envelope metal should be. I still wholeheartedly wanted to keep going on, but at the same time it was as if I had found the mountain's golden top in a devilish Norway. That is precisely when I discovered Korova's *Dead like an Angel*. I got to tell you, and up to this day I still don't know why: it was an immediate love story. As a matter of fact, it was my first exposure ever to an exotica-flavored kind of psychedelic opera metal. These musicians weren't evil, cold, suicidal, burning churches wannabes and so-called superior murderers; perhaps not, but that's mostly because Korova were instead drowning themselves into deeper waters that somewhat had something to do with pure, uncensored and confusing weird-

ness. They were, so to speak, buzzing flies films into our dreams. Now that's kind of challenging, isn't it?

As a matter of fact, there's often that troubled, colorfully demented and paranoid atmosphere throughout most of *Dead like an Angel*. Vocalist and main composer Christof Niederwieser, while distributing his lsd-infused candy songs in a Van Gogh's sky, often sounds like an altered madman sweetly singing hypnotizing children songs on a dark, bluish melting sea beach from planet Mars. It is not techno music but it's got groove and swing; it is not futuristic keyboard noise but there are always passages of subtle electronic strangeness in all corners; it is not typical metal music but distorted guitars are riffing forth manias and more raging growls, screams and vocal screeches abound everywhere. It is basically Korova and nothing else and that has marked me forever.

One ought to mention the bizarre yet highly poetic lyrical lines, which are basically as fascinating as Korova's music can get. These are pure enigmas that a psychiatrist could have taken out of one of his schizophrenic patients diary. Once again very colorful, and singer Niederwieser only adds to their evocative power by singing in a very off-kilter, almost out of tune clean vocal fashion. His voice has to be experienced, it is impossible to only describe it with words, or worst, to even compare it with any other terrestrial singer.

I know the band weren't satisfied at all with the production, but all in all, even though it was recorded in '98, the sound has a personality of its own. It is low-fi but drummer Moritz Neuner and bassman Florian Oberlechner both groove with great depth and all of the toms, double bass drums and acrobatic bass lines resonate deep into the overall sound picture. One excellent example of this is *Der Schlafmann Kommt's* mesmerizing finale. The same goes for the keyboards and the great pianos: those are upfront and imposing, twisting every musical shape with unexpected patterns and

alien melodies. As for the guitars, one could say that they're almost only a buzzing frequency in the background, which adds to the feeling that this could not be a metal album at all. There's even a delirious Christmas song on here, including bells and snowing midtempo chills, which was admittedly composed in January '98, probably just after a broken bottle Christmas Eve in Hell.

When I previously wrote *exotica-flavored*, I wanted to mean that it is not dark and avant-garde metal music as we're normally used to – its darkness is more subtle, perhaps more psychological and mind-bending than Black Metal's usual black-and-white philosophy. Christof Niederwieser had found a whole new palette of colors to explore with his feverish gang banging, and I must say that I'll forever be thankful to that kind of "let's push it further" attitude. At the end of the album, we are even treated with one exclusive song from their '97 never-released album *Echowelt*. Every experi-

mental metalhead should lend an ear to this strange masterpiece, as this is pure metal insanity at its peak. Who the hell is playing the lighting-fast pianos on this one? Completely genuine!

Korova's *Dead like an Angel* is, beyond all words, a vivid soundwave bridge down to your hidden dream universe, where everything possibly perceivable suddenly materializes for your own private mental challenge.

Olivier Côté

*It buzzes a Wave
like in dump Fever-Memories
and wobbles sweet Circles
around the Child's Eyes.
Dusk in young senses
to warm Realms they drown,
bewitched by the Voice of the Flyman.*

*... and if we dare to follow, we never will
return...*

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Europa In Flammen
- 02 - Strangulation Alpha
- 03 - Our Reality Dissolves
- 04 - Trip To The Bleeding Planets
(Unto The Light)
- 05 - Dead Like An Angel
- 06 - Echoworld Caravans
- 07 - Der Schlafmann Kommt
- 08 - Tantra-Nove-HyperCannibalism

THE KOVENANT

Nexus Polaris



Release: 24.03.1998

Label: Nuclear Blast

Avantgenre: Symphonies Of Angeldust And
Star Journeys

Duration: 43:34

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.gentechranch.tk/>

For most bands and artists the crossing of the vanguard borderline seems to be something they try to avoid like a dangerous disease. Once they found their own style of expression, the natural drive is to defend the conquered niche. Mostly till the end of the (creative) days. That's not bad. Iron Maiden rules and still I don't want to imagine their fabulous songs with techno beats or harsh industrial sounds.

On the other hand there are some individuals for whom it seems the greatest pleasure to break rules and search for new options of expression. Nagash and Blackheart from THE KOVENANT belong to this group, without any doubt. In 1998 and with the release of "Nexus Polaris" they first left the path of traditional Black Metal and stepped into a new cosmos of extraterrestrial rock music.

Against the trend back then the album appears quite progressive. The blast beats were reduced to a minimum to leave more space for guitars and the omnipresent synthetic sounds. This is nota-

ble, because no one less than Hellhammer was hired to give "Nexus Polaris" the right percussion. Till this album he was more known for his disruptive speed attacks than for smooth accented rock-drums.

Also the guitars play a subordinated role. Until Astennu comes around the corner to present his skills with an outstanding guitar-symphony, the electronic strings mainly are used as rhythmic fundament and are more comparable to rock music and traditional Heavy Metal, than to Black Metal and its characteristic fast tremolo picking.

The keyboards are handled by Sverd, well known for his work with ARCTURUS. The attentive listener will explore a lot of similarities to the masterpiece "La Masquerade Infernale" in terms of instrumentation and sound of the synthesisers. Nagash's screeching vocals, the only left relict from the old days, are flanked by Sarah Jezebel Devas opera chants, which are often underlying the leitmotiv of the tracks.

