

HORNS ABLAZE

ROCK AND METAL ZINE FROM APOCALYPSE LATER

REVIEWS

MASTODON

JOE BONAMASSA

SANTANA

MONOLORD

THE DARKNESS

PISSING RAZORS

RUNNING WILD

TOM MORELLO

MASSACRE

COUNT RAVEN

WOLFMOTHER

ROGER TAYLOR

ALBUM OF THE MONTH
AMAROK

#0 - DEC 21

Horns Ablaze is an indie music zine published monthly (hopefully) by Apocalypse Later Press.

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Of course, you can just buy a copy from Amazon instead and that would be appreciated too.

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COVER ART

December's cover art is *Woodland Glen* by Asher B. Durand (c.1850-1855), in the Smithsonian American Art Museum. It's in the public domain.

I welcome submissions, though I can't guarantee that everything submitted will be reviewed.

Please read the following important notes before submitting anything.

I primarily review the good stuff. There's just too much of it out there nowadays to waste any time reviewing the bad stuff. Almost everything that I review is, in my opinion, either good or interesting and, hopefully, both. I believe that it's worth listening to and I recommend it to some degree, if it's your sort of thing. Now, if you're a die hard death metalhead, you might not dig any of the psychedelic rock and vice versa. But maybe you will! Open ears, open minds.

I have zero interest in being a hatchet man critic who slams everything he writes about. I'll only give a bad review if it's in the public interest, such as a major act releasing a disappointing album. Even then, I'll often keep away.

If I do review, I'll still be completely honest and point out the good and the bad in any release.

I'm primarily reviewing new material only. Each month at Apocalypse Later Music, I review releases from the previous two months. Each January, I also try to catch up with any highly regarded albums from the previous year that I didn't get round to at the time. I then bundle my reviews up at the end of the month and publish in zine form on the 15th of the following month.

If you still want to submit, thank you! You can do so in a couple of ways:

1. Digital copy. Please e-mail me a link to where I can download mp3s in 320k.
2. Physical copy. Please e-mail me for an address.

My e-mail address is hal@hornsablaze.com.

Either way, please include any promotional material such as an EPK, high res cover art, band photo, etc.

And, whether you submit or not and whether I liked it or not, all the best with your music! Don't quit!

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Currently scheduled for release in the next couple of months include new albums/EPs from the following:

December - Behemoth; Death Angel; Epica; The Kings of Frog Island; Nashville Pussy; Praying Mantis; Spidergawd; Devin Townsend; Volbeat.

January - Autumn's Child; Battle Beast; Boris; Giant; Jethro Tull; Lawnmower Deth; Magnum; Tony Martin; Skillet; Tokyo Blade; Tygers of Pan Tang; Steve Vai; Wilderun.



INTRODUCTION

Hola folks. Welcome to my zine!

This is issue #0 of *Horns Ablaze*, which means that it isn't everything I want it to be yet (I plan to include interviews as of issue #1). Most of it is a better laid out version of the reviews that I post online at **Apocalypse Later Music**.

Each weekday, I post a review of a new rock album and a new metal album, one likely to be from an up and coming artist or band, maybe a submission or just someone else I've stumbled upon while researching, and the other from someone more established.

I aim to keep each week varied by genre and location, as my goal is to explore everything on the rock and metal spectrum, from old school rock to avant-garde black metal.

The spur for this was my realisation that so many people of my age (I've just entered my second half-century) who listened to rock and metal back in the eighties when I discovered it had a common viewpoint about the new music of today: it all sucks!

And, quite demonstrably, it doesn't. You may not like what's in the charts but much of what we listened to back then wasn't in the charts either. We've always looked beyond what's in the mainstream; why would we stop doing that now? Did we just get tired? That's no excuse.

I've been immersed back into new releases for three years now and I firmly believe that, while there's still a lot of crap out there (Sturgeon's Law stipulates that 90% of everything is crap), there's also more great new music released to eager ears than ever before. The cost of entry is lower with each year that passes, production is better and better all the time and the rock and metal disease has spread across the globe.

So don't give up on music because the charts are full of Korean boy bands and don't give up on music because the mainstream American press tells you that nu metal is still the be all and end all of the wider genre. Dig a little. Take a look at what's being released and listen to it on YouTube to find what you like.

And read reviews and listen to rock shows so that you can find curators who are sharing the good stuff with you. When you find that shares

your tastes, don't lose them. One of mine is in the image below. **Chris Franklin** has a narrower remit than I do, focusing on melodic rock and metal, but he plays amazing stuff and every two hour *Raised on Rock* show is guaranteed to include someone new to me who I adore.

And maybe I can be one of those curators for you. Read this zine and share it (it's licensed as Creative Commons so you can do that legally). If something grabs your attention, check it out and help to keep these artists making more new music by buying what you like.

10Radio 105.3 fm **10Radio 105.3 PRESENTS:**

Chris Franklin's
RAISED ON ROCK!
EVERY OTHER FRIDAY 8.00 -10.00 PM (UK)
10Radio 105.3 FM
THE REAL HOT ROCKER!
ALSO AVAILABLE TO STREAM LIVE: www.10Radio.org
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UPCOMING GIGS

Important Notes

Always check the venue website before committing to a gig!
 Most venues are requiring proof of vaccination or a recent negative test for COVID-19.
 Prices listed may be advance and tickets may cost more at the door.
 Details do change, of course, and I may have inadvertently grabbed bad information to begin with. I don't work for any of these venues and am merely finding what information I can.
 Any gaps mean missing information.

December 2021

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 Wed Crescent Ballroom
<u>Intervals</u>
Thank You Scientist
Cryptodira
Satyr | Phoenix \$18 16+
progressive metal CANADA
progressive rock Montclair, NJ
progressive metal Long Island, NY
progressive metal Atlanta, GA |
| 3 Fri The Marquee
<u>The Iron Maidens</u>
The Jack
Sweet Danger
Dierdre
Doubleblind | Tempe \$27 ALL AGES
hard and heavy Los Angeles, CA
hard rock Tucson, AZ
hard rock Phoenix, AZ
hard rock Phoenix, AZ
hard rock Jerome, AZ |
| 5 Sun Footprint Center
<u>Trans-Siberian Orchestra</u> | Phoenix \$20-\$84
symphonic metal Tampa, FL |
| 7 Tue The Marquee
<u>August Burns Red</u>
Fit for a King
Erra
Like Moths to Flames | Tempe \$27.50 ALL AGES
metalcore Lancaster, PA
metalcore Tyler, TX
progressive metalcore Birmingham, AL
metalcore Columbus, OH |
| 7 Tue The Nile
<u>Exhorder</u>
Take Offense
Extinction AD
Plague Years
Saintbreaker | Mesa \$20-23 ALL AGES
groove metal New Orleans, LA
crossover Chula Vista, CA
crossover Long Island, NY
thrash/death metal Detroit, MI
crossover Mesa, AZ |
| 8 Wed The Marquee
<u>Secondhand Serenade</u> | Tempe \$15.50 ALL AGES
rock Menlo Park, CA |
| 8 Wed The Nile
<u>The Red Jumpsuit Apparatus</u>
Eyes Set to Kill
The Wildfires Projekt
Dead American
Embrace the Sun
Then It Hit Me | Mesa \$20 ALL AGES
alternative Middleburg, FL
post-hardcore Tempe, AZ
alternative CA
rock CA
melodic metalcore Prescott, AZ
popcore AZ |
| 11 Sat The Blooze Bar
<u>Never Reborn</u> | Phoenix
dark metal Tucson, AZ |
| 11 Sat The Rebel Lounge
<u>Echoes in Ashes</u>
Shadow Guilt
Silence the Voice
Lawttery
Vytril | Phoenix \$10 ALL AGES
metalcore Phoenix, AZ
heavy/thrash metal Gilbert, AZ
metalcore Phoenix, AZ
hard and heavy Phoenix, AZ
heavy metal Phoenix, AZ |

- | | |
|---|--|
| 12 Sun The Marquee
<u>Jinjer</u>
Suicide Silence
All Hail the Yeti | Tempe \$32.50 ALL AGES
metalcore UKRAINE
deathcore Riverside, CA
heavy metal Los Angeles, CA |
| 14 Tue The Marquee
<u>Sebastian Bach</u> | Tempe \$30 ALL AGES
heavy metal Los Angeles, CA |
| 16 Thu Arizona Federal Theatre
<u>Allman Family Revival</u> | Phoenix \$38-85+
southern rock |
| 16 Thu The Rebel Lounge
<u>...and You Will Know Us</u>
<u>by the Trail of Dead</u>
Death Valley Girls | Phoenix \$18 21+
alternative Austin, TX
alternative Los Angeles, CA |
| 17 Fri The Marquee
<u>Steel Panther</u> | Tempe \$30
hard and heavy Los Angeles, CA |
| 17 Fri The Nile
<u>Smile on the Sinner</u>
<u>Condemned Till Dawn</u>
Apocalypse Pony
The Exiled Martyr
Apex Alpha
Hazen | Mesa \$10 ALL AGES
metalcore Phoenix, AZ
heavy metal Phoenix, AZ
deathcore Phoenix, AZ
melodic death metal Phoenix, AZ
metalcore AZ
alternative metal Gilbert, AZ |
| 18 Sat The Rebel Lounge
<u>Vigil of War</u>
Rival Tides
Murder Me | Phoenix \$13 ALL AGES
rock 'n' roll Los Angeles, CA
rock 'n' roll Phoenix, AZ
rock 'n' roll Phoenix, AZ |
| 19 Sun The Rebel Lounge
<u>Ultraviolet Communication</u>
Blu Joy
Pablo Lovetrain
MoonFuzz | Phoenix \$13 ALL AGES
rock 'n' roll Phoenix, AZ
alternative Mesa, AZ
alternative Phoenix, AZ
psychedelic rock Los Angeles, CA |

January 2022

- | | |
|---|--|
| 11 Tue The Rebel Lounge
<u>The Lonely Ones</u>
Sunflower Dead
Crack Rabbit
CZYK | Phoenix \$15 21+
hard rock
hard and heavy Orange County, CA
alternative Phoenix, AZ
alternative Phoenix, AZ |
| 15 Sat The Marquee
<u>Damage Inc</u> | Tempe \$22 ALL AGES
heavy/thrash metal CA |
| 15 Sat Walter Station Brewery
<u>A Perfect Tool</u>
Up the Irons
Digital Bath | Phoenix \$30
progressive metal San Diego, CA
heavy metal San Diego, CA
alternative San Diego, CA |
| 16 Sun Crescent Ballroom
<u>Y&T</u> | Phoenix \$24-34 21+
hard rock Oakland, CA |
| 19 Wed The Rebel Lounge
<u>Shiner</u> | Phoenix \$15 21+
post-hardcore Kansas City, MO |
| 20 Thu Yucca Tap Room
<u>Gathering of Bones</u>
Arsenic Kitchen
Commiserate
Killing Sunday | Tempe FREE 21+
groove metal Phoenix, AZ
hard rock Phoenix, AZ
alternative Phoenix, AZ
rock Glendale, AZ |
| 21 Fri Footprint Center
<u>Tool</u> | Phoenix \$70-\$145+
progressive metal Los Angeles, CA |

22 Sat Starlite Lounge <u>Never Reborn</u>	Glendale dark metal	Tucson, AZ
25 Tue Crescent Ballroom <u>All Them Witches</u> <u>Blackwater Holylight</u>	Phoenix rock hard rock	\$18 21+ Nashville, TN Portland, OR
30 Sun Arizona Federal Theatre <u>Shinedown</u>	Phoenix alternative/hard rock	\$36-90+ Jacksonville, FL

If you're a band who gigs in the Phoenix area, especially a local one, let me know about your upcoming gigs, especially at venues I'm not already checking, by e-mailing me at hal@hornsablaze.com.

I want to include everything rock and metal that's going on here in the Phoenix metropolitan area, so you don't miss out on shows just because you didn't know they were happening.

I deliberately include every band on the bill, with their genre and their home base. Different countries are highlighted in all capitals.

While the ad below doesn't have much to do with music and almost nothing to do with rock and metal, it does have plenty to do with me, given that it's a science fiction/fantasy convention that I founded and co-run each year here in Phoenix, AZ. Check it out if that's your thing.

↓ The ads in this issue are things I or my friends are involved in.
That'll change as people send in rock/metal ads for me to use.



SEPTEMBER 2-3 2022 TEMPE, AZ

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY CONVENTION



STEVEN BARNES
AUTHOR GUEST OF HONOR
COKOCON 2022



LINDA ADDISON
LOCAL AUTHOR GUEST OF HONOR
COKOCON 2022



S. J. TUCKER
FIK GUEST OF HONOR
COKOCON 2022

LOCATION: DoubleTree by Hilton Phoenix Tempe
2100 S Priest Dr, Tempe, AZ 85282

MEMBERSHIP: Adult (12+): \$40 | Child (7-12): \$20
Kid-in-Tow (<7): FREE
(limit of 2 per adult member)

HOTEL RATES: \$92 per night (single/double)
\$102 (triple) or \$112 (quad)

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COKOCON.ORG

Venues

<i>Ak-Chin Pavilion</i>	2121 N 83rd Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85035 ak-chinpavilion.com/ <i>*formerly Desert Sky Pavilion, Cricket Pavilion</i>
<i>Arizona Federal Theatre</i>	400 W Washington St, Phoenix, AZ 85003 arizonafederaltheatre.com <i>* formerly Dodge Theatre and Comerica Theatre</i>
<i>The Blooze Bar</i>	12014 N 32nd St, Phoenix, AZ 85028 no website
<i>Crescent Ballroom</i>	308 N 2nd Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85003 crescentphx.com
<i>Footprint Center</i>	201 E Jefferson St, Phoenix, AZ 85004 footprintcenter.com <i>* formerly Talking Stick Resort</i>
<i>The Marquee</i>	730 N Mill Ave, Tempe, AZ 85281 marqueetheatreaz.com
<i>Mesa Amphitheatre</i>	263 N Center St, Mesa, AZ 85201 mesaamp.com
<i>Mesa Arts Center</i>	1 E Main St, Mesa, AZ 85201 mesaartscenter.com
<i>The Nile</i>	105 W Main St, Mesa, AZ 85201 theniletheater.com
<i>The Pressroom</i>	441 W Madison St, Phoenix, AZ 85003 thepressroomaz.com
<i>Pub Rock</i>	8005 E Roosevelt St, Scottsdale, AZ 85257 pubrocklive.com
<i>The Rebel Lounge</i>	2303 E Indian School Rd, Phoenix, AZ 85016 therebellounge.com
<i>Starlite Lounge</i>	4346 W Olive Ave, Glendale, AZ 85302 starlitemusiclounge.com
<i>Talking Stick Resort</i>	9800 E Talking Stick Way, Scottsdale, AZ 85256 talkingstickresort.com
<i>The Underground</i>	105 W Main St, Mesa, AZ 85201 niletheater.com
<i>The Van Buren</i>	401 W Van Buren St, Phoenix, AZ 85003 thevanburenphx.com
<i>Walter Station Brewery</i>	4056 E Washington St, Phoenix, AZ 85034 walterstation.beer
<i>Yucca Tap Room</i>	29 W Southern Ave, Tempe, AZ 85282 yuccatap.com

If you're a Phoenix metropolitan area venue and I haven't included you here, please let me know by e-mailing me at hal@hornsablaze.com.

ADS

At this point, ads are FREE if they're about rock and metal.

If you're a band with a new release, a label with a lot of new releases, a radio show, a podcast, a zine, whatever, send me copy and I'll include it in the next issue of *Horns Ablaze*.

Depending on how the zine grows, I may start charting but, for now, send in your full page, half page, quarter page ads in any image format and I'll include you for FREE. Obscurity is the enemy.

ALBUMS OF THE MONTH



AMAROK *Hero*

Poland
Progressive Rock

15 Oct 2021
9/10

I have to say that the first thing to cross my mind when looking at this album was that there's a music application on Linux called Amarok, but I don't have it installed right now. Of course, when a prog rock band calls itself Amarok, that's not because they use the software either but likely because they liked **Mike Oldfield**'s polarising album of that name. I say likely rather than assuming it as a surety as I'm not hearing almost any Oldfield in the music here. I'd state rather than suggest that the primary influence of Amarok is **Pink Floyd**.

And that means that **Michał Wojtas** is a major Floyd fan, because this is emphatically his band. In the early days, it was a duo comprised of him and guitarist **Bartosz Jackowski**, but it became a solo effort with guests helping out here and there. Only in 2021, with five albums behind him, has it expanded to become an actual band, with four musicians now credited as band members. Surely, however, Wojtas remains the driving force behind Amarok, even if it's a band rather than a project now, and he stamps that unmistakable **Dave Gilmour** sound onto the music.

This is calm and subdued prog, but it's commercial and engaging. The vocals are soft and melodic but they carry a weight to them that commands us to pay attention, especially with clever turns of phrase such as "I look to

explain the unknown reality. The world we could foresee is gone." There's substance here and it's decorated not only by a simple but effective guitar but odd sound effects and evocative percussion taking the place of a traditional beat. That beat doesn't show up for a couple of minutes, when the teasing intro becomes a song proper.

Floyd were always great at creating songs that sound so simple and effortless that anyone could have created them, until we realise what's actually going on and how well crafted they have to be. Amarok are clearly aiming at the same elusive magic and they do an excellent job at it. *It's Not the End* starts effortlessly but grows substantially to leave us wanting to listen to the song again immediately rather than move onto *Surreal* and into the album. And *Surreal* does the same thing. And *Hail! Hail! AI*. And...

And really, I could end my review with that and you'll either have already bought *Hero*, knowing that you're going to adore it, or moved on because you know it isn't for you. However, there's a little more that I should mention. Whenever Wojtas brings his guitar into play, he channels not only Gilmour, as obvious a guitar influence as a general musical one, but some **Mark Knopfler** too. Gilmour is still first and foremost, as is especially obvious

in the second half of *The Orb*, with the notes not played just as important as those that are. The ever patient Wojtas never really speeds up, but the Knopfler comes out for me any time he thinks about it, like on the title track.

The other Floyd note to make is that, just as they were sometimes a guitar band and sometimes more of an electronic one, Amarok follow suit. *The Dark Parade* is driven by the electronic side with a dark bass joining the fray and that's not wildly unusual here. Often we'll hear the grooves first with the guitar joining in to develop the sound. *The Dark Parade* actually reminds at points of the *Doctor Who Theme*, not in content but in the way that it moves in waves, albeit rising and falling much more slowly.

And the result of all this means that this is a very easy album to listen to. I'm sure I could leave this on for a week and never get bored, even though it would become background music that would grab my attention back here and there. However, it's also an immersive album to listen to, one that we can fall into and explore. Every aspect is fascinating, whether it's guitar rock or electronic new wave, a guitar solo in an instrumental break, a narrative section from **Marta Wojtas** or just a background flourish at a random point. I've already found myself listening specifically for



guitar and for percussion and for effects. I could see that becoming a rabbit hole.

