

DISPOSABLE UNDERGROUND

VOLUME 16 NUMBER 39

CHAMPIONING THE MUSICALLY JADED FOR OVER 15 YEARS

FREE

DISCORDANCE AXIS WAS A BAND *not to be trifled with. Their brand of extremely harsh grindcore and cutting-edge guitar work has yet to be outdone. Discordance Axis released a number of earth-shattering albums, the last of which was the posthumous Our Last Day for Hydra Head. Years after they broke up in 2001, it was Dave Wine's legwork that made an assemblage of the original members in 2004 at a Mexican restaurant in their native New Jersey happen. In Discordance Axis, Dave blasted the drums, Jon Chang screamed and growled his highly intelligent lyrics, and Rob Marton made mincemeat out of distorted guitar chords.*

Dave casts his mind back to the last time the three of them were all in the same room together.

Dave: Melt-Banana dinner.

Jon: Yeah! When was that—like, three years ago?

Dave: Two tours ago. We always came here when we did cool band stuff and the last time was at the end of that tour when we went out for a celebration dinner with Japan's Melt-Banana.

Jon: Is that the one where we told everyone it was Yako's birthday?

Dave: Yeah, exactly. They came out with a cake for her, and she was mortified, very embarrassed." *[all laugh]*

Jon: It wasn't her birthday; we just wanted the free ice cream cake!

Dave: Y'know, a lot of people come out and they all clap, and she turned bright red. It was great.

Rob: ...like they're gonna do for Jon tonight. *[more laughter]*

Jon: I've been wondering where you went, you bastard. Yeah, it's been a couple of years at least.

It's pointless to attempt to describe how many times the band erupts into laughter during the interview/free-for-all, because the guys are cracking themselves and each other up constantly, with a few serious comments here and there. At the time of this interview, the posthumous last Discordance Axis record, Our Last Day, had yet to see a release, and featured several Discordance Axis covers by various bands, 25 of those by an individual who created his covers with MIDI ("The songs are, like, note-for-note, like, exact," proclaims Dave. "I can't believe someone put that much energy into it, just for Discordance Axis." Jon, in his own way, describes the release further: "Yeah, it's just gonna be, like, me, and it's gonna say, 'I wrote everything.'" Dave and Rob laugh, "Jon Chang's Discordance Axis!")

Jon: All the secrets are gonna come out. It's like, "I actually played drums on every one of those records. I wrote all the guitar."

Dave: I've seen him do blastbeats before.

It has to be asked: Is he good?

Dave: No. Horrible.

One could never say that about the musical ability of Rob and Dave. Rob would, however, receive comments at Discordance Axis shows.

Rob: I would have people come up to me and ask what size of strings I used, and I would tell them .008s, and they would be like, "What?!" It's like, the lightest possible strings.

Jon: I remember him going into a music shop one time after our practice, and the guy at the counter, he was, like, "You can't get no kinda heavy sound outta those things!" And me and Dave were, like, "Okay, Dude!"

Dave: If only you knew, guy.

Jon: I was, like, "Hey, I bet you the new Monster Magnet really kicks ass, yo!"

As for the rest of Rob's equipment, when Discordance Axis would play live shows, he describes, "I have an Ampeg SS 150 guitar head and a Charvel Model Five guitar, neck-through body, one of the ones I used. And I would usually find a Mesa Boogie [cabinet] from somewhere to borrow." When Discordance Axis recorded, the method was different. For one thing, Rob would lay down a number of guitar tracks in the studio.

Rob: Umm... I think it was two, actually. I used the SS 150 Ampeg amp and a Mesa Boogie at the same time, and we would then split the guitar cable into each head.

Jon: He had two cabs he'd be playing out simultaneously, so it was actually four guitar tracks while he was laying two.

Rob: Out of my guitar it would split and it would go into two different cabinets, and we would record those, and I would do that twice.

Talk turns to the subject of gigging.

Jon: You wanna know why D.A. never used to play shows? 'Cause we'd have to constantly get in shape. I remember when we'd go to Japan, [Dave] would start running every day, [Rob] would never go, so it didn't matter for him, Steve [Porcopio, who replaced Rob on guitar a few times during the band's existence] would start smoking more cigarettes, and I actually used to do stupid shit like running around screaming in my area at the top of my lungs so I could get used to running around screaming at the top of my lungs.

Dave: Can you imagine being a housewife and you go out your front door and there's Jon Chang running around? "What possible reason could that man have for running and screaming?"

Jon: Me and Dave and Steve, when we were gettin' ready for the tours, it sucked. We'd get together, we'd do the set three times in a row with, like, two minutes between each set ...

Dave: Yeah, we'd be dead.

Jon: I remember Dave would take his shirt off and he could fill, like, a glass with sweat at the end of every session. It was nasty. It sucked, man. I hated getting ready to do shows.

The Necropolitan record is one on which Steve Porcopio played guitar instead of Rob.

Jon: Those were [Rob's] songs.

Rob: Speaking of him playing the songs, well, he's got, like, a different style, so they all sounded different. Other than that, I think, for what we gave him, he did amazing.

Of course there is the subject of the band's Pikadourei DVD, which includes guitar tablature for Discordance Axis songs that viewers can flip through on the screen.

Dave: Those are hilarious.

Rob: Those are actually the notes I gave to Steve to learn the songs.

Jon: That was actually good. Steve, he tracked all those down and pulled them out of his, like, various places and we scanned them all in. Those notes are all classic Rob Marton there: "shzooga shzooga shah!"

Dave: "Play garbage. Just follow Dave."

Jon: Oh, that was "Empire." I love that song. I like some of the other notes: "This song is a real pain in the ass to play. If you have trouble, just tell Jon that my style sucks and that you can't do it."

Dave: "Blame Dave for this one." It's funny; a lot of people got pissed off about that, about the guitar tab, and they were saying, "Oh, that's pretentious," all this other crap.

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BY THE BALLS. MAYBE NOT

NAPALM DEATH IS A GRINDCORE BAND with often political lyrics from Birmingham, England that has been in existence, with various and extensive personnel changes, for well over 20 years. In 1987 the British record label Earache, headed by Digby Pearson, released the band's debut album *Scum*, a vastly influential work that continues to affect bands and listeners to this day. Earache reissued the *Scum* album in 2007 to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the original release, with remastered sound and a bonus DVD documentary, *The Scum Story*.

The original idea, according to early press reports from the label before the bonus documentary was put together, was to have Napalm Death's lineup which appeared on Side One of the album—Nicholas Bullen, who started Napalm Death, Justin Broadrick, and Mick Harris—participate in the documentary. (Appearing on Side Two were Harris, Lee Dorrian, Bill Steer, and Jim Whitley.) All of the musicians appearing on *Scum* have since left the band at one time or another over the years.

Quoted in criticalmass.se, Napalm Death bassist Shane Embury, who was present during the recording sessions for the album two decades ago, said that he'd received a message from Harris saying that he would not participate in the documentary. Some of the other would-be participants had other ideas as well.

As *Decibel* Magazine has inducted *Scum* into its long-running Hall of Fame series, where all of these musicians talked about the experience of recording *Scum* (as they did in the excellent book *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death Metal and Grindcore*, written by *Decibel*'s editor-in-chief, Albert Mudrian), this is an opportune time to look at other comments by some of the former Napalm Death members, outside of the interview process.

Chris Rohde, one of the moderators on the official Napalm Death message board started a thread at that website in 2006 that asked whether the then-rumored *Scum* documentary was going to materialize. In the thread, he quoted some of Harris' posts on the latter's MySpace page from the same year on the subject of the documentary (the title of this piece is taken from that of one of Harris' blogs). In response, several regulars to the board weighed in, none the least of which were Bullen and Whitley. What followed were fascinating statements of personal philosophy on music and the music industry, among other subjects.