If someone would tell me, that "Nexus Polaris" is not really vanguard, I wouldn't disagree. The ingredients are well known. Heavy, concise guitars, opulent keyboards and the vocals of a devil-worshipper: We all knew this already from DIMMU BORGIR and CRADLE OF FILTH, and some of us were even bored by this style back in 1998. But nevertheless I think this album is worth to be mentioned here, because it represents the will of its creators to make a big step forward. "Nexus Polaris" marks the turning point for an extremely creative and inspired band, which should later step even deeper in the world of avant-garde music ("SETI").

Polygon

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Sulfur Feast
- 02 - Bizarre Cosmic Industries
- 03 - Planetarium
- 04 - The Last Of The Dragons
- 05 - Bringer Of The Sixth Sun
- 06 - Dragonheart
- 07 - Planetary Black Elements
- 08 - Chariots Of Thunder

BAL-SAGOTH

Battle Magic



Release: 1998

Label: Cacophonous Records

Avantgenre: World Historical Metal

Duration: 50:00

Origin: United Kingdom

Official site: <http://www.bal-sagoth.co.uk/>

TRACKLIST:

01. Battle Magic
02. Naked Steel (The Warrior's Saga)
03. A Tale From The Deep Woods
04. Return To The Praesidium Of Ys
05. Crystal Shards
06. The Dark Liege Of Chaos Is Unleashed At The Ensorcelled Shrine Of A'zura-Kai (The Splendour Of A Thousand Swords Gleaming Beneath The Blazon Of The Hyperborean Empire Part: II)
07. When Rides The Scion Of The Storms
08. Blood Slakes The Sand At The Circus Maximus
09. Thwarted By The Dark (Blade Of The Vampyre Hunter)
10. And Atlantis Falls...

In my opinion (which counts for a lot in some parts of rural Honduras), "Battle Magic" remains the crown jewel of the Bal Sagoth filmography. I say filmography because Bal Sagoth albums are multimedia experiences on par with epic Hollywood filmmaking. Not content to provide mere lyrics, songwriter and vocalist Byron writes ridiculously involved epics complete with chronologies, genealogies, and cosmologies. He crafts concepts too big for any concept album to hold, spinning tales on a cosmic scale: pulpy sagas spanning millions of years and hundreds of galaxies involving alien beings seeding life on earth and then showing up to wipe it out billions of

years later. Silly? Yes. But it's also kind of grand.

The Lovecraftian scale Byron employs can be a bit overwhelming, which is why I like "Battle Magic" so much. "Battle Magic" takes place in historical time, with lyrics about Saxon warriors, seafaring adventurers taking on the Spanish Armada, vampire hunters armed with Japanese swords, and Celtic gladiators fighting for death and glory in the Roman Coliseum. It's still big, epic, and ridiculous, but the scale is manageable and it's easier to invest in characters who occupy a real place in history, even if that history extends back to mythical Atlantis. The music reflects historical heroics with simple western melodies, big, bold, and easy, forsaking the sci-fi razzle dazzle of later albums for something a little more down home (relatively speaking).

John Maulding's keyboard orchestration is big and brash without the dark brooding chords that characterized his previous work with Bal Sagoth, evoking a more percussive Basil Poledouris feeling. Chris Maulding's guitar lines are more in line with NWOBHM, less grindy and far more melodic than usual. Byron is Byron, alternating between bm screeches and "giant holographic head" voice that narrates the story like Hegel wrote about history: on a grand scale. The feeling is more upbeat and fun, dangerous adventure ala Robert E. Howard minus the lurking elder god paranoia of H.P. Lovecraft. It's ultimately the fun spirit and historical context that makes "Battle Magic" stand out- it's truly one of a kind.

James Slone



ULVER

Themes From William Blake's The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell



Release: 1998

Label: [Jester Records](#)

Avantgenre: Classical Beat Poetry

Duration: 01:41:09

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.jester-records.com/ulver>

TRACKLIST:

Disc 1

1. The Argument Plate 2
2. Plate 3
3. Plate 3 Following
4. The Voice Of The Devil Plate 4
5. Plates 5-6
6. A Memorable Fancy Plates 6-7
7. Proverbs Of Hell Plates 7-10
8. Plate 11
9. Intro
10. A Memorable Fancy Plates 12-13
11. Plate 14
12. A Memorable Fancy Plate 15
13. Plates 16-17

Disc 2

1. A Memorable Fancy Plates 17-20
2. Intro
3. Plates 21-22
4. A Memorable Fancy Plates 22-24
5. Intro
6. A Song Of Liberty Plates 25-27

William Blake was an illuminate mystic British poet and painter who died in 1827, and his literary works as well as his colorful illustrations are still regarded by many as a world of their own. Deeply religious, the man claimed and wrote in many of his eclectic writings, full of his mysterious self-confidence, that he had

visions of and conversations with angels, ether-bodied creatures and celestial intelligences. For sure, he seemed to have quite a unique grasp of what reality is. This is the feeding ground that Ulver chose to emerge from between fall '97 and rise '98, and clearly a great step outside what they previously had been associated with, namely black metal. It's hard to pinpoint in a few words exactly what Ulver are doing here, but all in all, they tend to explore more electronic territories, according themselves a kind of nostalgic trip hop attitude at times, whereas loud, industrial rockish metal also makes its way now and then.

The whole double-album is very genre-schizophrenic, as there are also more moody, almost ambient-like acoustic tracks, and all the musical focus is put on each of Blake's inspirational shifts of emotions, so it basically changes all the time. Singer Kristoffer Rygg aka Garm has really pushed his voice here, still in a serious, classical and opera-sounding context like he did with *La Masquerade Infernale*, but new to his vocal palette, there's sometimes that underlining mockery madness hitting on.

He also uses more spoken-word passages, reciting chants, tender romantic whispers, and completely electrified and textured throat sounds, all of which are accompanied by consequent compositions. Sure, the man was finding himself here, and so were Ulver, but it's still an incredible performance if you take in consideration the black metal context where these guys were coming from. The music, when it gets right-on heavy, is indeed very groovy and danceable, but still somewhat foggy-dark all the way through, and it was the first time Ulver almost only worked with beats, programming, sampling, big bass lines and so on. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* was clearly their breakthrough album, and for sure an avant-classical-beat creation full of new avenues for all upcoming records to gnaw on.