I honestly don't know how to rate this because I clearly haven't listened to it enough, even after three times through. I know that I really like it and I'll be listening to it more. I'm struggling to pick my favourite tracks because that's all of them or, more accurately, whichever one I'm listening to at any particular time. So this is easily a highly recommended 8/10 but I don't think that's enough. I think this is my first 9/10 after diving back into reviews post-ALIFFF. It will be hard to move onto my second review for the day, because the world seems emptier once this stops playing.

Now, what's going on in Poland that can generate albums of the quality of this one, the **Kruk** earlier this year and the **Fren** in 2020? I've found gems, but what have I missed?



ADLIGA Vobrazy

Belarus
Post-Doom Metal

5 Nov 2021
8/10

I've only reviewed a couple of albums from Belarus before, **Belle Morte** a mere couple of months ago, but here's another one, thanks to their guitarist **Ignat Pomazkov** who kindly sent me a copy. It's an interesting album, one that, quite frankly, I wasn't ready for. I knew that I was into this on the first listen, but it's a post-metal album with a particular focus on doom, which is a combo that I'm sure I've never heard before. Metal Archives lists Adliga as one of only 85 groups who play doom/post-metal around the globe and they're the first one that I've listened to.

What I expect from doom is a slow pace and a heavy sound. I've heard all sorts of guitar tones



and vocal styles within that basic framework, but doom has to be slow and heavy. This album is both in its way, but deceptively so. It never really speeds up, but it doesn't always feel slow. And it's heavy while often seeming to be not particularly heavy. I've had this on repeat for the whole day and it's told me that it's accessible music, even if it isn't remotely mainstream; and that it's not the doom metal that I know and not really the post-metal I know either.

I found myself going through an odd loop. The second song, *Naščadkam*, begins crushingly heavy, with a harsh male voice and an enticing female shout over slow beats and deep guitar. Of course, this is heavy stuff! How else could we hear this? But if this is heavy stuff, why didn't I feel that way on the opener, *Apošni raz*? So I went back to that and it's suddenly heavy too, especially late on and if not remotely as heavy as *Naščadkam*, but only because I'm thinking of it from that perspective. It feels odd.

What I ended up realising is that this cycles through three different genres and these three don't always mix. Sometimes it's doom metal and only doom metal, like that first minute of *Naščadkam* which verges on death/doom and the sections of that song that revisit that approach. It's brutally heavy stuff, with a recognisable clean doom metal guitar. **Katja Sidelova's** shouts are extreme but never seem to have come from hardcore. She endows them with real emotion and we can't escape the power. I usually hate shouted vocals but I

simply adore these, especially in a conversation with the harsh male vocal of **Uladzimir Burylau**.

Sometimes it's post-metal and only post-metal, as perhaps best depicted in *Paparać Kvietka*. Sure, it's still slow and dark but I wouldn't call this doom in the slightest. It's experimental, with a vocal that begins with spoken word and gradually escalates as the song runs on, and with instrumental backing to match. My thoughts here were of bands like the **Swans** and others that I think of with a label like alternative slapped on them, albeit not the sort of alternative that gets played on radio stations across America.

And, sometimes it's both post-metal and doom metal at the same time, but not too often. What I think caught me out is that I tried to imagine what the two genres would sound like combined and this rarely does that. Instead, the band weave back and forth between post- and doom without us really acknowledging when that happens. That makes the album feel something like a magic trick but a really enjoyable one.

It also makes it hard to choose a favourite song because so much of the album plays not as a set of individual tracks but as a single piece of music, something new and enticing that we haven't heard before. I'm impressed by the band's sound and how heavy it gets while staying so clean. Maybe I'd plump for *Naščadkam* and *Žyvy*, because they effortlessly combine all three of those approaches.

The band here are always interesting and I'd

happily listen to this in entirely instrumental form. It never falls into the background because, even though there are points where the guitars are just playing riffs, there's always development going on, whichever song I'm on building and becoming and evolving. And that goes for whichever instrument you want to focus your ears onto.

However, I have to call out the vocals as a real highlight. Sidelova's voice is versatile, shifting from a clean and melodic style to those emphatic shouts, without ever losing power. Burylau's voice is a supporting one, not used remotely as much, but he has a warm growl that fits alongside whatever Sidelova is doing at the time. I found myself eventually pressing stop after my ninth or tenth time through the album just so I could wander over to YouTube and see Żywy being performed.

Now, what else is going on musically in Belarus?

Amarok are from Warsaw, Poland and are:

Michał Wojtas: vocals, backing vocals, electric and acoustic guitars, synthesizers, upright piano, harmonium, theremin, electric drum beats, gong (7), cello, flute, sampling

Marta Wojtas: voice (1,6), backing vocals (3,4,7), gong, frame drum, djembe, percussion

Kornel Popławski: bass (1,2,4-6), violin (1,3,4), backing vocals (1), additional synth (3,6)

Konrad Zieliński: drums (1-6)

They can be found at:

<https://amarokmusic.bandcamp.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/amarokofficial>

https://www.instagram.com/amarok_music/

<http://www.amarok.pl/>

<http://www.progarchives.com/artist.asp?id=2064>

https://twitter.com/Amarok_project

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJFD4Ki0xwdOyzYzKShMYIA>

Adliga are from Minsk, Belarus and are:

Ignat Pomazkov: guitar

Uladzimir Burylau: guitar & vocals

Katja Sidelova: vocals

Roman Petrashkevich: bass

Artem Voronko: drums

Guests on this album:

Igor Kovalev: vocal (2)

They can be found at:

<https://adliga.bandcamp.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/adligaband>

<https://www.instagram.com/adligaband>

<https://twitter.com/Adligaband>

<https://vk.com/adligaband>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB1ISHSOW6z8Pc3qkR8rI5Q>

The latest book from Apocalypse Later Press is

↓ *The Awesomely Awful '80s, Part 2* by me, a
look at my '80s guilty pleasure movies.

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THE AWESOMELY AWFUL '80s PART 2
Hal C.F. Astell

THE AWESOMELY AWFUL '80s PART 2
Hal C.F. Astell
APOCALYPSE LATER

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED



SEKLUMPAN ORANG GILA *Second Voyage*

Malaysia
Alternative

25 Sep 2021
8/10

This may be titled *Second Voyage* but it looks like it's Seklumpunan Orang Gila's third voyage at a full album length, after 2014's *Bahtera* and 2018's *Dermaga*. Before all those was a 2013 EP called *Civilization is on Trial*. And I was fascinated to hear what it sounded like because I haven't heard a Malaysian alternative band before, my experience here at Apocalypse Later limited thus far to a melodic death metal band called **Mothflesh**.

Their brand of alternative is an interesting one because it's surprisingly varied from the outset, a very contemporary and trendy American approach mixing it up with traditional ethnic music. For instance, the album starts with what we can only see as an intro, even though it must be a song of its own, a solo female voice performing in an overtly south east Asian style that I can only assume is Malaysian. That voice belongs to **Shafa'atussara** and it's delightful.

But then we leap into the album proper with the title track, which features as western a guest as **Tim Lambesis**, the much troubled lead singer of San Diego metalcore legends **As I Lay Dying**. He's appropriate here, because this is an up tempo song, with Lambesis's shouty voice combining with the snarly one of a band member and another that's not just clean but

sweetly clean. That makes this quite the synthesis of styles, especially when you factor in whatever ethnic instrumentation is happening in the background. I'm not a big metalcore fan but I really like this.

Sailors of Sorrow follows suit in a stripped down fashion, losing the guest vocals and cutting down on the ethnic material without losing it entirely. The quiet section close to halfway suggests that it's really keyboards but it sounds like wind instruments. Whatever it is, it's a fascinating contrast to the edgy guitars, overt bass and lively drums, just as the clean pop voice contrasts neatly with the snarly hardcore one. There are times when this ventures into post-rock but it's primarily still alternative rock, often metalcore without much metal, if that makes sense. *Memories* does more of this.

But then the band switch sound entirely. *Tugu Ugut* feels like a dance song with the electronica on mute, but with that overt bass almost duetting with the vocals. It gets a lot edgier, almost finding its way into experimental punk, but never really speeds up. The fastest it reaches is a woah woah chorus. Like most songs here, it's just shy of four minutes, but it veers from dance to post-rock via pop and hardcore punk. It's a fascinating mix and the band keep varying the balance between the edgy and the traditional as the album progresses.

One of my favourite songs is *Pelukan Angkasa*, which introduces a clean female voice to that mix. I came back to this one after listening to the whole album the first time to see just how much it gets into its, you guessed it, just short of four minutes. It starts out as ethnopop, the keyboards aiming for a chiming gamelan sound. It erupts almost palpably into a heavier chorus. The female voice, of famous Malaysian singer **Shila Amzah**, is a welcome addition and the two combine explosively and grow with the song too. There are strings to underpin the emotions. It gets traditional as it finds itself only a minute from the end but then builds back up. It's a heck of a ride.

It's fair to say that not everything in this

sound is up my alley, but my ears are always open to new syntheses of sounds and the end result here is fascinating to me. By the time *Radicalism* towards the end of the album shifted into new genres a few times in a short period of time, I even started to think of **Mr. Bungle** as a comparison. No, they're not that adventurous, but they are definitely adventurous and I haven't seen Kuala Lumpur as a hotbed of that sort of thing. The closing songs, *Senja Yang Tua* and *We are Stronger Than Before*, sound like different bands, but they're not out of place next to each other.

Sometimes, styles that I'm not particularly fond of can work really well as counterpoints and that is how the shouty hardcore voice plays here for me. I don't like celery either and wouldn't eat it as a snack but it can work in the right soup. The shouty voices and boy band vocals work in this wildly diverse soup, as do the strings in *Senja Yang Tua*, the wind instruments in *Second Voyage* and the fundamentally traditional vocals on the intro, *Warkah Dari Rumah*. It's quite the album and I'll be adjusting to it for quite a while. Which I like.



DUST MOUNTAIN *Hymns for Wilderness*

Finland
Psychedelic Folk Rock

22 Oct 2021
8/10

I've been listening to this album on and off all day and it keeps on captivating me. It would be easy to just dismiss it as old hippie music, as we've been rather conditioned by pop culture

to think that way, but chat with any old record collector and they'll regale you for hours about underrated rock, folk and psych from the late sixties and early seventies, albums that most will never hear but that resonate to the knowing. And this reminds me of those in general and one of them in particular.

I'd be very surprised if the folk behind Dust Mountain haven't heard *Parallelograms*, the album by **Linda Perhacs** that was almost universally ignored on its release in 1970 but which has become an important influence to many, including **Mikael Åkerfeldt** of **Opeth**. It's overt in the opening track, *Harvest Maiden*, and it's overt in *Holy Equinox*, which feels like Perhacs singing for **Hexvessel**.

And, talking of Hexvessel, the last time I mentioned Perhacs at Apocalypse Later was in my review of their wyrd folk masterpiece, *Kindred*, my album of the year for 2020. And, looking at the line-up of Dust Mountain, I see drummer **Jukka Rämänen** of Hexvessel among members of a who's who of bands from the Finnish psychedelic and avant-garde scenes. Organist **Toni Hietamäki** performs for **Oranssi Pazuzu** and the **Waste of Space Orchestra**; guitarist **Pauliina Lindell** hails from **Vuono**; and bassist **Riku Pirttiniemi** is part of **Death Hawks**.

The most obvious presence as we begin is **Henna Hietamäki** of post-rock/dreampop outfit **Cats of Transnistria**. She's an ethereal presence, her soft voice inviting us into all sorts of things we know nothing about and might enjoy but come to regret. Never accept a gift from the Fae, right? She's a dreamweaver of a singer and we tumble headlong into the worlds she conjures up without even thinking twice. She isn't kidding when she sings that we're under her spell. She opened her mouth and that's all it took.

I mention Fae gifts because these songs initially seem sweet and innocent but gradually reveal an acutely dark side. The longer we listen, the darker we realise it all really is. It was there all along in the lyrics, hiding in plain sight, telling of dancing with the devil, of burning down villages and of casting spells over people. It's there in the music as well, if we pay a little more attention, though it becomes unmistakable by the time we get to *Apollo*, the album's eight and a half minute epic.

Before that point, there are jarring moments in some early songs that shake us momentarily

as if we're waking up from a dream, before they shift back into comforting, deceptive beauty. They're warnings, just like the final note in *Village on Fire* to return us to reality from the trance-like state we've just spent the previous five minutes and forty-nine seconds. And then *Apollo*, with its overt and dark chords and, well, we can't be helped at that point. We've already committed ourselves to being willing sacrifices.

There's a lot to digest here in an album hiding behind its bright and cheerful hippie demeanour. It isn't bright and cheerful, or, if it is, it isn't for everyone. There's folk here, of course, with a neatly psychedelic edge, but that's not all that's to be found on these grooves. *Under My Spell* features jazz beats. A number of songs betray the rock and metal roots of many of its musicians. It's never just one of those things either, because it's always mixing things up.

It isn't this year's *Kindred*. I frankly wasn't expecting anything to be that good, while lying in wait like a panther for something that is. It's a damn good album though and it underlines just how we should be paying very close attention to what's coming out of Finland lately, especially what can't be easily confined in a single bucket.



ORPHAN GEARS *Orphan Gears*

UK
Stoner Rock

25 Sep 2021
8/10

I try to mix up the genres I cover each week at Apocalypse Later and I already reviewed one **Black Sabbath** influenced stoner band on Wednesday. However, Orphan Gears take a different Sabbath approach to **Monolord** so I feel comfortable including them both. This is

rock instead of metal and it aims for energy rather than slow heaviness. Sure, there's Sabbath here and **Motörhead** too and even **Budgie**, but I heard **The Almighty** here a great deal, bringing a nineties feel to proceedings.

What's more, I was surprised by the American influences, are inevitable in stoner rock but not the names I expected on this album. Orphan Gears aren't channelling **Kyuss** so much as they're taking notes from **Rage Against the Machine** and the **Red Hot Chili Peppers**, who are most notable in the lead vocals of **Michael C. Stevens**. Check out **Jeremiah Crowe** and **M.A.W.** for prime examples. And, while it's not my area of expertise, there's a punk edge here that doesn't feel British to me.

Initially they find that Sabbath vibe and ramp up the punk attitude, *Bearded Axe* getting things into high gear immediately, where they stay for a few tracks and, for the most part, all the way to the absolutely killer of a closer, *Psychic Super Wizard from Outer Space*. However, there are many points where they mix it up to keep this sound fresh. It's never this band meets that. It's always an original Orphan Gears sound distilled from a dozen different sources in different blends.

Jeremiah Crowe slows down a little and gets funky, though it's never far from bouncing right back into high gear, especially during the chorus which Stevens spits out with attitude. *Walking Papers* gets very bluesy, down to adding a harmonica that doesn't seem at all out of place. **Rich Cornell** is the only guitarist here, so that's him digging into the blues and also into psychedelia on *M.A.W.*, a neatly wailing solo making me wonder why he doesn't do that more often.

I liked all these sounds, though I definitely prefer the more uptempo songs. I have nothing against *Party Hard* or other songs that take more time to get moving, but Orphan Gears really shift when they want to. So much stoner rock gains its heaviness from being slow and it's almost refreshing to hear a stoner rock band remain heavy while simply ripping their way through songs. I'd love to see this band live to see just how much they own the stage. I get the impression that this is not a band you listen to from the comfort of the bar; this is a band to experience right down at the front with all the kids who have more energy than us.

I'm not seeing a negative side at all unless you happen to hate albums that are so consistent that nothing stands out as a killer track. I'd hazard a guess that, if you gave this to ten different stoner rock fans, they may identify eight different favourites. Mine would be that closer but, every time I play the album through again, I think it's going to be something else until I get that far and come back to the same choice every time.

Maybe I could call out the cover art as a negative. Why is there a shiny monolith on the prow of a Star Destroyer? Isn't that crossing fannish boundaries? Yes, I kid, but I have no idea what I'm really looking at or what it has to do with orphan gears. It got me thinking. That's enough, right?

And the question that I can't leave alone is that, without an obvious killer track, how do I rate this album? Usually that means a solid 7/10 but I think this is better than that, so I'm going to go with a highly recommended 8/10. I'm maybe five times through now and I don't feel the need to skip any of the songs. They all maintain their energy and the variety keeps the album fresh. Yeah, 8/10 it is.



TRIPULANTE
Lickan Antay

Chile
Heavy/Power Metal

21 Oct 2021
8/10

I thoroughly enjoyed Tripulante's debut album, *Mensajero del tiempo*, a couple of years ago, but, as good as it was, it felt like a band coming together. They were a new band, that debut appearing only a year into a musical partnership of vocalist **Aymarita Colque** and multi-instrumentalist **Julio Cesar Moya**. I felt that the latter dominated, not through any discrepancy in talent but simply in the

opportunities that the songwriting gave him, but that's emphatically not the case here, with the two finding the balance I hoped they would on this, their second album.

It starts out well with *Sotar Conti*, which is a vibrant and up tempo opener with hidden depths, but I have to say that the album didn't grab me by the balls until *Ckuri*, which wraps the first half and sets us up for the second, which just keeps getting better and better. The early tracks are all good ones and none of them let the album down but, however many times I listen through *Lickan Antay*, I leave it convinced that the second half exceeds the first.

The better balance between vocals and music is one obvious change, but it's not the only one. For a start, I believe *Mensajero del tiempo* is sung in Chilean Spanish, but this isn't, though I'm unsure as to which language or languages it is sung in. Google isn't much of a help here, but I'm assuming that Colque sings in at least Kunsá and Quechua, because *Heutur* translates to *Rise* in the former and *Amawta* is a skilful or wise leader in the latter.

As for the album title, the Lickan Antay are an indigenous people of the Atacama desert, who are found in northern Chile and Argentina and into Bolivia, while this album appears to be an attempt to pass on knowledge from various Atacaman cultures, which presumably includes theirs. That may be a difficult task when it's done in languages I can't identify, but I applaud this approach and hope to learn more about what's actually going on. The only other word I can identify is *Chakana*, which is the Incan stepped cross.

All this leads to another more surprising change, which is that there seems to my uneducated ears to be less of an ethnic flavour here. It's obviously there on the interlude called *Alikhantu*, with its heavy use of Andean flutes weaving in and out of each speaker. Also, at least one song appears to be, if not an actual cover, an interpretation of an older Chilean song, and that's *Lalktur Cuijai*, an easy one to find on YouTube by **O. E. Galleguillos Colque**, a surname which makes me wonder if the neat melodies on this one were written by a relative of Aymarita Colque.

I presume at least most of the rest is original, because the overt influences here are metal bands like **Iron Maiden** and **Helloween**, not only in the heavy/power metal genre sound

but in the way the guitars develop and the songs build. There's even an epic to wrap up the album in *Gentiles*, a sustained gem even at eleven minutes and change. The first half of it is great but then it steps up even further as the keyboards swirl six minutes in, out of which emerges an excellent riff to start the escalation of the second half.

It's definitely one of my favourite tracks here, but there are others. *Ckuri* isn't the first song here to highlight just how well Colque can sustain notes, but it's impossible to miss how she doesn't just hold notes for extended periods but does interesting things with where those notes go. Each time I listen through the album, *Ckuri* stands out more and more, as does *Heutur* after it, making them a rock solid heart to *Lickan Antay*.