"Earache are being, let's say, a little unhelpful right now regarding my business dealings," Harris wrote in his blog. "But they want help with this so-called making of *Scum* documentary that they know I have all the answers and truths to. They want my words on film (I'm reluctant, let's say that), but I feel fans want to know and just want the truth, not half measures.

"I wrote Earache this morning, saying, 'Well, I have several filmmakers that would love to interview me for a documentary about Napalm Death, etc.' They replied, 'Do it, but you can't use the music. We own it even if you wrote it.'

"The truth to this story is never, never, never sell your publishing rights/songwriting rights to the label. It's all like the promised positions. All fucking lies."

In a later blog, Harris continued, "Told them Harris style, plain and simple—bollocks. Told Earache to fuck off with their desperate money making idea to make a documentary about the making of *Scum*. What a load of shit, eh. Shame, as so much can be said ...

"Earache won't help me (they helped themselves many a year ago getting me to stupidly sign away my life/rights). So I have told them, 'forget it.' I have a filmmaker friend in New Zealand who is in the middle of finishing off his killer Kraut rock documentary who could do a killer job himself, but Earache have told me my songs can't be used unless I pay to use them, so I told them, 'Go fuck yourselves again, as you won't be getting no documentary.'

"Harsh, whatever. I can be brutal if I want. What I don't need is weakeners like that weakening me and taking the piss the way they do."

In one of the replies on the thread, Bullen wrote, "It would be good to have the full details available for people as the album *Scum* has meant a great deal to many people, particularly as it was their introduction to new ways of viewing music. However, I'm not sure how I feel about the way in which this may all be part of the 'nostalgia industry': there are young people all over the world putting their hearts and souls into making music and that's where the interest lies."

Whitley posted a response as well, in which he wrote, "Nik, you hit the two main words on the head: 'nostalgia' and 'industry.' I think you'd perhaps share my distaste of both notions; especially as in both cases we don't need to afford

any oxygen, be it financial or in terms of credibility, towards Digby and his empire.

"That said, I agree with you that there is a story to be told and conversantly there are still lessons to be learned. If there's a way around Earache not copping a penny from this, then I'm willing to participate and maybe add my 10ps worth. Seeing as Digby now 'owns' feelings and expressions that we both had a part in creating a long time ago I'm not sure how such a project could manifest itself."

After this reporter posted a bulletin on napalmdeath.org's message board in 2007 that Earache had released a trailer for the documentary, and that the trailer featured none other than Harris, there were several responses here as well. In one of the replies to the post, Bullen wrote, "In the initial stages, I personally was interested in being involved in the DVD: it seemed like a good idea to have a 'final' document of that period in time—to put a 'seal' on it—and (at some level) I thought it might be amusing and fun ...

"However, Harris then decided that he was not going to do the DVD. The reason for this (or so I am told) is that he wanted to use his involvement in the DVD as a bargaining tool in order to get back some of the publishing rights which he had previously sold for money to Earache. When they would not agree to this, he said he was not going to do it.

"During this period, Justin and I (and I spoke to Lee about this as well) both decided that we didn't want to be involved: the main reason for this is that we didn't want to make anyone involved in Earache any more money from it. Earache have presented the whole endeavour as a 'labour of love' and a 'necessary document' of a 'fantastic period' in music. This may well be true:

however, I may be cynical or overly suspicious, but it seems more likely to be a typical marketing tool utilised by a business (to resell an existing item in new packaging, particularly at the point of an 'anniversary'), and even more likely that it was inevitable coming from a business which seems to have been slipping into the doldrums of commercial success for a decade or so.

"I personally have no particular disagreement with Earache: when I was on their label, I always regarded them as employers rather than friends (unlike other ex-members of Napalm Death who felt they had a friendship with people in Earache) and was never particularly surprised by the way they conduct their business. However, I understand that others do have a sense of disgruntlement (which may well relate to their perception of their relationship with Earache).

"I think it is probably important to clarify my own position regarding the whole issue of making music and monetary gain. I was never in Napalm Death to make money or be famous or meet people for sex or to be put on a pedestal by my peers: I started the group at a young age and had no interest in those kinds of rationale—all I was interested in was expressing myself through art, a viewpoint which was informed by the anarchist group Crass and my readings on anarchism. If anything, my general attitude was that once people begin to view their music making as a 'career' (an engine to make money), it can invariably lead to a somewhat mercenary attitude which has a negative effect on the music being made. I know that this viewpoint may be one that many others do not hold, but it is nonetheless my perception on this issue.

"I have never made any money from Napalm Death: I never received any royalties from the album *Scum* because I did not sign a contract with Earache for that record. I perhaps could have contested this in the courts (and may well have won because of the prior documentation which would support a claim to the name, lyrics and music), but I felt that this would be a counter-productive exercise in the long run and decided instead to view it as an unpleasant period in my life and one which I would recall as infrequently as possible. At the time, I was more interested in pursuing my studies at university as they were more vibrant and challenging, and it seemed something of a step backwards to remain in that milieu.

"I also never received any publishing for the lyrics and music which I wrote for Side One of *Scum* although I believe a certain member of the group sold the publishing rights to this music and lyrics for their own personal financial gain (as they did with the lyrics of Side Two of *Scum* which were written by Jim Whitley).

"It may seem somewhat strange (or positively incomprehensible) to a lot of people, but I value my own sense of self-worth and self-respect higher than financial gain: I would rather remain true to my beliefs than sacrifice those beliefs for the sake of money—that's just the kind of person I am. That is why



MICK HARRIS, 2006 FROM HIS MYSPACE PAGE

I continue to make music which doesn't have to become a commodity in someone else's marketplace: for me, success in music making is not defined by the potential for a career, but by how it makes me and my collaborators feel—if we can turn to each other afterwards and say, 'That went really well,' it has been a success.

"The reason I am saying this is that it becomes a little tiresome when people insist on judging the reasoning behind making music by their own (in my opinion shallow) standards: I understand why people may wish to make music for such reasons, but I am not interested. I earn a living through my work, and the music I make is made free from any consideration other than, 'Does this music express itself?' It may seem naïve, or overly utopian, or smugly self-righteous, but that's what it is.

"Thinking of money: after making the decision not to appear on the DVD, I decided to (for my own curiosity) see exactly what Earache would offer me to appear on the DVD—it was ultimately an academic exercise, but I am naturally curious and thought the exercise might be entertaining. They told me they would pay my expenses and that the reason for doing it was as a 'labour of love' to document the period. Of course, this may well be true but I was also aware that this 'labour of love' approach seemed to only extend to the participants from the band—Earache weren't exactly going to give the profits from the DVD to charity.

"I told them this wasn't satisfactory, so they made a few more offers which ended at £200 for the interview and a say on the edit of the DVD. So, from a potential income of £200,000 (on a conservative approximation of the DVD selling 10,000 copies at £20 a unit), they offered me £200 – which is around 0.10 percent. I'm afraid I can only see that the offer they made goes beyond effective business practice into the realms of a lack of respect for me on the part of Earache.

"I'm also interested to see what the DVD contains in terms of insight into the development of the 'high speed' aesthetic in Napalm Death and the songwriting process of Side One of *Scum* considering that the architects of those elements (Justin and I) are not present on the DVD."

DISCORDANCE AXIS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Jon: Really?

Dave: Yeah, it's like, "Yeah, they're real pretentious, they take themselves way too seriously." I'm like, well, if you realize it's a joke, then it's not pretentious, y'know?