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings, wrote William Blake in 1790, and it appears to me that Ulver had finally found their own musical sky to soar into. If you are up for some truly

heavy music with a mysterious edge, and if you are also ready to explore more delicate forms of emotional expressions, you've got what you were looking for within this almost two-hour-long album.

Olivier Côté

DØDHEIMSGARD

Satanic Art



Release: 1998
Label: Moonfog
Avantgenre: Chaotic Black Metal
Duration: 15:59
Origin: Norway
Official site: www.dhg.no

With AGM's Birthday and a PDF-Version of avantgarde-history approaching, it's time to take on one of the forgotten treasures of the nineties: DHG's "Satanic Art". Let's touch the devilish mind for a chaotic mindtrip, which starts with a relatively unspectacular (but weird) piano intro. Following that comes "Traces of Reality", and this song (one of the craziest BM-songs I've ever heard) leaves none of them. I don't know what kind of drugs you have to take to write such a monster – It is fast, it is chaotic, and it is raw and aggressive. And kind of spaced out at the same time. DHG's attacks come from some parallel realities, intercepted by one of the best symbiosis between classic and Black Metal which crossfades into a slightly industrial part, everything with subliminal synth effects infiltrating the listener. A piano with really strange voicework grants a short

pause before the rest of the song destroys your synapses with an ultra-fast blast inferno, ending at exactly 7:06 (do your math here).

"Symptom" is much straighter, but not less disturbing with its speed and distortion backed by snarled vocals. The synths do their best to heave DHG's Satanism on a cosmic level (musically, and with "cosmic" I do not mean something like the exaggerated ramblings of the late Mr. Nödtveidt). Twisted, driving, outerwourldish. Sadly, too short with only two and a half minutes.

"The Paramount Empire" could be something left from "Monumental Possession"; it shows the old face of DHG with relentless BM which nevertheless shows a twist in the direction they will turn.

"Wrapped In Plastic", a piano piece again, leads us out of this chaos... And those of you who followed DHG know that it will greet us again, introducing "Shiva Interfere". A congenial move, this bridge between two releases, if there ever was one.

"Satanic Art" is beauty in chaos, and this might be a hint (and a hidden parallel) to a possible influence ABIGOR had in reinventing their art with "Fractal Possession". DHG have shaped a beautiful fractal, whose only downside is that "666 International" could not exactly cope with what SA promised (But then, with "Supervillain Outcast", who cares?)

True satanic art indeed.

Tentakel P.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Oneiroscope
- 02 - Traces Of Reality
- 03 - Symptom
- 04 - The Paramount Empire
- 05 - Wrapped In Plastic

1999

CARNIVAL IN COAL

French Cancan



Release: 1999

Label: Kodiak

Avantgenre: PrOnpOp

Duration: 40:54

Origin: France

Official site: <http://www.carnivalincoal.com>

This is once again a band from the land that brought you 1789 and a president that looks like Depeche Mode's Dave Gahan as shown here.

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Bark At The Moon
- 02 - Out Of Misery
- 03 - Maniac
- 04 - Piranha
- 05 - My Favourite Armchair
- 06 - Baker Street
- 07 - Fall From Grace
- 08 - Mama
- 09 - Fucking Hostile

But let us stick to the musical facts. Carnival in coal do a lot of covering on this album, so why not cover a movie for this review? That's why I made a screenshot per song of this album out of the sleazy Italian classic "Discesa all'inferno" (aka Italian Inferno; aka Satanic Inferno) by Mario Salieri from 1991. The quality of the images has got nothing to do with the quality of the album, it's more an insight into to cheap VHS to Divx digitalisation.

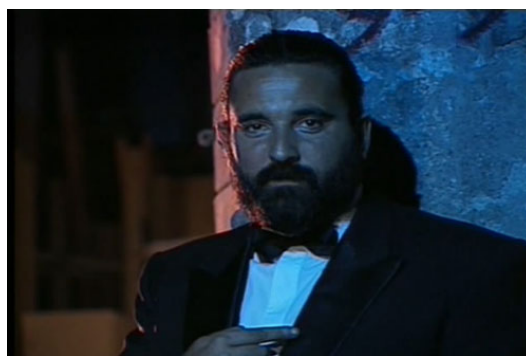
Please find the timestamps next to the songnumber for neat reference.



song 1 - 00:14



song 2 - 42:12



song 3 - 1:15:08



song 4 - 59:27



song 5 - 22:40



song 9 - 00:57

Jonny Lignano

THE KOVENANT

Animatronic



song 6, 1:15:52



song 7 - 40:25

Release: 1999

Label: Nuclear Blast

Avantgenre: Millenial Industrial
Dance Metal

Duration: 51:07

Origin: Norway



song 8 - 7:16

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Mirrors Paradise
- 02 - New World Order
- 03 - Mannequin
- 04 - Sindrome
- 05 - Jihad
- 06 - The Human Abstract
- 07 - Prophecies Of Fire
- 08 - In The Name Of The Future
- 09 - Spaceman
- 10 - The Birth Of Tragedy

"Animatronic" is bombastic and silly, a combination that has caused some heads to explode in the black metal scene. A BM

fatwa was issued after the NWOBHM influenced, keyboard slathered "space metal" of "Nexus Polaris." But the Kove-

nant, never passing up free publicity, continued to agitate with the industrial metal outrageousness of "Animatronic," the most hilariously overwrought album of 1999. The beats are more disco than metal, guitars are heavy and simple, growls are blasé, and the lyrics range from fascist to nihilistic (all satire of course). It sounds extreme, but is pop at heart, with bold dance hooks and space age epic metal riffs. The lyrics, which throw around Nietzschean phraseology like "will to power," gravitate towards science fiction satire, with some post-human conjecture and "big ideas" about the end of religion and the collapse of human society. Big surprise, millennialism was riding high in 1999, the year of its release. Thoughtful despite being disposable, "Animatronic" revels in a kind of dancehall nihilism, EBM disaffection suffused with metal pomposity. It sounds like music you'd hear in shopping malls of the shiny dystopian future: violent, simple, kind of stupid, and outrageously entertaining.