Oddly, because Tripulante only need help when performing live because there's just no way Moya can play everything there that he does in the studio, these are also the two songs featuring guest vocalists. *Ckuri* has a second powerful female voice in **Cinthia Santibáñez** from Chilean prog metal band **Crisalida**, who I now must check out, and *Heutur* features *Yen Squivel* as the male voice that counters Colque's.

I really dig Colque's vocals throughout this album. As I mentioned last time out, her pitch is lower than we might expect for a female metal singer but she still has quite the range. There are points where I think she's stretching too far upward and then she soars beyond it to highlight how it isn't a problem for her at all. I'm intrigued as to who influenced her the most, because I hear a heck of a lot of **Bruce Dickinson** in her voice, which makes obvious sense, but he's not alone and I can't see who else is in there.

So to rating this. I gave *Mensajero del tiempo* a 7/10 and this is clearly a step up on that excellent album, but some of it is two steps up. I'm seeing it easily as a highly recommended 8/10 and now I have to echo what I said at the end of my review of the debut but even louder: "I really can't wait for the next album! Let's see how they can grow!"



OMIE WISE *Wind and Blue*

Portugal
Progressive Rock

1 Oct 2021
8/10

I've been listening to this album a lot over the past week and it's become a real gem in my mind, a mostly calm and peaceful work that ought to sit wonderfully in the background but somehow isn't ever content to do so and keeps me listening actively. It's a prog rock album from Omie Wise, from Braga in Portugal, their second after 2019's *To Know Thyself*.

It's enjoyable but deceptively light from moment one. It's folksy, it's pastoral and it's free. And if a description like that makes you think of English folk prog, then you're not entirely wrong but the opening song, *Arroyo*, ends up middle Eastern. It's difficult to place the band's influences because they're as much countries and genres as bands and they're woven together. There's definitely lots of English folk here, which is probably most evident at the beginning of *Crown Flash*, an odd track because it's not heavy in the slightest but often feels reminiscent of a **Black Sabbath** interlude.

However, Omie Wise's looks around the globe go much further than the English countryside. The middle

eastern sound is probably most obvious on *The Boy and the Wind*, through the use of vocal wavers but made even more obvious by the djembe. And there's some real energy in this one, so if folksy, pastoral and free makes you think quiet and inoffensive, this will cure you of that idea, if an escalation in *Arroyo* didn't already. This one escalates much earlier and keeps on going for longer. I should mention that the first three songs are all reasonably

long because they're patient.

The Celtic influence is most overt on *Shoals*, a neat instrumental interlude performed mostly by a synthesiser that sounds like flutes. It has a soft, lilting melody that's very Celtic but there's more here that I don't recognise from my travels through world music. I'd already wondered early on if the stringed instrument in *Crown Flash* that sounds like a harpsichord is the braguesa, an acoustic guitar with ten steel strings that's from Omie Wise's home town. Here I wonder what else they're trawling into their sound.

And sometimes, especially as the album runs on, the sounds move away from prog rock. If we keep the folk sound as a common component of prog, then it's *Sow the Wind* that starts the departures as it's really an alternative rock track as much as anything else, a genre that's hinted at earlier in *The Boy and the Wind*. The characteristic way the chorus is delivered is very familiar to me, but I'm unable to place it. I'm thinking more experimental music, maybe **Captain Beefheart**. *Pyre* is the smoothest piece here, with a lot of lounge in the music and exotica in the vocals and a soft saxophone. And the album wraps up in singer/songwriter style with *Aurora*, meaning that the second half is all over the map musically but without ever losing coherency and consistency. That's a neat trick to pull off.

I liked this album on a first listen. It's a very hard album not to like, I think, because it's so smooth and so easy on the ears even when it's doing some surprisingly deep and complex things. However, I didn't expect that it would grow on me the way that it has. I thought it would be a pleasant listen that would pass me by, as I moved on to the next album to review and the next.

However, this isn't planning on leaving me alone any time soon. It's seeping into my soul, even though it's hard to call out any track for special mention or any musician above his peers. Everyone and everything does exactly what's needed at every point. Now I need to listen to that earlier album!



MASTODON *Hushed and Grim*

USA
Progressive Metal

29 Oct 2021
8/10

The new Mastodon, their eighth studio album, was recommended to me by a friend, but it's a hard one to review for a few reasons. One is that it's really long at almost an hour and a half, so it's not easy to step back from it far enough to see the big picture. Like *Godzilla*, it's just too big to fit into the frame and we only see parts of it at any time. However, none of its fifteen (count 'em) tracks is able to stand out from the crowd to say something small enough for us to grasp and, with twisted irony, that means that each song really serves as the album in miniature.

Just in case that sounds negative (and I guess it is, at least in part), I should underline that I had a good time with this album. There's no doubt that this is accomplished stuff, obviously an intricate work but always an accessible one, and I found myself in the moment at every moment. Even at its crazy extended length, I never found myself bored, the closest I came being the occasional wonder at how it was still playing, given that I started it what felt like a few hours ago. However, all those hours were good ones and I was always engaged with whatever riff was playing, whatever change was being wrought, whatever hook was being exploited.

The catch is that, once it's all said and done, I couldn't even hazard a guess at a favourite track, or a favourite hook or a favourite riff or a favourite anything. Everything blurs together into a really long musical journey that I thoroughly enjoyed without being able to tell you much at all about it. I was there and now

I'm here and whatever happened in between was great but it's obscured into a jumble of senses and you kind of have to take that journey yourself.

In fact, that feeling dominates so much that the closest comparison I can give isn't a musical one at all but a train ride. I got exactly the same effect from watching a ten hour Norwegian train ride that took me from somewhere (Trondheim, I think) a long way north into the Arctic Circle. I loved that journey and it spoke to the soul but I can't really tell you anything else about it. There was a lot of snow. Everything was beautiful but moments were more so. It was an experience. That's it. And the same applies here, sans the snow.

And, at this point, I fully realise that I'm on my fifth paragraph and I haven't said anything about the actual music here. I can do that, at least. This is prog rock that's often heavy enough to count as prog metal, continuing Mastodon's development from a sludge metal band, albeit a massively influential one, into something far less limited, more diverse and emphatically more interesting. Much of this sounds modern only because the guitars are frequently heavy, the bass likewise and the drums very active. Yes never did this, we think, and then we realise that *Gobblers of Dregs* is kind of like a **Yes** song that Yes merely didn't write or record. Except when it's like **Tool**.

The more frequent comparisons would be to people like **Dream Theater**, **Opeth** and, at odd crucial points, **Voivod**, none of which should be surprising. I'd say that *Pushing the Tides* is the most overt song to push that Voivod influence to the foreground, but I'm sure that there are a whole bunch of other nineties influences in there too that I don't know as well. The other song with an element that stands out, even if the song doesn't, is *Dagger*, because there's instrumentation on that one that goes beyond the usual and the brass or strings that show up occasionally. I had to look this up and found that it's a sarangi, an Indian stringed instrument played with a bow.

And so I find myself in the odd situation of wanting to recommend an album, which is clearly good stuff, without being able to really explain why. There are no singles here, though I did try to listen to songs in isolation and they sound good, albeit with a loneliness that comes

from the separation from the other hour plus of music on this album. It really does work best as one long slab of prog rock/metal but don't just set aside an hour and a half because you can't just listen to this once. It grows with repeat listens as we sink into the music. You need a day, at least, and realistically that still won't be enough. I need to listen to this a lot more yet.



COMPASSIONIZER *An Ambassador in Bonds*

Russia
Progressive Rock

1 Oct 2021
8/10

I didn't find progressive rock until 1984, when Tommy Vance's *Friday Rock Show* sprang it on me at the same time as every other form of rock metal from **Steely Dan** to **Venom**, but I was never in any doubt that it was a game-changer a decade earlier. I imagined people who had grown up knowing exactly what music was (whatever they grew up listening to) hearing it for the first time and being shocked into wondering what was happening. In the eighties, however, it was just prog rock, as we had come to terms with what it was, put boundaries around it and labelled it.

I mention that because this second album from Compassionizer, a musical project built around the keyboardist **Ivan Rozmainsky**, feels like it has to be prog rock but maybe isn't, as it ignores just as many traditions as it adheres to. This doesn't sound like **Yes** or **Genesis** or **King Crimson**, if they're what spring to mind when you think of prog rock. Maybe there's some Canterbury here, especially on *The Man That Sitteth Not in the Seat of the Scornful*. Maybe there's some krautrock in here, on *An Ambassador in Bonds (Part 3)*, with what sound like seagulls flying out of the synths. However,

I'd suggest that it doesn't sound like whichever bands you think of in either of those genres either.

So what else could it be? It isn't jazz, either, even though the main instrument is often the clarinet of **Andrey Stefinoff**. Yeah, I said Compassionizer was built around a keyboard player and it is, with those keyboards primarily being synths and also frequently harpsichord, as at the very outset on the intro to *Follow After Meekness*, but this isn't remotely **Vangelis** or **Jean-Michel Jarre**. Maybe there's some Tomita here, not that you'd ever confuse the sounds, as the main reason it isn't jazz is that every piece feels carefully built and every moment is precisely what Rozmainsky wants it to be. He's not just playing with the air to see what happens when he does interesting things to it.

And that makes me wonder if the closest comparison ought to be to contemporary composers, not that this is classical music, even with so much harpsichord and clarinet, but it is very deliberate in its composition. Rozmainsky doesn't seem particularly interested in songs with hooks, far beyond this being entirely instrumental; he's much more interested in riffs and rhythms, as well as more esoteric things like contrasts and layers, making a lot of this play out to me like a folk prog take on **Philip Glass** albums like *Glassworks*. And there are responses. This album often feels as if it's really a conversation between instruments, especially on *An Ambassador in Bonds (Part 1)*.

If musical experimentation for its own sake sounds like an emotionless endeavour, I should point out that this is very emotional music. *Different Sides of Ascension*, as the title suggests, plays in a lot of different tones that elicit very different emotions. It moves from cheerful celebration into darker, more thoughtful tones but reemerges somewhat into the light before it ends. *I am Sitting on the Pier* is wistful. *Hard-Won Humility* is questioning.

Surely the most striking piece here is the title track, which appears in three very different parts. The first is thoughtful and it shifts from gentle to volatile, with the most overt guitarwork on the album. The second is martial and processional, unfolding in bold brass. The third, later on, returns to pensive and adds playful to the mix, before it gets really interesting with the introduction of an array of layers, undulating like an ocean. I should add

that everything here is interesting, so when it gets even more interesting, we ought to pay attention.

If there's a problem here, it's that all these pieces of music feel like they ought to run forever, but they end and usually sooner and less clearly than I wanted them to. It's immersive stuff and I just wasn't ready to climb out of any of it. At least, there's an earlier Compassionizer album for me to check out, 2020's *Caress of Compassion*, and a whole slew of albums by Rozmainsky's main band, a possibly similar chamber prog outfit called **Roz Vitalis**, who have released ten studio albums and nine live ones since their founding in 2001, including a 2007 album called *Compassionizer*. I guess it may be the key to this.



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ALBUM REVIEWS



LE CHANT NOIR *La Société Satanique des Poètes Morts*

Brazil 22 Oct 2021
Avant-Garde Black Metal 7/10

Even though everything here seems to be French, from the very name of the band to the lyrics to all of the songs, Le Chant Noir are actually a Brazilian outfit hailing from Rio de Janeiro. They're fairly listed as avant-garde black metal, making the intro an appropriate affair, with its backward masking over a flavourful carnival organ and accordion. The outro and the final track proper, *Eloa, le bel ange*, play overtly in this vein too, and it's never quite absent at any point. However, the first song, *Le vampire*, kicks off with power

chords so reminiscent of the **Who** that I found myself imagining the opening credits to another *CSI* spin-off show.

This is a really interesting song. Sure, those are are black metal vocals that entice and beckon like an orc carnival barker and we respond. There are some wall of sound moments but mostly the drums are the other black metal component, if we skip past the Satanic lyrical content for a moment, but they're typical black metal drums. When they're fast, they're very fast, but the production has the odd effect of making them sound like the drummer is galloping far beyond his capabilities but very consistently. It's an odd feeling! And they're rarely echoed by any other instrument so, when the drums slow down, we're back with heavy metal power chords, speed drifting slowly away in the rear view mirror. That's what happens at the end of *Le vampire*, which is effectively just drums and voice, one that seems very female to me.

I'm hearing two voices here, though I'm only seeing a gentleman named **Lord Kaiaphas** credited. One feels male and very influenced by **Dani Filth** in its theatrical approach, so that's likely *His Lordship*. It becomes very deep on *Nuit de l'enfer*, though it mostly sits in the standard black metal shriek range. However, the other voice seems female to me and it shows up a lot, often taking the lead. Is this

some sort of admirable versatility or is there a guest here that I don't know about, perhaps even a second lead singer, one just as influenced by **Edith Piaf** as Dani Filth?

Sadly I'm not seeing a lot of information about the band. It was founded in 2016 by Lord Kaiaphas and a couple of others **Malphas** and **Mantus**. The suggestion is that Kaiaphas provides the vocals, Mantus handles lead guitar and bass, while Malphas does everything else: rhythm guitar, keyboards, drums and a varied set of percussion instruments including vibraphone and marimba.

All of them have other bands too. As **DJ Zhyin**, Kaiaphas mostly performs psygressive trance as **Minimal Criminal**, though he's also in a black metal outfit called **Thokkian Vortex** that evolved from just him to a full band. Mantus belongs to what looks like every other black metal band in Brazil, playing an array of instruments under an array of names; the most prolific bands are **Mysteriis** and **Patria**. Malphas is also in Mysteriis, as their drummer, and he's in a few others too, drifting into death and power metal. So they're all experienced and ready to create something new and different within their genre of choice.

There are heavier songs here that come closer to traditional fast black metal, like *Nuit de l'enfer* and *Le baron sanglant*, but they're more interesting when they're mixing it up, as they

do often. There's a gothic edge here that comes into play in slower sections and in the interlude called *Marche infernale*. Often there's an echoey piano or distant guitar that combines with the theatrical approach to create a lush environment that far outstrips the actual depth of instrumentation. This isn't layered densely but it does some of what **Cradle of Filth** do anyway, just more stripped down.

I really like *Les métamorphoses du vampire*, because it starts out gothic, goes full blown black metal and never quite loses that gothic edge, the piano maintaining its stubbornly slow presence, even with the song shifting into hyperspeed. We lose it on occasion but it's always there. That female voice has a spoken return here, almost as an interlude within the song itself, and the drums are fascinating on this one, again sounding very different to what we expect, but in a really good way. *La danse macabre* does many of the same things, without spending as much time at full speed.

I listened to this more than I should have done today, but I keep finding more in it each time I listen to either a particular song or the complete album. I liked it from the outset, but I like it more now than I did that first time through. Now, to the rabbit hole that these musicians suggest I should dive into, with *Mysteriis* surely the first band on that list after the debut *Le Chant Noir* album, *Ars Arcanvm Vodvm*. I like when black metal bands do something different and this band definitely do that, though perhaps not as much as I'd have liked, given how delightful the accordion is when they haul it out. How about a dedicated orcish carnival metal album built around the sound in *Eloa, le bel ange*?



SANTANA *Blessings and Miracles*

USA
Rock

15 Oct 2021
6/10

It's been twenty-two years since *Supernatural*, the rebirth album of Carlos Santana, and this one is a fresh attempt to recapture that magic. And I don't say that as a commentary on anything he's put out of late, just that it's another collaborative album that clearly aims to give the veteran guitarist a set of opportunities to play with diverse musical talents and see what sparks. Some of it sparks very well but, perhaps inevitably, not all of it does and there's no obvious single here in the vein of *Smooth*, not even the **Rob Thomas** track, *Move*, which is decent but, well, not remotely as smooth as *Smooth*.

It starts out surprisingly experimental, with *Ghost of Future Pull* a symphony for what sounds like saw and bicycle bell, but that recognisable guitar tone shows up and grounds it all as the intro moves into *New Light*. Then there's a quintessential **Santana** jam in *Santana Celebration*, which sounds like a Rio carnival with guitar wailing over the top. It's as lively as you might imagine from that, even when the guitar is replaced by keyboards and drums as solo instruments. It's a wild and glorious piece of music.

Rumbalero is kind of a wild and glorious jam too, though it doesn't seem it for a while. This starts out as electronica with an overt Latin feel that doesn't entirely come from the Spanish vocals. The guitar is very recognisable, though, and gradually the carnival spirit takes over as it builds. I liked where this one went, even though it hardly started out on comfortable ground for me. That's the best thing that I can say about this album, by the way. It took me to musical places I wasn't familiar with but found the common ground with what I know that made them accessible and enjoyable.

The guests on *Rumbalero* are Santana's son **Salvador**, who has run his own band for decades and done quite the variety of collaborations himself, and **Asdru Sierra**, the lead vocalist, trumpeter and pianist in the Latin fusion band **Ozomatli**. What Santana does with this song sets the stage for a set of similar approaches to other guests and other genres of music as the album runs on. He tends to let

them lead the way in the style of their choice but chips in with his guitar and grows with the song to create quite a synthesis of sounds.

And these guests are very varied indeed. Some are established names, some of whom have been very famous musicians as long as Santana himself. That's versatile singer and organist **Steve Winwood** on a very odd cover of *Whiter Shade of Pale* that seems unnecessary. That's late jazz pianist **Chick Corea** on *All Together*, with his wife **Gayle Moran Corea** creating a conglomeration of voices in *Angel Choir*. Their presence makes it odd to realise that the oldest sounding song here is *Mother Yes*, with zero guests. I could believe that this was an early seventies Santana song, especially given that his current singer in residence, **Tommy Anthony**, channels **Jimi Hendrix** with his vocals.

A little less established than Winwood and Corea but still massively established are **Diane Warren**, an incredibly successful songwriter and singer for **DeBarge**, on *She's Fire*, and a pair of thrash legends on *America for Sale*: **Kirk Hammett**, the guitarist in **Metallica**, and **Marc Osegueda**, lead singer for **Death Angel**. It's not a thrash metal song at all though, both those guests playing outside their style. I think Hammett simply has a blast trading licks with Santana while Osegueda sounds more punk than metal with his vocal. The result often sounds like heavy **Chili Peppers**.

Given these guests, it might be surprising to find that my favourite songs are *Rumbalero* and *Joy*, the latter featuring a solo country singer called **Chris Stapleton**. I also dug *Peace Power* a lot too, which is a heavy funk song led by **Corey Glover** of **Living Colour** that sounds rather like **Lenny Kravitz** jamming with the **MC5**, not only because of its black power lyrics. Even without thrash metal legends on it, it's heavier than *America for Sale* and more memorable too.

And, as you might imagine from this review, this is something of a patchwork album. When it works, it works really well, even if it that's not on the songs I might be expected to like the most. I'm hardly the world's greatest fan of Latin electronica or modern male country singers, but I really dug *Rumbalero* and *Joy*, with the instrumental *Santana Celebration* even better still. I even like *Break* with Christian soul singer **Ally Brooke** and *She's Fire*, with a hip hop lead vocal by **G-Eazy**.

When it doesn't work, though, it doesn't do much at all. There's almost an hour of music here, with no fewer than thirteen songs between the intro and outro. To be brutally honest, I've forgotten a few of them already even after two listens through the whole album this afternoon. That's not good and it's certainly neither a blessing nor a miracle.