Jon: How can somebody say "Mexican hat dance part blast beat" is pretentious?

Discordance Axis played one of the Fiesta Grande festivals back in the day, and they were surprised at the wave of positive response they received there, and the degree to which they were popular in America as well. Yet the band's catalog would sell out quickly.

Jon: They loved the shit out of us. I mean, I was puttin' out the records for a while, and, like, basically, one of the reasons we went on tour in Japan all the time was 'cause 89 percent of our records were sellin' in Japan. Like, the distributors over there would pick 'em up over there and they'd just be gone. That's where people like grind music, you know? The only thing people were interested in here for the most part, as far as we could tell, was slow shit, you know? Pretty much the same as today, right? Almost every band is, like, slow. It's all about, like, grooving.

Dave: People are tryin' to climb the ladder these days, but they're failin'.

Jon: Yeah. I mean, it'd be nice if there could be a fast ... I'm lookin' forward to the new Slayer record with Lombardo, man. That's gonna kick ass all the way through.

Dave: Yeah. It better be good. I think it will be good.

Jon: I have a good feeling about it. I'm convinced.

When prompted, Jon reveals that he "really liked God Hates Us All." Some listeners have a problem with that release, since there is such a degree of groove sections to the songs and with Kerry King saying in interviews at the time that Slipknot kicked his ass.

Dave: You know what's weird, though, if I can interject here? This is a point that I wanted to bring up with the whole Slayer thing. People rip on them 'cause they sound like bands today, and then people don't even realize that they started that and those bands ripped them off, and they're just doin' what they originally did, but a little bit different. It's weird, 'cause there's some parts, "Oh, yeah, it sounds like Slipknot or Korn," on that last record, and I'm like, well, if you really listen to it, it sounds like "Raining Blood" when they break it down, "dun dun—dun dun—dun dun." They did it first. So it doesn't make any sense, and I'm blabbing.

Jon: I mean, Slayer's Slayer. They're like an institution, you know? I mean,

Whitley responded to Bullen's post by writing, "I can only concur with Nik's eloquent and reasoned statement of which I support 100 percent. For the record I was never contacted at all regarding any input to this project; not that I had any expectations or yearning to get on board, although maybe it would have been nice to have the opportunity to tell them where to shove it after hearing what 'incentives' there may have been ...

"Likewise I never signed a contract with Earache at any stage of my involvement with Napalm Death and similarly I never copyrighted the words I wrote or the odd 3/4 songs I conceived musically to the *Scum* B Side. In hindsight perhaps maybe I should have, although I too persist to this day wanting to create music/noise as cathartic expression and social interaction without resorting to all of the bullshit trappings and peripheral nonsense of 'the music business.' I have no idea to this day who 'owns' what I put onto paper—it was all done without my consent, nor my knowledge ...

"I only ever received £200 plus around half a dozen copies of *Scum* as recompense for my efforts; the £200 itself came in 1988 and I'm sure that the money was only on the basis of trying to keep me 'sweet' as Digby had expressed an interest in getting Ripcord (the band I joined post-Napalm Death) to sign to Earache. Luckily we declined that offer and proceeded the good old DIY way.

"It's inevitably sad that friendships get soured when the great God greed emerges from within what was a facade of common purpose and meeting of minds. We all have to evolve and strive to maintain our freedoms and dignities despite it all."

Even today, 20 years later, the music industry hasn't changed, but we can take heart that artists in music, be they new to the scene or seasoned veterans like the gentlemen quoted above, still cherish their art and still inspire the generations.

Many thanks to Nicholas Bullen, Mick Harris, and Jim Whitley for expressing their views publicly on these matters, as well as the forum at www.napalmdeath.org, without whom this article would not be possible. ■

God Hates Us All is one of the most pissed off records I've ever heard, man. And, like, for me it was especially strange, 'cause I was goin' to work that day when that came out. I stopped to get that record at Vintage Vinyl, and, like, 10 minutes later I'm up on the Turnpike and I see the Second Tower explode. I mean, most people don't remember that came out on September 11th.

When asked to look back on Discordance Axis, Dave answers, "I think it was a great experience. We all had a great time."

Jon: One of my favorite moments is, like, Rob Marton, coming over to his house, 'cause he lives in his parents' basement, and you come in and knock on the glass door and he'd be on the floor doin' pushups, gettin' ready for practice, 'cause he had to build that downpickin' arm up. Rob was pretty old school. You should have seen him when he had metal hair. Whoof! He looked like Mille from Kreator, man. It was, like, the best thing you could ever tell him, too.

Dave: Did people mistake you for him sometimes?

Rob: Yeah, I had a couple people ask me for an autograph.

Dave: And you'd sign "Rob Marton."

Jon: I'll tell ya, despite the problems that are on all the records, 'cause there's stuff I screwed up on every record too, I actually like those records. I kinda hated it, 'cause I actually like those records better than any other grind records other than Mortalized, pretty much, right now. I'd rather listen to those, which is prob'ly why I don't listen to almost any grind anymore, 'cause I don't really like listening to myself that often. But, I mean, I really dug those records.

Dave feels Discordance Axis' records stand the test of time. He reveals, "I listen to 'em once in a while. You know what? I think they're good to me." That's Dave being modest. It behooves anyone who appreciates extreme music taken to its limits and with the upmost of thought to invest in the Discordance Axis reissues that are currently available, and to really listen to them and read the lyrics, and, in the case of the DVD, watch the band play. Exposing yourself to great music will be your reward.

Discordance Axis release and reissue select discography on Hydra Head:

Our Last Day

The Inalienable Dreamless

Pikadourei

Jouhou

Original Sound Version 1992-1995

The Discordance Axis web site is www.studio-grey.com/da. This interview originally appeared on the web site of Zero Tolerance Magazine. ■

ATHEIST WILL MAKE YOU BELIEVE IN TECH METAL

Story and photos by Asa Eisenhardt, originally for the Goucher Quindecim.

I am stoked. In the spring of 2006, seminal tech-metal band Atheist announces a series of reunion shows during inaugural European metal festivals like Hole in the Sky (Norway), Evolution (Italy) and Wacken (Germany) for audiences of up to 60,000. It is a given that they will return to their American homeland to bring their pioneering brand of jazz-fusion death metal, and I for one immediately presume the first show will be in their hometown of Tampa, Florida. But when rock news site Blabbermouth.net informs the metal world that Atheist's first USA show in 13 years will be in Baltimore for the first annual Auditory Assault Festival, I shout aloud and startle my roommate.

My friends and I don't even get to the door before I catch an earful of Atheist soundchecking their classic thrasher "On They Slay" and follow it to open double doors at the back of the Sonar club, where I watch singer Kelly Shaefer warm up and nail the vocals. With them are live fill-in guitarists Chris Baker and Sonny Carson. I'm pumped already—never mind the fact that the band won't take the stage until midnight.

Thanks to a contact at the band's home on Relapse Records, I am introduced to Kelly—a tall hippyish dude with bleach blonde hair and a knit hat—and drummer Steve Flynn, clad in gym shorts and a Florida State University sweatshirt and baseball cap. They can't possibly be nicer if they try and are very willing to participate in what becomes a 20-minute interview. Bassist Tony Choy is stuck at the airport and arrives later, so his responses are added where possible.

D.U.: How has the fan response been?

Kelly Shaefer: The fan response has been overwhelming. We can't often say how lucky and grateful we are to come back and have that.

Steve Flynn: It's certainly been overwhelming from my perspective, too. We didn't expect to get what we did overseas; it was unbelievable.