James Slone

ARCTURUS

Disguised Masters



Release: July 1999

Label: [Jester Records](#)

Avantgenre: Electro Jester Mushroom Trip

Duration: 48:09

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/arcturusnorway>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - White Tie Black Noise (Designed By When)
- 02 - Deception Genesis
- 03 - Du Nordavind (1998 Re-recording)
- 04 - Alone (Intellecto / Valle Darktrip)
- 05 - The Throne Of Tragedy (Phantom FX Jungle Remix)
- 06 - La Masquerade Infernale (Valle / Hellhammer Reconstruction)
- 07 - Master Of Disguise (Phantom FX Remix With Gangstafications By S.C.N.)
- 08 - Painting My Horror (G. Wolf Levitation Mix)
- 09 - Ad Astra (The Magenta Experience)
- 10 - Ad Astra (Ensemble Version)

Following their Norwegian tradition of varying their previous work * Arcturus managed to create an absolutely mind blasting remake of their own tracks from the previous, just as twisted album, "La Masquerade Infernale". The idea of shifting one of the weirdest albums into a new shape, giving it another (some would say a more normal) dimension shows a will to recompose already written music into a new form, as if one was creating a collage by tearing a masterpiece into bits and pieces and gluing them back in a different manner. Lost between the boundaries of experimental metal, and the forbidden waters of electronic, they blended the two into some of the most brutal facelift operations in the genres. Shall we observe the deeds of "The Institute of Common Oblivion"?

Painting an atmosphere for this release would be impossible, as the music varies through a wide palette of sounds. The only "infant" along with the intro of this album is the "Deception Genesis" track. It follows the atmosphere of LMI, even though it seems lost between some universes Arcturus stumbled through, giving it an individual cling. It somehow seems to point out the deception caused by the remix of the old tracks, the confusion and chaotic layers of the upcoming sounds. The rest of the album comes in quite a blurry mater, repetitive, but never mechanic, somewhat like a feeling of repeating one dream over and over again. These parts are regularly interrupted ore covered by some shuffling beats, most likely sampled form acoustic drums, the exception is of course "Ad Astra (The Magenta Experience)", which features a steady, party-like beat. The other great surprise is the "Master of disguise " rap version. Although it may

seem weird or out of place, the background music and beats are absolutely great, the guitar "solos" are resampled and looped over and over again, giving it a crazy swirling twist. The lyrics on the whole release are also manipulated: raging from looping or being sung in different style, in the case of "Painting my horror" (the song with the most enigmatic atmosphere) - in a different language. The most twisted part is the remake of "La Masquerade Infernale", just by adding a simple beat the song's rhythmic structure was even more emphasized.

This sick little piece of music evokes the image of two crazy jesters caught in a schizophrenic dance; spinning in a perfect, cabalistic (I write this word with fear) precision around an imaginary axis, grinning at each other and at the few viewers hidden in the corridors of their obscure theatre. The album ends with the string quartet track from "Ad Astra" which, even if it lacks structure when standing alone" gives the listener the pleasure to rebuild the original melodies in his head, or just to enjoy the ambience itself.

You might have noticed I didn't mention the re-recording of "Du Nordavind ". There is much to say about this particular track, especially if you know it has four official versions, which do not vary much, and this is one of them. The best parts of this version are the vocals: even though they are filtered they give the song a new, blurry charm. Arcturus always seem to follow their own direction, regularly wandering beyond the borders of what people thought to be the borders of creativity or even good taste. In order to create something new, you have to destroy what you have already done....or?!

*"In darker institutions
They are beyond discipline
And repentance is no option"*

* Edvard Munch's "Jealousy" paintings, Mayhem's several resembling live albums

Ulv

IN THE WOODS...

Strange In Stereo



Release: 1999

Label: Misanthropy

Avantgenre: Atmospheric Doom Rock

Duration: 63:10

Origin: Norway

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Closing In
- 02 - Cell
- 03 - Vanish In The Absence Of Virtue
- 04 - Basement Corridors
- 05 - Ion
- 06 - Generally More Worried Than Married
- 07 - Path Of The Righteous
- 08 - Dead Men's Creek
- 09 - Titan Transcendence
- 10 - Shelter
- 11 - By The Banks Of Pandemonium

After the ornate symphonic rock of "Om-nio," In the Woods... stripped down their sound and production for "Strange in Stereo," opting for a somewhat colder, edgier approach. The songs are shorter, more straightforward, and less opulent. But the band makes it work in their favor, abandoning cozy familiarity for something more hermetic and strange. Hence the title.

The first song, "Closing In," establishes the atmosphere right from the start with a claustrophobic white noise and piano plodding sound somewhere between David Bowie's laconic "Heroes" period and spacious Scandinavian doom, poppy and gloomy without ever quite veering into goth rock territory. Jan Transin's low voice eerily hangs over the music; he sings

about intense sexual attraction in ob-tuse, introverted language, his lyrics corresponding with the opaque mysterious-ness of the music.

In the Woods... use metal guitar tones but their overall arrangements contain a classic rock sense of harmony, and am-biguous glaminess hangs in the air with the sexually adventurous lyrics and the drag imagery of the album art. In this sense, "Strange in Stereo" carries great crossover appeal. I've played it for rock fans and goths, and both parties took to it- the goths, being the good club kids that they are, even danced to it.

The tempo varies from song to song, even reaching black metal momentum once, but never betrays the subtle feel-ing. The band is joined by a cellist on a few meandering songs reminiscent of Amber Asylum, seriously creepy and a little pastoral, like being buried alive in a pleasant garden.

"Strange in Stereo" is metal perched on the crossroads of popular music, not quite metal, not quite rock, but occupying a dark gray zone somewhere in between.