It's a worthy album though, even if that's primarily through opening your ears to sounds you've never heard before. After all, it's a pop, rock, electronica, jazz, funk, alternative, soul, hip hop sort of album and there aren't too many of those out there for obvious reasons. I'm happy that Santana seems set on making quite a few of them. Best of luck to him.



DEATH SS X

Italy
Industrial Metal

29 Oct 2021
6/10

Death SS have been around since 1977, with a couple of breaks, though they haven't crossed my radar often since then. With this tenth album behind me, I'm eager to hear their early work, not that there is much of that. Their debut, *...in Death of Steve Sylvester* (the SS of the title, which does not appear to have any Nazi connection), didn't show up until 1988 and they only managed three more before the year 2000. Given that they split up for four years a decade or so ago, they've clearly been busier in the 21st century than previously.

I heard that they had moved over time from heavy metal to doom metal to industrial metal but, even if that's true, it's not the whole story. This album starts out as traditional heavy metal, reminding me of **Mercyful Fate** but with **Alice Cooper** at the mike rather than the falsetto of **King Diamond**. It's hard not to see

this as "horror music" too, the organ and effects at the outset of *Zora* guaranteeing that if the chanting monks in *The Black Plague* didn't trigger that thinking a song earlier. The industrial side manifests in *Under Satan's Sun*, effectively so without ever taking over.

Just as I wouldn't call this an industrial metal album, even though there's industrial in it, there's one other influence I kept hearing that doesn't take over and that's gothic rock. This is not a gothic rock album either, but there's often a driving anthemic groove that reminds me of gothic rock, especially the **Sisters of Mercy**. It's here on *The Temple of the Rain* and *The World is Doomed* but it's most overt on *The Rebel God*, which nails its groove so well that it's impossible to ignore it once it gets going. It's initially just a good song but, by the time it gets past its first chorus, it's the sort of good song that'll have you looking up from the bar and suddenly finding yourself on the dancefloor.

So far into their career, I have a feeling that Death SS wrote this with all their different styles in mind, but the shifts can be a little jarring. It's not so bad in the first half, as we move from heavy metal into overt horror rock, then though the gothic industrial drive back to the most emphatically heavy metal song, *Ride the Dragon*. After that point, it's a bit more awkward.

Suspiria (*Queen of the Dead*) is clearly horror rock, with characterful bookends—a harpsichord and an accordion at one end and more accordion, female voice and violin at the other—but it's slower, much slower, and more textured. It's notably gothic, drenched in velvet and fog, and it feels like the texture is the point, far more than the music itself. It's less a song and more a backing track to whatever **Steve Sylvester** will be doing on stage at the time. *Heretics* continues that and, like *Suspiria*, it sounds great but doesn't stay with me past the end of the album, unlike *The Rebel God* and *The Temple of the Rain*, which carry on playing in my head.

The World is Doomed hearkens back to those two, but with a little less effect. It's a lesser version but still a step up at this point of the album. And then we return to the most obvious Alice Cooper number on offer, which is *Lucifer*. It doesn't take any stretch of the imagination to picture the godfather of the genre covering it and making it his own. And so this ends

decently enough but in a way that I struggle to see as anything but a doomed attempt to bring the album back to its early levels. The first half is a 7/10 for sure but the second half is more like a 5/10, so I'll split the difference and give this a 6/10.



MONOLORD Your Time to Shine

Sweden
Stoner/Doom Metal

29 Oct 2021
6/10

Those Swedish purveyors of ultra-heavy doom metal are back with another new album, their fifth in only seven years and it doesn't really surprise if you've heard them before. This one starts out bludgeoning in near monotone for a minute or so before shifting into such a quintessential **Black Sabbath** riff that I was humming it on my first time through, even if I was going with the original of *A National Acrobat* rather than this take on it called *The Weary*.

I should add here that, while Sabbath are never far away from any reviewer's lips when taking on a modern stoner/doom album, it's often a cheap reference that can usually be better served with another band Not here. Monolord are trying to channel early Sabbath in so many ways that it's impossible not to bring them up first and foremost. A cynic would suggest that there are only two bands in their sound: Black Sabbath and Monolord.

On *The Weary*, their nod to Sabbath is mostly in the riffs and an occasional Ozzy shout. On *To Each Their Own*, it's in the mellow sections, because this band is not only a brutally heavy riff machine. However, I couldn't find my way into either of these songs, which mostly do what they do and move on, and that's not a great thing when they constitute about a third

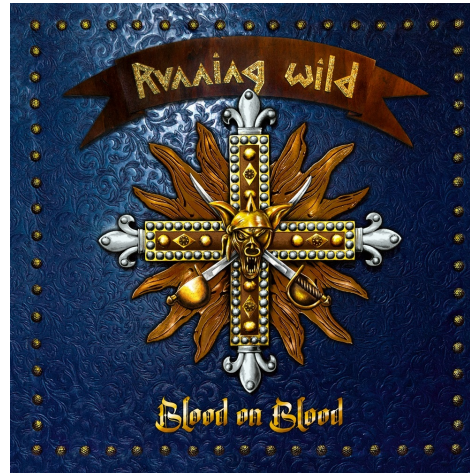
of the album.

I do find that my take on Monolord tends to be pretty negative on a first listen only to shift slowly into positive with each further listen. I have to say that *To Each Their Own* has grown on me a little but I'm still not a big fan and *The Weary* just seems derivative to me. It was on *I'll Be Damned* that the album started to grab me. It has a bit more oomph from the outset and it feels more like they mean it, whatever it is that they mean beyond simply heaviness. I really like the riff halfway which is acutely simple but very effective.

Surely the best song on offer here is the title track, which begins beautifully. Of course, it's heavy and it's slow but it's dripping with melancholy and the minimalism is glorious. I can't remember a bass fill that simple but effective since **Joy Division**. It's a ten minute piece, the longest here, but it grows well. Its extended finalé is the mellowness that played a part in *To Each Their Own* and *I'll Be Damned* at its most effective.

In fact, it's so effectively mellow that the arrival of *The Siren of Yersinia* is something of a

shock. It kicks off as fast and urgent as this album gets, though it doesn't stay there. For a song that starts so emphatically, I found myself drifting away from it a lot and that pushes the downside to well over half the album. There's good stuff here, on this track once it gets into its second half, and notably on the title track, but the album as a whole isn't grabbing me with time the way that I've come to expect from Monolord. I definitely liked *No Comfort* more.



RUNNING WILD ***Blood on Blood***

Germany
Heavy/Power Metal

29 Oct 2021
7/10

Running Wild are one of those perennial European bands that are so easy to dismiss because they've been around longer than dirt and they play every festival and they may be the definition of "reliable" and, yeah, they were pirate metal before the guys in **Alestorm** knew how to stand up on their own two feet and isn't that genre over yet? But then you throw on another album and listen to them again for the first time in a while and remember just how damn good a band they are.

They were formed back in 1976 as **Granite Hearts**, changing their name to Running Wild, after the **Judas Priest** song, three years later. **Rolf Kasperek** has led the band since the very beginning and has been the sole founding member since 1984. He's still there, singing and playing guitar, though he did disband for a couple of years in 2009. The line-up has been stable since 2015 and this is their seventeenth



studio album, their first since 2016's *Rapid Foray*.

And it's refreshingly good. The lyrics to the opening title track may be cheesy, with their "One for all and all for one" mentality but it's an upbeat and catchy number to get us going and it doesn't stop being upbeat and catchy for a long time. It doesn't matter how far into the album you move—a cynic might call the next four tracks interchangeable—you'll pay attention and tap your feet and wonder at how effortlessly the riffs and hooks are. This isn't a tired forty-five year old outfit in the slightest; this is a vibrant forty-five year old band who knows precisely what they're doing and just continues to do it and do it again and do it once more for the back row and...

I have to admit to being a little out of touch with regards to Running Wild. I listened to them quite a bit back in the eighties and nineties but can't remember the most recent album of theirs that I played. I see that their ratings haven't been great since maybe *The Brotherhood* in 2002, but this doesn't feel to me like it deserves a 53%, 54% or 60% rating like their previous four. This is easily a solid 70% all the way to *Crossing the Blades* and then it livens up even more.

Now, I should emphasise that there's nothing here that Running Wild haven't done before many times so you're not going to find anything original here at all. I don't think it counts as ripping off when you're ripping off yourself and bands as great as **AC/DC** have made careers out of that. The songs here are all decent, even if they were never going to be innovative or revolutionary. It's fair to say that Running Wild haven't been innovative or revolutionary since inventing pirate metal in 1987.

I recently reviewed the new **U.D.O.**, *Game Over*, also a seventeenth studio album from a German heavy/power metal band with a constant lead singer, and that was great until it wasn't. Whether it was the fourth track or later that crossed the line into filler territory, U.D.O. got there and they struggled in vain to get back out again. Running Wild does far better here. The first six tracks are easily worthy, with *Say Your Prayers* perhaps the best amongst them.

Maybe the seventh, *One Night, One Day*, lets the side down a bit with its overly anthemic outlook, but it's not filler and it's going to find

an eager audience. *The Shellback* is able to restore things to business as usual, just as anthemic without trying quite so hard. *Wild, Wild Nights* is as cheesy as its title makes it seem, but it isn't filler either. These late songs may make you fistpump or cringe or wonder how you got transported back to the late eighties, but they're not filler, and neither is the ten minute epic that closes out the album, the clumsily titled *The Iron Times (1618-1648)*.

So, nothing here is filler and a lot of it surprisingly strong. However, the lack of originality doesn't help it towards higher ratings and I have to wonder about those most recent four albums with the low scores. If I dive into them, will I find four albums just like this one and it's the fact that they're all the same that's letting people down? Or do they truly deserve those ratings and this is a step up in the band's 45th year? I'm actually interested in finding out and I don't think I was coming in. That has to count for something.



MASSACRE *Resurgence*

USA
Death Metal

29 Oct 2021
7/10

I'd love to read a biography of Massacre because they're an important band who managed to lose their place in the spotlight quickly and very effectively. They formed in Florida as far back as 1984 and soon became one of the founding fathers of the Florida death metal style. Yet, their habit of splitting up on days ending in Y kicked in early, so a strong debut album, *From Beyond*, didn't show up until 1991, after they'd already split up once, and they promptly split up again.

Settle down, kids, because it gets worse. Reforming again, they issued an album so

hated that it's struggling with an average rating of only 8% at Metal Archives. And that's with one 40% spiking it upwards! I checked it out on YouTube and it sounded interesting for about thirty seconds before it descended into dreck, as if death metal pioneers had suddenly turned into an amateur high school **Pantera** clone. They didn't even wait for it to be out to split up that time, they split while recording it, **Kam Lee** even claiming it's not him on vocals, but they kept on reforming and splitting up again like clockwork, even changing name twice, to **Massacre X** and then **Gods of Death**.

And now they're back again, with only their fourth album in thirty-seven years and arguably their third "comeback" album, given titles like *Promise*, *Back from Beyond* and now *Resurgence*. At this point, I'm very wary about diving in but I'm too eager to find out what they sound like nowadays. I liked their debut a lot back in the day and they've fed members to a who's who of extreme bands, from **Death**, **Obituary** and **Six Feet Under** to **Kreator**, **Nasty Savage** and **Whiplash**. So what's Lee up to with his gazillionth line-up of Massacre?

The good news is this that certainly isn't another *Promise*, I promise. It's actually a pretty decent album, once we get past a Hallowe'en music intro and an oddly sedate opener in *Eldritch Prophecy*. *Ruins of R'lyeh* is where it brought back memories of *From Beyond*. The tone is similar and it's nice and heavy, not buried in downtuned bass but with texture. Lee's vocals are deep and gruff but not overdone, working well as an extra instrument in a mix that allows us to follow each instrument if we choose.

Well, mostly. If I'm reading correctly, there are three guitarists in Massacre nowadays, with **Scott Fairfax** on lead, long time Kam Lee collaborator **Rogga Johansson** backing him up and keyboardist **Jonny Pettersson** doing double duty on a third guitar. I remember when **Adrian Smith** returned to **Iron Maiden** but they didn't ditch **Janick Gers**; now having three guitars felt like a solid expansion to their existing dual guitar sound. This doesn't feel as dense but it still feels agreeably meaty.

The bad news is that, while the band do make a serious attempt to vary the death metal formula and keep the album interesting, that was always an uphill struggle, especially when the attempts they make are within the genre.



There's nothing brought in from outside to infuse the genre with originality. Modern production aside, this could have been released back in the genre's heyday. In 1991, this would have been seen as a good indication of what death metal could do but in 2021, it's a day late and a dollar short. The genre has quite simply moved on.

And that sounds more than a little brutal, if that's not an inappropriate pun. Did this album blow me away? No, it didn't. Did it impress me as something new and innovative in a tired genre? That would be a no as well. But did I cringe and laugh at the same time and turn it off after a minute? I didn't. I enjoyed this album throughout, even if mostly as a nostalgic trip into what the genre was and why I appreciated it when it showed up. And hey, was there anything remotely new on the last **Cannibal Corpse** album? No, there wasn't. This doesn't hit as hard, for sure, but I'd argue that it's more interesting and more worthy of your attention if you want that kick of nostalgia.

So, welcome back, Massacre. *Promise* turned out to be a bad promise and you weren't able to stay *Back from Beyond* for long, but this could be a *Resurgence*. But you'll need to stay together more than half an hour this time and a fifth album in a year or two should contain something new that doesn't betray your genre of choice but does add to it. Best of luck.



JOE BONAMASSA *Time Clocks*

USA
Blues Rock

29 Oct 2021
6/10

Joe Bonamassa is rightly known as one of modern America's pre-eminent blues guitarists, even if he's obviously more influenced by the British blues wave of the sixties. On his prior album, *Royal Tea*, he explored that side specifically, recording at Abbey Road and with British guests on board like **Bernie Marsden**. This one, his fifteenth, is less British but he's never going to lose the British sound entirely, even if this starts out with hand held drums and didgeridoo.

In fact, there's a lot here to digest, so much so that there are many points where we forget

this is a blues album. Not for long, mind you, but there's a very telling line in *Notches* to point out: "I've been all the way around the world, there and back a time of two; that road leads me home, brings me back to the blues." This does a lot of wandering around the world, but it always comes back to the blues, rather like a base of operations for Bonamassa's dabblings in prog rock or world music.

Notches certainly seems like an international song, with a British bassist, South African drummer and percussionist and a line of Australian backing singers. Of course, Bonamassa is American and so is **Charlie Starr** of **Blackberry Smoke** who co-wrote it, bringing some southern rock in with him. It's rooted in the blues, of course, but it's more southern rock than blues rock and the midsection gets neatly experimental, Bonamassa's blues guitar floating through its landscape.

Similarly, *Time Clocks* is rooted in the blues but we often forget that. It's soft rock, it's arena rock and it's even country, especially in Bonamassa's guitar, which is often notable for how prominent it isn't. This is a good song that's hard not to like and hard not to sing along with, but it's often an oddly commercial **Pink Floyd** type of song, which isn't what I expected here. What I expected was a song like *The Heart That Never Waits*, the unadventurous blues song that sits between these two more interesting numbers.

And so it goes. There are routine blues songs here and there are more interesting diversions from the genre, always built on the blues but happy to move quite a decent way from it. Frankly, when it plays it safe, it's enjoyable but forgettable. *Mind's Eye* has us close our eyes and rock in our seats, because Bonamassa does this so effortlessly well, but I was forgetting it even as it played, with an earlier song like *Questions and Answers* stuck in my head instead.

Yet, even there, while it's agreeably odd, it's odd in an oddly mainstream way. It feels as if it's a dangerous song rendered safe so it doesn't bite us, strongly reminiscent of **Tom Waits** but with **Mark Ribot's** jagged guitar and Waits's unmistakable roar replaced by smoothed out edges and smoother vocals. It grabs the ear but I'm aching to hear the non-existent original. The same goes for *The Loyal Kind*, with its Celtic whistle and folk melodies. It's a nice enough song, but it ought to be led

by a strong female voice that transports us to the forest rather than soothe us like some citrus lozenge. It does find some balls, but only at points.

And I feel out of place for thinking this. Somehow, I think most of the people buying this are going to be happiest with the songs I like least, the effortless soulful funky blues of *Hanging on a Loser*, *Curtain Call* and *The Heart That Never Waits*. They're going to skip the songs that grabbed me the most, like *Notches*, *Question and Answers* and even the title track. Where they and I will meet is in a shared appreciation of Bonamassa's talents. Where we'll diverge once more is in what we think about how he uses them.

Frankly, I'd like him to shut up and play his guitar, as **Frank Zappa** put it, because his guitar is much more interesting to me than his vocals. And I'd like him to take more of the experimental turns he took here but to take the training wheels off when he does so, because he doesn't need them. It's as if he's feeling his middle age and thinks he's playing to the **Jimmy Buffett** audience. Sure, you'd started out because you heard **Clapton**, Joe, and he's as safe as they get nowadays, but you heard him do *Crossroads* in the sixties and he blistered. Don't you want to blister too?



BETWEEN PLANETS Parallel World

Czech Republic
Post-Rock/Metal

18 Sep 2021
7/10

Here's another submission from the Czech Republic and it's an easy one to fall into because it's an immersive listen. *Between the Planets* is a solo project for multi-instrumentalist **Martin Spacosh Perina**, with a few studio guests here and there and an

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BRUCE DAVIS

Gangsters in space never read so well.

expanded line-up when playing live. This is Perina's third album under the name and, even though it features guest vocals on three tracks, I keep thinking of it as an instrumental album. Part of that is that only one of those three features lyrics; the others use the voice of **Bara Liskova** entirely as an instrument.

The majority of it is Perina doing interesting things with his guitar against a variety of backdrops also conjured up by Perina. None of the instruments in play sound unusual to me, though I should emphasise that keyboards are definitely one of them, sometimes the most prominent one, so this isn't a post-rock album in the strictest sense. *The Twin Paradox* is a fantastic soundscape, one that conjures up comparisons to seventies Krautrock, but I don't think there are any instruments on it except synths, so this is definitely not a band emulating that sound with guitar, bass and drums.

The most obvious way that Krautrock doesn't fit the whole album is that one of the guitar sounds that Perina is fond of is a modern djenty palm muting sound. I've never been much of a djent fan, but that's mostly because I think it's a limited style that works as a form of rhythm but not as the default sound for riffs. It works here, because Perina acknowledges its limitations and uses it as a rhythmic element for the drums to improvise around and a soloing guitar to soar over.

I bring this up specifically because Perina's influences include a lot of djent bands, including the genre's progenitor, **Meshuggah**.

However, while I can hear bands like Meshuggah, **Tesseract** and **Animals as Leaders** in Perina's broader palette, this album doesn't really sound like any of them, making any comparison to them a little misleading. It's more post-rock than it is post-metal, I think.

For instance, the djent sound comes into play on the first track, *Metamorphosis*, but it's not there all the time and there's a lot more going on even when it shows up. It's used on *Time Dilation* as a sort of punctuation to the flow of musical language. By the time we get to the title track and hear the violoncello of **Karel Zdarsky**, we've almost forgotten that there was djent here. It's just one of a number of ingredients in this musical stew and it's noticeable in some bites but not in others.

