

# EOL-Audio Archive

+ EOL-Audio + *Industrial, Goth, Metal,  
X-Over, 80s and More*

**EOL-AUDIO** v7.1.

industrial, gothic, darkwave, synth-pop, x-over,  
electronica (and anything else we like the sound of!)

**EOL-AUDIO** v8.0.

A collection of music writing by Jonny Hall (aka Jonny EOL, now Terminates Here) from  
1998 to 2006, plus some from 2010-2014



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## **EOL-Audio – What Was It?**

EOL-Audio was a solo written, edited and created collection of music writings, covering any artist or genre I found to be of interest, but focusing primarily on the gothic/industrial/EBM/darkwave genre. It began as a Geocities site in 1998, moving to custom hosting in late 2001, and relaunching as an activity, PHP/SQL driving site in November 2005.

The site went on hiatus at the end of 2006, due partially to personal reasons, but also due to the fact that running a site on that scale became impossible without contacts, connections and allies that I did not at that time possess.

I've also added a number of reviews written for early versions of my Terminates Here site and a few other locations, hence there is material covered here as recent as 2014. I am no longer writing individual album reviews, preferring more holistic retrospectives and broader, long-form articles.

All content is presented largely as-published, with minor typo and formatting corrections. They do not necessarily represent my views as of today.

If you're of the TL;DR mindset, this ain't for you. If, however, you have appreciation for reams and reams of text (actually, printed out it'll come to just shy of 1 ream), welcome.

## **EOL Audio Archive – Album Reviews**

### **Action Directe – Intervention (2006)**

Action Directe are one of the more blatantly political members of the UK's 'industrial punk' collective, and their own description of their third album is fairly close to the mark – 'a more scattershot and irresponsible approach, with the band firing wildly in all directions at a range of worthy targets'. So they're anti-Bush, anti-Blair (and certainly against the pair of 'em working together!), anti-Nazi and distrustful of just about everyone who's in a position of power. The spirit of classic punk is thus safely intact – not that that says anything about the quality of the music, of course.

They start off in promising fashion – the downtempo drum-loops and guitar chords of 'Strike First Strike Hard', a suitably menacing atmosphere in which to discuss the rise of 'rogue nuclear states'. After this, they move back towards their more 'typical' electronically-enhanced punk rock sound. 'There Is No Going Back' alternates techno loops with riff barrages, whilst the free-form of 'For Your Protection' lays increasing quantities of noise upon a one-note arpeggio, but sounds confused structurally. One of the album's strongest tracks 'Sufferation' – it's where they get the balance of raw aggression and a more emotive feel for their cause just right. As it stands, it's a rhyming dictionary style trawl through just about everything that's wrong with this country.

There are two tracks ('Room 101' and 'Social Democate') that utilise a real drummer (Sami Vuorela from Sekasorto) and sound more 'live' than the other songs, though the (deliberate?) lo-fi quality of these songs makes them sound somewhat 'demo-ish', though the same could arguably be said for much of the rest of the album. It's a problem suffered by many political bands – the quality control seems to take second place to the underlying message. Their shameless rewrite of NMA's '51<sup>st</sup> State' in the form of 'England' indicates

that they'll have their say at any cost. Nevertheless, their diverse influences make this album more interesting than something churned out from your average lefty punk combo.

## **AEC – Hate Life (2012)**

This album is a much-delayed release by Tyler Newman, better known for his work as Battery Cage and Informatik. It's worth noting from the outset that these recordings, whilst only just seeing the light of day, are between ten and fifteen years old. And this recording certainly has the feel of a late-90's electro-industrial/dark electro project, the era after the brief flirtation with industrial metal guitars was largely done with, but before the invasion of six billion cookie-cutter Hocico wannabes. This is equal parts Bill Leeb-school cybernetic rhythm throb and Velvet Acid Christ-style dark electronic loathing of everything and everyone.

So, my kind of thing, then. In principle. How does it stand up with the benefit of more than a decade of hindsight? It certainly starts in promising fashion, the creeping synth pulse, slow beat pulse and gravel vocals of the title track transporting us immediately back a decade or so. Only for a massive 'HATE LIFE!' chorus to burst out of nowhere. The song continues to fluctuate between it's various phases, each of them featuring detailed programming and a competent sense of purpose, but somehow the finished song amounts to less than the sum of it's parts.

"Obsession/Compulsion" breaks out the jackhammering drum machine bursts that were once commonly in this genre, but not been heard since the turn of the millennium. The track is a ponderous affair, once again with an explosive chorus providing the highlight. It's on "Burned Alive" that the dancefloor beats really kick in, a straightforward but well-executed combination of aggressive beats and pulsating synths, vocaled snarled out over the mix. This is the kind of thing I build DJ sets out of. It's a pity there's so much competition!

"Drug Fix" is slower but no less effective, a glorious hateful account of the lives of those reliant on drugs. Things get schizophrenic again on "Jealous Much", an urgent, rough synth lead dominating the opening phase of the song before switching to a slower chorus, and then proceed to switch between various other phases, re-visiting and moving on from each seemingly at will. Someone is going to tell me that this is a masterpiece of songcraft, but it all just seems a bit haphazard to my eardrums.

"Echolalia" sees a move to female vocals and a darkwave sound, mournful keyboard melodies layered over an equally funereal stomp. The vocal performance is actually quite strong and the atmosphere generated quite effective, but once again structural flaws result in a composition that outstays it's welcome by a minute or so. "Evil Inside" takes the pace up once more, scattershot drumming providing a lively backdrop to the usual synthetic machinations and vocal drone.

"Freezing To Death" is another slow crawler (with the male vocals this time) that I'm running out of fresh ways to describe. The album proper finishes with "Afterlife", all echoed keyboard stabs, with some deeply reverbed percussion thumping away in the background. Certainly it sets the mood as an album closer, but I wouldn't listen to it on it's own.

There are three remixes to finish things off. Pneumatic Detach's mix unfortunately swamps or simply removes too much of the original song's best parts to win any support from me. Grenadier takes "Echolalia" in a minimal techno direction, and hence will probably every stiff barring those few people that really 'got' Haujobb's late 90s output when Herr Myer himself went in a similar direction. Infrastructure adds a teeth-clinchingly harsh drum loop to "Jealous Much?" and again, it's a case of 'if you like that kind of thing'. And I didn't.

I have to say I found this a very frustrating album to listen to. Conceptually, the essential 'sound' of AEC is one I like. At it's best moments, it brings back memories of some of my favourite industrial bands at their peak. But somehow the composition of the songs just didn't click with me. Whatever elaborate structural concept was at work here, I just didn't get it. Too often, the tracks would just cut to another line of attack just when I was enjoying myself. But this review is the voice of one man. If this is your style of choice, by all means give it a go. You might get what I didn't.

## **And One – Aggressor (2003)**

And One have been rather quiet recently. Since the release of 'Virgin Superstar' in early 2000, the only sign of any activity has been occasional live shows and the odd remix. This might not seem so unusual if it wasn't for the fact that even the band's official website has been in a state of non-existence for as far back as anyone can remember. Anyone stumbling across this band in the midst of an EBM/wave DJ set had very little to go on. Try typing 'And One' into Google and you'll see what I mean.

Anyway, for the record, Joke Jay has left the lineup, with early member Chris Ruiz returning after a decade off. The loss of the band's chief source of vocal harmony isn't really as much of a loss as you might expect, as this is very much a 'back to basics' album for And One. Their move towards and ever increasingly degree of synth-poppiness has been reversed, as they're now back to the 'diet EBM' sound that got them where they were in the first place, hovering somewhere around the 'I.S.T.' area when it comes to the issue of balancing the levels of 'oomph' and 'cheese'. It's therefore still a little bit inoffensive to qualify as bona fide body beat, but it's still closer to the original blueprint than some of the vocalised trance stuff laying claim to the tag right now.

They still like to break into song where appropriate, but the vocals also spend a lot of time occupying the 'half-spoken, half-sung' territory. What more notable about the vocal elements is that every word is sung in German. Not just the odd token song this time, the whole album! The title offers a small clue as to why they've suddenly chosen to re-claim allegiance to their native tongue. It's a anti-George Bush measure, in the sense that they refuse to sing in the language of the 'Aggressor' himself. Too drastic a measure? Not my choice to make. I might just add at this point that lead singer Naghavi is Iranian-born, so there's a deeper meaning to this than you first may realise.

The first half of the album is given over to the poppier material. The punchy drum loops are still very much a feature, but in the final reckoning they prove to be more reassuring than jarring. The frequent use of slightly discordant synthesiser tones again proves to be less offensive than one might expect, conjuring images of cheeky schoolboys turning knobs that teacher told them not to, rather than cutting-edge industrial pioneers creating totally unique sonic experiences. It's all very cheesy stuff, really – good fun, but not likely to please anyone who mistakenly bought this CD expecting to hear 'industrial' music. Not that I have even the slightest clue what that term might mean any more.....

What's strange is they do try to get political with us nonetheless. The lyrical elements of 'Schwarz' and 'Krieger' might deal with burning skies, impending apocalypse and suchlike, but the chunky synth-pop accompaniment means they could be singing about disco dancing a la 'Techno Man' for all I care. I think this is what they mean by 'juxtaposition'. More successful is 'Sternradio', featuring a vintage, ultra-camp And One chorus and the silliest middle eight this side of SPOCK to boot. My personal favourite here, however, is 'Spiecherbar', where they tone down the frivolity a tad, and manage to knock out a respectable 80s-style synth-popper.

Things step up a gear once we pass the halfway mark, with 'Für Immer' offering a big blunt synth loop that sounds like it was lifted from an early EBM album. It's all pretty simple stuff, sounding ludicrously dated in these days of multi-layered digital production methodologies. 'Strafbomber' makes a better fist of the style, more varied musically, with some neat Richard 23-style cries of 'Go!!!', which combined with the military subject matter gives the track the feel of a long-forgotten Front 242 rarity. To be honest, it's the only song on the second half of the album that really sticks in the memory, the rest coming up sounding a little underdeveloped, particularly the aimless instrumental 'Einsteig'.

That said, 'Fernsehnapparat' might be of interest to old-time And One fans, since returnee Chris Ruis handles the vocals, offering a slightly more forceful style than Nagahavi. Once again dominated by one big blundering keyboard line repeated ad infinitum, it's like DAF all over again. As is the more minimal 'Tote Tulpen', with it's lusty, spoken-word vocals. It's a strange coincidence that two notable German groups should release long-awaited but similar sounding albums within a few months of each other. Are they seriously trying to tell me that old-skool proto-EBM synth-pop is due to make a comeback?