James Slone

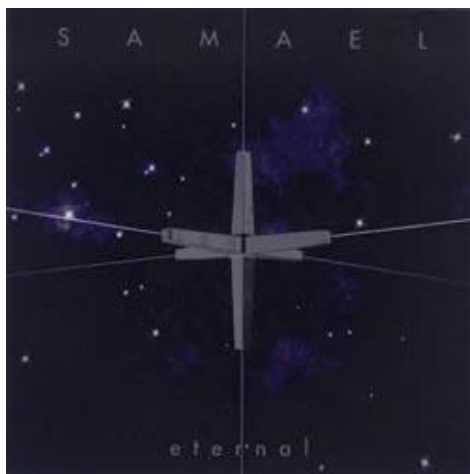
Samael's "Eternal" is remarkably catchy for an industrial metal album, sounding like disco music from a parallel dimen-sion where state socialism worked and the Soviet Union won the Cold War, a kind of worker state rock n' roll. I'm sure Samael don't quite see it that way, but with the utopian lyrics, the synthesizer drenched choruses, and hammer clang-ing industrial beats ("Together" sounds like a totalitarian anthem), the music is like something you'd hear over the PA at the end of history. Someone might read this and say "hey, but Laibach already did that!" but not like this. Where Lai-bach revel in a certain pomposity and schmaltzy aloofness- Samael is smooth and catchy, like monolithic dance music.

Their actual lyrics offer romantic yearn-ing for an authentically better world in-stead of Stalinism or nationalism, and the band writes love songs- they sound tough and militaristic but reveal a band who are basically nice Swiss guys. The album takes the excessiveness of metal and industrial and runs it through a dance filter, polishing it off with a big production. Scarily powerful, blissfully in-tense, infectiously groovy, and some-times quite beautiful, "Eternal" is like an collection of love songs from a post-human world.

James Slone

SAMAEL

Eternal



Release: 1999

Label: Century Media

Avantgenre: Industrial Metal Future Pop

Duration: 47:19

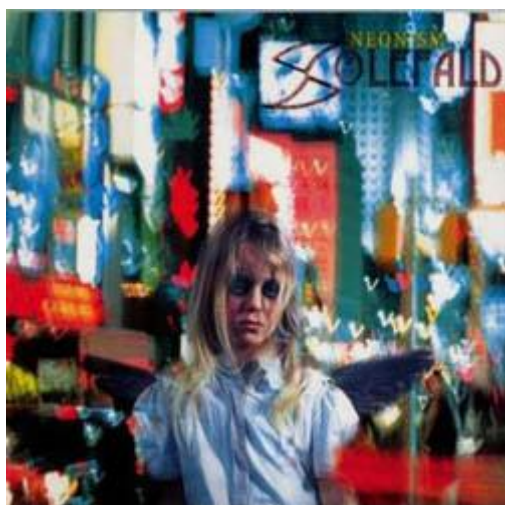
Origin: Switzerland

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Year Zero
- 02 - Ailleurs
- 03 - Together
- 04 - Ways
- 05 - The Cross
- 06 - Us
- 07 - Supra Karma
- 08 - I
- 09 - Nautilus & Zeppelin
- 10 - Infra Galaxia
- 11 - Being
- 12 - Radiant Star

SOLEFALD

Neonism



Release: 1999

Label: Avantgarde Music

Avantgenre: Pastiche Metal

Duration: 50:11

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/solefaldofficial>

Neonism was a radical departure from Solefald's debut album. Gone were the eccentric symphonic metal arrangements and urbane pastoral pretensions, replaced with a frenetic pastiche, a black metal Mr. Bungle with an irreverent sense of humor and wild mood swings. The first song, "Fluorescent (The Total Orchestra)" signals the band's new intent, with razor sharp black metal overlaid with synth pop, surf rock, and unexpected reggae breakdowns. Cornelius and Lazare, the composers and players, are all over the map when it comes to singing, offering some poppy melodies and punk smarminess along with the usual assortment of growls, hisses, and shrieks. There's even some reggae toasting and rap boasting when the music calls for it.

Towards the latter half of the album, the metal becomes sparser and a poppier sensibility takes hold, with the punk/worldbeat satire "Backpacka Baba" and the silly synth prog of "Third Person Plural" taking center stage. The album's overall production sucks in a good way, with guitar lines reduced to a grindcore

buzz and blasting tin can drums. It's one of the rawest black metal recordings ever and yet completely "untrue," defying every convention the genre had attempted to establish. The lyrics follow suit, offering snide political commentary, jabs at globalized culture, exploration of sexual utopianism, references to "Twin Peaks," and a feeling of deep urban malaise best summed up with the lyric "she swallows the light, only to throw up shadows minutes later on a broken public toilet."

Neonism might have been hated when it came out, but extreme metal has opened up a lot since then. With the risk of making a bad post hoc argument, I suspect *Neonism* had a lot to do with the outright abandonment by many black metal bands of the rote sound. The album injected some much needed color into the cold gray landscape of Scandinavian black metal, a fearless experiment hell bent on teaching extreme metal how to laugh and sing and all that other good shit.

James Slone

TRACKLIST:

01. Fluorescent
02. Speed Increased To Scaffold
03. CK II Chanel N*6
04. Proprietors Of Red
05. A Motion Picture
06. Omnipolis
07. Backpacka Baba
09. 0434 PM
10. The New Timelessness



DØDHEIMSGARD

666 International



Release: 1999

Label: Moonfog Productions

Avantgenre: Kosmische Techno Black

Duration: 66:06

Origin: Norway

Official site:

<http://www.myspace.com/dodheimgard>

With 666 International, we see Dødheimgard creating, of course out of the famous black metal hole where they came from, a whole new way of playing with sounds. Already on their previous EP Satanic Art, we could hear more and more traces of the upcoming chaos, but nothing was so certain yet. Whatever happened to guitarist and prime composer Vicotnik, singer and lyricist Aldrahn and their now partners-in-crime between 1997 and 1999, there's an obvious dive into psychedelic adventures within the music they then put into form, just as there are clear evidences of schizophrenia in the way many absurd musical details happen to create, once placed together, kind of an attractively strange meaning. The music here is as much groovy as it is disordered.