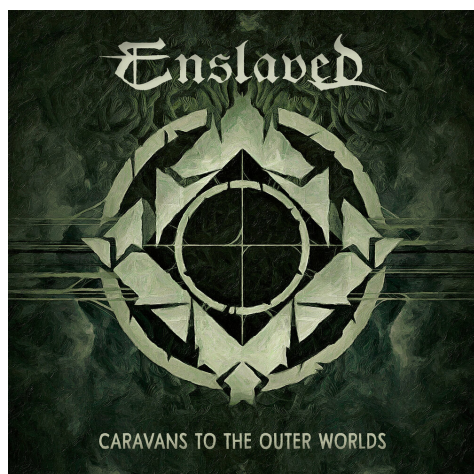
I like the title track a lot, partly because it's so introspective but still enticing and partly because of the sounds that it conjures up. That violoncello is one, plaintive and haunting, but there's what sounds like a muted electronic xylophone too and some interesting drum beats as well. I'd call *The Twin Paradox* my favourite piece of music here, but it's very short at only a couple of minutes and this is a lot more substantial and has more of a growth arc.

The song with lyrics is *Hungry Eyes*, at the very heart of the album, and it stands out because we'd got used to instrumental exploration and words just weren't part of that picture. The guest singer here is **Martin Schuster** from the prog metal band **Mindwork**, who are also in Prague and who also sent me their new release

for review, an EP called *Cortex* back in January. He's versatile here, in a couple of different clean voices and a harsh one, each matched by Perina's music. He also provides a guitar solo and his bandmate **Filip Kittnar** contributed to the drums throughout and is also one member of Perina's live version of *Between the Planets*.

The most obvious other guest is **Sam Vallen** of the Australian alt prog band **Caligula's Horse**, who lends his considerable guitar talents to *Sleepwalking* and *Waves of Consciousness*, shining on the latter with a searing solo. There's a distant voice behind the music on this one that I presume is a sample, but it's deep enough that I can't understand it; it just adds to the progressive nature of the material. The one downside to the album is the use of static early in this song and also on the closer, *Distortion of Reality*. I presume this is there to add texture, but I wasn't fond of it at all. Fortunately, it's a rare and minor intrusion.

It's good to hear more music from Prague, especially music that connects to music I've reviewed at *Apocalypse Later* before but sounds very different. Thanks, Martin!



ENSLAVED *Caravans to the Outer Worlds*

Norway 1 Oct 2021
Progressive Black/Viking Metal 7/10

Enslaved have been busy of late. It's only been a year since their fifteenth studio album, *Utgard*, a strong album that made my highly recommended list for 2020, but they've knocked out four, count 'em, four live albums since then, albeit in limited editions (300 copies each and 1,000 more in a box set), and now there's a new EP to boot. And, while 'm still listing it as a progressive black/Viking metal release, as I did *Utgard*, that's really not the

case, because they've moved a long way from those roots. Really, they play progressive metal nowadays.

It's a short EP, running just over eighteen minutes, and two of the four tracks on offer are shorn of vocals, a pair of Intermezzos to break up the vocal tracks, but without a closing vocal number to be the final bookend. Each track is interesting, but the opening title track is the highlight without an argument from anyone listening, I don't think. There's a lot going on in this song, which is an epic even at only six and a half minutes long. It feels like a ten minute plus piece, not because it drags but because so much happens in it and all of it is comfortable and patient and unrushed.

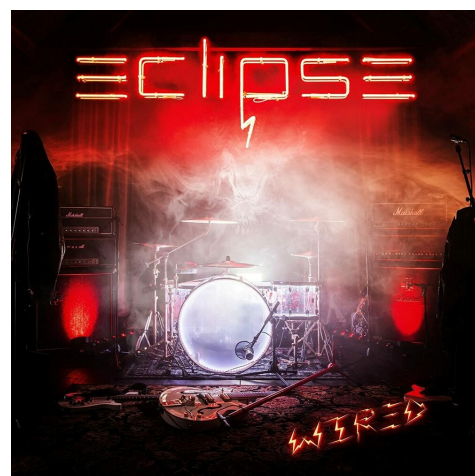
It begins and ends with swirling mist, out of which emerges the prowling bass of **Grutle Kjellson**, a harbinger of doom countered by the keyboards that grow around it. The guitars are a frantic and penetrating force, almost experimental, but the groove the song finds is more akin to **Hawkwind** than anyone else, incessant and driving. The vocals are initially harsh, raspy and determined, but a second clean voice takes over for the chorus and we have a conversation. This journey evolves; I imagined that these Vikings started out on a ship in rushing water, but ended up traversing space on their journey to the Outer Worlds. Whatever it's telling us, it's magnetic.

The other song proper is *Ruun II: The Epitaph*, presumably a sequel to the title track of their ninth album, the award-winning *Ruun*, from 2006. It's a little shorter but just as patient and deceptive in how much it achieves. It's a quieter piece too, one that starts out progressive but ventures firmly into gothic territory as it grows. It's hypnotic in its repetitive opening, but there are hints behind the droning keyboards and ritual hand drums that only grow when the vocals show up. Again, the Hawkwind influence shows up, with pulsing determination, but there's **Bauhaus** here too.

The instrumental tracks are less interesting but they're still worthy. They both find agreeably odd vibes, but neither feels like a complete entity, but I'm not yet sure whether they ought to be part of a much bigger, more ambitious piece or whether they should be split up further into a bundle of short interludes, especially the first of them,

Intermezzo I: Lonnlig. Gudlig., which could easily be broken up into two pieces or expanded into something more substantial. I'm not convinced that it accompanies either the title track before it or *Ruun II* after it, so it becomes a question that won't ever find its answer.

And so this is very much an assortment of Enslaved music to dip into rather than the coherent four track EP it may be trying to be. Everything's worthy and some of it is excellent but everything also works best in isolation from everything else. Maybe it's a teaser for a forthcoming album, when it might make more sense. In the meantime, it's more enjoyable stuff from an endlessly fascinating band still growing and evolving thirty years into their existence.



ECLIPSE *Wired*

Sweden
Melodic/Hard Rock

8 Oct 2021
7/10

Two things leapt quickly to mind during the early tracks of this album, which is *Eclipse's* eighth in a couple of decades. Firstly, this is energetic stuff for melodic rock. I'd call it hard rock that isn't far off heavy metal much of the time and gets there on a few occasions. There's energy oozing out of its very pores and in quantities that far exceed most of the undeniably metal albums I've listened to lately. And secondly, holy crap, these are astoundingly clichéd lyrics!

It kicks off with *Roses on Your Grave* and the familiar refrain of "only the good die young". Then it moves into *Dying Breed* and the old "born to lose but always live to win" chestnut. *Saturday Night (Hallelujah)* highlights that "nobody's getting out of this world alive" and "we'll sleep when we're dead". And the next

song is called *Run for Cover*... is there an original word anywhere to be found on this album? I caught myself almost unwilling to continue because I was cringing too much.

I have to point out that Eclipse are Swedes but they sing in English and I have little idea what their fluency levels are. Lead singer **Erik Mårtensson** certainly seems to be totally fluent and he did on the **W.E.T.** album that was my Album of the Month in February. The E in that supergroup's name is for Eclipse, with the W being **Robert Säll** from **Work of Art** and the T **Jeff Scott Soto** of **Talisman**. I also have to point out that I absolutely continued because this is such dynamic stuff that I couldn't bear to stop, however clichéd the lyrics became. Yes, the line before "run for cover" in the chorus of that song is "you'd better run" and the one after is "run, run for your life". How did you guess?

The energy levels simply can't stay this vibrant throughout or we'd be worn out. *Carved in Stone* is an acoustic ballad to slow things down substantially. It's just as clichéd, starting with "If the stars refuse to shine", but it's a soft ballad that doesn't piss me off, even with overblown choral backing vocals, and that's quite the achievement nowadays. It pumps up somewhat for its finale too and it cuts off wonderfully at the end. *Poison Inside My Heart* plays with soft guitar too, without being a ballad.

And so we go. The first five songs tell me that this is a tight band just aching to play and their vim and vigour is contagious. Sure, it's a 2/10 lyrically, if not an absolute bottom of the barrel 1/10, but it's infectious musically and it's impossible not to move. I think I have a broken toe so it's not good for me to tap with abandon and dance in my office chair but I couldn't stop. Eclipse should rename to the Pied Pipers because it really doesn't matter what they do, we follow them anyway. *Deep in the Twilight*, they even wrap up with Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* and it somehow seems like the most natural thing in the world.

Mostly this is exactly what you can expect from checking out any random song on YouTube, but it's not without its surprises. The soft guitar on *Poison inside My Heart* is folk rather than rock, with a Celtic flavour that showed up earlier on *Run for Cover*. That flavour returns on *Things We Love*, an indicator that,

while Mårtensson doesn't sound remotely like **Phil Lynott**, whoever writes songs in this band has been listening to a lot of **Thin Lizzy** and maybe some more poppy contemporary Irish acts. There's also some LA hair metal here, especially on *Bite the Bullet*, the heaviest song on offer, even though it plays with surf rock in the middle.

Oddly, the other influence I kept hearing was **Bryan Adams** because, while this is certainly heavier and far more guitar-focused, the hooks in songs like *Twilight* and *Things We Love* are reminiscent of Adams's more energetic early songs like *Cuts Like a Knife*, *Run to You* or even *Summer of '69*. It may explain why this sounds so fundamentally commercial, given that it's often heavier and more driving than anything we're likely to hear on mainstream American radio.

So yeah, this definitely continues in the vein it started off in, with enough energy to keep you up all night, hooks so powerful you can't stop humming them and melodies that will haunt you. But it rots the brain if you listen to the words. It's not as good as the **W.E.T.** album from earlier this year, but I might well have gone for an 8/10 if it wasn't for those lyrics. I have to drop a point and ought to drop a couple. I don't think I could live with myself dropping it to a 6/10 though, so 7/10 it is.



COUNT RAVEN *The Sixth Storm*

[Sweden](#)
[Doom Metal](#)

[29 Oct 2021](#)
[7/10](#)

I remember Count Raven from their debut album in 1990, which was yet another decent entry into the growing catalogue of Swedish doom classics. I don't remember anything after

that, but I seem to have missed three further albums in the nineties as I was drifting away from music, all with **Dan Fondelius** adding lead vocals to his guitar duties after **Christian Linderson** left to join **Saint Vitus**. I see that they split up in 1998 but got back together again in 2003, but they haven't been too active in the studio, this being only their second album in those eighteen years, a dozen on from the last one, *Mammons War* in 2009.

I don't know what they got up to on those four middle albums, but this feels old school to me, very much in the traditional vein with **Ozzy-era Sabbath** obvious throughout. It's downtuned but not so much as to feel extreme. It's heavy, of course, built off predominantly slow riffs that get lively on occasion. The opener, *Blood Pope*, gambols along like a baby mammoth, heavy but also bouncy to the point of being playful, and there's a great escalation halfway through *Oden* that does that in much the same way. And the vocals, still from Fondelius as they've been since 1992, are clean.

And these songs are long. *Blood Pope* starts the album out just shy of nine minutes. *The Nephilims* breaks ten and *Oden* almost reaches twelve. Only one of these nine songs lasts under five and it's an anomalous song that's oddly like a **Phil Collins** solo single with a surprisingly heavy atmosphere of keyboards layered over it. I kept waiting for the moment when the drums would kick in just like *In the Air Tonight*. It works here as an interlude, especially given that the three tracks ahead of it total almost half an hour, which would make an album all on their own for some bands.

I like *Blood Pope*, but my favourite early piece is easily *The Nephilims*. The riff gets under the skin and the vocals are interesting, almost a chant at some points and a narration at others. It's easily the most varied and quirky song on the album and I'd call it out as my favourite period, if not for a few later songs that resonate in other ways. *Baltic Storm* has a memorable chorus. *Oden* is a great epic that ends in a great singalong.

And then there's *The Ending*, which is traditional except for a whistling keyboard line that adds an interesting melody over the riffs. If it isn't my favourite song here, it's certainly my pick for those in search of a gorgeous riff-driven stomper. For those looking for heaviness, then it's *The Giver and the Taker* that

I'd queue up, again mostly because of its riffs. Everything here is rooted in Ozzy-era Sabbath but this one's the closest to that template, on all fronts, especially the vocals.

So, while there's variety here, the biggest problem the album has is that it's very long, at over 73 minutes, and there just isn't enough variety to sustain that sort of length for anyone who isn't an inveterate doom hound. Sure, *Heaven's Door* is something different and *Goodbye* wraps things up with something different again, being a ballad. It could easily be called Count Raven's *Changes* as it really is as different from the norm as the song of that name was for Sabbath. And, like that old ballad, it's occasionally clumsy lyrically but it's clearly heartfelt and it's impossible not to feel the grief that was poured into the song.

I'd call this a solid and welcome return for Count Raven, after a dozen years away from the studio. It's good to see them back.



NIDHOEGGR Arise

Switzerland
Folk Metal

29 Oct 2021
7/10

I'm not entirely convinced by Nidhoeggr's approach to folk metal, because the music is as lively as you expect from the genre, if downtuned a little, but the vocals are primarily harsh, which makes for an odd contrast. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, and I did find a charm in songs like *Twilight Zone* moving between folk/death and lively jigs. I'd definitely be down the front at one of their gigs, policing the pit, and getting into the spirit of the gig, especially during the folkier bits, but I also wish that there were more of them, even I got used to the approach and

came to appreciate it.

Certainly, it's those folkier bits that grabbed me here and they start early in *The Journey*, which is the first song proper. The vocal sections are lively, I guess, but they're a lot less lively than any of the instrumental sections in between. Then the band really kick their feet up and we heed the call to dance, even if we can't. And, if that holds through the parts using only traditional instruments, it holds double when they bring in what sound like accordions but may well be the work of synths.

I always look for exotic instrumentation on folk metal albums and I'm not sure there is any here in truth, but it sometimes sounds like there is. *Onwards* kicks off with harpsichord, even if it's really synths, then adds an odd bouncy sound to the background that reminds of dance music. It's quite a neat addition actually, even though I've probably just made it sound like it shouldn't be. I like it in this song and on *Winters Wight* later on. I also like the various other neat additions that show up across the album, but more about that later.

The other thing I liked here a lot was the occasion venture across genre boundaries. Maybe I'd see the harpsichord as a nod towards goth (as with the violin on *Winters Wight*), but *Onwards* isn't a gothic metal song. However, *Scorched Earth* kicks in very much like a psychobilly song and I could totally picture a bearded metalhead's fingers running up and down the strings on his double bass, even if that wasn't happening in truth and the instrumentation was traditional. It sounds unusual but cool and I dig this song a lot.

The most frequent border that Nidhoeggr cross is the one from folk metal into Viking metal. *Rise and Fall* isn't the first shift across that border—it's there from the outset in *The Journey*—but it's surely the most overt. And I think this works very well indeed, because of **Janos Thomann's** harsh vocals. They may not be my preference for a folk metal album but they work really well on a Viking metal album and, when the two genres merge on songs like *Twilight Zone*, it all sounds great. The Viking/death angle does threaten to overwhelm the folk but the folk battles back valiantly and it ends up being perhaps my favourite song here.

And that also means that my favourite three songs are all next to each other on this album,

three very different songs in slots four, five and six. It's a decent album before them and it stays decent after that with those neat additions to each song I mentioned earlier to elevate it, from the organ intro to *Mighty Willow* to the basswork of **Thibault Schmidt** early in *Desolation*, never forgetting little piano touches from **Lorenz Joss** that often go by unnoticed on a first listen but leap out to be noticed on further runs through. However, none of these other songs quite challenges those three as the first half becomes the second. At least not yet. I'm liking this more with each listen so I may not be done with it yet.



ROGER TAYLOR Outsider

UK
Rock

1 Oct 2021
6/10

This may not be the most minimalist cover on any album I've reviewed at Apocalypse Later, but I'd be surprised if it isn't the most pink. I guess that makes it an Outsider and the logical response to that is, "Welcome to the club!" Now, we don't tend to think of Roger Taylor as an outsider, given a highly acknowledged career in music that dates back to three years before I was born (and I'm on my second half century). Most obviously, of course, he was the drummer in **Queen** from before it was even founded, given that it grew out of **Smile**, in which he spent a few years alongside **Brian May** before **Freddie Mercury** joined and renamed it Queen.

Now, Queen were always an eclectic band—arguably the most successful eclectic band of all time, though they might have to hand that crown to **the Beatles**—and this album follows suit, because it veers through a patchwork of different genres and styles. That can be a good

thing, as it was on a variety of Queen albums, especially *Sheer Heart Attack*, but it isn't always and it's eclectic here in many ways because it's half reworkings of older material and half newer songs to add to them.

That's an odd approach but then Taylor isn't really known for his solo albums. This is only his sixth such in over half a century of making music, following *Fun on Earth* eight years ago, and my guess is that he felt the urge to do something during lockdown. There's a song here called *Isolation* that is easy to read as his feelings over the past year. It's actually one of the highlights of the album, a notch or two above quite a lot of it.

I believe it opens with new stuff. *Tides* is new wave pop/rock with an edge of prog. It's enticing and easy to listen to, Taylor's voice as soft as ever. *I Know, I Know, I Know* mixes teasing xylophone with poppy fingersnaps, but settles into a similarly patient pop/rock vibe. There's a lot of **David Bowie** here, as there is on *Absolutely Anything*, but with a side of **Pink Floyd** too. In between those latter two tracks, though, is *More Kicks (Long Day's Journey into Night... Life)*, which is a rocker, starting out with some rocking drums and, well, rocking throughout. It's not a great rocker, really, but it's a rocker and it feels as at home here, given his talents, as it does out of place with what's around it.

Then we get some older songs. *Absolutely Anything* is a reworked version of a song he wrote for a film of the same name in 2015. *Gangsters are Running This World* is a single he put out a couple of years ago, oddly included here in two versions, one heavier than the other (and very cool indeed). These all feature right in the meat of the album, while two others wait for the end: *Foreign Sand*, a new version of a song he released as a single in 1994, and *Journey's End*, a single in 2017. I have to own up here because they're all new to me. I don't think I've heard any solo Taylor since *Fun in Space* way back in the early '80s, though I do remember his other band, **the Cross**, a little later on.

As you might imagine, this doesn't feel particularly coherent as an album, but the songs are good for the most part and it occasionally sparks into great. For me, that's around the middle, with the two takes on *Gangsters* bookending the only track with a

guest, *We're All Just Trying to Get By*, an interesting singer/songwriter sort of number with **KT Tunstall** lending her talents to proceedings. I like *Isolation* after them too, which has moments of experimentation in a song that feels smooth in that Bowie-esque style. And then there's a spirited cover of *The Clapping Song*, a million seller for **Shirley Ellis** in 1965. How it even thinks about fitting here I have no idea, but it's a highlight. I'd be lying if I didn't say I drifted away somewhat after that.