Well, if it is, it might help if either band could fully exploit the possibilities. And One score over DAF here in the respect that they don't sound like their TOTALLY stuck in the past, making this album more enjoyable and more involving to listen to as a result, with some seriously catchy little pop songs buried in there. Unfortunately, things get all rather unpredictable whenever they try and toughen up their sound, though 'Strafbomber' remains as evidence of what they can do when they try. Maybe the 'back to the old school' approach wasn't such a wise move, as both 'Virgin Superstar' and '9.9.99 9 Uhr' seem to be worth repeat listens right the way through, which isn't the case here at all

## **And One – Bodypop (2006)**

For many, it might be 'just another And One album', but this release is still significant in several respects. Their return to an independent record label, leaving Virgin and joining the growing Out Of Line roster. Their return to the use of the English language following their 'Dubya' protest album 'Aggressor'. The succinct definition of And One's style in the form of the album title ('Bodypop' – why did nobody think of that before – or have they?). Oh, and the fact that it contains some of their best songs in ages. The lead single 'Military Fashion Show', for instance, sums up everything that draws people to And One – the blunt, unsubtle melodies, the chunky EBMpop rhythms and some very slightly silly vocals from Steve Naghavi (and no – 'cutiest girl' is NOT accurate English, even if it's forgivable in the context of the song).

The remainder of the songs over around the synth-poppier end of the And One musical spectrum. 'Enjoy The Unknown' is highly reminiscent of mid-80s Depeche Mode, 'So Klingt Liebe' bears sexual overtones and a hint of the 'girlie vox' echoing of the bands Virgin era (is that irony?). 'Body Company' features some outrageous cheesy turn of phrase and synth soloing, but still succeeds despite of itself. In fact, the entire album continues along these lines – it's nothing new for And One, but the hit rate of decent songs seems higher than in the past. It thus best enjoyed for what it is – an amusing, harmless collection of electronic pop songs. Some bands are better off not trying to sound profound and meaningful.

NOTE:: The limited edition version of this album features a second CD entitled 'FrontFeuer'. The songs on this disc aren't as well developed as those on the main album, though they do offer a reminder of the more EBMish face of the And One sound ('The Force' is almost DAF-like in it's simplicity) 'Master Master' has a moment of lyrical ingenuity, featuring a cowboy, Laura and lots and lots of oil.....

## Angels and Agony – Eternity (2001)

Compared with it's European neighbours, The Netherlands hasn't exactly made that much of a contribution to the minor flood of electronic something-wave bands that have emerged from Europe in the past couple of years (most notably from Germany, Sweden and Norway) and invaded the various dancefloors that might previously had been known as 'gothic'. Fortunately, they do have one band to call their own – Angels & Agony

Despite the origins away from the bleep heartlands, this Dutch trio, headed by Reinier Kahle, do have some pretty big names helping them along, with both Axel Ermes of Girls Under Glass and Ronan Harris of VNV Nation credited with production on this particular disc (Ronan handling the lion's share of the knob-twiddling in this case). The affiliation this outfit have with VNV's main man has been much touted by the scene critics, proving to be a double-edged sword in terms of both their reputation and overall sound.

Double-edged sword? Well, the thing is that while Ronan Harris has a reputation for being THE man to have on your side if you want to do the future pop 'thing', there's also the problem that you might end up sounding like a 2<sup>nd</sup>-rate copy of Dublin's London's Hamburg's finest, with the added difficulty that many people will assume that automatically and not bother to listen to the fine details. But enough speculation – is this actually the case here?

Thankfully, it isn't. There's certainly a future poppy feel to it, there's some distantly familiar synth patches and the whole feel of the album sits in nicely with the rest of the current pantheon. But it does in most cases have a sound all of it's own. Reinier and co have somehow managed to extract the benefits of their two big-names producers without sounding like a copy of either. The whole album sounds crisp and inviting, packed full of intricate little sonic details that make you want to listen. They also appear to have some sort of vision – not quite as well defined as the whole 'Victory Not Vengeance' thing, but encouraging nonetheless.

Their ideologies are probably best defined by the track 'One', originally heard on their debut EP 'Unity'. Prefaced by the lush spoken word intro of 'Tao', it sums up the entire Angels & Agony manifesto better than any other track here. A bubbling bassline and restrained four-beat lead us in gently, eventually joined by a mass of swirling synthesisers and a simple but effective vocal, proclaiming 'We Are One, We Go On'. Echoes of Jean-Michel Jarre, yet planted firmly in the present, this is the sort of anthem every band needs at least one of if they are ever to make a mark on the world.

Of course, there's plenty of newer material here as well. 'Revelation' is a more straightforward uptempo dance number, stepping the middle ground between trance and EBM, but this time more reminiscent of Assemblage 23 with all of it's 'I am....' symbology and throbbing electronics. 'Darkness' is up next, slower and moodier than the 'Revelation' but still thought good enough by the group to release as a single. I'm not if I agree, as lyrically the track is overly simplistic, even if it's up to scratch instrumentally.

Echoes once more of Equinoxe-era Jarre in 'Surrender', an affirmative lead ascending from the swirling blend of electronic ear candy going on underneath, with the first audible guitar on the album also appearing later on in the song, though it's so deep in the mix you might mistake it for another synth. Next up is 'Don't Be Afraid', which goes for a bright synth-pop sound. It's a perfectly valid approach, but again suffers a little in terms of the fairly basic level of songwriting. I'm afraid they'll have to do better than 'Love Me, Please Love Me' to impress THIS reviewer.

'Heart & Soul' is the last of the Axel Hermes-produced tracks (the others being 'One' and 'Revelation'). It's a generally accomplished but rather ordinary piece of Eurobleep, and doesn't really do anything the other songs don't. More notable is 'Forever', a more downbeat track, featuring some heavy vocoding in the verse, and a more melancholy feel in general, brightened only by the shimmering, redemptive chorus which shines particularly bright thanks to the all the gloomy bits in between.

'Into The Sun' is up next, musically similar to what has come before in it's blend of EBM, trance and 70s neo-classical space rock, while lyrically it sounds like it wants to be every VNV Nation song at the same time, so I'm not sure if I like it or not. 'Promised Land' is probably the hardest track on the album, with the biggest beats and the most audible guitars so far, though structurally it sounds a little messy. We end on 'Eternal Eternity', a sweet little synth-pop thing that conjures up images of what the current European electronic music might sound like if Vince 'ErasureDepecheYazoo' Clarke had a go at producing it.

Now, I'm really, really up for recommending this album to someone. It's hardly forceful or abrasive enough to be called 'industrial', sounding in most places like a mix of VNV Nation and Jean-Michel Jarre, with some 80s electro-pop concepts thrown in. Dark trance pop, perhaps? However, I do feel that was the original intention. They've still got to work on their songwriting, and they might yet make better use of their guitarist, but the reality is that Angels & Agony are onto something good here. Let's hope they find whatever it is they need to unlock their potential before their next album.

## **Angels and Agony – Avatar (2004)**

The first Angels and Agony album did a lot to impress me in terms of its production and overall feel, though I felt the songwriting needed a fair bit of work if the project was really going to achieve everything it originally set out to do. They took their time over Album No.2 – the 'Salvation' single came and went in 2003 without any indication as to when the full album might appear. A year later, 'Avatar' did indeed appear on the shelves of my more favoured CD outlets, and I was happy enough to shell out for a copy (yes, this reviewer still BUYS his CDs!) and see if they'd done what they needed to do.

First impressions weren't bad – the usual limited edition Out of Line digipak at least ensure the CD looked the part, even if the artwork seemed a little generic. I inserted the CD into the player to be greeted with the opening track, called, erm, 'Opening', a spacey new-age style instrumental that set the scene nicely for 'Stronghold', the first actual song, and one of A&A's strongest works to date, with it's lush synth textures and yearning-for-the-answer thematics. It's everything that drew me to the band in the first place.

And then came 'Salvation'. The track from a year-old single that I snapped up on account of it being a limited edition, only to put it on the CD rack 11½ months later, lacking any urge to listen it again. It's actually a relatively accomplished piece of future-pop, uptempo with a real feel of urgency. But in the final reckoning, it's just another track contributing to an increasingly swamped genre, never really jumping out of the speaker cones and yelling 'Put that Assemblage 23 album away and listen to me instead, damn it!'

I only say this because Track 4, 'Circles' sound EXACTLY like Assemblage 23. The sulky lyrics, pretty little synth motifs and mid-tempo four beat have all been heard before, and frankly I'm getting tired of it. Following this is 'Insight', the next instrumental interlude – nicely textured with some spoken-work Chinese verse as the icing on the cake, taking us to 'Blind World', a song which is only saved by the Oxygene-like portamento indulgence that occurs occasionally throughout – the song's message seems to suggest the question



'Why did we come this far?'. Like the need to produce another album like this wasn't enough of a clue.....

'Rites of Passage' continues in a similar vein, a busy lead synth failing to drag the rest of the song into my field of interest. 'Karma' is in many respects an improvement – VNV-style 'redemptive' lyrics, new-wavey synths and a more subtle style of drum programming at least allows this song to stand out from the rest. We then get the third 'interlude' in the form of 'Experience', once again offering some interesting electronic textures along with more spoken-word Chinese Sutras – the translations are provided along with the rest of the lyrics in the little booklet, if you must know what they're on about.

'Civilisation' sees Angels and Agony aim firmly for the scenes dancefloors, discarding regular songs structures in favour of repeated phrases, fed through heavy vocal effects, with soaring strings, arpeggios and plenty of ear candy filling out the sonic palette – it's a track probably best experienced when fed into a 5am DJ set rather than stranded in the middle of the album. 'Division' is next, a pleasant enough listen, but the 'I'm trying to do the impossible' nature of the lyrics sounds rather forced and the song as a whole does not excite.

Then comes 'Destination', an insubstantial number that last appeared as a B-side to 'Salvation'. The vocals buried deeper in the mix than usual, but at least features some pretty glockenspiel-style synth chimes that kept me interested for the duration. Another instrumental break in 'Awakening' (the weakest so far), and then 'Restoration', a confused track with words and music that often seem to be at odds with each other, never really meshing to form a cohesive song. Stumbling towards the end now, we get 'Hold Me', a slow and largely turgid piece which drags despite being a mere 3:30 long.

The last full song on the album is 'Radiance', a(nother) song about leaving everything behind and moving on, which once again features a distinctive lead synth as the only real feature of note – the rest just sound like, well, you get the idea now. The final track on the CD is 'Closing', which seems to want to do the new age thing one final time, complete with ethereal flute drifting over the rich, resonant sea of sound heaving around underneath. If you're lucky (?), you'll have a bonus CD to play with, featuring Okish remixes of 'Civilisation' and 'Salvation' (I had enough of those last year!), an exclusive instrumental track 'Lethargy' plus a 'multimedia section', featuring a photo gallery, a screen saver and some background info. Only worth shelling out for if you're a die-hard who has to have it all.

I have to admit that I found the album as a whole to be a disappointment. I really felt they were onto something with 'Eternity', if only they could improve the songwriting. I'm vaguely aware of a Taoist/Buddhist thread running through the songs, but this alone does not make them interesting – a lot of the spiritual concepts get boiled down to fairly ordinary future-pop spiel. And whilst some of the elements that attracted me to this act in the first place are still very much in evidence, in other respects they seem to be losing their musical voice – there's just too much of this style of music floating around right now. Every now and again it shines – but the bar is set higher now than it was three years ago, and Angels & Agony, whilst putting in a better performance than some, still fall short.