Out of all the nine songs, there is for instance "Shiva-Interfere", an almost ten minutes sick industrial floating opera, where Aldrahn sings some unpleasant tales of mythology and outer space, with a uniquely bizarre and angular beauty in

TRACKLIST:

1. Shiva-Interfere
2. Ion Storm
3. Carpet Bombing
4. Regno Potiri
5. Final Conquest
6. Logic
7. Sonar Bliss
8. Magic
9. Completion
66. Hidden Track

his tragic-comic vocal tones. As he's just about to cry, being all sweetly delicate and nostalgic, he then explodes into a perverse, sadistic and out-there laughter. I would even go as far as to say that there's a certain "alien" quality to his voice – it is simply out of this world. All of his vocals, in this song, are performed over a mysterious desert-riffing style which follows some sort of a deep, pulsing electronic drum groove. Quite special, to say the least! Well the majority of 666 International is performed on the thin borders normally placed between sanity and common sense, in such a way that at first, you always feel a sort of uncertainty, an odd unpleasantness, a real feeling of discord and paranoiac terror. You're not really sure if what you hear is supposed to be kick-ass black metal or a horrible mind-fuck. Then again, that's what avant-garde music is all about: to first question what has always been conceived as normal and natural, and then create a whole new universe.

Be very attentive when it comes to all the textures and the wrappings of the musical content displayed here, because that is where Dødheimgard do shine through the most on this album. Ginge from Norwegian electronic band Subgud had his hands on the final product and its easy to hear why, as there's a serious attention to a certain atmosphere of sounds, clearly reminiscent of techno music. I'm not saying that form wins over content; quite the contrary actually, because if it weren't for Vicotnik's singular guitar twists and how he builds these up and down in the most unusual way, along crushing groovy techno drums and all kinds of synthesizers and grand piano, I couldn't be writing these words.

Every black metal possible experimentations has been given a try on 666 International, for the better or for the worst, all depending on how far you can actually take it, and it's as much death, thrash, black and rock metal music here as it is noise and ambient related there – usually at the same time! From pure mayhem blast beat chaos to slick, techno avant-garde rock, Vicotnik and

his super-hero mates cover it all up around here. Come and discover how sick and perverted excessively aggressive attitudes in music can become in the right (or wrong) hands. Only for those who can find real pleasure deep in pure psychosomatic madness and drug-infused cosmic fantasies.

Olivier Côté

PECCATUM

Strangling From Within



Release: 1999

Label: [Candlelight Records](#)

Avantgenre: Eerie Progressive Black Metal

Duration: 43:35

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.myspace.com/peccatum>

The world's metal scene is heavily loaded with side projects and secondary bands. In a somehow rough statistic ruling, it is quite obvious that most of them don't elevate to the level of the whelping mother band. Naturally, the expectation arising when there's new mysterious project, courtesy of prominent and influential artists like Vegard Tveitan. To those who breathe their share of black clouds, the man known as Ihsahn, the leader of the best black metal band ever, Emperor. I think that the man is a genius – limit breaker musician and amazing lyricist, even a poet. With his vision, Emperor defined anew the genre with each new album, with its complex and expressive music. Despite the temptation, this review handles Ihsahn's other

band and the most meaningful one – Peccatum.

TRACKLIST:

01. Where Do I Then Belong
02. Speak Of The Devil (As The Devil May Care)
03. The Change
04. The Song Which No Name Carry
05. The Sand Was Made Of Mountains
06. I Breathe Without Access To Air
07. The World Of No Worlds
08. And Pray For Me
09. An Ovation To Art

Actually, Peccatum is a family band. Beside Ihsahn stands the other prominent and balancing figure – his wife, Heidi Tveitan, AKA Ihriel. The third figure is Ihriel's brother, Lord PZ (didn't have his real name), vocalist of the goth-metal band Source of Tide. This fact, as later examined, contributed to the album the wrapping feeling that the music was created by people very close to each other, as they are very close to the music and to the worlds behind it.

Peccatum was formed by Ihriel in 1998, as an expression to her ambitions to translate her inner world to sounds. To my interpretation, this data is placing the band in constant tension between its leading figures. Between her meaningful contribution in arousing life and shining, and his proven ability as an erudite musician, there's somehow a concealed struggle which leaves her, carved in our minds as less important figure, under his reputation. As goes the first paragraph in this review, the attitude towards Peccatum is like another fruit from Ihsahn's tree, and Ihriel follow his trail.

Peccatum's debut album, dating from 1999, was conceived through a tight co-operation of the married couple. She created the concept and wrote all the lyrics, he composed the songs and played all the instruments. They both sing – Ihsahn with his majestic voice, sometimes screeching, sometimes low but mainly clean, revealing clear Placet tendencies and operatic attitude.

To this attitude, Ihriel is playing a partner, delivering the songs in a tender Soprano voice, sometimes cracking into screams and whispers. Lord PZ, also a clean vocalist, is the weakest of the threesome. Although his voice fits the

music well, it's not as impressive as his counterparts and therefore he disappears in the back. Musically, Peccatum is squeezing itself to the somewhat vague category of avant-garde metal. In practice, the band represents Ihsahn's open perspectives, as expressed since the middle Emperor period: not just black metal and its satellites, but also progressive, ambient, classical and symphonic music, as well some electronic sparks. Consequent upon this, Peccatum is a bucketful of quite a few musical genres, under his vision.

The basis is black metal, travelling through gentleness to aggressive breakings and has given unrest melodies. Also accompanied by synth work, defined by classic escort and ambient sprinkles, within progressive song constructions. Over this concoction lies a feeling one can get by a careful listening to a profound doom metal album: the same feeling of enlightening corners with a little torch, of the deep penetration into the artist's inner depths. The album is abundant with emotions, in writing and in performance and it's capable of cancelling schematic declarations that are not cohesive of metal and of pure emotions display. Despite its creator's experience, the album shines of precedence, the rejoicing of primal creation.

The album contains 9 songs of changing diverse, keeping the high Peccatumian standards: complex craftsmanship, varied singing and refined playing, wrapped in great beauty. The opening song carries the scorched wonderment that accompanied the entire album as a ghost: "Where do I then belong?" – violins, pipe organ and ethereal vocals against Ihriel reciting the lyric as a silent elegy. A howling guitar will strike the listener with the second song outburst, "Speak of the Devil (As the Devil May Care)", and leads to a maelstrom in which the three are singing, one into another, inside and outside to breath, shrinking under a neo-classical cloak that reminds of a horror movie soundtrack, crippling behind one's back.