So this is a mixed bag. Fans of solo Taylor will enjoy, as may some fans of Queen but it feels like it's a solo album by a musician not known for his solo music. There's good stuff here but it doesn't gel together particularly well, even if there's a vague arc of aggression that waxes and wanes as the album moves on. The opener and closer, *Tides* and *Journey's End*, are stylistic mirrors that have us coming in calm and leaving that way, with the more interesting, less thoughtful songs in between.



SANTONEGRO Roots

Spain
Stoner Rock

3 Sep 2021
7/10

Here's yet another interesting album from Spain and, beyond its obvious **Black Sabbath** influence, which is pretty much a given for anything touching stoner rock, everything else here seems to be inspired by the nineties to me, even though their previous album, *Flesh & Bones*, states that they play "Stoner Rock con influencias de los 80's". And it is clearly stoner rock instead of stoner metal, even though it's often heavy stuff. *7 Animal* is a lean and mean three minute number that grinds with attitude and anger and almost a **Swans** vibe.

Mostly, the band feel like they're a big cat preparing to pounce. They have a dangerous sound and a versatile one too, one that draws its influences from grunge and punk as much as it does metal, even alt country and southern rock on *Those Memories*, which is hard not to call southern grunge. It's an enticing combination.

Much of that comes from the vocals of **Javier Marco**, which surprised me when they showed up in *Them*, the first track proper. I don't have enough depth in nineties American alternative rock to properly call out all his influences, but I'm hearing an agreeably weird mix of **Chris Cornell**, **Glenn Danzig** and **Eddie Vedder**. As you might imagine from that, he sings in a clean voice but it varies a lot depending on the song and its need for impact. He never gets harsh but there's a hoarseness to his voice that gets emphatic when he shifts to more of a shout.



As much as I like Marco's voice and, as surprising as it was for me, I like his voice over this music, I really love that music. A lot of it's in the guitar of **Juan José Jover**, whether he's building a riff or leaping into psychedelia for another memorable solo. A lot of it's in the very active back end, as I have to point out that **Leandro Del Río's** bass isn't remotely content with providing a bedrock for the band to build on; he's a lead participant from moment one, as prominent on *Into the Valley* as Jover's guitar, both of them enforcing their presence as the album begins. At least I assume that the bass there is Del Río's, as there's a guest bassist on that one too, **Alberto Puga**, who I believe is a former member of the band. Whoever's responsible for it, it sounds great.

I should add that *Into the Valley* is one of two instrumentals here, both of which are magnificent and annoying only in their shortness. It's a glorious intro to the album but it's over a minute and a half later. I wanted it to evolve and grow, whether it stayed instrumental or acquired a vocal track. I'd echo that on *Whispers* too, the other instrumental, which is all about power and dominance in a Danzig fashion. I could see this one featuring in a horror movie and again, I wanted it to last far longer than the two minutes it has.

And I wanted the album to last far longer than it does too. There are only eight tracks here, which include those two short instrumentals, with a combined running time that's a whisker under half an hour. That might work for **Slayer**, because half an hour of *Reign in Blood* leaves us bludgeoned and reeling. Half an hour of this, however, feels more like a really good start and I wanted two or three more tracks to really leave me satisfied. As I replayed again, I realised that I was thinking of the album like a good meal without the dessert. I wasn't full yet.

I think it's fair to say that the band set themselves up for that one criticism. They do a lot here in that half an hour, carving a very Santonegro sound out of a wild set of influences, not just in their choice of genres to mix in but in their tones. *7 Animal* is angry and aggressive. *Go Away* is bouncy and commercial but still edgy. *I Feel Like a Scarecrow* floats effortlessly, even though it's as heavy as pretty much anything here except *7 Animal*. All of that deserves praise, but I can't help but feel that there are more strings to Santonegro's bow

that they just aren't showing us yet.

But hey, it's a show business maxim to leave the punters wanting more. I want more.



EVIL HUNTER *Lockdown*

Spain
Heavy/Power Metal

8 Oct 2021
7/10

Here's another submission, this time of a band from Spain who are an odd mix of smooth and very much not smooth. The former is in the music, because they play a traditional form of heavy/power metal that's right out of the eighties and it's slick, tight and capably produced. The latter is in the lead vocals of **Damián Chicano** who has a powerful and abrasive voice that's probably bigger than he is and knows it. I initially thought **Lizzy Borden** and **Marc Storace** of **Krokus**, but the longer this ran, the more I realised it was **Axl Rose** trying to emulate **Udo Dirkschneider**. How I missed that on the opening of the opener, *Guardian Angel*, first time through, I have no idea.

There's certainly a lot of **Accept** here and not a heck of a lot of **Guns n' Roses** otherwise. Perhaps I could call out *Get Up* as the most obvious homage to the Accept style of riffing, but they're a clear influence from the start all the way to the end. In fact, I spent a long while trying to identify why the chorus of the closer, *Blown with the Wind*, sounded so familiar, until I realised that it was *Winter Dreams*, the closer to Accept's classic album *Balls to the Wall*.

The other obvious influence is **Iron Maiden**, though that's mostly in the guitarwork. This is a twin guitar band and **José Rubio** and **Víctor Durán** are clearly fans of the **Murray/Smith** approach. It's a given late in *You'll Never Walk Alone* but it shows up often. In fact, the other recognisable section, the intro to *Burning in*

Flames, isn't light years away from the intro to *Transylvania*. Of course, as I point out that there are only two recognisable sections, I keep thinking others are familiar too, so I should highlight that none of these songs are riffs. Evil Hunter's sound is just distilled from so much eighties metal that it can't help but sound familiar.

There are other influences that I caught. There's a riff halfway through *Burning in Flames* that's right out of **Tank**. Some of the Maiden-esque guitarwork shifts a little forward to sound more like the many bands in European power metal who owe Maiden a debt. And, just to throw us, there's a Celtic bit on *Blown with the Wind* that does much the same job as those classical sections in many eighties Accept songs like *Metal Heart* and *Bound to Fail*.

I liked this from the outset, though Chicano's voice did take a little while to get used to, but it also grew on me a lot. I found myself taking fewer notes than I needed as I just sat back and enjoyed the damn thing, only realising it was done when that chorus from *Blown with the Wind* showed up again. I can't count how many times I listened through this album with the goal of taking more notes and failing miserably because I got caught up in enjoying it once again.

My favourite song is a gimme, for a change. It's *Fear Them All*, which kicks off the second side and it wins out because it does absolutely everything that Evil Hunter do well and in abundance: it has what may be the best riff, the best transition and surely the best hook. This is the song you'll find yourself singing along with even on a first listen. Sure, I can't swear that this one doesn't seem a little familiar too but I can't place anything.

And, perhaps most crucially, Chicano's voice is about as restrained on this one as it gets. I do like when he lets loose, because he has some serious power; he provides an excellent extended scream on *You'll Never Walk Alone* and promptly outdoes that at the end of *Get Up*. However, he's really fond of dancing on the border of control and just out of control for effect and that's the bit that's going to turn some people off. He gets a little raucous late in *Fear Them All*, but it builds well and that works.

At the end of the day, there isn't a lot that's original here, but Evil Hunter nail this eighties sound and take me back to the glory days of

Accept and **Tokyo Blade** and **Lizzy Borden**. It's energetic and up tempo and accessible, but with a dangerous edge to it, courtesy of Chicano's vocals. Frankly, if you grew up listening to eighties metal in the UK, this will be right up your alley. And there isn't a duff track anywhere to be found. If you like one of these tracks, you're going to like all of them. If it featured more originality, like the Celtic sections on *Blown with the Wind*, this would be an 8/10.



JERRY CANTRELL *Brighten*

USA
Hard Rock

20 Oct 2021
7/10

I'm not the world's biggest fan of **Alice in Chains**, though I did appreciate their take on grunge, as it was a bit more diverse and bit heavier than most of their peers. I'm actually surprised to realise that they're still together and with hardly any line-up changes, given that two out of four original members are no longer with us. In fact, Alice in Chains have been more prolific in the 21st century than Jerry Cantrell has on his own, this being his third solo album, his second this millennium and his first in the nineteen years since 2002's *Degradation Trip*.

If I've heard that, it would have been around its release and I've completely forgotten it, so I have to say that I'm coming into this pretty much without expectations, any that I have shaped by early Alice in Chains. And, while there's definitely a gritty tone to proceedings, it manifests more as alt country than it does grunge. That more modern tone aside, this feels much older than grunge, as if it's a covers album of country rock and classic rock deep cuts from the seventies that I've never heard

before.

In truth, there's only one cover here, the short closer, which is of **Elton John**'s *Goodbye*, the final track on *Madman Across the Water*, which was released in 1971 when Cantrell was only five and I'd maybe figured out how to stand up on my own. It's delightfully stripped down and resonant.

Perhaps the country flavour is made more overt by *Atone*, the opener and opening single. It's the most grunge song here too, reminding me of **Mary My Hope** as well as Alice in Chains but with an impactful drum sound that carries a stomping feet vibe, as if this was playing at a revival in a tent. A more traditional country flavour shows up on *Siren Song*, again an alt country rock number built off power chords and a much more laid back vibe. There's alt country too on *Prism of Doubt* and a lot on *Black Hearts and Evil Done*, a song that I could hear covered by **Son Volt** or **Uncle Tupelo**.

While the cover is of an Elton John song, the most frequent vibe I got here was **Tom Petty**, mostly in the credits that Cantrell can claim for his own: the guitar work, the songwriting and in some of the vocal melodies, if not the tone. His favourite song is apparently the title track and whenever it doesn't sound like Tom Petty, it sounds like **ELO**, especially in the changes and the **Jeff Lynne**-like chorus of "You only reap what you sow." Lynne, of course, wrote, produced and performed on the *Full Moon Fever* album for Petty, which has only grown over the years.

There would have been a member of the **Heartbreakers** here, keyboardist **Benmont Tench**, but he had other commitments that prevented him playing on *Siren Song*. His inclusion would be far less surprising than some of the people who are here. On bass is **Duff McKagan** of **Guns n' Roses**, who don't spring to mind as an influence at all. There are two members of the **Dillinger Escape Plan** at points, **Gil Sharone** contributing about half the drums and **Greg Puciato** adding backing vocals, again far from their genre of choice.

It's the other major contributor who seems to fit most logically and that's **Abe Laboriel Jr.**, who's been **Paul McCartney**'s drummer for the past couple of decades. There are **Beatles** moments here but a lot fewer than there are ELO or **Lynyrd Skynyrd** moments and far fewer than there are Tom Petty moments. By the

time we get to *Had to Know*, it's impossible not to see Petty's hand all over this album, even if he had absolutely nothing to do with it. I wonder what Cantrell has been listening to most lately.

And so this was a bit of a surprise for me. It's recognisably Cantrell but it's also Cantrell channelling a seventies vibe that I didn't expect, trawling in alt country, southern rock and classic pop/rock, over which he layers his grunge heritage as much as attitude as tone. And I like it, more than I expected to, which is always a good surprise for an album to bring me.



WHITECHAPEL *Kin*

USA
Deathcore

29 Oct 2021
7/10

I like my deathcore the way I like my death metal, namely varied and with plenty of contrasts. This eighth studio album from Knoxville's Whitechapel is full of contrasts, songs shifting from calming and thoughtful to brutally bludgeoning and usually on a dime. I haven't heard much Whitechapel, but this is consistently solid enough to make me pay a lot more attention.

The most effective contrast is the pairing of *Without You*, a peaceful minute long interlude late in the album, with *Without Us*, a song that kicks off so angrily that I almost ducked. The latter moves through calm, bittersweet sections, to more bludgeoning. If it's the story of a relationship, as it certainly seems to be, it's emphatically a turbulent one, as both the lyrics—"This isn't home, it's Hell with a lovely face"—and the contrast in musical style underline.

And much of the album does this, to varying

degrees. The lyrics make for depressing reading, emo angst but with a voice of experience. *Anticure* explains that “This house is poisoned beyond repair and the souls of our past life are trapped on the inside.” *The Ones Who Made Us*, a telling title if I ever saw one, suggests “Deep inside, you know that this is not what we were fighting for.” *History is Silent* adds “It’s not okay to have a knife in your chest and still be able to breathe.” If that isn’t a suicidal song—the repeated refrain of “Put me in my grave” suggesting that it is—then we cannot mistake *To the Wolves* for anything else: “So long, throw me to the wolves,” it pleads. “I’m a lost cause drowning in the weight I pull.”

Yet the music offers hope. From the opening of *I Will Find You*, there are uplifting quieter sections and the heavier ones don’t always emulate the depression. Sometimes they just highlight vitality and vibrancy. The lyrics suggest that the narrator has had enough of everything and just wants to die to escape it all, suggestion an emotionless wreck. However the music suggests that he’s often happy and often angry and both of those are emotional states. If you can still feel, whatever it is that you feel, then you’re still very much alive. This narrator isn’t just alive, he’s kicking.

The calmer sections often feel like alternative rock, melodic and only a little angsty, never close to emo, while the angrier ones shift unmistakably into deathcore and sometimes almost into death metal. **Phil Bozeman**’s vocals mostly manifest as a rough and raspy shout but, when he speeds up his delivery, as on *Lost Boy*, they almost become a death growl. It’s a little odd to hear two genres ostensibly so far away from each other connect so effectively as

contrasts, but that’s the joy of the sound Whitechapel nail here.

Just in case that isn’t enough, there’s not a lot else here. Pretty much everything moves between those couple of contrasts, but there are a few other moments. *Anticure* has a fantastic intro, which plays out like a grungy southern **AC/DC**, while the one a song earlier on *A Bloodsoaked Symphony* has the AC/DC mix with **Tool** instead. I liked these odd touches and wished there had been more of them. They do elevate those songs, which move into very different territory otherwise. Clearly I’m in need of more Whitechapel.



ÆXYLIUM The Fifth Season

Italy
Folk Metal

29 Oct 2021
7/10

Æxylium are a folk metal band from Varese in the very north of Italy, right on the Swiss border, so I was eager to see what local instrumentation they’d bring to bear. Mostly it’s flutes and violins, a mandolin often joining them and some bouzouki too. However, their sound is certainly not sourced only from Italy, because there’s a lot from much further north, as this often moves away from the pastoral mindset to sea shanties and Viking metal.

It starts out heavy, with *The Bridge*, which layers folk instrumentation over melodic death metal. There are sections for the flute to shine and the violins and the bass, but it’s mostly a heavy song with the harsh male voice of **Steven Merani** leading the way. He sounds good, raspy but accessible and intelligible. And I should point out before moving onto *Mountains* that he’s the band’s only singer, because it suddenly seems like he isn’t just one song later.

That’s because there’s a guest vocal on

Mountains from **Arianna Bellinaso**, a clean soprano, who’s so well woven into this song that it’s very easy to think of her voice as the lead and Merani’s as an agreeable texture behind her that steps up to duet with her at points. I don’t know who Bellinaso sings for regularly and I have a feeling that she doesn’t, because she may only sing metal on the side of classical performances, but Æxylium ought to sign her up permanently because she’s just perfect here.

Mountains may be my favourite song, though there’s so much variety on offer that it’s difficult to compare some of these songs with others. It begins with solo piano then heavies up, though it’s a flute that takes the lead. The melodies are excellent and it’s this one that stayed in my head over a couple of days. It’s just as obviously a metal song as *The Bridge* but it feels like it’s folk metal at its core rather than melodeath. *Immortal Blood* does much of the same but without Bellinaso and it works well, if not quite as well because of her absence.

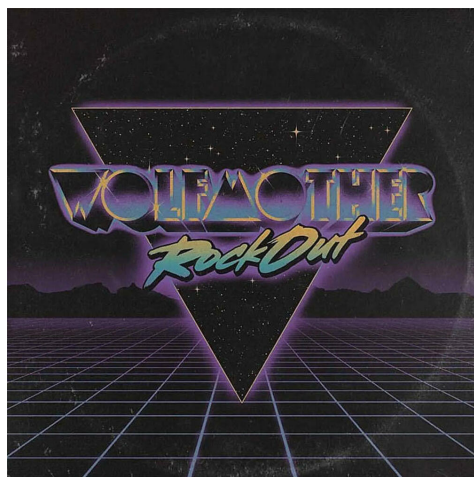
And then we start to move around the genre. *Battle of Tettenhall* begins with sounds of warfare and turns up the choral aspect. There’s a male guest here, **Samuele Faulisi** of the Italian epic folk metal band **Atlas Pain**, who sings clean; I believe he returns for *Vinland* and *Spirit of the North* as well. *Skål* is a sea shanty in the **Alestorm** style but folkier and less crunchy. *Yggdrasil* is very Norse and very emphatic. There’s nothing small about it and it’s happy about that. *Vinland* sounds like it ought to be Norse too and it is, with the most obvious call to dance yet. It’s a wild and lively one, with accordion and mandolin at the fore.

Even while they shift around the genre, they do a surprisingly good job of defining the core sound of the band, which I’m thinking of as being built around those flutes and violins. Once we get past *The Bridge*, they’re the focal point even above the guitars and harsh vocals. In fact, each half ends with an instrumental piece of folk music, where those other elements notably take a break and it falls to the flutes and violins, with some drums, to really strut their stuff. *Am Damhsa Mór* could be called an interlude and *On the Cliff’s Edge* a postlude, but they’re substantial pieces, not much shy of three minutes each. They’re really the bedrock of what Æxylium do, merely without guitars and power and vocals layered over the top.



I think it's *Mountains* for me over everything else here, with its fantastic female soprano that I'm hoping to hear more of. There are eight musicians in this band; what's one more? I like *Yggdrasil* a lot too, as the biggest and heaviest song but with its delicacies too, and *Vinland* following it. And I love those instrumental pieces and could happily listen to an album comprised only of them. Given that I've just highlighted five very different pieces of music, I guess I've underlined how much this album does.

It's only the band's second release, after 2018's *Tales from This Land*, and, as those titles suggest, they've sung in English throughout. I do wonder what they'd sound like with vocals in Italian, but I wonder more what a full album would sound like with Arianna Bellinaso fully incorporated into its sound. I think that's what I want for Christmas.



WOLF MOTHER Rock Out

Australia
Hard Rock

12 Nov 2021
4/10

I had a blast with Wolfmother's prior album, *Rock 'n' Roll Baby*, released right at the end of 2019, even though it was so short that I struggled to call it a full album; a mini-album maybe. This shock release, dropped on the streaming services without any notice, isn't much longer, only squeaking past a half hour by a nose, but it's fundamentally disappointing. It's enjoyable enough to listen to, with all the component parts you might expect from a Wolfmother album but, even on a first time through, it feels off and, rather like the *Star Wars* movie *The Force Awakens*, which was enjoyable to watch, it continues to get worse the more we think about it.

Part of that is the production, because this feels more like an unpolished demo recorded on cheap equipment than it does a proper studio release. Now, it was recorded during COVID and the lo-fi aspect is surely deliberate, but it's offputting to me, especially with regards to the vocals, which I could believe were recorded on a broken mike. Part of it is that Wolfmother songs continue to get shorter; half of the ten on offer here fail to reach three minutes and one doesn't even last to two. Like *Rock 'n' Roll Baby*, the album's over before it's really begun.