## **Angst – Tar Ner Skylten (2014)**

You can always trust Swedish musicians with synthesisers. Be it synthpop, EBM, dance music or whatever-you-call-that-stuff-Cold Meat Industry-used-to-put-out, Sweden has always been a go-to nation for those with a taste for synthetic aural texture (oh, and Brutal Resonance originates from there, too!). And one of the countries most creative exponents is Henrik Björkk, known to me for MZ-412 and Pouppee Fabrikk, possibly known to you for

one of his numerous other projects, but known to all of us for the next few paragraphs as Angst. Mathias Pettersson forms the drumming half of the project, but I can't tell you what bands he's been in as this is a far-from-uncommon Nordic name!

Whilst it would be easy to describe this project as 'REALLY old school EBM', that is more a reflection of the artists musical background and likely end audience than a precise musical definition. Whilst not totally dissimilar to the DAF wannabes of the world (hi there, Jaeger 90!) with the predominantly one synth-one drumkit-one voice approach, this project also has aesthetic similarity with the synthier works of Throbbing Gristle and Monte Cazzazza. And that surprised me. I once said anyone that tried to replicate the style of the industrial pioneers would end up stuck in one of the more contemporary subgenres that emerged. Wrong again!

Oh, and just to really give the project an esoteric edge, the vocals are in Swedish. This wouldn't seem so unusual if it wasn't so common for Swedish bands to use the English language. I'm not saying that's a bad a bad thing – it makes the music more accessible to a wider audience, and most Swedish musicians know the language well enough to write good lyrics. But it's nice to see their national tongue get some love, too. OK, to me, the chmaltzy e-ignorant Englishman, it's all sounds like Norse code, but this is not a style of music where deep lyrical insights are necessary. A few key phrases you can drag through Google translate and you get the idea. The tone of the Swedish language definitely fits this style of music, and that's what matters most here.

The album kicks off with "Välj", a rough synth line, drum stop and spoken-word Swedish essentially distilling the roots of classic EBM down to their most basic form and recreating them here, setting the tone for the album as a whole. The texture don't get any smother on "Klasskamp", the grating electronics almost purposely painful to listen to. Have to admit to skipping over this one after the first few listens.

"Konstant" is reliant (some may say too reliant) on the urgent drumming driving the song through it's sub-3 minute duration, whilst "Dumma Saker" adds new levels of 'nothing at all' to the minimal synth genre and "DDR" meanders more than seems possible for songs built on such basic principles. Anyone worrying that an initially-promising project may be losing direction need only wait for (or skip to) "Underbar". Detuned synth pulses, uptempo drums and a vocal delivery that nails the 'Gabi Delgado's Swedish cousin' vibe they've been aiming for since track 1.

And dancefloors may remain filled for "Vin Blod Sex Mod", built as it is on similar principles, before things get esoteric again for "Krav". It's another stripped-down affair, appealing as much to those people who buy those 'Electronic Pioneer' compilations as the old-school EBMers who are ten times more likely to know this project even exists.

A raucous "Sanning" keeps the interest level high, and whilst "Rädda Barn" never really comes together, the album still delivers one final highlight with "Står Still". A slow, steady drum stomp, big on the ride cymbals links well with the synth sequence and vocals, proving that sometimes it's best not to get too indulgent with sonic experimentation when there's a decent tune in the offing. That only leave "Utfärd", a noisy outro for those who "like a bit of rough" in the analog synth department.

And so ends what is either a nostalgic revival of old sounds for old EBM-heads, or a history lesson for the late arrivals to the scene as to where industrial and EBM music were at least partially rooted. Co-incidentally, the album title sits alphabetically next to Nitzer Ebb's 'That Total Age' on my iPod, and I immediately switched to this album as a kind of 'EBM History – Lesson 2'. For now though, it's a good debut album for the project,

occasionally self-consciously or self-indulgently too experimental for it's own good, but solid for the balance of it's duration.

## **Aphex Twin – Classics (1995)**

I never made much sense of Richard D. James' backcatalogue (and in all honesty, never made much sense of the man himself), and thanks to compilations like this, I probably won't have to now. The man who once seemed set on confounding discographers the world over with his multi-label, multi-pseudonym release schedule (actual releases accounting for only a small proportion of his actual output) at least had the sense to release the choice cuts in an easy-to-find, easy-to-carry CD form. This is one such collection.

Whilst previous Aphex Twin collections have dealt with his 'Selected Ambient Works', drawn from his vast library of home-produced demo tapes, this compilation is drawn from his myriad 12" releases, all now long since deleted. Whilst DJs and collectors still search out the originals, this collection will satisfy pretty much everyone else. That is of course, unless you've developed a taste for RDJ's 'ambient' works, as this compilation deals strictly with the harder, harsher side of his work. And the guy can be pretty fucking abrasive when he wants to be.

The songs on this collection generally sit between the boundaries of extreme techno and power noise, most tracks taking a no-holds-barred approach to blowing your brains out with sheets of electronic dissonance. Ironically, he starts off on pretty familiar ground – the album sandwiched by two versions of 'Digeridoo' (studio version at the start, live version at the end). Built round a sample of the said instrument, the brisk drum n'bass oriented beat is typical of the Aphex Twin's more recent works, not jarring too much and thus likely to keep his more recent fans happy.

It's the stuff between these two (remarkably similar) tracks that's more likely to cause a few shocks, even in the diverse climate of 21<sup>st</sup> century IDM. 'Phloam' is probably the most intense track in the collection. Kicking off with a harsh techno refrain and a 200+ BPM drum loop, the piece eventually builds blasts of white noise into the general sea of things, adding another distorted loop over the top, the result being one of the most scathing pieces of electronics this side of Ant-Zen. (Don't know who Ant-Zen are? Clue – if you like this track, you'll like most of their output, too.)

Almost as harsh is 'Dodeccaheedron', though this time the main loop is accompanied by some chilling keyboard tones, creating something of a horror-movie feel for the duration. Another noisy track is 'Phlange Phace', mating icy blasts of noise with some more atmospheric keyboard tones. 'Metapharstic' is another stormer, a mutated bass drum appended to a loop built around some sort of heavily echoed sci-fi phaser sound, with plenty of electronica 'flavour' sounds thrown in to flesh it out a bit.

Other tracks have more of an extreme electronica feel, and thus may be significantly more appealing to those who just can't seem to enjoy noise music, no matter how much they listen to it. 'Flaphead' and 'Isopropanol' are good examples, hard techno loops underpinning all the elaborate electronic wizardry going on underneath. There are also two pieces that avoid the extremities met by most of the other cuts – 'Polynomial C', utilising a more conventional breakbeat over a bubbly, cascading electro-sequence, and 'Analogue Bubblebath I', a pleasant low-key track that gives the ears a welcome rest.

There's also a couple of remixes on this album, the 'QQT' and 'TTQ' mixes of Mescalimum United's 'We Have Arrived'. Of course, Aphex Twin remixes are usually indistinguishable from his own solo works, and here is no exception. The 'QQT' mix is another noise-

oriented track, featuring lots of metallic noises that give the mix a heavy industrial feel, while the 'TTQ' mix utilises the same loop, but with more of a drum n'bass texture. It's a bit fragmented, but manages to achieve something or other by the time it reaches it's conclusion.

This just leaves what is probably the weirdest track of the lot – Tamphex (here in it's Headphuq mix). Now we know it's not unknown for the Aphex Twin to show a little humour in his work, but somehow this piece transcends the level of the Willy Wonka/nursery rhyme sampling heard elsewhere. For this track, ladies and gentlemen, is a remixed Tampax commercial. Taking horrifically feminine samples like 'Why stop when the bleeding starts?' and building them into his own testosterone-fuelled techno stew, Richard D.James proves to all and sundry that having a screw lose can often be a good thing.

Look – I've probably said enough to convince you one way or other about this album. It's not an easy listen and it's appeal depends on how extreme you like your dance music. That said, if you really do want to see the darker side of Richard D.James, and aren't afraid of a little bit of sonic deformity, this collection might just be what your collection needs.

## **Aphex Twin – Come To Daddy (1997)**

The first full vocal release of Richard D.James, following on from the occasional twisted voices appearing on the likes of 'Milkman', 'Beetles' and 'To Cure A Weakling Child'. James has taken the chance to expose himself as the evil-looking, chmalt-grinning nutcase that he is, rather than the rather anonymous public image we've seen so far. Pasting his face onto the bodies of schoolgirls on the cover proves the point. This man is making himself an image, and it's not looking nice at all.

And he's writing music to match. Take, the title track, the 'pappy' mix. The childish nursery-rhyme singing of previous works has been replaced by a crazed croaky screaming style that makes Dani Filth sound down-to-earth. The whole repetition of 'I Want Your Soul, I Will Eat Your Soul', before moving to 'Come to Daddy' and ending with a rally of ceaseless yelling, he is accompanied by some sort of textured fuzz-guitar sound (though it's probably totally synthetic), and a beat that sounds like a drum machine having a shit. Wish I wrote songs like this.

The B-sides all have something to offer. 'Flim' is a gentle childish sounding piece, counterbalancing what we've just heard, sounding much like the Aphex Twin of old. Then there's the 'Little Lord Fauntleroy' mix of 'Come To Daddy'. Being the Aphex Twin, this is actually a totally new piece of music, taking little if anything from the original. Instead, we get another gentle little piece of kindergarten electronica, this time with a 'dirty little boy' vocal, not quite as warped as 'Milkman' but still enough to twist the track into something it might not otherwise be.

That leaves 'Bucephalus Bouncing Ball'. This ones even weirder. It starts with rough assortment of clicking, creaking and other electronic miscellania, before threatening to break into melody about 1:30 in. It proceeds down the endless path of obscurity, until by the fifth minute, we've lost control totally, even a sample from the old arcade game 'Defender' finding it's way in there. Look, it's Aphex Twin doing what he always does! I can't explain it, you'll have to buy the CD (Note: This was technically an EP, so you won't find these tracks on an album).

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – Soli Deo Gloria (1993)**

The first Apoptygma Berzerk album offers a feast of competent and generally quite catchy hybrid of electronic goth (or should that be 'darkwave') and EBM. Notable tracks include the scathing 'Bitch', the oft-forgotten darkwave classic 'Burnin' Heretic', the Pitchfork-esque 'Spiritual Reality' and a (rare) good cover of a Velvet Underground song – 'All Tomorrow's Parties'. There's also a remake of the early Apop single 'Ashes To Ashes', smoothing of the rough edges of the original and making it more listenable as a result.

There is the occasional moment of overindulgence. Skyscraping is too self-consciously 'clever', a somewhat directionless seven-minute composition that stuffs in more samples and musical influences than advisable, but the album is for the most part free from filler. Even the four short instrumentals serve a function, with the two parts electro-medieval 'Like Blood From The Beloved' sandwiching the album neatly. In my experience, many people miss the album and just buy 'The Apocalyptic Manifesto' – although you'll miss out on some good songs if you do.