Throughout the album, waves of guitars crafting them unto the listener – like the

vocals, sometimes they're breaking or run wildly to melodic solos, hardening and calming, and one cannot chase the threesome as they run down the abyss. In addition, the main riff in "The Change" reminds us that the black metal roots are too deep to be forgotten. The progressive structure of "The Sand Was Made of Mountains" is stirring and proves that complexity and beauty do live together. Nonetheless, the best song on the album and my favourite is "The World of No Worlds" – almost 9 epic minutes, so fragile, breaking with guitars that almost touch the climax and the heart beats, and the song repeats that to the next effort.

The album exalts a concept of self-seeking journey of a human being (sometimes mentioned as an angel), torn between life and reality, and the worlds beyond, lack of pertinence cast upon him like the hands of the burning sun. The concept is split into two parts: the first is named "The Black and the White Meant for Nothing. The Shadows Meant for All", includes the first 5 songs and binds a process of death and rebirth into a new shape and foreign destiny. The second part, "The Carrier of Sorrow Transforms", describes the inner decay, the consuming darkness, the emptiness.

It's obvious that the lyrical side of the album was conceived through a lot of thoughtful work: the lyrics are well-written, abound with metaphors and still navigate clearly through the protagonist's feelings. Over the words lies a poetic magic, giving tenderness and dark grace. In some contradiction to the fact that the album is a concept album and in sharp contradiction to the song "The World of No Worlds", each song is a world of its own, another step in the eternal quest of Peccatum to reveal the secrets of the human soul – the laden and silent cosmos. The combination of the endless musical abilities of Ihsahn, as a musician and as a co-creator, and of the unusual interpretation of Ihriel gives the band two hands: creating and anthropomorphizing.

Another interesting issue, dealing with the previously mentioned tension, relates to the selection of the album's

name. Although it's a line taken from the sixth song, it illustrates well the atmosphere, and even so, in light of the bursting of creativity, an ironic exclamation is needed. On the one hand, one can wonder whether it's the hidden sides of Ih-sahn, which he cannot express in his mother-band, or a statement with a wink to his audience – my creation wellspring will never cease to gurgle. On the other hand, it is appropriate to spotlight Ihriel, for she formed the band and created the basics of the album.

It is possible that choosing the name is her personal utterance, men's aside. An optional reinforcement of this choice can be found on the album's cover, where she appears alone, on a dark green background, directing wide open eyes and tight lips to us. She might be the strangled one, maybe because her husband talent gets eternal hails and her talent stays in the shadows, and Peccatum is her way to daylight.

In my opinion, the album is very unique thanks to the co-operation of these two. Although it's colored much with Ihriel's outlines, his valid most in favor of the hearts and minds who created, and not only for Ihsahn's brand name. At the same time, Ihriel proves her talent – not just "the wife of..." – in an overwhelming display, which is not disposable, but it's only natural that the band finds it a bit hard to reconstruct the primal flame in its future albums, continuing the experimental line but suffering from what sterility and over polished sounds.

In 2001, during her Peccatum activity, Ihriel formed her solo project "Star of Ash", displaying experimental electronics with metal and rock influences. Lord PZ has left the band, which took the direction of the further realms of avant-garde, of electronics and jazz, until the split-up in March 2006.

Jobst

OPETH

Still Life



Release: 1999/2003

Label: Peaceville Records/Music For Nations

Avantgenre: Triangulation Rock

Duration: 1:02:29

Origin: Sweden

Official site: <http://www.opeth.com/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Moor
- 02 - Godhead's Lament
- 03 - Benighted
- 04 - Moonlapse Vertigo
- 05 - Face Of Melinda
- 06 - Serenity Painted Death
- 07 - White Cluster

There should have been way more

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e| |--3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----1--||
B| |--1-----1-----1-----1-----1-----1-----1-----10--1--||
G| |--2-----4-----4-----0-----0-----0-----0-----01--0--||
D| |--3-----4-----2-----0-----0-----0-----0-----01--0--||
A| |--3-----3-----4-----2-----2-----2-----2-----2-----2--||
E| |--1-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3-----3--||
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but I am glad there is not too much of

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c| x-----|-----|
h| --x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-|x-x-x-x-x-----|
s| ---0-----0---|---0-----000000|
b| 0-0---0-0-----0-|--0---0-----|
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which sounded more like The Scorpions than anything else I've ever heard and wrote about. I did enjoy

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G| -----|-----|
D| -----0-4-2-1-----|
A| ---0-3-2-----4~-----|
E| -1-----4~-----|
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and of course