And a large part of it is that the whole thing just feels derivative, as if Wolfmother have done this before or that other people did and really didn't care too much. The most overt lack of originality comes on *Upload*, which I could swear blind is a studio demo of **Kiss** in 1978 covering the new single by **Foreigner** called *Hot Blooded* just because they could, with absolutely no intention of releasing it to the public. It has to be on some collector's edition box set of outtakes somewhere. But all the songs here feel derivative.

Fellin Love (whatever that means) feels like Wolfmother's own *Woman*, but with a thinner sound than I'm getting listening to that right now on YouTube. *Rock Out* is back to seventies Kiss again, as are so many of these songs. Humble is almost an **Ozzy Osbourne** solo song but with guitars edited out and the bass pumped up to a blur in some vain attempt to counter that. *Metal & Fire* feels like a **Joan Jett** riff, as do so many others, especially the closer, *Walking*.

The worst songs wait for the second half. *Metal & Fire* is so derivative it sounds like every eighties band all at once, but with thinner production than they had back then and with the cheese amped up for no good reason. This one's almost a parody. That it's catchy doesn't help its case. The vocals on *Ego* are cheap and conversational and that roll just doesn't work over a fluid guitar that I'm sure I heard on a song on **Motörhead**'s *Another Perfect Day* album. It's good guitar. It's awful vocals. The result is embarrassing. "Who am I?" is the final line and I wondered that too.

I know some people didn't like *Rock 'n' Roll Baby* but it did the job for me. It was catchy stuff that felt like **Andrew Stockdale** cared. Sure, it's ridiculously short but it worked. This

one doesn't and I can't imagine fans being too happy with him after this. Maybe dropping it without any fanfare at all was the best approach. It's the easiest way that fans are going to ignore it or treat it more like a bonus than a real album. It wouldn't surprised me if it got yanked back off streaming again and its existence denied.

I try not to post bad reviews, but I like Wolfmother and *Rock 'n' Roll Baby* made it onto my highly recommended list for 2019. Maybe this will serve as a warning to fans not to bother with it. I'm in public service mode. Unlike that one, this is absolutely not highly recommended and it's not recommended in any fashion. Steer clear.



WAQAS AHMED A Perpetual Winter

Romania
Shred/Progressive Metal

14 Nov 2021
7/10

I reviewed Waqas Ahmed's debut album, *Doomsday Astronaut*, last year and he kindly sent me his new EP for review with its release date that's exactly one year after its predecessor. As you might imagine, the negative side is that it's short, its six tracks amounting to only seventeen minutes of time; three of them are very brief indeed, interludes reaching a minute or so each. We could well see them each as an intro to the more substantial song that follows it, which interpretation might call this a three track 12" single. The positive side is that it does everything we might expect from Ahmed, but in a more varied mix, so it's a good step forward.

Oddly, for a guitar shredder, the first of those tracks, *Warrior in Time*, is entirely electronic, but I should note that Ahmed plays almost everything here, not just the guitar: he's

responsible for all the guitars, bass and drums and some of the keyboards, with only **Sarmad Ghafoor** helping out on the latter. I like how balanced this all is, because Ahmed is not a guitarist who can do other things, he's a true multi-instrumentalist, and he gives each of those instruments all his attention as if he hasn't ever seen anything else.

Really, *Warrior in Time* is a pleasant and peaceful intro to serve as a contrast to *Demon Slayer*, the track proper that follows it, because that gets right down to business with shredding straight out of the gate. I couldn't help but wonder exactly how quickly this one matches the note count of the opener and it has to be in mere seconds. It's a blitzkrieg of a song, a solid *Guitar Hero* challenge, but it's enjoyable to simply listen to with some slower sections, electronic parts in the background for flavour and a very liquid guitar tone that varies depending on where the song has got to. It's a portfolio piece, sure, but it's a fun journey for us too.

No Laughing Matter is the next song proper, after a brief interlude called *The Hunt*. This one adds some different elements to Ahmed's shredding, opening with a doomy riff that's soon echoed by that liquid guitar, as if angels are harmonising with demons. It certainly feels diabolical at points but it also gets bluesy for a while which makes us think that Ahmed has wandered on down to the crossroads, not to sell his soul but to challenge the devil for a guitar made of gold. The only thing that makes this feel any different is that the core theme that Ahmed returns to throughout is an infuriatingly catchy one, to the point that it could be a TV theme tune.

The final track is the title track, following a piano interlude with orchestration called *Aftermath*, and, to my mind, *A Perpetual Winter* is the best of the bunch. It starts heavy but gets soulful, with some delightful slower sections that are exactly what I was looking for more of in my prior review. I like Ahmed as a shredder; *Demon Slayer* is a lot of fun. But I like him more when he's playing like this, soaring above both strings and crunch. I also like the extra ethnic flavour, even it's restricted to hand drums early on, and the way he plays with modern dissonant chords later in the piece.

So, this is good stuff. I liked Ahmed's debut album but I like this more. The only thing I



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don't like is that it's so short, but hey, I'll take what I can get. What this really boils down to is a three track EP or single with intros to each that sound great but are quickly forgotten in the grand scheme of the release. Now I'm looking forward to his second album all the more. Thanks, Waqas!



THE DARKNESS
Motorhead

UK
Hard Rock

19 Nov 2021
7/10

It's hard to imagine anyone not liking the Darkness because they're so infectious. They don't have a single sound, unless we can simply label them lively or energetic, so they're not pigeonholeable. And, even if that isn't a real word, it seems like one that they might use themselves, given a sense of humour that pervades everything they do. Most bands wouldn't be able to get away with a song like

Welcome tae Glasgae at the beginning of the album, especially when not a single member is actually from Glasgow. I'm not sure the Darkness do either, but they come closer than they ought to.

It's a wacky song, with an overdone opening built out of bagpipes, martial drums and even wilder falsetto vocals from **Justin Hawkins** than usual. It settles down a little and rocks, but I can't say it's particularly coherent. Then again, I've been to Glasgow. It's a vibrant city but, yeah, I couldn't say it's particularly coherent either. My biggest problem is with the lyrics, because they state "the women are gorgeous and the food is OK." Now, I'm not going to diss on any Scottish lassie, but I do have an abiding craving for the African restaurant down the stairs next to my hotel when I was there last. They're a heck of a lot better than merely OK! I hope it survived COVID.

From that opening, the band settle down a little. I emphasise a little because they veer around an array of genres while never losing their rock base. *It's Love*, Jim's verses seem like Britpop rocked up a few levels. There's **AC/DC** all over the place, most clearly on *The Power and the Glory of Love*, and there's **Queen** absolutely everywhere too, especially on *Sticky Situations*. *Eastbound* dabbles in country rock, even with prominent plugs for what I assume are favourite British pubs for the band. And it's happy to wrap up in new wave and post-punk on *Speed of the Nite Time*, which reminds of nobody if not **Gary Numan**.

That's not to forget the glam rock that

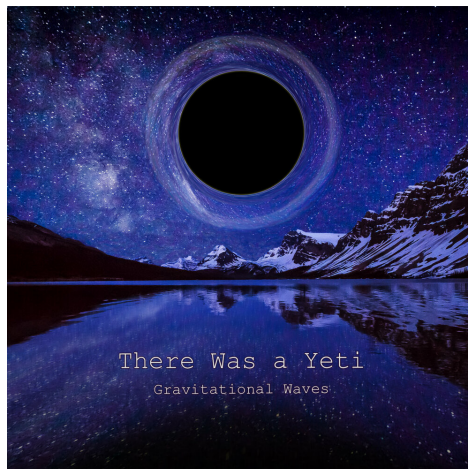
underpins most of this. The band obviously grew up with a good stack of **Slade** records and they played them a lot. There's a nod to **Rick Springfield's** *Jessie's Girl* on *Jussy's Girl*, just with the Darkness's pixie-like humour: "And if you don't wanna be Jussy's girl, have you got a friend who looks just like you but maybe isn't as fussy and wants to be with Jussy?" Talking of humour, the title track isn't light years away from **Tim Minchin's** *Inflatable You* except in how much it rocks. It covers much the same ground lyrically: "I never had much luck with women so I bought myself a droid."

With such variety on offer, different song leap out for special attention on each listen through. It really is the sort of album that changes in your mind, depending on your mood at the time, which I remember well from Queen, for whom drummer **Rufus Tiger Taylor** still plays when needed in the place on the stage that his dad made famous. Talking of Queen, *Sticky Situations* keeps growing on me, and I can't resist *Nobody Can See Me Cry* when it simply barrels along in between verses.

However, my favourite song is consistently the title track, which was released as the album's first single in August. It has a particularly killer opening, starting out simply, adding an ethnic flavour as it builds, before getting jagged and experimental for a moment and finally sliding effortlessly into its groove. I often sat back in my chair thinking about how tight this band are, but that went double for the title track. No wonder the Darkness are so well regarded on stage.

The downsides for me are that it can be awkward to appreciate just how damn good

this band are when they're messing around on their sillier songs and that Justin Hawkins's falsetto can seem a little overused. But hey, this is what the Darkness do and they've carved a considerably niche out of the rock 'n' roll genre for themselves. That's impressive all on its own but that they're still fun makes it all the better.



THERE WAS A YETI Gravitational Waves

Canada
Post-Rock

19 Nov 2021
6/10

I can't find much online about *There Was a Yeti*, but I'd certainly like to know more. The band may not even be a band, just one guy from Alberta, Canada; the location is a given, but that's about it. The only other absolute is that this is instrumental music. I'd call most of it post-rock, because it's aiming at creating soundscapes with what appears to be traditional rock instrumentation: guitar, bass and drums, though I'm pretty sure there are

keyboards here too, even if they're not obvious all the time. Occasionally, it ventures into post-metal too, but that's far from consistent across an array of nine tracks that amount to a generous seventy minutes of music.

On the opener, *Massif*, that's done by heavying up the piece considerably, literally moving from its initial post-rock approach into a post-metal one. Sometimes, though, such as on the title track, it's a texture. This one's a post-rock song, but the post-metal crunch is added somewhat for effect into the background, as if whoever's playing the heavy stuff is in the next studio over with all the doors left open so that the sound clearly bleeds through. I like the contrast, with a softer echoey guitar noodling away as our foreground and the slightly subdued crunch behind it. I'm not convinced that I like it more than the softer songs on their own though.

Gravitational Waves is a long piece, exceeding ten minutes, but it still fades out if it still had more to tell if only there wasn't a time limit pressing. There's some intricate drumming right at the end of the song that particularly caught my attention and I wanted a lot more of that, but I wanted in vain. I should add that this isn't the only piece in double digits, *Leviathan* an epic closer indeed at fourteen minutes. The shortest piece here is *Simulation*, at four and a half, but it feels more like a calm interlude before things liven up considerably on *Caligula's Favourite Pastime*.

This is one of the heaviest songs on the album and it features a lot of intricate changes, so it could well be categorised as instrumental progressive metal as much as post-metal. Boundaries do blur, but this one crosses it pretty emphatically. And that just makes me wonder who's actually playing the instruments because they deserve praise. Sure, the guitar is always at the forefront of everything that *There Was a Yeti* does, but there are some great moments not on the guitar, like the drums late in *Gravitational Waves* or the keyboard bookends to *Simulation*.

Talking of *Simulation*, it may be the shortest track here but it's easily my favourite. That keyboard intro is neat but, when the guitar takes over, it does so with the west African highlife tone that's a constant source of happiness to me. It's impossible for anybody's spirits not to be bucked up when listening to



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highlife and that works just as here too. This one's a jazzy piece as well, especially as it gets going, so it keeps us on the hop even as it's cheering us up.

And, even though I have a metal heart, I much prefer the softer pieces here mixing highlife guitar improvisations with jazzy beats. They're not particularly challenging, but *Simulation* and *Renjo La* and *The Lion's Daughter* are delightful. Sure, *Renjo La* does build for a while in its second half with power chords and drum fills, but it still does what it did, merely with an added layer of emphasis. I don't dislike the heavier pieces, but they don't feel anywhere near as free or natural. After only a single time through the album, I noticed that I was thinking about skipping forward through most of the heavier songs to get to the more introspective pieces. That's telling.

And so I think this is a 6/10. I enjoyed it and the talent on display by whoever's in this band is clear, but I can't past the feeling that I should have enjoyed some of it more than I did.



GHOST CRIES **Purgatorium**

Japan 24 Nov 2021
Symphonic Black/Death Metal 7/10

The Japanese are known for taking things to extremes; whatever it is that you do, there's likely to be someone in Japan doing it more and probably better. The latest example of this for me are Ghost Cries from Tokyo, who tend to be listed as symphonic black/death metal and fairly so but, if you're imagining it right now, it's that squared. The best word I can conjure up is "frantic" as this often feels like shred, but with shredding done on every instrument at once. I haven't felt this overwhelmed since the latest **Fleshgod Apocalypse** album.

But it works. I listened to *Sin of Justice*, the opening onslaught, four times, then watched the official video, before continuing onto the rest of the album, just to figure out what they're doing. It's deceptively calm and symphonic a little way into the song, but keyboard runs and drum fills appropriately hint that it's not going to stay that way for a long and, sure enough, the initial vocals signal "go!" in no uncertain terms. No, I don't mean the number five in Japanese, I mean "Unleash the Kraken!" It's a good thing that this band is so tight, because this could go horribly wrong in so many ways if the musicians weren't up to the challenge. And that's what this song is: a challenge that they meet.

I tried to follow individual instruments in some of those repeat listens, but I kept failing. If I tried to follow the drums, which are so emphatic that it feels as if there are at least two drummers, I'd succeed for a while but suddenly I'd realise that I'd switched my focus to the keyboards without my active brain noticing the change. The two guitars feel like four and the vocals show up in multiple styles, depending on what the song needs. They're clean for two and a half minutes, then there's a harsh verse ending with a gorgeous and well-timed scream that's all the more impactful for not being acknowledged. Rinse and repeat but with a narrative section midway for good measure.

It's amazing to me how the band got all this into one song that's only a breath over seven minutes long. And there are seven more to come. Frankly, just listen to that one. If it's not your thing, then nothing else here is going to remotely convince you, but if it is your thing, then you've bought this already on the basis of that one song along and my job of providing discovery is done and I'm able to shut up now and be done.

Frankly, there isn't much more to say. Ghost Cries describe their sound as "dramatic death metal", focusing on the vocals, the extreme blastbeats and the symphonic atmosphere. I could add that it all serves the purpose of texture. The clean and harsh vocals don't duet or contrast; they're there to meet whatever textural need the song has at any particular point of time. I'd suggest that this holds true for every other element, including the blastbeats and symphonic keyboard overlays, to the degree of the gothic piano that shows up

here and there and occasional effects like dripping water that bookend *Demigoddess*. Everything's there for texture.

And what that means is that nobody's going to pick a favourite song here on the basis of riffs and hooks and melodies. It's all going to come down to the textures that speak to you. For me, it's *Sin of Justice* and *Demigoddess*, with the closer, *Phantom of the Kingdom*, not far behind. You might pick completely different songs and that's fine. We're all different and we like different textures. But, if you like dense, gothic, dramatic music where six people seem to be playing lead at once, I'd suggest that you're going to find your texture here.



PLAINDRIFTER **Echo Therapy**

Germany 24 Oct 2021
Psychedelic Rock 7/10

Every time I listen through this album—and I've done that rather a lot while nursing a sick ferret—I'm surprised all over again when the vocals show up. This feels like the sort of psychedelic rock album that's entirely instrumental, the musicians—and I'm not surprised there are only three of them—losing themselves in the sonic journeys. I imagined them live on stage with eyes closed as they improvise a new destination and craft the way there by manipulating the air. It seems odd to me that one of them found enough presence in the now to open his eyes and actually step up to a microphone.

But there are vocals on *M.N.S.N.*, which opens up the album. They don't show up until halfway and they're quickly gone again until late on, but they're there. They're there early on *New World* too, for a brief moment, and

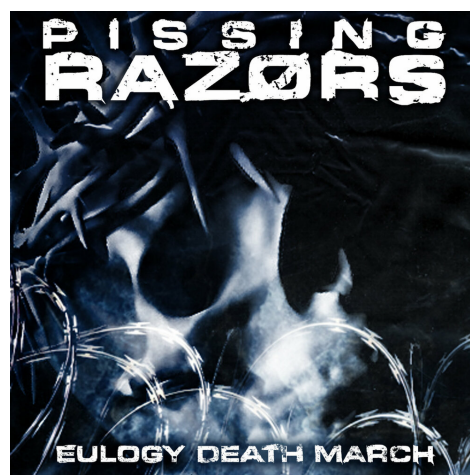
halfway through *Proto Surfer Boy*, and so on, but I'm surprised every time one of these pieces of music finds voice. I think it's because I'm not thinking of them as vocals, in a sense of a means to bring me words and meaning that I should pay attention to. I'm treating this voice as if it was another instrument, even though it it's an entirely clean and even soft voice and it takes its time. I'm thinking of it as a guitar or a keyboard, a new layer to the music, emphasising a mood or a soundscape.

And I like that music. This is rock rather than metal, but it isn't afraid to get heavy in the old ways, without having to downtune too far and add crunch. It's also surprisingly easy to listen to, not that stoner rock is a challenge but because this is smooth stuff. I don't have to join their journey under my own steam; I can just lie back on the raft that is *Plaindrifter* as it, well, drifts on down a cosmic river to reach whatever weird and wonderful place it has in mind for us. It's effortless, especially *Proto Surfer Boy*, with its almost organic intro. Maybe this song is a fantastic voyage instead of a cosmic trip, aiming inwards rather than outwards.

If *Proto Surfer Boy* is my favourite track here, I think my least favourite is *Prisma*, a twelve minute epic that may well work for some people, because it's easy to get lost in it, but doesn't for me. I'm finding that it's the one that vanishes into the background for me and lets me drift away from the album. It's not a bad song; it's just one that needs a bit more focus. Of course, I'm listening to it in my office, which is not the optimal environment for an album like this. I should be in bed with the lights out, listening on headphones at three in the morning. My counter to that is that my office is no problem for the other four tracks here.

Certainly, *Digital Dreamcatcher*, somewhat appropriately given its title, pulls me right back in. It surely has more ambition than anything else on offer here, which I appreciate, finding a prog vibe during the second half, with a guitar/drum conversation that's groovy and fascinating. It certainly has the most overt vocals of any song on the album—whichever of the three band members sings does so as a lead voice on this one rather than a supporting one. And that must make it my second favourite here, a great way to wrap up the album, underlining that *Plaindrifter* know exactly

what they're doing in this genre but are willing to mix it up at points. It's a perfect way to make me wait for a second album.



PISSING RAZORS *Eulogy Death March*

Canada
Post-Rock

19 Nov 2021
7/10

I've been in love with the name of this band ever since I first heard it back in the nineties. Sure, it actually refers to a dose of the clap, but it's a perfect encapsulation of attitude in only two words and nobody can claim to be surprised if they see it on a poster, wander into a gig knowing nothing else and hear this music erupting out of the speakers.

I'm not as much a fan of their style of groove metal, but they do it well and they seem happy (if it can ever be appropriate to use that word in conjunction with this band) to be back. While this is a seventh studio album for them, it's also their first in no fewer than eighteen years. They split up in 2004, a year after their previous album, *Evolution*, and stayed away for

a decade. They've been back since 2014 but this is the first full length product since, after a pair of 2019 singles, *Crushing Grip* and *Left for Dead*, both of which can be found on this almost hour-long return.