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – 7 (1996)**

Whatever Apoptygma Berzerk promised on 'Soli Deo Gloria', they well and truly deliver here. Opening with the organ and 'O Fortuna' laden dance hit 'Love Never Dies', Stephan Chmal proceeds to take us on a roller-coaster tour of his varied musical influences. The Nirvana tribute 'Mourn' features a sample from their version 'The Man Who Sold The World', whilst the anti-war, anti-national service 'Non-Stop Violence' makes its point with pulsating synths and a socially-aware lyrical style that merge to form an unbelievably catchy dark dance anthem. And that's only the first three tracks!

As the album progresses, we get hints of Stephan's industrial influences with the slow, scathing '25 Cromwell Street' and the straight ahead electro-industrial stomps 'Deep Red' and 'Half Asleep' that both show vague signs of a Tyranny-era Front 242 sound. A couple of slow songs ('Nearer' the better of the two) help round the album off. The quality of this album's content is such, however, that it's even worth FFWDing to the 'hidden' section after the final song – a reprise of 'Non-Stop Violence', a few minutes of grating, noisy rhythm and a cynical piece of synth-pop that seems to have acquired the title 'Untitled Too' to finally see the album out, one of the most consistently enjoyable collections of songs this genre has ever produced.

Note: The original version of this album has been out of print for some time. The best version to get is the 1998 Metropolis version, featuring a remix of 'Mourn' and a particularly good cover of 'Electricity' (released in Europe on the 'Mourn EP'). They're inserted between the last two tracks, and actually improve rather than upset the flow of the album. The current version has a 'guitar remix' of Mourn, but also strips out a number of samples for legal reasons – I hate it when that happens!

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – The Apocalyptic Manifesto (1996)**

A useful (but far from complete) summary of Apop's early career, packaged for the US market. Generally, the tracks chosen are the better ones, though really it's two-thirds of the 'Soli Deo Gloria' album, 'Deep Red' and its B-side 'Electronic Warfare' with different tracks (including a couple of pieces exclusive to this disc) filling out the space. All of the important tracks from the first album ARE here (though different versions of ARP and 'Ashes To Ashes' are featured), but the unified feel of the disc is disrupted, even if you are getting more Apop for your money.

There are some other oddities from the early Apop releases here – interesting but rather ‘primitive’ alternate versions of ‘Ashes To Ashes’ and ‘Burning Heretics’ for instance, though a few of the songs seem a touch on the indulgent side (the death grunts during the old B-side ‘Wrack Em To Pieces’ seem surplus to requirements). The collection is still likely to be of interest to those casual fans who just want one disc to sum up the history of the Apop story prior to the release of ‘7’, but completists might now be best picking up the now-reissued ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ as well as the more comprehensive singles compilation (see below).

### **Apoptygma Berzerk – APBL98 (1998)**

This is a limited edition CD (10,000 copies) detailing Apoptygma Berzerk’s 1998 tour. The setlist consists of tracks from ‘7’ and ‘Soli Deo Gloria’ as well as ‘Paranoia’ (which at the time was to be Apop’s next single) and their cover of ‘Enjoy The Silence’. These recordings are interspersed with audio snippets of the band and their crew. The quality of these recordings is OK by ‘live album’ standards but come over as slightly muddy compared with the studio recordings, whilst the outtake snippets strike me as rather self-indulgent and not as funny as the band obviously thought they were. No doubting the quality of the songs, but nonetheless this is best regarded as a ‘fan special’ than a true representation of the band.

### **Apoptygma Berzerk – Welcome To Earth (2000)**

With a minimal, white-and-gold crop-circle artwork and increasing evidence of a number of commercial trance and techno influences replacing the more industrial and gothic elements of the Apop sound, it’s fairly clear than Stephan is reaching beyond his current genre in an attempt to find a new direction for the project. Opening with trancey, hand-waving anthems ‘Starsign’ and ‘Eclipse’, he largely gets away with such stylistic sweetening thanks to the sheer quality of the material. Both of these songs combine reflective synth-pop and chart-friendly dance in near-perfect harmony, to the extent that it doesn’t matter what genre this happens to be.

Though the beautiful ‘Kathy’s Song’ with it’s female-computer voices and awesome breakdown and the spectacular Metallica cover ‘Fade To Black’ (which rips just about everything barring the vocal from the original and still keeps the spirit of the thing intact), the album peaks one more time during the Underworld-meets-New Order frenzy of ‘Paranoia’. Unlike the previous album, however, this CD does appear patchy in places – ‘Help Me!’ is quite dull and neither the Twin Peaks rip-off ‘Moment of Tranquility’ nor ‘LNDP3’ succeed as ballads in the same manner as ‘Nearer’ (sorry, you can’t sample Briggs ‘Love Is Not Enough’ moment and stick a substandard song afterwards). I suppose if you were to buy one APB album, I would still say ‘7’ – but this isn’t a bad second purchase, as long as you’re not expecting ‘industrial’ or ‘gothic’ anything!

### **Apoptygma Berzerk – APBL2000 (2001)**

A reasonable summary of Apop’s ‘Welcome To Earth’ tour. Their songs don’t vary much live compared with the studio albums (though a few are extended or feature added guitar lines), but still good clean fun right the way through. Unlike APBL98, this album features only songs and doesn’t have any intervening ‘outtakes’ (they saved those for the DVD), though the sound quality is also better than last time. Nothing essential here, however, just the usual sort of live album, and this is the second one issued by this still quite young band. The Lise Mhyre cartoon in the inlay is a nice bonus – look out for the cameo from Nemi and Cyan.

Note: A DVD was released of this tour, which probably gives a better indication of what this band are like live.

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – APBL2000 – The Movie (2001)**

This is the video/DVD incarnation of Apoptygma Berzerk's 2000 Tour. Most of the songs from their 'Welcome To Earth' tour setlist are featured (all taken from a live show in Oslo) interspersed with various pieces of 'behind the scenes' footage. The live performances are enjoyable enough, with a sufficient number of camera angles and reasonably clear sound quality (the audio is noticeably louder than during the intervening parts), whilst the intervening footage is the usual sort of 'bands and their mates messing around' sort of thing. All highly entertaining, but it only makes me resent the tedious nature of my own day job!

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – Harmonizer (2002)**

This album signifies Apop's final move away from anything goth-related, Stephan's boys instead immersing themselves in the synth-pop/trance combo first hinted at on 'Welcome To Earth', the feel of the album characterised by warm, sweet synthesisers that prove to be remarkably easy on the ear. They conjure up at least one sure-fire anthem in the form of 'Until The End of The World', the lead refrain a sure-fire call-to-arms for glowstick-wavers the world over. They also do well at the sweet split male/female-vocal synth-pop of 'Unicorn' and 'Spindizzy'.

Unfortunately, there's more filler than ever before – 'OK Amp Let Me Out' is too long and repetitive to become the hard dance anthem it was probably intended as. 'Photoshop Sucks' (starring Computorgirl) and the minimal techno 'Detroit Tickets' both sound more like technical experiments than songs par-se and the wet ballad going by the name of 'Pikachu' should have been shot at birth. Overall, it seems as though Apop can still come up with the anthems when it counts, but it's starting to seem like they're losing their touch in terms of creating well-rounded studio albums.

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – The Singles Collection (2003)**

A useful collection of Apoptygma Berzerk's non-album back catalogue from their Tatra years (starting from Kathy's Song and working backwards, skipping only the Mourn EP). Unlike many such compilations, the material on here is surprisingly strong and diverse, containing everything from an ancient version of 'Ashes of Ashes' thru to recent Ferry Corsten and VNV Nation remixes of 'Kathys Song', so will be of interest to any 'late arrivals' to Apop's fan-base who missed these first time out. Some long-forgotten B-sides, such as 'Electronic Warfare' and 'Seven Signs' are a particularly welcome presence.

In the process, we do get original or near-original versions of the majority of Apop's key songs during this era, even though it's not a totally comprehensive hits collection, due to the bands habit of saving some of their best songs for the albums ('Starsign' and 'Love Never Dies' are the two most obvious absences).

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – You And Me Against The World (2005)**

Apoptygma Berzerk do what they've been threatening to do for many years and 'go rock' (you thought those Metallica covers were done for laughs, didn't you?). In some respects, this was a wise move, in that the 'future pop' sound of Harmonizer and Welcome to Earth is now very much a sound in decline. Indeed, the lead single 'In This Together' portrays an effective electro-anthem-rock direction, suggestive of the like of both HIM and Bon Jovi whilst still having that distinctive Apop 'feel'.

Unfortunately, the rest of the album largely fails to match this lead song. The Kim Wilde cover 'Cambodia' is probably the strongest album track, with their taken on 'Shine On' by The House of Love not far behind, but most of the Apop's own creations sound rather thin and lyrically vacuous. The guitar parts, whilst avoiding the generic 'chug-a-chug' power chord obsession that many otherwise-electronic bands indulge in, aren't musically all that advanced and therefore just don't have a chance to shine (on) – not even the heaviest track ('Maze') really feels like a true rock anthem, whilst none of the more electronic tracks garner more than a 'meh' level of interest.

## **Assemblage 23 – Failure (2001)**

It seems strange to me that this 'future pop' thing still holds an interest for me (I call it that even if everyone hates to – and no, it's not a synonym for EBM). There's many an album held up with maybe one strong single, and lots of substandard recreations of that one same tune, or over-indulgent 'experiments' that do little musically or otherwise. Fortunately, quite a few people out there still have that special something that allows them to do a little more than that. Assemblage 23 is one such act.

'Contempt' was a reasonable start, but it's here that Tom Shear's talent really begins to shine through. It's not like it's hugely revolutionary or anything. Most of the tunes sit comfortably in the contemporary synth-pop/wave country, whilst the lyrics sing of failure (obviously), fear, foreboding and other human frailties. The success of the album is that it does all of the above very well, over the course of a number of songs. Even the most overworked genre is good for quite a few albums, and this particular disc is a decent attempt at becoming one such CD.

We start with 'Naked' which unfolds gently into a strong, solid dark dance number. Tom Shear takes no risks, settling for a mid-tempo tale of how having nothing means having nothing to lose. Sets the scene nicely for 'I Am The Rain', whose distinctive chiming lead has long since become something of a cyber-goth call to arms. There's something undeniably commercial about this track, but the huge 147bpm loop underpinning it ensures it keeps most of it's distant-but-still-evident EBM credibility. It's a trick Assemblage 23 seems to have mastered, even if they don't always pull it off, as we shall see.

'House on Fire' has an urgent, panicked tone that works well, fitting well with it's overall theme of running from an unescapable doom, questioning 'why?' every step of the way. Next is 'Tried' – a slower piece, nice and punchy in the verses with a vocoded chorus barely audible above swathes of sweet synthesiser. It's not the sort of floorfiller that people buy these CDs for, but a good listening track for those looking for a change in tone.