Tony Choy: In a nutshell, it's been better than I'd ever thought. When Kelly first told me about this venture—about reuniting—I was kinda doubtful. "Really? Are you sure?" And he said "Man, it's time again." Wacken was incredible—every [festival appearance] that we did has been super accepted. Couldn't be happier.

Which from what I understand is different than your old days. Kelly, I recall you mentioning that touring with Cannibal Corpse was like "ABCs and calculus." I found that amusing... [laughs]

Shaefer: Me and my big mouth.

Flynn: Well, people wanted to see blast beats, and Cannibal Corpse did that really well, and we were really different from them. And we had a hard time winning over people.

Shaefer: Europe was different. Back then, there was a smaller group of people down with technical metal. But still—in, like, Germany back in the early 90s, they just wanted Bathory stuff—really heavy. And we were just completely different—we were confusing them, I think. Now there's an intellectual metal audience over there, and we're curious to see what America's like 13 years later.

I just go my hands on *Focus* [Cynic's 1993 album].

Flynn: It's ridiculous, it's insane.

A lot of parallels between both bands—they were also doing jazz-fusion



stuff but used the synth vocals and the keyboard.

Flynn: We did one [show with Cynic] way back ... with Roger [Patterson, the band's late original bassist]. It was cool.

How long had you guys been playing when you guys did *Piece of Time*? It's obviously not as technical as the later albums.

Flynn: Probably four or five years, I'd been playing drums.

Shaefer: Yeah, I'd been playing guitar for about four years. I started at 14 but never really "got it" until age 15. Then 17 was when we got together.

Flynn: No, 16 was when we got together. You and I.

Shaefer: Right, and we played for a couple years and finally did the demos and started getting good around '87.

Flynn: The song "On They Slay" we probably wrote two years before [we really got going].

Shaefer: Those lyrics are the youngest I've ever been.

Flynn: When we wrote that and "Unholy War," we were probably had only been playing three years. How old are you?

Almost nineteen.

Flynn: [laughs] The song's older than you are!

Tony, what's your musical background like, as you didn't join until *Unquestionable Presence*? I take it you have some training, as you're playing Latin music now?

Choy: I'm Cuban, and I've been surrounded by so many different genres of music, even when I was in metal. When I was playing in Cynic, people used to joke that, "Hey, these guys sit around and listen to Chick Corea and play death metal." After the *Elements* album, you can hear me making the transition out of metal. I call it "salsa metal." Very Latin-oriented, very groovy. I grew up on pop, latin, jazz, funk—anything that grooves, anything that has passion. I like metal, I like rock ... you can't close your mind when you're a musician—especially if you want to survive in music! This is what I do for a living. We were joking about it earlier—Tony Choy was playing in a salsa band last night and now he's doing death metal. Last night I was in a group called Made in Miami playing jazz and salsa and now I'm doing Atheist.

My next question is about Roger. Of course he amazes me and he has a really original sound. How much did he know about music?

Flynn: Music theory? Very little.

So it was by his ear?

Flynn: Pure, raw, God-given talent. Just unbelievable musical ability. Had no clue about it.

Shaefer: He was a very simple kid, you know? He liked to smoke pot, hang out ... bum cigarettes from everybody. He had this dexterity that was feline, man. His fingers were so strong, and he had a lot of attack. In metal, you play really fast and a lot of guys don't have that because it's really hard. His fingers were really long and he used all four.

Flynn: He had an ability to write riffs that was just ridiculous.

Shaefer: When he did, we'd have to sit all night just to get them, you know?

Flynn: He busted out the intro to "Piece of Time" and I was like, "What the hell was that?"

Shaefer: My hardest thing was "I Deny" [hums opening bassline]. And I thought, "What the hell am I gonna do on guitar?" [both hum opening riff] That was a moment where we realized how orchestration was the best way it was gonna be. Everybody was playing something different [in the song] and we made it our goal for it to be that way.

Flynn: That became our niche.

What do you guys think of technical bands today?

Flynn: There's some bands that have some really technical drummers. Like Flo [Mournier, Cryptopsy] ... ridiculous how good so many of them are now. It's been a renaissance instead of being ... well, I love Dave Lombardo, but his stuff is just powerful, straightforward stuff. Players now try to do Richard Christy and Gene Hoglan and be really musical with the drums, and it's really refreshing to hear.

Shaefer: There's so many amazing bands. MySpace has been really beneficial—I mean, if we would of had that when we were together—that way to see our demo? That many people? I mean, it's been so helpful for Gnostic [featuring Flynn, Baker and Carson] because we just send people right over. If you don't use MySpace [for music promotion] you're asleep at the wheel. You can expose yourself to a lot of people and get a fanbase without a label's help.

Choy: I've dabbled into a few bands, and these guys [in Atheist] keep me

"You can't close your mind when you're a musician"

SCHAEFER AND CHOY

in tune. I don't listen to a lot of metal when I'm far away from it. But it's come a long way. There's groups like Linear Sphere and Spiral Architect and these guys are like, "WOW! I'm really baffled!" These guys are coming right after us and it's amazing. I applaud these people. Great musicians. I'm glad that people in the scene want to really play their instruments, not just headbang.

I think that's about the only good thing it has to offer. How do you guys think songwriting should be balanced with technicality? How did you guys go about that?

Shaefer: I'd love to create this glamorous portrait of how we did it. But we just rolled up a joint, sat down ...

Flynn: And whatever came out, came out.

Shaefer: We'd start playing and recognize if it was an Atheist riff or not, and just go from there. His drumming always evolved until we rolled tape. He was always changing stuff and we practiced six days a week, spending a lot of time working on those songs. It took us a couple of weeks per song to write. These days, people write faster than that. I do too. But back when we were young we had lots of time. We sat around, got high, and made the music as crazy as we could make it, and that's how we made it.

Flynn: Some people that don't smoke weed think, "Oh, that's a terrible thing to tell the kids," but that's how we did it.

Shaefer: I would record riffs and bring them to practice, then write lyrics and bring those back too.

Flynn: I think the only formula was writing stuff [for drums] that I wanted to write and would find cool as a drummer. Like, if I heard it I would go, "Oh, that's really cool."

Shaefer: Believe it or not, we tried to make it catchy. Our manager at the time was Borivoj Krgin, who [now] does Blabbermouth.net, and he was always telling us it was. So we would shoot for that. We were fans of Iron Maiden and bands like them who had big hooks in their metal.

And Tony, what're your thoughts?

Choy: You have to have somewhat of a song structure. You can't just be technical to be technical, y'know? You should incorporate many things to make a song a song. A lot of people want to be the most technical and crazy, but then you're like, "I don't even know what I just heard." Song structure is definitely important. Show off your chops, but make it in a song structure. I think people would dig it more.

I think of Atheist songs as having a disjointed kind of catchy. Like your own kind of catchy—the opening bassline of "Mother Man" for instance. It's spidery.

Flynn: That's Roger. That's totally Roger.

Can you guys see your impact today?

Shaefer: We can. And we feel grateful as hell. And we're absolutely humbled by all of this—the press. I mean, you're 19 years old, man! And you're standing here interviewing us about music that's—

Flynn: 19 years old.

Shaefer: Yeah, 19 years old. That's a huge thing as an artist when you can make something that continues into a new generation.

Flynn: Kelly wasn't as surprised as me, because I've been removed from the [metal] scene for a long time, and we started this with the [Relapse Records] reissues, I was not only amazed by how many people came out and said, "You were a big influence," but also the stature of people—people like ... Okay, so I just had a conversation with Richard Christy, who played on the Death albums, and he was like, "Oh my God, I was a huge fan of you and Atheist," and I was like, "Come on, this guy—this guy is amazing!" And that blows you away, you know? We never set out and expected that. And like



BAKER AND CARSON

Kelly said, you can't pay any greater compliment to a painter or a sculptor or musician than saying that their stuff is still relevant more than a decade after it's been done.