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G| -----|-----|
D| -----5---5/9---9/7---9/11h12-|
A| -3-3-3--034-----|
E| -----5-3-----|
```

but I still wish there was more double bass.

Jonny Lignano

2000

AGHORA

Aghora



Release: 2000

Label: [Dobles Productions](#)

Avantgenre: Meditational Metal

Duration: 55:40

Origin: USA

Official site: <http://www.aghora.org/>

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - Immortal Bliss
- 02 - Satya
- 03 - Transfiguration
- 04 - Frames
- 05 - Mind's Reality
- 06 - Kali Yuga
- 07 - Jivatma
- 08 - Existence
- 09 - Anugraha

For some odd reason, my brain could never conceive why the principles of far eastern philosophy have never, or rarely, been the source of inspiration of some of the

greatest metal albums ever released. I always found it surprising since some of rock 'n rolls greatest rooted in the 60s hippie scene who took great interest in the wisdom of taoism, buddhism, and especially hinduism.

I suppose that many artists found it easier to find inspiration in the realms of drug consumption which is totally ok since it provided many precious moments in music history. They tend to have the negative externality of taking their toll on the musicians we love

though.

And then there are persons like Santiago Dobles, a Berklee School of Music graduate, practitioner of body and soul balancing exercises ranging from qi gong to yoga and mastermind behind Florida based jazz metal prodigy Aghora. Those of you who know about the Aghori know that there can't be a better name for a metal band that seem to find part of its inspiration in the ancient sanskrits, since the Aghori are also referred of being religious anarchists.

The Aghori are a hindu sect which worships Lord Shiva, the ultimate deity in Hinduism. The Aghori distinct themselves by an unusual approach to the theme of duality, which for them, doesn't exist. In essence, their beliefs boil down to two points: First, the gods are perfect. Second, the gods are responsible for everything. Hence, everything that exists is perfect. The Aghori even find beauty and perfection in such actions as consuming excrements, cannibalism and other things which the common occidental inhabitant would consider being disturbing and sick.

I have no idea how hard or easy it is to digest any sort of backdoor releases but as far as the band is concerned: the only thing I find hard to come by here is to select the right words that will make you understand that you need to order this album right now!

It is with a crushing in-your-face style riff that "Immortal Bliss" kicks in the door to a domain of yet unheard soundscapes. The nine songs containing tracklist will take you on a journey through neckbreaking complex, syncopated rhythmic riffs ("Immortal Bliss", "Satya"), driven by a powerful and epic bass lines, up to exalted jazzy parts ("Frames", "Jivatma") consisting of wonderful guitar melodies, some oriental folk instrumentation, subtle pianos and Danishta Rivero's beautiful vocal lines that underline a yearning for the answers to our most fundamental philosophical questions. I must stress here that I am glad to hear a woman on the microphone that manages to give her vocals a sopranic injection without sounding gothic. Her

voice also joins in the numerous oriental intervals which is an appliance I am particularly fond of.

This album lives of everything it is built up upon. Every element has a prominent spot in the sound. I wish more bands would understand that each instrument is part of the whole and that only a balanced equilibrium between all of them will provide the listener with the most pleasant sonic experience possible. It might be far fetched but it wouldn't surprise me if Dobles said that this is one of the goals he wishes to put into effect with this band since he knows that only a balance between the energies flowing in our body leave us in good health. He sure found a good balance in the production of this album.

I can only pronounce my deep respect for this complete work of art. And those of you who are not interested in the whole concept: if you want to know what Sean Malone and Sean Reinert where up to, among others, before reuniting Cynic, then this is for you too. Namasté.

Trident

FLEURETY

Department Of Apocalyptic Affairs



Release: 2000

Label: [Supernal Music](#)

Avantgenre: BM Pulp

Duration: 50:01

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://folk.uio.no/sveineh/fleurety/>

In 2000, Fleurety moved into more ambitious terrain with "Department of Apocalyptic Affairs," a convoluted genre spanning event with special guest stars from the Norwegian black metal scene (Maniac, Garm, Hellhammer, et al.). The songs are still cold and ugly, but have a sense of humor and jump around a lot. Late period King Crimson riffs slam head on into jazzy trip hop while scat vocals dance on industrial metal surfaces. The production ties it all together with an empty flatness that somehow makes the music sound paranoid and manic.

Lyrics are grim and frosty, but are more interested in drug abuse, murder, and suicide than trolls and mountains- less Nord, more noir. Vocals are provided by veteran Alexander Nordgaren, but he's joined by Heidi Gjermundsen, Karianne Horn, Maniac (Mayhem), and Garm (Ulver). Naturally all voices are different, but here they're joined with a unified sense of sardonic amusement, flat, understated, and compellingly disinterested, the voice of the hardboiled. Mari Solberg's sax work adds a forlorn urban dissonance to a few songs, spicing up what would otherwise be a purely metallic smorgasbord.

While not quite the classic "Min Tid Skal Komme" is, Department is an amusing stroll though the alleyways and gutters of extreme metal.

James Slone

TRACKLIST:

01. Exterminators
02. Face In A Fever
03. Shotgun Blast
04. Fingerprint
05. Facets 2.0
06. Last-Minute Lies
07. Barb Wire Smile (Snap Ant Version)
08. Face In A Fever (Nordgaren Edit)

RAM-ZET

Pure Therapy



Release: 2000

Label: Spikefarm Records

Avantgenre: Black Industrial Gothic Nu Metal

Duration: 50:24

Origin: Norway

Official site: <http://www.ram-zet.com>

Fat rhythmic guitar riffs in the typical Nu Metal style, powerful mid-tempo drums, guttural vocals, spiced with keyboards and elektro sounds – Is this Ram-Mstein? No, it's the debut-album of Ram-Zet. At the first listening I got very annoyed. Around the year 2000 there have been so many bands trying to create a very modern millenium-sound, mixing the popular Rammstein-guitars with futuristic elements. Ram-Zet seemed to be another of those bands with big, modernistic production and little new ideas. So I immediately fell asleep.

But when I woke up I found myself in a sparkling world. Trivial riffs and fat production are just the commercial foreground of "Pure Therapy". As soon as their winsome rhythms and melodies have caught your ears they start to mutate. The rhythms get complex and winded. The melodies get exotic, sometimes dissonant, sometimes oriental. One of the biggest strengths of Ram-Zet are the elaborate arrangements. Driving headbanger riffs are joined by slow vio-

lins and sweet angel voices. Peculiar weird themes melt into catchy tunes. Dramatic and bombastic parts flow into peaceful ambient-scapes. Everything is very varied and colorful. And it fits perfectly together. Ram-Zet have their unique style somewhere between Industrial, Gothic-Wave, Alternative and tons of all kinds of Metal. They are one of the very few bands, that are catchy and commercial, but also avantgardistic and innovative at the same time.

TRACKLIST:

01. The Fall
02. King
03. For The Sake Of Mankind
04. Eternal Voice
05. No Peace
06. Kill My Thoughts
07. Sense

Chrystof

FANTOMAS

The Director's Cut



Release: 2001

Label: Ipecac

TRACKLIST:

- 01 - The Godfather
- 02 - Der Golem
- 03 - Experiment In Terror
- 04 - One Step Beyond
- 05 - Night Of The Hunter (Remix)
- 06 - Cape Fear
- 07 - Rosemary's Baby
- 08 - The Devil Rides Out (Remix)
- 09 - Spider Baby
- 10 - The Omen (Ave Satani)
- 11 - Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer
- 12 - Vendetta
- 13 - Untitled
- 14 - Investigation Of A Citizen Above Suspicion
- 15 - Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me
- 16 - Charade

Avantgenre:

Pre-postmodern/
postmortem Subpop

Duration: 38:47

Origin: USofA

very +

Jonny Lignano



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