'Disappoint', however, is where all elements of Assemblage 23's sound come together at once. For once, the lyrics seem to serve a specific purpose rather than portraying a vague philosophical statement – dealing as they do with Tom's feelings regarding his father's recent suicide (he doesn't admit his directly in the inlay, but the album dedication makes it pretty clear). Musically, things are kept to the straightforward mid-tempo four-beat synthpop, which here is a good thing as this is a song where the music needs to support the words and not the other way round (as is often the case). For here, even if you haven't shared our narrator's experiences, you now at least understand them.

'Divide' is up next, offering the harshest sound heard on the album so far, opening with some cold blasts of brooding synth before the song kicks in, though once again a pop-styled chorus balances everything out. Then there is 'Longevity', perhaps the weakest track on the album – uncertain in terms of structure, vocals buried deep in the mix and instrumentally a case of trying too hard, packing in a number of potentially successful fragments, but never really gelling.



'Silence' stands out as the other 'maverick' track on the album. Whilst we've occasionally heard little bits of vocal distortion, here we get burst of full-throats industrial gravel straight from the Hocico school. It's not really what this act is best at, but while it doesn't cut as deep as some of it's contemporaries, it's still an interesting experiment at a 'guest' style. I just think, like the track that came before, the whole thing could have been assembled more carefully.

Though anyone worrying that the album has now run out of steam clearly hasn't heard 'Awake' yet. Yes, it's undeniably the most commercially accessible track of the lot – but anyone wanting more of 'I Am The Rain' and it's ilk will go for it's pulsating sequences, soaring atmospherics and inspired songwriting, sing-along chorus thrown in for free. This just leaves us with the tailpiece of 'King of Insects', one final piece of slowed-down contemplation to see us out.

And my final verdict. The two weaker tracks don't really upset the album, the better tracks really are seriously impressive and there's a fair mix of the down-tempo reflective and the faster dancey pieces. Has to be said that if you're fed up of this kind of music passing itself off as industrial, then this album isn't actually all that likely to force you to reconsider. However, if this IS the sort of thing you like, then this album still is a good example of it's kind, so I wouldn't disagree with anyone trotting off their vendor of choice and bagging a copy.

## **Assemblage 23 – Defiance (2002)**

It's sort of strange that despite being American, Assemblage 23 are usually spoken of in the same breath as European giants VNV Nation, Icon of Coil and Apoptygma Berzerk, not to mention sharing many a DJ setlist in Slimelight and its equivalents around the world. Signing to Accession probably helped them there. Then again, KMFDM signed to Wax Trax!, so the lesson remains that geography isn't necessarily an indicator of how a band might sound.

And this CD, if nothing else, will sit VERY comfortable alongside the likes of 'The Soul Is In The Software' and the much-maligned-despite-being-pretty-good 'Futureperfect'. Sure enough, another band that's traditionally labelled EBM has realised they might be able to widen their fan-base by picking up the appropriate synths (Access Virus? I'm no guru, but future poppers wax lyrical at this particular bit of kit) and bringing it a bit of that trance/techno sound which to date has been dominated by big-names DJs rather than the musicians behind the actual music.

Of course, I'm not against mixing styles together. In fact, in moderation I really quite like this particular genre-combo. It's just everyone's at it now. Don't forget, however, Assemblage 23 were doing this kind of thing right from the word go, so they're no bandwagon jumpers. But the competition is now very fierce indeed. Thankfully for the sake of this album (and this review) Assemblage 23 are just very good at this kind of sound. Mid-to-high-tempo beats, plenty of arpeggios, swirling synths and a whole stack of ear candy. The songs sound like you want them to sound.

To visualise (or rather auralise) what this album sounds like, try and remember the track 'Awake' from 'Failure'. Five of the tracks on this disc develop on that particular 'feel'. Album opener 'Opened' is particularly commercial in, with a euphoric hands-in-the-air lead and everything else typical of your typical TV-advertised dance comp – with one exception, of course – the vocals. Tom Shear has at least got the good sense to write some decent lyrics. In this case, they read like Depeche Mode but sound more like VNV Nation in the delivery – a fair compromise.

Of the other 'glowsticks on standby' tracks, there is of course 'Document', release on single with two billion remixes. Even if you're sick to death of it, there's no denying it's 'longing to leave a mark on the world' subject matter comes over fairly well. There's also 'Drive' and 'Fallen Down', which do the same sort of thing. And of course, my personal favourite, 'Blindhammer'. Slowed-down just a little compared with the others, the 'mindless destruction' concept and almost-classic-EBM drum loop plus soaring synths hit the sweet spot in every respect, with the paraphrased biblical verse during the songs outro particularly well-placed.

Things get 'interesting' when the tempos move beyond the '120-high 130s' BPM safety zone (easy to spot as the back cover provides these values for you), and BTW, those quotes were deliberate. There are two 'fast tracks' in the later stages of the album (but no hoarse Hocico impersonations a la Silence from the last album). Hitting 140BPM is 'Light' – all perfectly reasonable but left me feeling notably indifferent by it's conclusion. The fastest track of all is 'Maps of Reality' – apart from a heavily distorted drum break hidden in there somewhere, it really just sounds like one of the other songs with a 10% rise in tempo.

There are also three slower tracks. My favourite of these is 'Horizon', with it's huge beat, carefully textured synths and subtle vocal effects. The sparse 'Cocoon' is OK, too – lyrically ambiguous enough to keep you thinking, but not doing the 'token slow one' that many a 'reflective track on an otherwise dancey album' is usually guilty of. The album closer 'Lullaby' is unique to this album (but not music as a whole) in that's it's a slow, dreamy piano song, but it's too maudlin for my liking. This is still the area of the scene where VNV Nation retain unquestioned dominance.

Well, let's round up the plus and minus points. It's got a number of good, dancefloor-friendly songs on it, and enough variations of that theme to keep it interesting. Production is as good as any competition and it's just very nice to listen to. Sadly, it's also nothing special. The previous album 'Failure' sounded like Tom Shear was seriously pushing himself, and for whatever reason you just don't get that feeling this time round. 'Defiance', in the final reckoning, is never going to be a great album. Just a good ordinary album.

## **Assemblage 23 – Storm (2004)**

This album comes at an interesting time. The 'futurepop' sound, such that it is, appears to be reaching a form of saturation point. There's only so much you can do with it. The 'big three' (VNV, Apop and Covenant) may have built themselves sizable fanbases that'll survive any downturns in the fortunes of the sound. But at the top of the second division, we get the likes of Icon of Coil and (of course) Assemblage 23. On the border between the big time and 'just another scene band', both bands need to deliver if they are to progress far enough to ensure survival.

Icon of Coil might well have made it with 'Machines Are Us', and even formed a collection of side-projects as back-up. Tom Shear, however, seems to be relying on Assemblage 23 alone. And the Assemblage 23 formula that comes with it – combining trance, EBM and synth-pop influences to produce that oh-so-effective juxtaposition of happy, dancey, glowstick-waving dance with a resigned, nay, depressive, lyrical tone. It's worked for him before, and this album is very much a case of 'better the devil you know'.

With a couple of exceptions, the album's songs are upbeat, all seemingly aimed at club play. The album is also well produced, with a more 'detailed' sound than previous efforts, and confident, accomplished vocals from Tom. And that's essentially it. Stick it in the CD player, and sit back and enjoy the punchy beat, arpeggios and sweeping synths of opening track 'Human'. And then there's the actual song content. 'Forgive Me My Mistakes – I'm Only Human'. Hmmm, REAL innovation there.....</sarcasm>

'Skin' keeps things going along similar lines, a anthem to promote self-discovery with an oh-so-80s crystalline bell chime and a euphoric ascending synth line providing the hooks. Then comes 'Ground', which is one slightly erratic synth burble away from being the purest form of common-or-garden future pop imaginable. And that ain't a compliment! Next up is lead single 'Let The Wind Erase Me', a sort of cry for anonymity in musical form. By the sounds of this, he's already achieved it....

'Infinite' is next, the fastest song on offer here, a competent but rather ordinary song about feeling small in amongst the enormity of the universe (Maybe I should develop myself a cliché counter, and test it with this album). We then finally get the first of two token downtempo numbers in the form of 'Complacent', which carries a valid message and makes a fairly good fist of the contemporary goth-friendly synth-pop sound. But is it meant to be self-referential, because it could certainly be viewed that way?

Back to the dancefloor trax, then, with 'You Haven't Earned It'. It's one of my favourites lyrically, a scathing attack on the attention-seeking bandwagon-jumpers of the world, whilst the lead synth that bridges the chorus back to the verses is a simple-but-effective hook that makes this song at least stand out from the others. 'Regret', meanwhile, does nothing of any interest whatsoever, providing me with absolutely notable in terms of musical elements to comment on at any stage. 'Apart' is a slight improvement, the forceful layers of percussion offering us the only really industrial elements of the whole CD, even if I spotted similarities with VNV's 'Fearless' when listening to it.

But somehow, despite my indifference to the vast majority of this CD, there is still one track that stands out. It's not unknown for Assemblage 23 albums to end on a slow song, but this one at least tops 'King of Insects' and 'Lullaby', the closing numbers from the previous two albums. The song in question is '30,000Ft'. The vocals are processed to sound like a mobile phone message, sent from a plane plummeting to Earth, the delicate instrumentation finally achieving the feeling of utter resignation that Mr. Shear has been seeking throughout the last 4 albums. As before the message is complete, the call (and hence the song and the album as a whole) comes to an abrupt end. There is no crash, no explosion, just a plaintive squeak, and then silence. End of CD.

And quite frankly, I was relieved. There's no doubting the technical merit of this album. Tom Shear has become a very competent synth-meister and future-pop 'name'. But at the end of the day, it isn't really all that exciting a listen. Whilst a couple of songs ('Skin' and 'You Haven't Earned It') pack in enough hooks to acquit themselves, the others largely fail to do so. Which gave the usually perfunctory closing number an unprecedented chance to steal the thunder of the whole album. Anyway, if this is the way future pop is going, all I can say is roll on the next Hocico album....

## **A Thousand Societies – Le Crepuscule Des Idoles (2011)**

The French have a fine history in terms of minimal electronics projects. Back in the early-to-mid 80's, projects such as End Of Data, Opera Multi Steel and even the early works of Die Form produced a legacy of work that has sadly seen little international recognition outside of the 'Cold Waves and Minimal Electronics' compilation issued a couple of years back. A particularly obscure practitioner of this style was A Thousand Societies, late arrivals at the Coldwave Ball, producing a few self-released albums in the mid-1990's and then disappearing again.

Spurred perhaps by a revival of interest in this particular corner of music history, A Thousand Societies are back for another try, delivering up this self-released 13-track selection. Despite all of this history, this is not a project stuck in the past, avoiding the temptation to become a Moog-toting lo-fi retro-electro revival outfit, instead delivering a

cleaner, punchier production, borrowing influences from various 00's electronic styles without directly copying any of them. And that's a relief in it's own right. Last thing we needed with another "tribute band with new lyrics".

For example, the opening track "Action P4" builds itself around a pipe organ chord progression and spoken-word vocals, a fine prelude to the album's title track, which is just a solid, mid-tempo melodic electronic composition. The French language vocals, punchy beat and melodic elements are all relatively simple in concept, but in combination they just work together in a manner too intangible for this poor reviewer to sum up in words.