Shaefer: Think about something you'd say when you were five years old. And then someone comes up to you, years later and says, "Man ... that stuff you said when you were five? It changed my life, man." We hear all these little stories from people and how they discovered the band. We were definitely the bastard metal band back in the day; we didn't get much accolade. There were a few [industry and record label] people that were hip to what we were doing.

Flynn: Industry people always loved what we were doing. Magazines, people who were producing bands always gave us really high praise. Other bands were just going, "What the hell're you doing?" They were just confused.

To further pat you guys on the back, I've been working on some of Roger's stuff and it's still incredibly hard.

Flynn: [laughs] Tony is still working on those!

Thank you guys so much for your time; it's been beyond an honor.

Flynn: Our pleasure, man.

Shaefer: No problem!

Choy: You're very welcome.

The show is every bit as amazing as a fan could've hoped. They open with the tranquil picking of "Unquestionable Presence" and then straight into the raw riffing of "On They Slay." Every instrument except the drums, unfortunately, manages to fail mid-song at a few different points, and there's mistake here or there in the mid-set songs like "Retribution," but the band soldiers on—these are musicians who have faced much greater hardships. The worst was the loss of Roger, to whom Kelly dedicated the classic, frantic-yet-groovy "Mother Man" to the loudly cheering audience. When the bass interlude is reached, Choy launches into a freeform bass solo as Shaefer, Flynn, Baker and Carson retreat offstage. Flynn then returns to his drum throne to engage in a little call and response with Tony, after which the entire band returns to end the show with "And the Psychic Saw" and bring out an encore of the cornerstone "Piece of Time." Thirteen years after they called it quits, Atheist's technicality is still unbridled, unequalled, relevant and mindblowing.

Check in with Atheist at www.officialatheist.com. ■

DISPOSABLE MUSIC REVIEWS

Architect of Entanglement *Grand Unified Theory Through Entanglement*

At a Loss

This three-piece metal fusion group demonstrates good musicianship all around, except for the vocals which aren't so hot. Their material has atmosphere and regularly eases into smooth jazz sections which sound like a blend of The Weather Channel ("and now, your local on the eights") and the break in "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." These parts in turn give way to metal sections with some occasionally interesting riffs and progressions. They mix a few metal styles here and there, with some parts having an affirmatively death metal sound, but the instrumental interludes prevail throughout and are overall more interesting. The production is clear and mild-mannered. But ultimately it's the muffled, low death metal vocals that really cause the vibe to suffer. (by Lenny)

www.myspace.com/architectofentanglement

Black Cobra *Bestial*

At a Loss

The elephantine, tubular, down-tuned tuba of a tube-amp guitar sound coupled with

middy, throaty yells and big sludge rock drums smack of such forces of nature as Kylesa, 16, and High on Fire—in fact, this rumbling two-piece sounds like a pure concentration of those bands into one long, thick, cord-like unit. I won't lie to you: Black Cobra has my fine specimen of Alabama black snake twitching in appreciation. Too boo coup, my ass! (by Lenny)

www.atalossrecordings.com

Bleeding Kansas *Dead Under Décor*

Abacus

The three-piece known as Bleeding Kansas has a gnarley groove on *Dead Under Décor*, and it sounds like whatever it is that's going on in Kansas is getting their goat. The boys are a sweaty, crust on the strings, skins in need of changing kind of band. There's some pummeling going on with this record. The thick, aggro grooves that sometimes loop over each other dominate the record, but the band goes other places too: they back off the distortion and add some texture here and there. *Dead Under Décor* doesn't get old for one second. Highly recommended.

www.abacusrecordings.com

Bring Me the Horizon *This is What the Edge of Your Seat Was Made For*

Visible Noise/Earache

I didn't realize Earache was in the metalcore game until now. That's what Bring Me the Horizon plays, unfortunately. *D.U.* traditionally trashes the genre and any band that plays it without mercy, and Bring Me the Horizon will be no exception. But let's take a few moments and attempt to examine the band's EP with as little bias as we can, which is what we're supposed to be doing in the review section.

First, let's go through the checklist to make sure that we're talking about a metalcore record: Emo lyrics—check (verbatim from the lyric sheet: "you're a traitor to my heart your a traitor to us fucking all"). Chugga-chugga palm-muting and "DEEE" breakdown riffs—check. Black hair with bangs/black shirts/metal shirts/lip piercings—check.

Next, the songs: standard metalcore, with as many breakdowns packed into the songs as the band feels is possible, it seems, with a few rudimentary metal guitar licks thrown in here and there. Due to this, the songs sound thrown together without much of any flow. The vocals are yelled and screamed all the way through this four-song release, except for some brief low-volume spoken lines. The production and performance are a little rough around the edges, giving the band a bit of a raw sound. The group sounds competent enough at playing this type of music.

Now to a closer look at the lyrical theme: Bring Me the Horizon's message, as far as I can tell, is a) live life for today, enjoy life while you still can, and don't plan for the future ("it's not worth it"); and b) don't have any regrets and don't set yourself up for having regrets in the future. There's a lyric wherein the singer, as he explains in the liner notes, is trying to convince himself that it was okay to cheat on his girlfriend, while pointing out that "hey, shit happens." Then, verbatim in the liner notes, the band advises to live the best years of your lives: "roadtrips, making music, fucking girls, whatever. just go do it." So a bunch of dolled-up boys in a horrible band are offering juvenile life lessons exclusively to other boys. Interesting. Sad and pathetic, but interesting.

Chthonic Seediq Bale

Downport Music

Seidiq Bale is a proficiently executed, decently produced "commercial black metal" release from Taiwan with a strong Dimmu influence and the occasional metalcore riff thrown in for good (?) measure. The synths are heavily pronounced, competing with the guitars and erhu (a Chinese violin-like instrument), making for a somewhat muddled mix. Lyrically, they focus on "ancient" Taiwanese culture, which is an interesting twist on typical black metal fare. While ostensibly a somewhat distinct release given the "exotic" nature of the band's origins and themes, ultimately Chthonic offers nothing remarkably new here musically, although the songwriting is adequate and there's plenty of adept musicianship apparent. *Seidiq Bale* should be of interest to those into latter-day Dimmu and other commercially inclined faux-black metal. (by Mason)

www.downportmusic.com

Conquest of Steel *May Your Blade Never Dull*

No Face

Seeing as we're a right jaded lot here—and you know this!—I trust you fine readers will take me at my unimpeachable word that this mini-album from NWOBHM-style band Conquest of Steel is spectacularly boring—a dish best served to only a retard. Excuse me, I meant to say mentally challenged retard. (by Lenny)

www.nofacerecords.co.uk

Conquest of Steel *Hammer & Fist*

No Face

This UK group's newer record is significantly better than the mini-album reviewed above.

For starters, it's better played, has improved production, and the songs are way better. There's lots of twin guitar leads and the melodic vocals mostly work, yet in the quiet sections cannot escape sounding remarkably like Spinal Tap contemplating the mysteries of Stonehenge. The lyrics about fighting for metal and such make my jaw slacken in stupefaction—"all for the glory, all for the whores, all for the king of heavy metal." And just who the fuck is the king of heavy metal, exactly? King Diamond or King Fowley? What with all the veneration of kings, kingdoms, and edged weapons going on, I can only imagine these backward-looking gents as serfs afflicted by scurvy, huddled together in a leaky thatch-roofed hut with a manure floor, passing the time with fantasies of glories that never were, and singing "Sweet Home Lower Uncton" in eager anticipation of their daily beating from the local magistrate. (by Lenny)

www.nofacerecords.co.uk

The Communion *Nihilism is for Lovers*

Another shot to your dome. The grindcore has an Autopsy influence in places, and an Eyehategod influence moreso, especially since the guitars sound like they're out of tune. That and the static-ish distortion just adds fuel to the Communion fire, though. On top of that the old school powerviolence has rubbed off on the boys from NYC as well. They're yelling and screaming their heads off and don't care whether they can be heard, because they're just going to keep playing anyway in their incredibly manic, teeth-bared fashion.

www.myspace.com/thecomunion

Disappearer 2007 album

Trash Art!