I didn't really hear the groove in groove metal until *Chemical Burn*, three songs in, which finds a neat vibe. The first two, and much of the album, are pure attitude, spat out by an angry band in a barrage of staccato riffs that highlight how tight they are. The long pauses between riffs in *Unsee* are a recipe for disaster if a cover band attempts them without being as tight as these guys are. I prefer the opener, *In Spite of My Scars*, which seems even angrier than the other songs here, but I have to call out *Result of Virtue* as the epitome of this approach.

It really builds its sound on an incessant and monotonous beat, using not just actual beats on the drums of **Eddy Garcia** but overt chords on **Geo Gomez's** bass and **Mat Lynch's** guitar too. It's a loud and brash and in your face approach, a promise of violence built on that bass-heavy post-*Reign in Blood* **Slayer** sound that **Pantera** made such a career out of. It's an acquired taste and I have to say that it's one taste that I never acquired. My favourites here aren't the pure Pissing Razors songs, so *Result of Virtue* is a way down my list, but I'd bet it's a favourite for the die hards, if not the top of their lists, the best thing here for them.

I got into this early with *In Spite of My Scars*, the opener, as it's so uncompromising right out of the gate and because it unexpectedly finds some middle eastern melodies as it develops. That's surprising and I like surprises like that. I really like the title track, which is a bit more adventurous musically, with lo-fi tribal

drumming and backing vocals that quickly remind of **Sepultura**. It simply gathers up power and barrels along effortlessly during the late guitar solo, **Joe Rodriguez**'s voice lending it even more of a **Suicidal Tendencies** feel.

And I got that a lot here, especially after the title track. *Left for Dead* and *Pulverized* both carry a Suicidal vibe, mixing the raw speed and energy of their earlier material with a groove from later on. Rodriguez has a voice that sits in between clean and harsh, as raw attitude as these rhythmic staccato riffs, and raw in feel too. He uses a raspy shout, so it's harsh, but the rasp often dissolves into the music behind him, so often feels cleaner than it is.

The other influence here may manifest itself a little obviously, through a cover. The way that the band barrels along like some unstoppable force just looking for an immovable object to challenge it is most apparent in *Wasting Away*, which is a **Nailbomb** cover. They do this really well and this is a constant approach through the second half of the album, especially on *Crushing Grip*, which has a glorious start, with the drums trying something different and the bass right in the focus. But it manifests itself most clearly on the cover, so clearly they borrowed it.

It's fair to say that I liked the second half more than the first. It's faster, though the Slayer riffs do give way to **DOA** style slower parts. It's punkier. It's sassier. And, even when it's borrowing famous riffs from things like **Led**

Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song* for *Nothing to Say*, it's a lot more varied than the first half with its purer and more limited rhythmic guitars. In spite of a few highlights, I'd have gone with a 6/10 on the basis of the first half, but I have to increase that because of the second. It has to be at least a 7/10 and, if this sort of groove metal is your thing, maybe further. Welcome back, folks!



JUGULATOR *Under the Verdict*

Algeria
Thrash Metal

25 Nov 2021
7/10

Every time I get a chance to review something from Africa, I leap at the opportunity and I couldn't be happier that this underrepresented continent in the world of rock and metal often provides us with quality music. I just wish there was more of it! But hey, here's Jugulator from Algeria, formed in 2014 out of the cold ashes of an earlier band called **Curse of Pharaoh**. They play a technical form of thrash metal that's very much in the west coast American style with some British influences in there too, I think. I'm not discerning any particular local flavour.

The main man seems to be **Ramzy Abbas**, who founded the band and provides both lead vocals and lead guitar. His vocals are decent, if nothing special, but his guitarwork is excellent and I dug this a lot from an instrumental standpoint. Backing him up on rhythm guitar is **Abdelwahab Merzouk**, who goes by **Death Corpse**, even though I couldn't detect any black metal influence here—this is a pure thrash album—and the pair constantly weave riffs out of nothing like there's a neverending supply of them in Algiers. They just keep on coming and they never let us down.

This is perhaps more evident the longer the songs get and these do tend to stretch: they start out around the five minute mark with *Strangers Conflict* and *Who Will Save Us*; leap into *Civil War*, an epic which nudges past nine; and then settle into a comfortable six to seven minute length for the remainder of the album. That epic may or may not be the best song here, but it surely must be the crowning achievement of the incessant riff machine angle of Jugulator. It's the gift that keeps on giving on that front, with every riff giving way to another and another until we're lost in the song and still thoroughly engaged when it wraps nine minutes in.

I like this album. It's not a bludgeoning assault the way that a lot of modern thrash can be when it really benefits from 21st century production technology. It's more thoughtful thrash, a sedate but powerful album that takes its time and lets these songs breathe. This is the element that reminds me of second wave British thrash bands like **Hydra Vein** and **Metal Messiah**, who were never quite prog thrash but did come close to it with their intricacy.

There's a lot of midpace stuff on offer but it feels deliberate and worthy, delivering what the song needs whatever its pace. So often nowadays, extended midpace sections suggest that a band can't keep up any more and need a bit of a break. I never felt that here, as Jugulator feel always ready to speed up again. *Crysis* is a solid example of this. It's midpace for most of the song, but intricate and clever with it, and there's one point where it ramps up majestically for a sprint. *Blood on the Red Flag* does that the other way round, spending most of its time up tempo and slowing down as needed, and it's even better still.

I could have done with a few more hooks to make it all a little more memorable, but this is a peach of a technical thrash album, one for the guitarists to be absorbed by. Ramzy Abbas's guitarwork is the highlight, ably assisted by Merzouk and a capable rhythm section. **Abderezzak Yahimi**'s drums are impeccable and the well mixed bass of **Nour El Islem Aidi**, who goes by **Black Bear**, gets plenty of notable moments too. This is a second album for Jugulator, after 2019's *Ad Exitium*, and I'm now eager for a third. This is very close to an 8/10 for me. I want to see if the next one will be.





TOM MORELLO *The Atlas Underground Fire*

USA
Alternative

15 Oct 2021
6/10

No, you're not stuck in a time loop. *The Atlas Underground* was Tom Morello's debut solo album, a collaborative effort in 2018 that featured him grooving with an array of diverse guests. *The Atlas Underground Fire* is a thematic sequel that does much the same thing but with this new array of diverse guests, names that I have to assume have a higher profile given that I've actually heard of some of them. There's **Bruce Springsteen** for a start, lending his voice alongside **Eddie Vedder's** to a cover of *Highway to Hell*. Yes, that one. My first discovery here is that Morello toured with the **E Street Band**.

It's not a bad cover but it's an unnecessary one and hardly the highlight of the album. What surprised me is that my favourite songs here are far from what Morello is known for, though his patented liquid guitar does make a few notable appearances. He provides a searing solo on my pick for the standout, which is *Driving to Texas*, featuring **Phantogram**, a New York dream pop duo whom I'd not previously heard of. Between the multi-instrumental talents of **Josh Carter** and the soothing and seductive voice of **Sarah Barthel**, this reminded me of the fascinating *Dark Night of the Soul* album by **Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse**.

I liked *Naraka* with **Mike Posner** too, which starts out as soft vocal electronic pop but brings edges into play, slow ones but dark and ominous ones. It's an interesting choice, as Morello surely can't be on more than about half the track and he doesn't do much at all until late on. I'd be more likely to listen to **Damian Marley** than Mike Posner, but both

their songs work here. Marley is on a louder and more abrasive number called *The Achilles List* which, like much of this album plays with distortion and electronica, but with that recognisable voice revelling in it.

Beyond the fact that, like most collaborative albums, this is a mixed bag with some songs shining far brighter than others, my biggest problem with it is that it's very deliberately overproduced. I like a lot of the grooves and vibes here, but there's much post-production decoration that only served to distract me from them. It's there from the outset on a brief opener, *Harlem Hellfighter*, that's a sort of electronic rock mashup, pitting cutesy against distorted, but it's omnipresent here with every song maxing out the spectrum at some point and deliberate glitches everywhere. My least favourite song, *Charmed I'm Sure*, doesn't do anything else.

And what that means is that, even more so than the recent Santana collaborative album, *Blessings and Miracles*, that danced its way through a whole slew of genres, this one is recommended far more for the adventurous listener and most likely one who's coming to it from the pop side rather than the alternative rock side. *Let's Get the Party Started* is a lively and up tempo song featuring **Bring Me the Horizon** that's edgy in a sort of trendy rock rap way with catchy emo lyrics. It's rock music for pop fans. The closer, *On the Shore of Eternity* is an instrumental guitar workout but one's that's laid over techno beats that are likely to put off traditional rock fans.

And that's both a good thing and a bad one. I love hearing styles that I've never heard before and I'm thankful for this introducing me to Phantogram, but I do wonder how Tom Morello's core fans will receive this. The only song with a **Rage Against the Machine** vibe is *Hold the Line*, featuring a relatively new indie singer and rapper called grandson. The liquid guitar that many know Morello for because of songs like **Audioslave's** *Like a Stone* is here on a few songs, like *The War Inside* and *On the Shore of Eternity*, but it's hardly a focus for the album.

So hey, it depends what you're looking for. This is imaginative and mostly quality stuff but it may not be remotely the music you think you're getting into. This is an electronica album more than it is a guitar one and it's a pop album more than it is a rock one. That a lot

of it is good stuff may not make any difference to whether you'll like it or not.



LYNX *Watcher of Skies*

USA
Alternative

15 Oct 2021
7/10

I don't usually do this but I've read a lot of reviews of this album by other people because I wanted to see what they thought of it. Some love it and many don't, for a variety of reasons. There's little guitar distortion to be found. There's too much cymbal bashing. **Marvin Kiefer's** vocals suck. Every time they get moving, they slow down again. These complaints make me wonder about the age of each of those reviewers, because I think they may be too young to see the album from a particular perspective.

No, these guitars aren't distorted, but that just makes it a hard rock album more it is a metal one and that's just classification. There's a lot of obvious NWOBHM influence here, but there's also a touch of American bombast in the vein of both **Boston** and **Kiss**. Arguably, *Dark Shadows Rising* is the only song here that really counts as metal, because it's far more urgent than anything else, a nod more to a band like **Raven**. I could see that being a single on **Neat Records**.

I didn't have a problem with **Franz Fesel's** use of cymbals or the way that the band mix up the pace of these songs. The production isn't anything to write home about, unless the goal was to sound as if this was recorded on equipment from 1981 during whatever scant studio time could be afforded by the band's parents and released on a British indie label that doesn't have a promotion budget. The only concern I can echo is Kiefer's vocals. I

don't think they suck, but they are the weakest link in the chain for me. Again, they fit that NWOBHM mindset where half the band are still in school and they're just burning to get their music out anyway, with the expectation that they're going to be the next **Def Leppard** or **Iron Maiden**.

And, if this were 1981, there's no reason why they couldn't be. It often came down to perseverance and growth and the right cohesion within the band. Some got a self-released single out but faded away into obscurity, even though they made outstanding music; some made it to the majors and are still world famous today. It wasn't all about quality. While Lynx don't feel like a **Diamond Head**, I'd throw out an **Elixir** comparison, a band who got good product out but failed to achieve the success they deserved.

But this is 2021, forty years on, and that means that this is mostly going to play to nostalgia, even though Lynx are a new band with new music. I remember so many albums like this in the eighties, where the best quality shone through mediocre production, and really came out on stage. I'd love to see Lynx live, even though they're from Germany and I'm six thousand miles away, so it isn't too likely. For now, I'm enjoying their album a lot, even though there's really nothing new here at all.

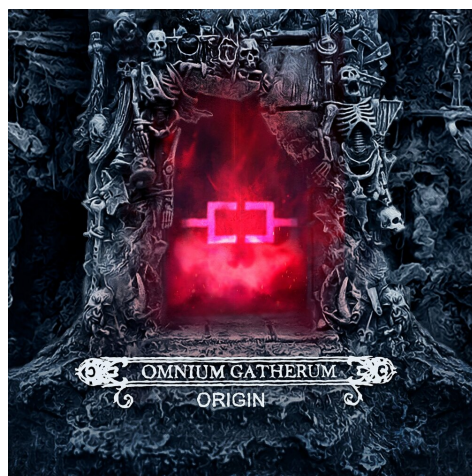
Like the recent **Wolfmother** album, every song here sounds as if I've heard it before. Unlike that album, however, I can't tell you where, because this isn't plagiarism, it's a distilling of a couple of decades of music into a new form, not entirely unlike what someone like **Greta van Fleet** does. The only song that actually feels specifically familiar is Beyond the Infinite and I can't place the reason why.

The most obvious influence is early Iron Maiden. Kiefer's vocals are a lot more like **Paul Di'Anno**'s than **Bruce Dickinson**'s. The bass intros on songs like *Savage Mountain* are right out of the Steve Harris playbook. What's more, the band often gallop along in that Maiden vein. None of these are Maiden songs repackaged, but that early Maiden vibe is unmistakable. I have to say that, while I still adore their first two albums, they wouldn't have been able to progress to *Powerslave* without a change of vocalist and I can see a direct comparison there to Lynx. It wouldn't hurt for Keifer to hand over the mike to a

Bruce Dickinson equivalent and concentrate on his excellent guitarwork.

And all that means that I'm going to buck the trend of the reviews I've read. I can't give this 10/10 because it has problems, not that I give anything 10/10 because I feel that sort of classic has to hold up over multiple years and a couple of weeks since release can't justify that. But I can't slam it either. I just plain enjoyed this, on a first listen and on a fifth listen. It's a fun album that took me back almost forty years and that means something to me. Not every musical change in those four decades has been a good one and I had a blast with this musical throwback.

It's vibrant and it feels like the band really mean it, as if this music is the most important thing in the world to them and they're aching to succeed. I don't hear that much nowadays, even from the youngest bands. I dug the sheer energy here and I hope to hear a lot more of it. As **Tommy Vance** used to say after announcing the results of the Rock War on *The Friday Rock Show*: "Don't quit!"



OMNIUM GATHERUM *Origin*

Finland
Melodic Death Metal

5 Nov 2021
6/10

I haven't listened to Omnium Gatherum in so long that I'm effectively coming to them fresh again and they surprised me here. This album kicks off with a piece of music that's slick, thoughtful and very patient. It's also, quite frankly, hard rock instead of the melodic death metal I expected and, sure, *Emergence* is only an intro but it feels like an intro to a very different album than what I expected. As the songs proper kick in, with agreeable melodeath crunch, they're also slick, thoughtful and very

patient. There are a lot of keyboards in play and it feels like it's intended for an arena rather than a small club. They've clearly been listening to a lot of **Dark Tranquillity**.

And that's not necessarily a bad thing, just something I need to adjust to. There are a few heavier sections that feel more like traditional melodic death metal, even with a keyboard layer floating over the top, but the most obvious genre component is the vocal delivery of **Jukka Pelkonen**, and it almost feels out of place with its unashamedly harsh aspect. Which seems so weird to say! It's a melodic death metal album and it feels strange for the vocals to be harsh? I can safely say that I'd never expected to find myself writing that at Apocalypse Later!

Now, some songs play a lot more traditionally than others. While the first three kick off with their keyboards paramount, as if we're in **Within Temptation** territory, and the fourth starts quiet and slow with pensive guitar, *Friction* kicks off just like the melodic death metal you might expect. It's heavy and up tempo and, while it doesn't stay fast, it starts that way. *Solemn* may have another of those quiet and thoughtful intros, with a soaring but subdued guitar solo, but it kicks in hard too, with prominent drums and guitars that ramp up soon enough to match. Pelkonen feels right at home here.

But this isn't the norm. For the most part, this feels like the band have done an **Opeth**-esque shift from an extreme metal sound to a prog rock sound but they haven't let Pelkonen in on the secret yet. Even as *Solemn* builds into something even more dynamic than it began, it feels like there's a clean voice missing and, on many other songs, it feels like that missing clean voice ought to be the only voice. There is a clean backing vocal late on *Solemn* and notably in other songs like *Paragon*, but I'm thinking more of a co-lead. Should these be clean/harsh duets?

I should emphasise here that I don't mean to be negative about Pelkonen. His harsh vocal is warm but dark and he's able to get a lot of intonation and inflexion into his delivery. *Solemn* is easily my highlight here and that's in part because of him. And I should also emphasise here that I like this. If I've sounded negative above, it's because I'm struggling to come to terms with this approach to melodic

death metal. I tend to love when bands mix genres in unusual ways and I dug the way that this album did that, from the opening intro, with its odd combination of crunch with tinkling piano or bluesy guitar. It just feels like the music has become bigger than the vocals allow it to be.

Reading up on the changes to the band over the years, I see that only guitarist **Markus Vanhala** has been constant since the band's beginning in 1996. It's telling to me that **Aapo Koivisto** has the next seniority, as he's been the keyboard player since 2005. Pelkonen joined a year later and has provided harsh vocals throughout, but he's spent the last decade in tandem with **Joonas Koto's** clean vocals and I see that Koto left last year, to be thus far unreplaced. I wonder if that was really a good decision. Maybe I'd benefit from checking out their previous album, 2018's *The Burning Cold*, to see the other side of that change. For now, I like this but I can't lose the feeling that it's missing a key element.

I post two rock/metal album reviews every weekday at **Apocalypse Later Music**.

I write book reviews for **The Nameless Zine** of science fiction, fantasy, horror and pulp books, and index them every month at **Apocalypse Later Books**.

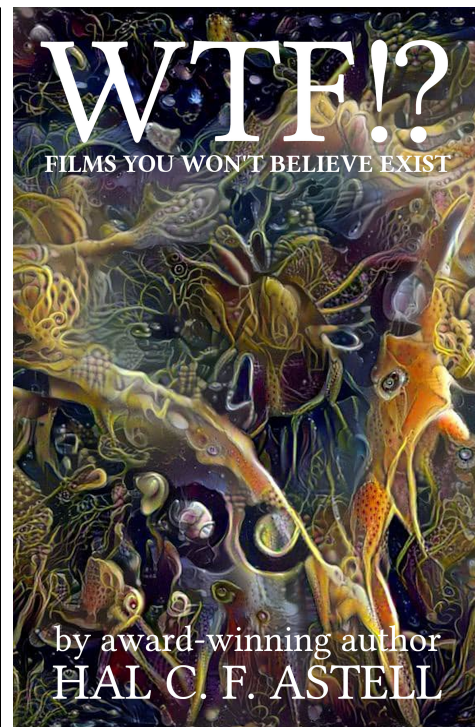
I write periodic film reviews of obscure, genre and unusual movies at **Apocalypse Later Film**.



Apocalypse Later Press publishes books by **Hal C. F. Astell** and others. *WTF!? Films You Won't Believe Exist* is forthcoming in January 2022.

The **Horns Ablaze** zine publishes monthly and hosts an index of all my music reviews.

The **Apocalypse Later International Fantastic Film Festival**, the only dedicated annual genre film festival in Phoenix, AZ is every October at the Phoenix Center for the Arts. Submissions are open at FilmFreeway. Ticket sales are open at the ALIFF website.



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