"Keep Rockin" sees a switch to the English language, and a slight dip in quality due to some rather trite lyrics and the songs up-tempo nature coming across as being rather 'rushed'. "LSD" is the first really weak track – the first lead female vocal track and first appearance of guitar proving to be very dirge-like compared with what has come so far. Almost on cue, things instantly wake up again with "Do You Like It?", an furious, blistering composition, distoro-beats and sneered vocals finally bridging the gap between the French and American schools of coldwave.

"Fly With Me" is slower but no less memorable, featuring a octave bass line and an alternating pair of synth leads that borrow equally from the And One and [:SITD:] schools of catchy, modern-day EBM. The albums midpoint is marked by "Les lèvres de l'existentiel", an intricate piece that alternates clean and dirty basslines in a manner that keeps the piece sufficiently interesting for the duration.

"Stop" takes the tempos up again, but the inherent energy that the track tries to convey fails to come across in the final production. The curiously named "EBM! (A Thousand BPM)" is an improvement, certainly the best dancefloor track so far, borrowing equal parts from the old and new schools of body music, mixing shouted vox with throbbing arps and synth effects. 'Licht im Licht' adds a third language to the mix, even if it is only in the chorus, again combining an Belief-era Ebb bass with various modern-era synth trickery.

"See Me Bounce" is another mid-tempo EBM cut, but quite monotonous compared with what we've had so far. "Erreuer Fatale" finally returns us to the artist's native tongue, and whilst the chord progression and ominous piano melody work well enough in places, the track as a whole isn't especially memorable. "Give Me The Mix" ends the album, with effected female vocals hinting briefly at the now-deceased electroclash sound that was once so popular, but there just isn't enough song here to prove to be anything other than a token album closer.

This is still an impressive collection of songs, even if it's a couple of filler too long, and more importantly, the project doesn't try to associate itself with any one electronic sub-genre. At a time where every band wants to be the next Nitzer Ebb, the next Combichrist or the next Depeche Mode (dream on....), it's almost a relief to here a couple of musicians just getting on with sounding like themselves. The challenge they face is finding themselves an audience – getting any kind of attention for this style of music without significant label backing is difficult at best in these times. Here's hoping this is just the start of a new era for the band, and not just an abortive comeback attempt.

## **The Beauty of Gemina – Iscariot Blues (2012)**

This is the fourth album but the Swiss gothic rock/darkwave outfit, and with it comes a further shift in the projects overall focus. Their first two releases, strong as they were, had something of a 'sprawling' feel about them, like they were trying to pack every facet of their style into a single release. Since their previous album (At The End Of The Sea), they've shown a definite preference for the rockier aspects of their sound. This album cuts down

the tracklisting to a mere 10 tracks (their shortest so far) and emphatically homes in on their direction of choice.

As someone who was drawn to this band by their synth-led recordings, you might have expected me to be somewhat disappointed with this stylistic shift, but nothing could be further from the truth. This album might very well be the strongest gothic rock recording I've heard in many years, and despite the reduction in use of electronics, there is still an impressive spread of stylistic influences at play here. Whatever form of dark guitar rock you happen to like, there's something for you here.

You may fall for the 'Joy Division Plus' post-punker 'Haddon Hall', the walls of effected guitar and resigned vocals of 'Voice Of Winter', or the straight-ahead middle-era goth rocker 'Golden Age'. It's worth mentioning that The Beauty Of Gemina aren't just a fanboy project trying to shoehorn in references to all their favourite bands, though. Every song twists their chosen style in a manner that makes a (relatively) cohesive album. Hard rock anthem 'Dark Revolution' would in many respect be right at home on a late-80s Cult album, if it wasn't for the atypical time signature. Works for me.

To be honest, there's some tracks here that couldn't really be defined as bona-fide 'goth rock' at all, and what a relief that is, too! Last thing we need is yet-another-band trying to fill in for a lack of a follow up to 'Vision Thing'. 'Seven-Day Wonder' does a sort of Garbage-esque electronic-infused indie sound, 'Badland' opens with a low-key bluesy acoustic twang before building into a noisy climax, and 'Stairs' is built around a hymn-like chord progression on organ, which is more of a salute to Pink Floyd than the kind of things requested by those people who scribbled 'Play Some Goth!' on club setlists. You know who you are!

The only synth-heavy track on the album is 'June 2<sup>nd</sup>'. The track feels a little 'uncertain' in it's early stages, spluttering rather than pulsing into life, but by the third minutes it lurches up a gear and ultimately proves to be as memorable as anything else here. The only track here that didn't win me over was closing number 'Last Night Home', the albums longest track meandering rather than surging toward it's conclusion.

But I'm not going to hold that against them – if you've read this far, you're obviously not just here to seek out kickin' industrial beats and throbbing arpeggios. And in that case, there's something on this album for you. You could pick a choice track from your download site of choice, but you'd be much better off buying the whole thing.

## **Bella Morte – The Best Of Bella Morte (2013)**

One of the things I've learned about writing for Brutal Resonance is that I'll never hear every band of note in the scene. I used to think it possible, but not any more. Sure, reading through the reviews gives you a chance to sort the stuff you might like from the stuff you never will, but there's always going to be some bands you miss. And Bella Morte managed to release eight studio albums and various other recordings before I got round to listening to them. And then this compilation comes up for review, and as I'm not adverse to a bit of "American Gothic" (yeah, naming genres after paintings, how cultured!), I decided it was time to catch up.

The newcomer isn't helped by the fact that the compilation isn't in chronological order. This means that their early synth-based recordings sit alongside their more guitar driven style of later years. Anyway a few minutes of research with Discogs.com soon allowed me to establish some kind of pattern to their backcatalog. And for those of you who find me too verbose, I'll tell it like I hear it here: Started synthy, went punky, then metally, then went all maturity of sound on us.

Admittedly, there's a part of me that wishes they'd kept their original sound. "Fall No More", a compilation track from 1999, kicks off the disc, and it's amongst the finest examples of darkwave pop you'll hear, descending piano synth, twinkling synth motifs and yearning lyrics. It's not unlike "The Rain Within Her Hands", a well-executed synthpop tune that follows all the 'less is more' mantras to a tee.

Even more minimal is "One Winters Night", the oldest track here, being the sole representative from their 1997 debut 'Remains'. The synth string line might sound dated to modern ears, but it harks back to an era when there wasn't a big divide between the deathrock mafia and the EBM army. Yes, synth-heavy goth has always been a soft spot of mine. The most stripped-down track of all is called "Winter", all tuned percussion sounds and cubic yards of reverb (how's that for a descriptor?). With plenty of empty space in the mix to hold all the atmosphere, it harks back to forgotten era, before music production was all about filling every space in the mix with some form of noise.

Anyway, somewhere around the turn of the millennium, Bella Morte discovered guitar amps and the bulk of the remainder of this collection is given over to riffastic action. Even here you can chart development. "The Coffin Don't Want Me And She Don't Either" is a noisy post-punk track from 2001's 'The Death Rock EP'. It a competent take on the style, even if it's a complete about turn from what they released only two years previous.

And one year later, we're onto the album 'The Quiet', and straight into buzzsaw guitars and snarled vocals as heard on "Logic". It lacks the fine art of anthemic song-craft, but it certainly makes more of an impact than the title track of the same album, which despite being featured on a 'Best Of' like this, sounds like a 12" B-side from a 80s Cure wannabe? Perhaps I was wrong to look for patterns after all?

Luckily, this is a rare blip in what is already proving to be a promising if somewhat haphazard journey of discovery through a sizeable discography. A brief return to a more electronic style came in 2004 on "Many Miles", but they then delivered huge, power-chord laden numbers such as "Flatlined" (2005) and "Find Forever Gone" (2008). At one moment I thought I was listening to Paradise Lost, and that has to be a good thing. In between this, we did get "On The Edge", a gritter metal number, but one that at least knows the benefit of a cheesy electronic melody as an kind of 'instant hook'.

I have to admit to not liking Bella Morte's most recent works. "Here With Me" comes from their most recent studio album (2011's 'Before The Flood'), and it's a tedious six minute of e-piano navel-gazing reflective balladry which brings little goodness to these ears of mine. There's also a remake of their old track "Evensong", but it's sounds like a 'will this do?' garden-variety trad-goth filler.

But I have to admit – I'm very tempted to give the actual Bella Morte albums a go now. For the balance of their career, they explored the limits of the space occupied by darkwave and gothic rock and as a newcomer to the band, my curiosity is piqued. And then it all made sense. In the recent past the highest marks I've given in Brutal Resonance reviews have been to The Beauty Of Gemina, Grooving In Green and now this. Here I am, trying to present myself as a one-man lone EBM soldier, battling the invading forces of dubstep and suchlike, and all along I could have just Played Some Goth.

Just don't ask me to do the look, though. All that dressing up ain't for me.

## **Bionic – Close To Nature (2010)**

Those of you with knowledge of industrial scene heritage may have fond memories of the Off-Beat Label, whom in their mid-90s prime delivered classic albums from the likes of

Project Pitchfork, Haujobb, Front Line Assembly and countless others. In amongst these releases is an less-well remembered album 'Rest In Peace' by a project called Bionic. Don't ask me why, but they've decided that time is right for a comeback and have duly unleashed 'Close To Nature' onto an audience that are as good as unaware of their distant past.

And I'll be fair, first impressions aren't bad. "It Doesn't Matter" is a fine example of the muscular EBMish synthpop dished up by countless European bands, lyrics somewhat goofy but still affecting in their own way. I have to admit to returning to this song several times whilst reviewing this album, which is a polite way of saying that from here on, quality control is variable at best.

I'll round up the good bits first. "Give Me Shelter" is a good, dynamic pop song, a decent balance of punchy beats, synth melodics and sing-along chorus. "Inside" makes a decent stab at doing the whole throbbing arp/filter sweep/morose lyrics thing attempted by those many bands that set out trying to sound like VNV Nation but ended up coming across like an Assemblage 23 album filler – this particular track at least avoids the most obvious clichés and thus succeeds in sounding distinctive. And if you're looking for the tracks worth downloading from your digital seller of choice, you might as well quit reading now.

Of the remainder, "Somewhere" is a tolerable but totally unmemorable body beat pop song. "Anything" and "Cold Eyes" both attempt to pack a mishmash of synthetic concepts around static four-beats, both offering occasional moments of interest but otherwise presenting a largely bland musical landscape. "Strive for Uniting" is a disjointed attempt at a slow, menacing number, too stop-start for me to even hope to even start to describe it, so I'll just stop here. The album's real nadir is "It's No Par", a pathetic attempt at a minimal Nitzer Ebb wannabe.

There are a couple of remixes at the end of the album. Accessory's remix of "Inside" is a cluttered, noisy affair, knocking all the life out of the track, a disappointing showing for a band that usually knows how to twist such material into a floorfiller. There's also a passable remix of "It's Doesn't Matter" by Minusheart, toughening up the original in places but essentially leaving the essential elements of the song intact. Which, given what we heard from Accessory one track previously, is probably a good thing.