Disappearer is heavy and majestic ambient rock music. This Massachusetts trio play instrumentals exclusively, a phenomenon seemingly more and more common these days. The songs are long and sprawling, enveloping and rolling. While they offer sounds that are quite common to the style, if you like to do drugs and get spaced out on music this is nevertheless a perfectly acceptable train to ride. (by Lenny)

www.trashartrecords.com

Disarray *Edge of My Demise*

Inner Void

Disarray's fifth album finds the band sticking to a somewhat dated sounding groove-thrash vibe. To their credit, they don't seem to take themselves all that seriously: *Edge of My Demise* invites you to shut your brain off, and enjoy (well, if you're into this sort of thing) Disarray's straight-forward, no-frills metal. The sludgy, midpaced groovy thrash riffs are punctuated by some nice (if too brief) guitar solos, and while the production (courtesy of a Pro-Pain member) is a bit muddy, *Edge of My Demise* is ultimately a solid addition to Disarray's discography. A word of advice to the band—I would strongly suggest a change of logo (seriously, it looks like something a 12-year-old might have come up with), as well as developing a more consistent and sophisticated aesthetic; the artwork on Disarray CDs tend to look pretty cheap, and in no way reflect the quality of the band's material. (by Mason)

www.disarrayonline.com

Fight Amp *Hungry for Nothing*

Translation Loss

The images the songs invoke are of a dark hallway with many turns down its length, empty beer bottles, scraps of paper, and dirt on its floor, few and far between yellowed light bulbs flickering on and off. You have to have your arms out to catch the walls to steady yourself.

Fight Amp throws a lot into each song, mostly mid-paced chops, crunches, and beat downs, but they upshift into their version of D-beat territory on "Lungs" and an Unsane-esque stomp on "Get High and Fuck" (an homage to the Dwarves, perhaps?). But they only stay with these ideas for a while—they keep shifting the riffs and beats to keep your equilibrium off a little. And on top of all this, there's a multimedia component—some suitably raw as shit live footage edited to have a raw as shit music video feel.

www.translationloss.com

Fleshgore *May God Strike Me Dead*

This Dark Reign/Devil Doll

Produced by the band, *May God Strike Me Dead* is the third album from Ukraine's Fleshgore. It's hard to say what the band's message is, as there's no lyrics included, but there seems to be some populist views, with the "we stay united" slogan in the booklet and with the cover art that features images of social problems such as war, the church, and the U.S. dollar.

Musically, it's new-school death metal that gives new meaning to lead guitar wanking. And unfortunately, the band has some goregrind influence in the vocals. It's hard not to laugh at the piglets squealing. On the other hand, as soon as you press PLAY you're hit with a full-bore death metal blast beat riff, which is one of the ways to start a good death metal record. Also, the clean guitar and vocal on "Passion" that Fleshgore had the balls to include is bound to raise some eyebrows—also the mark of a good death metal record.

www.thisdarkreign.com

Funeral Crashers *La Fin Absolue du Monde*



THE COMMUNION PHOTO BY E.T.

One likes a band that grabs one's attention on the first song. Funeral Crashers have a rather sizeable Killing Joke influence, which in this reviewer's book means they are awarded Gold Stars. There's a bit of Joy Division as well. They have a punk swagger to them in that they are biting off a little more than they can chew in the musical performance department and they go for it anyway. The problem with Funeral Crashers is the vocalist is in the main a one-trick pony. Whether it's a rocker with distorted bass or a moody number with a flanged clean guitar, this guy approaches the song the same way. But despite that, *La Fin Absolue du Monde* comes recommended with a clear conscience.

www.funeralcrashers.com

God Fires Man *A Billion Balconies Facing the Sun*

in de goot

One can hear a Smashing Pumpkins influence on this song, a My Bloody Valentine streak on that song, and there must be other influences that escape this reviewer on *A Billion Balconies Facing the Sun*. As a whole, it's a rock record and it's not bad. There's some good energy, mostly coming from the drummer, on songs such as "Dark," but that doesn't permeate the whole album. The weakness of God Fires Man, however, is in the vocals. Some of the songs need a kick to spark more interest and the vocals don't deliver that, and in several cases the lyrics don't provide any meat either. Often there's enough stand-alone lyric for one verse and one bridge and one chorus, and the rest of the time the lyrics simply repeat those. Maybe God Fires Man will deliver material that will make listeners stand up and take notice on the next album.

www.indegoot.com

Graf Orlock *Destination Time Tomorrow*

Level Plane/Vendetta

Possibly even more fun than the first album, *Destination Time Tomorrow* is further entrenched in so-called cinema grind scene, and features some packaging that has to be seen to be believed. The lyrics are whole chunks of dialogue from various action and sci-fi films, and there's movie samples aplenty, even in the middle of the songs. And there's some nutty material too: lots of schizo arrangements, guitar/bass acrobatics, fast drums, aggression in the vocals, which are varied, and clean but seething production. The guys have a good sense of humor, but kick ass at the same time.

www.level-plane.com/www.vendettarecords.de

Honey for Christ *The Darkest Pinnacle of Light*

Rundown

Honey for Christ is a varied metal band from Ireland. Their singer has character, delivering both articulate clean melodies and harmonies and rougher-edged verses with some urgency. The production sounds a bit amateurish and the drum mix is somewhat weak. Some of it loses me, especially when they seem to feel they are being profound but are actually sounding quite melodramatic. (And as I listened to the disc, these aforementioned parts—typically choruses—kept creeping up with disturbing frequency.) No lyrics were provided; I wonder if they are some kind of Christian group? The singer has definitely got a Franz Ferdinand thing going on with a lot of these vocalizations. Hmmm. It's like: let's write one good fast and heavy song and put it first, and then play a ton of sensitive melodic crap with no hooks. Again, hmmm. **(by Lenny)**

www.rundownrecords.co.uk

Hulda *Always Haunted*

Hulda Worldwide Recordings

Between the ambiguous band name and non-descript CD cover, I was unsure as to what to expect from Hulda. While the bio offers comparisons to Evanescence and Lacuna Coil, aside from having a female vocalist Hulda otherwise bears no resemblance whatsoever to either band. With abundant keyboards and Siouxsie Sioux-esque low-register vocals, Hulda's sound is more akin to a rather bland bar band's approximation of a dramatic and poppy '80s goth style similar to Ghost Dance or late Xmal Deutschland. Oddly, the retro-goth vibe seems entirely accidental; on Hulda's MySpace page, they namecheck Foo Fighters and Journey as influences. They'd be well-served to bust out the kohl and PVC and embrace the '80s goth angle, be it accidental or not, and work on further developing that aspect of their sound, which they're fairly adept at. Otherwise, given their rather dated (if occasionally intriguing) sound, I suspect that Hulda may have a difficult time finding an audience outside of their local club scene. **(by Mason)**

www.myspace.com/hulda

Human Incineration *Aggression in the Face of Apathy*

Dissected Angel

The thing about these young dudes from Ohio is that they really want to do this rock and roll thing. They're still wet behind the ears, but they're taking the steps that bands take: become hungry for shows, do a demo, do another one, look for a label, say fuck it and put out an album themselves. And this album has plenty of music on it. The songs are chunky death metal with socially conscious lyrics, which is cool, and have a lot of crunch, but they're also repetitive and mostly mid-paced without a lot of changes. They're also way too long. A listener can get the point of each song a lot quicker than Human Incineration thinks it takes to deliver it. So one has to be honest and say one isn't a fan of the album. *D.U.* will, however, keep an eye on these guys to see where they take their band. Better things musically will hopefully be on the horizon.