The end result is a patchy album that really offers a mere trio of good songs, and those three aren't a significant deviation from the countless other tracks in the same style squeezing my playlist to bursting. Much as I love my synthpop and 1990s electro-industrial, particularly when the two concepts meet within the confines of the same song, I really don't see the point behind this project's revival. There is so much more exciting material out there to enjoy instead.

## **Blood Axis – Born Again (2010)**

I'd almost given up waiting. It's been twelve years since 'The Gospel Of Inhumanity'. An album which drew influence from the darkest corners of the neofolk, martial, occult and industrial scenes, and then ironically delivered one of the most listenable albums this highly elitist subgenre has produced. And now after barely stoking the fire with various live albums, colabs and limited singles for more than a decade, Michael Moynihan FINALLY issues the long-awaited full-length follow up to his debut. And despite the man's reputation as an extremist 'bad egg' (the debate about how true this is can rage elsewhere, I'm not here to discuss the politics beliefs of musicians), this album is even more accessible than it's predecessor.

The key difference is that whilst the first Blood Axis album sounded like it had been 'assembled', this one sounds as though it is actually being 'played'. And to hear evidence, you need look no further than 'Song Of The Comrade', a bodhrán beat overlaid by tuneful accordion and guitar, over which a verse celebrating the brotherhood and mutual support is spoken. It is a true anthem – regardless of how it is played, how the vocals are performed or what context it is set in, the message is clear. A little research reveals the verse has a darker and more controversial history than is initially apparent, but I won't ruin it for you by saying how.

And the album is far from a one-shot wonder – 'Madhu' bears a distinct medieval feel (complete with Old English lyrics), whilst the German language features in 'The Dream' and 'Erwachen In Der Nacht', the latter featuring some military snare rolls, one of only few real hints of this project's association with 'martial' industrial, a tag that once made sense, but now seems attached to the project for political rather than musical reasons.

And the myriad stylistic variations don't stop there. Annabel Lee sings lead vocals on 'The Path', whose swirling guitar lead appears to be rooted in psychedelic rock (anyone who liked the last few Der Blutharsch albums will be right at home here). The structure of the album as a whole also seems to have been carefully considered – the confrontational 'Churning and Chewing' serving as wake-up call between the ambient drones of 'Hard Iron Age' and the 8-minute long minimal piano epic 'The Vortex'. And if you were wondering where the folk was on what was allegedly a neofolk album, just skip to the penultimate (title) track for some Celtic bardic frivolity – Michael even resists taking to the mic here, resulting in the rarest of things – a Blood Axis track without so much of a hint of a sinister edge!

Of course, with three band members, a host of guest musicians, and a succession of traditional texts forming the bulk of the lyrics, one might even wonder how much creative influence Moynihan HAS over this album. But that's the wrong question to ask. Michael's assertive, controlled vocal delivery leaves the listener in no doubt that he is most definitely the man in charge here. He has the confidence not to need his name splashed over all the credits, the self-assurance to let his hand-picked comrades do their thing, yet leave us in no doubt in the end that this is HIS project.

Welcome back, Blood Axis. You were missed.

## **Blutengel – Demon Kiss (2004)**

I'm starting to think Chris Pohl is starting to spread his talents a little too thinly. Aside from Blutengel, he's got Terminal Choice and Tumor to worry about, not to mention his work with Pain of Progress. Not that all of this put together makes him enough money to quit full-time work. And this latest release from Blutengel suggests that this particularly prolific German needs to slow down and start taking some more time over his recordings. Because this sounds like a right 'did it in his sleep' job.

Of course, the first hints of Blutengel's decline came on 2002's 'Angel Dust' album, which had its moments, but moments padded out with rather generic electro-gothic filler. And now it seems the 'moments' have largely gone, and Pohl has to fill an entire album with the substandard stuff. Plus the bonus CDs. Not content with the usual 'bonus CD' box set, Out of Line have decided to issue a 3CD fold-out box thingy to boot. I still can't believe I shelled out for it, either!



But back to the important bit – the snapshots of the cute goth chicks. Oops, hang a minute, I'll rephrase that.....

But back to the important bit – the album proper. The opening track 'Angels of the Dark' largely defines that sound of the album as a whole – sweet, formulaic gothic electro-pop, alternating male-female vocals for the verses, uniting for the chorus. On the surface, it's all fairly proficient. But it's also sounds very one-dimensional. The lyrics contain all the usual darkwave terminology (darkness, angel/vampire references, sacrifice, etc), whilst the song just wanders past without ever trying to make a mark.

Lead single 'Forever' follows, a slight improvement, a relatively accomplished but rather cliché use of chmaltz metaphor (which might explain Pohl's horror-movie attire in the inlay), with only some punchy drum rolls standing out from the standardised collection of sounds that make a Blutengel track these days. Then comes 'Silent Tears (For You)', a more-minimal classical oriented piece, sung by Constance and Eva. The mix of orchestral drumming and harp works well enough, but there's no aura of greatness about it. Against all the odds, it's just another song.

And now the album really descends into tedium....the bitty 'In The Distance' and the blatant reworking of old concepts on 'Solitary Angel' both failing to leave even the slightest impression, whilst the token attempt at uptempo electro-industrial (omitting the extreme vocal distortion) of 'Love Killer' just sounds like a self-conscious attempt to add an additional style to the album that sorely needs a wake-up call. Eva Poelzing gets her first lead vocals of the album on 'Senseless life', but it neither improves on nor develops upon what has come before.

We finally get something of worth come 'Navigator'. Just this once, everything comes together at once – the programming seems to have found some of it's former dynamism, whilst Pohl's chorus shines brighter than anything else on the album, singing of the angel he know he is never going to be. Backed on to this is 'Stay', a cover of the old Shakespeare's Sister number. Their adaptation starts out as a fairly straightforward piano-based affair, Constance making a pretty good job at the vocal (particularly with the soaring, chmaltzy e chorus), before Chris comes in and shows us how to sing it Blutengel-style.

The two best tracks on the album are now out of the way, however. The rest, from 'Ice Angel' through to the conclusion, is just more of the same. Sure, if you like shimmering synths, textured pads and strings, droning male vox interspersed with sweetly sung girlie bits and songs about angels, lost souls and all that, you'll probably be in heaven. Oh, except for 'Go To Hell', where we get another attempt at the up-tempo electro-industrial-minus-vocal-distortion thing. It's better than 'Love Killer', admittedly, but nothing revolutionary.

There must be some readers who are thinking that I got just a little bit bored whilst writing this review. Well, all I can say is that you're absolutely right. But you ain't seen nothing yet. I've got the bonus discs to write about. The 'Fire' CD contains five further songs, as if 15 on the album were not enough, the best of which being the offbeat instrumental 'Demon Kiss' and the almost groovy 'Falscher Stolz'. The other three ('Second Chance', 'Ohne Dich' and 'Kingdom') are just chm everything else on the main album.

The third CD, entitled 'Ice' is only found on the limited edition 3CD set. I've got one of those, meaning there's only 1999 others out there (update: got a pretty sum for it on Ebay since writing this). If you missed it, don't worry too much. You get the band's 'Konzertintro' from their 2003 live shows, a reasonably well-conceived exclusive EBM-ish track 'Mistress of the Dark' (but does everything have to be 'of the Dark' or 'of the Night' all the time?),

plus an uninspired remix of 'Forever' and an acoustic (piano-based) take on 'Die With You' from Seelenschmerz, which is reasonable enough compared with everything else here.

There's also a videoclip of 'Vampire Romance' in .mpg format, a sort of mixture of horror movie clips mixed with footage of the bands performance of the same song at the M'era Luna festival aircraft hangar in 2003, with the studio version played over the top. I was there personally, and was surprised they picked that show, due to the way that the bands backing video mysteriously had the on-screen counter left switched on for their entire show. But I've had enough of being picky.

So I have to admit to being disappointed. Not that I was surprised given the advance warning of the 'Forever' single. It's like the magic that brought this group to my attention has gone. The techniques that made greats such as the heavenly 'Soul of Ice' or the resigned melancholic gloom of 'I'm Dying Alone' are still technically in evidence. But there are no fresh ideas as to how they might be applied. Pohl and his two lady friends just trawl out song after song, throwing in all their favourite ingredients, but ultimately producing little more than standardised Euro-goth. That said, there's apparently still a demand for this sort of thing, so if you excuse me while I warm up the Korg Triton, as if he can do it, so can I. And I won't call any of my songs 'Forever', either.

## **Blutengel – Forever (2003)**

Right, that's it. No more. Could all these Euro-bands please kindly stop calling their songs 'Forever'. It's been done. It's finished. Get over it. Angels and Agony, Bruderschaft, Culture Kultür, a couple of others with band names so generic I can't seriously be asked to recall them, and now Blutengel, too! It's not original anymore. It's become more cliched than an Access Virus preset.

Not that all that means this is necessarily a bad song of course. That's more of a subjective matter. Let's ignore the 'Forever' bits and get to the heart of the song. Blutengel have, after all, produced some very beautiful pieces of music over the years. What we have here, however, sort of sits in the middle of their creative music spectrum. Pohl's deep Germanic voice takes lead role, with little evidence of any female vocals this time. I could dream up a more elaborate description, but there's no point as ultimately it's just another piece of vaguely melodic goth-friendly synth-pop.

B-side 'Leaving You' is also fairly predictable stuff, a downtempo one complete with the slowed-down beat and perpetually looped piano synth (I'll award a prize to the first band who can make one of these sound as good as real piano). It's a real take-it-or-leave-it one – compared with classics like 'Soul of Ice', it's little more than Blutengel by numbers. Not awful, but hardly attention grabbing.

There's also a selection of remixes of the title track. The 'dark pop mix' is reasonable, filling out the sound with an extra helping of bleeps, arpeggios and suchlike. There's also three related mixes, one by each member of sister (sorry, brother) band Terminal Choice. Louis Manke's mix adds some fairly straightforward riffs and power chords to the overall mix, which works reasonably well. Jens Gartner goes for a forced restructuring of the key sequences, which ends up way too complex for a song this simple, whilst Gordon Moczny tries but just fails to carry off a stop-start kick drum treatment with washes of guitar noise over the top.

So it's really a bit of a disappointment then. Compared with Blutengel's previous works, this is all rather generic, all rather 'heard it before', either in their previous work or in the music of other Germanic electro-goth acts. It's really hard to suggest what Pohl could do to develop the project from here, as three strong albums (plus two as Seelensturm before

that) seem to have exhausted the immediate possibilities. Hopefully he's got a surprise up his sleeve for the next album, because as advance indications go, this disc isn't exactly much of an encouragement.

## **Borghesia – And Man Created God (2014)**

Borghesia, forever consigned to being Slovenia's second most-famous industrial band, are back. And if you're expecting yet-another review of an old EBM band returning after many years away and delivering a well-produced but unoriginal and derivative revival of their old sounds, well, that is not the review I have for you. This one needs a little more critical attention. But first a little bit of history.