www.myspace.com/dissectedangelrecords

Incantation *Onward to Golgotha*

Relapse

It was 1992, when men were men and death metal was death metal. Incantation vomited the *Onward to Golgotha* album, and around 15 years later, here it is again with a DVD containing three live shows from back then and a beefed-up booklet. The CD alone is worth it, it being one of the scariest death metal albums to ever come out. It truly is essential, and it also has some darn catchy (in the death metal sense) riffs too. Revisit this album to hear how it's supposed to be done. Relapse isn't charging any more than a CD price for this reissue, so get 'em while they're hot!

Killgasm *Goat Grind*

Christian Annihilation Productions

It's kind of a bad thing to admit but the lyrics to this CD-R are so OTT that they bring some laughs out loud. There are five studio tracks and three live ones—the Misfits cover has to be heard. The playing and production are raw and at the seat of their pants, just the way Venom intended it to be. Killgasm is trying to be as obnoxious and extreme as it possibly can, which is a laudable aspiration, and deserving of just as much praise is that the band members don't take themselves too seriously. That's a welcome breath of fresh air in a black/death scene full of stale griminess and tired depravity. Killgasm plays underground music for the common man (and woman, one assumes, despite what the lyrics will lead one to believe), not just for some dudes around a campfire in a frostbitten wood somewhere.

www.killgasm.tk

Man of the Hour *Destroy the Machines of Slaughter*

No Face

While the music—being the guitars, bass, and drums—is top-notch, the vocals are one

of two areas where Man of the Hour falls short of being strong on all fronts. The musicians in this band know their traditional metal and these Scots do a solid job of belting it out. There's double bass and chirped harmonics all over this record, as well as a few southern metal riffs and even some clean guitars here and there. The problem is where the vocals come in, serving up overblown melodies with way too many high-end Rob Halford screams that can't be taken seriously because of the delivery. The subject matter of wizards, droids, trolls, and wolves is fine enough, but the way the vocalist sings the lyrics, and the way the band presents itself in the album sleeve, makes it hard to believe that Man of the Hour holds heavy metal as an art form. The record and packaging has a smelly air about them, suggesting that heavy metal is something absurd, that the music the band writes is propelling some sort of inside joke at the same time that they're playing it. That makes *Destroy the Machines of Slaughter* incredibly annoying and not worthy of support.

www.nofacerecords.co.uk

Mathias *Mathias*

No Face

It's not easy to figure out what to say here, which is a good thing. The album reminds one in a way of bands like Dead On, as the focus is on trying to craft solid songs and an album as a whole that doesn't push too far in any particular direction. Not too fast, not too aggressive, not too heavy, not too slow, not too unusual—none of that. It's a very middle-of-the-road album, although there is some very mild sort of prog rock melody here and there. It's basically UK heavy metal that makes for easy listening hard rock, so to speak. That is, it's catchy and easy to get into. Instead of lyrics there's liner notes about the recording of the album.

www.mathiasnet.co.uk

Mystic Prophecy *Satanic Curses*

Locomotive

Despite lyrics and an overall presentation that couldn't possibly be more painfully cliché—seriously, Mystic Prophecy should have their bullet belts and Helloween albums confiscated for calling an album *Satanic Curses* in 2008—this fifth album from the German power metal band (and the first without Firewind guitarist Gus G) provides heavier fare than its predecessors, eschewing Euro pomp-metal tendencies for a more stripped-down, straight-forward approach. Most importantly, the riffs and melodies are solid and offered in abundance. While a couple of songs drag on a bit lifelessly, the album's relatively few uninspired moments are redeemed by tracks like the terrific Sinner-esque “Demon's Blood” and the awesome chorus of “Damnation.” Thick guitar tone, solid drumming, and vocalist Roberto's voice shines here, falling in range somewhere between Matt Sinner and Bruce Dickinson. A solid and worthwhile—if not necessarily essential—power metal release. **(by Mason)**

www.locomotivemusic.com

Nyia/Antigama split CD

Selfmadegod

Nyia from Poland has delivered one song that's cut into three sections. The vocals and some of the riffs sound like Godflesh has rubbed off on them, say from the *Selfless* era. If you let the song start pushing you around you might start moaning along with the singer. Interesting stuff.

Antigama from Poland has delivered six numbers, two of which are a soundscape thing, as Antigama has been doing for several records. You know Antigama—nothing too different from the last album here: choppy riffs, odd time signatures on the drums, blasting. Good stuff as usual!

www.selfmadegodrecords.com

Place of Skulls *The Black is Never Far*

Exile on Mainstream

Legendary Pentagram alum Victor Griffin is back with another absolutely killer slab of melodic doom. Armed with a plethora of crushing riffs, blues-rock guitar solos and the odd psychedelic flourish, *The Black is Never Far* places itself as contender for best metal (or hell, best hard rock album) of the year. Aside from an amazing metal pedigree, what puts Place of Skulls among the doom metal elite is an attention to quality songcrafting. Far from content with sticking with by-the-numbers Sabbath mimicry, Griffin seems to effortlessly juxtapose genuinely heavy riffs with thoughtful, dramatic passages and Trower-esque guitar soloing, all while incorporating strong vocal melodies and amazing guitar textures throughout. While any fan of Pentagram, The Obsessed, or The Hidden Hand already knows well to pick this one up, *The Black is Never Far* is definitely worth checking out for any fan of great, timeless hard rock or classic metal. **(by Mason)**

www.manstreamrecords.de

Sahg *II*

Regain

Although Norway isn't exactly known for its doom metal exports, Sahg defy expectations with an exceptional second album of traditional doom. Thankfully, although heaps of Sabbath influence are all over this disc (the riff from “Hole in the Sky” is not too subtly “adopted” in “Echoes Through the Sky”), they set themselves apart from the hordes of Sab disciples with great songwriting, guitar riffs that are frequently more thoughtful than your typical played-out Iommi worship, consistently well-done guitar solos (even displaying a few nice Schenker-esque touches here and there), and Sahg's vocalist is more Tony Martin than Ozzy—which, in this case, is definitely a compliment. For fellow fans of Solstice's *Lamentations*, early Revelation, and traditional doom done well. **(by Mason)**

www.regainrecords.com

Spiritual Beggars 1994 album

Regain

Don't let the year fool you—this is a reissue of the Swedes' first album (recorded at Tits & Ass Studios, no less) with four bonus tracks. This is pre-keyboards Spiritual Beggars, mind you, so it's way before the eventual keyboardist started playing in Opeh full-time. And yes, the '70s heavy rock band, wah pedals 'n' all, has the main man of Arch Enemy on lead. The surprising thing is a blues-based retro-rock band, complete with psychedelic cover art, didn't bore this reviewer to tears. Indeed, the self-titled album went from start to finish without a premature eject. It's even got good lyrics. Recommended for those into this kind of material and fans of the band that want to hear material from over 10 years ago. www.regainrecords.com

Thousandswilldie 2007 EP

Dyingfaith

Incredibly compressed songs spurt out of the stereo. Before you know it, the record is over and starts back at track 1, but you let it go—you want to hear it again. Thousandswilldie sounds really pissed, but that's only half of the story. The lyrics to these nine songs will confirm what they sound like. Holy mackerel. There's some good imagery in the words, and also a large helping of hate. If you like your grind manic and short, and your lyrics venomous and violent, check out Thousandswilldie. www.myspace.com/thousandswilldiegrind

Transistor Transistor Ruined Lives

Level-Plane

There's lots of bands doing the City of Caterpillar/pg.99 thing. You can hear a little of that with these guys. Hell, they did a split 7" with the ex-99 band Mannequin. But they go beyond that, and not without rocking pretty hard. This record does a lot more than rocking in a dirty way also, when they turn off the distortion and allow some clean

vocals to come in. Dynamics can be a good thing. *Ruined Lives* packs a serious punch, none the least due to the bass tone. The lyrics are bleak, which is really cool: "Do you know what it takes to fail this hard?" and so on. Yeah!

www.level-plane.com

Within Chaos Virulent

Koch

Texans Within Chaos drop an oppressive slab of 21st century American mosh-loving metal that can trace its roots to bands like Pantera and, well, mostly just Pantera. *Virulent*, their debut for corporate-backed Koch Records, holds it down with an unstoppable barrage of Triple Rectifier-backed staccato chunk riffs accompanied by that sublime confluence of double bass fills and half-time cymbal crashes that has all those music-loving, blood-lusting Marines whipping your pitiful asses in the pit. An obvious criticism is that the songs use the same pacing and sound too similar to others on the disc—so much so that on more than a few occasions I had to check to determine if it was the same song playing or if a new track had started. But only suckbags care about stupid shit like that. These guys are heavy and brutal and that's what counts. (by Lenny)

Zombie Hate Brigade 2008 album

Get Up and Kill

Like any self-respecting death metal band that cut its teeth on horror flicks, Zombie Hate Brigade has a sample before every song. And what songs they are. I feel as though I'm fighting with the undead for elbow room in the Wayback machine on a trip back to the early '90s death metal scene. They've grown up on a combination of George A. Romero and *Onward to Golgotha*, and know to take this stuff with a grain of salt. Take a minute and check into these guys.

www.myspace.com/zombiehatebrigade ■

DISPOSABLE LOCAL REVIEWS

A grouping of the local bands (from Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, DC) for this issue

Cannabis Corpse Blunted at Birth

Forcefield

The best thing about Cannabis Corpse is, well, it's hard to say what the best thing about Cannabis Corpse is. There's so many aspects to choose from. As any Cannibal fan worth his or her salt will notice, the title of the record is a play on words, and so is every song title here. The music is solid, no bullshit, recorded on an 8 track death metal. As for the lyrics, they've very cleverly combined lyrics involving graves, blood, and disfigurement with massive consumption of marijuana (sometimes forcibly). Absolutely brilliant. Reading them produced out loud laughs.

Forcefield, 2905 Park Ave #2, Richmond VA 23221

Fetid Zombie Pleasures of the Scalpel

Death metal fans should recognize the artwork that's all over this CD packaged in a thick 7" booklet. Mark Riddick's pen has graced tons of album covers and t-shirts. Now he has turned his talents to goregrind, playing all the instruments himself except for a few guest solos. The lyrics are sort of Autopsy influenced, meaning there's a sense of humor to the bloody carnage and sexual depravity described. The drum machine has a great tone to it, as do the guitars, and the vocals employ different effects so it's not the same shit the whole time. A fine effort and a nice package.

www.myspace.com/fetidzombie



DARK FUNERAL is a ripping black metal band from Sweden. Regain Records has been so kind as to reissue three of their old-school CDs and has released a DVD too. Let's look at each one of these, shall we?

First, we have *The Secrets of the Black Arts*, the remixed/remastered debut album from these motherfuckers. Dark Funeral apparently isn't interested in any wimpy bullshit that other black metal bands are into, like "keyboards" or "female vocals" or "melody" or "dynamic." They just want to play blast beats for Satan, and they do that quite a lot. Some of the lyrics are, one would guess, standard for this kind of music, but at the same time some of them do tell an interesting, unnerving story, as with "Satans Mayhem." Also, the band has thrown in a bonus disc, a previously unreleased earlier version of the same material as on the regular album.

The next one is the remastered *Vobiscum Satanas*, and can one dare suggest that Dark Funeral is expanding its frostbitten musical horizons just a little bit? Yeah, but only just. There's a few double bass riffs that they allow themselves to briefly slow down to, and maybe there's more Slayer beats as well. But mostly it's blasts, infernal screams, speed picking guitars, and lyrics about burning in eternal hellfire with Satan.

Under the Flood The Witness

Koch

These Virginians are playing in the same generic, entertainingly bland rock format in which many radio bands are playing. The names of such bands, the ones where the guitars and drums are mixed to sound heavy but actually aren't, are unknown as they all sound the same and it's not easy to tell one from the other. (One could say the same thing about grindcore, but at least the songs are short and hopefully packed full of energy and hatred.) All of the songs on *The Witness* have the same tone, sound to have the same tempo, and deviate from the same formula only once, where there is a piano/strings number with vocals, but even the vocals have a similar angle there. Fans of the radio-friendly pseudo-heavy rock format will dig Under the Flood, but unfortunately, *D.U.* cannot recommend bands that are a dime a dozen.

Usuario 2008 demo

There's a bit of At the Drive In in Usuario's music, which is cool. There's also passion and energy, complimented by a raw production. Both guitars do their part to build the songs, and the vocals have variation. So do the songs: one is boisterous while another holds back. The one place where Usuario gets poor marks is in the packaging. It's just a CD-R with the song titles written on the face of the disc, housed in a paper sleeve originally used as a CD giveaway at Burger King. They did go to the trouble of putting together a cover, but that's just been hastily glued on to the sleeve. Thumbs down on the presentation, thumbs up on the music.

www.myspace.com/usuario ■

There's four bonus tracks of a savage live performance too.

Thirdly is *Diabolis Interium*, again remastered, and the boys have gone even farther, going so far as to have a slow song. Catchiness in the riffs, like with "Hail Murder" and many other songs, something the band tried to avoid previously, has been embraced on *Diabolis Interium*. At some point many extreme bands realize that contrast makes the heavy, fast bits that much more brutal. There's nothing "Christian" or "good" about a catchy riff, Dark Funeral has realized, which makes this album so much better. This release has a bonus disc too, packed with four covers.

As for the two-disc DVD, *Attera Orbis Terrarum Part 1*, there's three full shows (from '05 and '06 and from three different European countries), a video for "Atrum Regina" (from a later album), and fan-shot footage. As we were saying earlier, the singer has great black metal-style screams and, less frequently, growls, but in between songs, he says things like "Thank you very much" and "It's nice to be back" and "The next song goes out to all the ladies. It's called 'Goddess of Sodomy,'" in a normal speaking voice. That's pretty cool. The pro-shot shows are great quality so you get to see how these dudes play up-close. You'll learn, for example, that they use B.C. Rich guitars (because they're obviously totally evil).

Go to www.regainrecords.com and order all of this stuff. It's *totally* worth it! ■

If you didn't see your release reviewed in this issue, it's because a) I didn't want to review it, or b) it didn't make it this issue and will

(hopefully) appear next time. Thank you for your patience. Disposable Underground by Richard Johnson unless otherwise noted, in 2008.

Contributors this issue: Asa Eisenhardt, Lenny Likas, Mason.

—Richard, editor

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PMB #570, 21010 South Bank St, Sterling VA 20165-7227, USA