I first became aware of Borghesia's return at WGT 2014. Their heritage in EBM secured them second-top slot on Sunday's TheaterFabrik billing between Vomito Negro and Spetsnaz. They duly arrived on stage with guitars, female singers, a full drum kit and not a synth in sight. Within three songs, the room had all but emptied, the body beat crowd voting with their feet and electing to hide out downstairs drinking beer before Sweden's finest Ebb-alikes hit the stage.

I stuck around, as did my girlfriend. She remembered the band in their original two-piece form, owns their classic albums on vinyl and was going to watch this come what may. I, meanwhile, had already seen *White Lies* on the Friday night, was not remotely scared of those guitar thingys as a result, and hence was willing to give the new Borghesia a go. They might have thrown a curve ball so extreme that it came back and smacked them in the face, but there was also a feeling that there was something of musical value at the heart of this.

And now for the album. The title and artwork show that the socio-political awareness that features throughout Borghesia's history is still present. And musically they still seem to adopt a style befitting a counter-cultural stance. It's just it happens to be 60s hippy rock, not 80s EBM. A meat-eater I may be, but I can still relate to such material, and on opening track "We Don't Believe You", the sedate guitar twang is accompanied by a flatly spoken list of Capitalist terminology, reminiscent of "Fitter Happier" by Radiohead, alternating with the massed voices of the chorus.

"C'est la Guerre" sees the tempo rise, synths take more of a role, and female joint-lead vocals. Add a catchy-as-hell chorus and the end result is an infectious composition that should appeal to anyone who wasn't expecting EBM. This reviewer's honeymoon with the new Borghesia's doesn't last, though. "My Life Is My Message" is a comparatively dull grind coloured by a hotch-potch of influences, whilst "Kaufen Macht Frei" is a silly fusion of social comments set to tropical lounge-rock steel guitars.

And then the whole album ignites with "194". Tempos rise once more, middle eastern scales join the mix, whilst the vocals takes the form of a no-holds-barred anti-Israel rant. They're certainly not afraid of sticking their necks out, even when you consider the predominantly Liberal Left leaning target audience that is likely to be sympathetic to such an outburst. Musically, it does serve the purpose of giving the whole album a massive wake-up call.

"Profits, Power and Lies" is as typical of the album as any track could be – synth-infused protest rock littered with musical curios at various points in the mix. "Para Todos To do" is less than the sum of it's parts, a dull drag which menacing guitar plucks and horn sections fail to brighten. "Too Much Is Not Enough" finally sees the electronic roots of Borghesia's come to the fore, another uptempo tunes with a driving synth baseline and all kinds of anger thrown in, even if the end result is not as tight as their earlier masterworks.

The album ends with one final surprise with “Shoot at the Clock!”. They finally get the slow grind dynamic to work, with the resultant off-tune synth-guitar combo strangely NIN-esque. It’s a surprising end to a surprising album. The validity of Borghesia’s new direction isn’t for me to question – after a hiatus this long, a shift this radical shouldn’t have been a surprise. Indeed, I myself came off a lengthy reviewing break of my own to cover this album, as I knew this particular review would require at least a little understanding of the backstory to truly provide a fair treatment.

But two questions remain. Firstly, can they make their new style work over the course of an album? That’s something they’ve achieved only partially here. And secondly, can they find the right target audience? It didn’t work on beer-drinking, pork-eating, army-boot-wearing Anhalters, but further afield there must be some subcultural group that’s been waiting for something like this.

Me? I guess I’m just glad they didn’t go dubstep.

## **Cabaret Voltaire – The Crackdown (1983)**

First a little story about how I discovered this band – The first year at uni had effectively finished, the exams done well enough, the accommodation secured for next year and I finally had some guilt-free time to myself. Of course, my hall-mates being what they were, no-one was in the mood for celebration, so I resorted to searching the Internet and record shops for new bands. This is what I eventually came up with. I took it to my room, and enjoyed it all on my own. Don’t know why, with all at HMV Oxford Street at my disposal, I bought a decidedly plain looking CD. Maybe it suited my emotional no-mans-land of the moment.

The first song, ‘24-24’, seems like a bit of a no-man’s land as well, even if it does showcase the ‘typical’ sound of mid-80s Cabaret Voltaire. Lots of rough electronic noodling with the odd snatches of Mallinder’s part-whispered vocal here and there. The whole thing seems in all respects ‘average’ by CV standards – not a bad song, just not one that tries as hard as some their others. Rather more interesting is the clicky, more ambient ‘In The Shadows’, sounding much like an outtake from their ‘Johnny YesNo’ soundtrack. The mix is still fairly rough (more so than 24-24, even), and can definitely be defined as ‘experimental’ above all else.

The first sign of song structure comes on ‘Talking Time’, which is probably the most listenable track so far, and one that’s very typical of the duo during this era, though it does go on a little bit too long. The ante is upped for ‘Animation’, more upbeat, sounding much like what we have heard already, only faster. The slap bass and vocal heavy ‘Over and Over’ comes up next, another track that hints at potential but was possibly a little on the sharp and fragmented side.

‘Just Fascination’ is catchier and slicker than the previous five tracks, upping the album’s appeal factor with the first real classic on offer. However, for me, the highlight of the album is ‘Why Kill Time (When You Can Kill Yourself)’. Unlike most of the other songs, this one actually seems to build as it goes along, as opposed to wavering about the place. Also, the vocals are also starting to sound more ‘purposeful’, Mallinder no longer relying on his much used technique of just ‘dropping in’ enigmatic/energising phrases here and there.

Another good track, ‘Haiti’ follows on, in a different vein. This one is mostly instrumental (just an almost-inaudible sampled voice), with some interesting instrumentation – including a sitar-like lead, some piano flourishes and a synthetic brass section’. Once that is over with, it’s time the title track ‘Crackdown’. CV trademark vocal whispers backed with all manner of sounds, this time strung together to something approximating a song! (yes, they

do write songs sometimes!). Then there is 'Diskono', an enjoyable little piece, which continues the album's upward trend in listenability.

The most unexpected section of the album comes up next, an instrumental called 'Double Vision', little more than a repeated synth sting chord progression. It's actually quite hypnotising in the right circumstances – in my case, staring out of a window in an ugly student hall on a dull June morning feeling totally uninspired, and seeing the same sight I had seen for the last year. Everyone else will probably find it a little boring, except for those that appreciate a little break.....

Closing up the album is 'Badge of Evil', a dark instrumental verging on the avant-garde – really no more than a deep synth line overlaid with a random assortment of percussion and the odd sample or effect, though the assembled collection of noises is not without appeal. That just leaves 'Moscow', an interesting 'lil number, featuring a dismembered horn with various whispers dropped in along the way. You know the drill by now, don't you?

It's not a great an album as some make it out to be, but well worth a listen if you're into electronic rhythm experiments from the 80s. Remember, despite the album's place in Virgin's backcatalogue, it's only vaguely related to the sound of Virgin's other 'new wave' signings, so most of those picking this thing up under the understanding that it's a 'classic album' will be most likely to find it unbearable. The LP version comes with the last 4 tracks on a bonus 12" single (make sure you get this if you buy second-hand, as they're some of the best parts). What it lacks in clarity and direction it gains in sheer curiosity power – it's just someone really had to think harder about the running order, as the better tracks all seem to be toward the later stages

## **Cabaret Voltaire – The Covenant, The Sword and The Arm of the Lord (1985)**

A central reference point for Cabaret Voltaire's work, this. The point where they still had the industrial tinge about them, but at the same time became more melodic and more palatable to the end listener. The free form of earlier works is gone, though they haven't exactly moved to the full-on songwriting, either. I have no clue how successful this album was commercially, but it's just about the only album by this group that I could see getting widespread approval both inside and outside the genre.

The opening songs are a pretty good indication of the direction Kirk and Mallinder have taken. 'L21st' is an especially strong track, the funky bassline bubbling away in the background, whilst Mal offers some pretty simple 'whispered vocal' accompaniment (y'know, standard sort of thing from these guys), and some surprisingly melodic instrumentation. Naturally you could hardly expect an 80s 'industrial' band to write a real song, so they've thrown in a modicum of samples, plus a few little loops and stutters, just to ch your eardrums a little bit.

This leads into 'I Want You', the undisputed dancefloor favourite of the album, built round a sample of a quasi-religious all-American evangelist. It's a very energetic performance, including some mind-blowing drum programming, turning this into one of albums highlights. Maybe they just realised they needed to release a single from this album, so decided to write a track DJs would jump on? Those purists let down by the sheer slickness of it all need not worry, as the next song 'Hells Home' as a rougher feel about it, opening up with a 45-second sampler-defecation followed by a mix laden with noisy guitar snatches.

Stepping the middle ground is 'Kickback', where the realisation is made that you don't really need to bother writing complex songs if you've built up a library of weird sounds and you're pretty handy with a mixing desk. Just keep reiterating the same thing over and

over...then surprise your listener with some new stuff when they least expect it. 'The Arm of the Lord' follows, a largely ambient, atonal piece, less than two minutes long, serving as a link piece that a full-on track.

And so to 'Warm'. That distinctive 'looseness' helps keep the song distinctive, though a vaguely orgasmic female sample gives the song a solid backing. The slightly irritating but somehow atmospheric 'Golden Halos' makes good use of the echo effect appearing on most synths around this time, though this time the track does seem to lose it's way at some point. It's an interesting listen, but not one that's easy on the ear. 'Motion Rotation' is a more listenable proposition, the 'yippee-o, yippee-a' vocal driving the song though its full length. There's even an attempt at building up to a climax, something rarely heard in most CV songs to date.

'Whip Blow' has a solid beat holding it together, and some surprising clean-sounding flourishes appearing throughout out the song, though it goes get a little cluttered around the three minute mark. That's a problem that dominates 'The Web', which just doesn't really do anything to stand out from the other songs we have heard here. Like all Cabaret Voltaire songs, it's worth a few listens on curiosity value, and there are some good sections laid about the place. But we've just had a whole album of this.

That's the end if you're listening to the LP, but CD owners get two bonus tracks also released on the 'Drinking Gasoline' EP. 'Sleepwalking' is probably one of the strongest tracks on the whole album, a moodier and darker proposition, and this time they don't fall into the trap of trying to stuff too many sounds in at once. 'Big Funk' is a more open affair, unfortunately sounding a little uncertain in what it's trying to achieve, though at least a semi-decent effort has been made to develop the song over its eight-minute duration.

I think this album is one of Cabaret Voltaire's better releases, despite the somewhat varied nature of the listening experience. The album is easier to get your head round than a lot of their early works, though it still keeps that down-to-earth rawness which won them so much respect way back then. Listening to whole albums of this kind of music can do your head in after a while, so there will always be a limit to how good this could be, but in the end, they did a decent job.

## **Cabaret Voltaire – Code (1987)**

This was Cabaret Voltaire's first album for Parlophone/EMI, but also their last one that kept true to the style that took them through the 80s with a solid (if not massive) cult fan base intact all the way. They would soon be hailed as a 'major influence' in the fast-developing house music scene, their subsequent output losing all the 'bite' it once had. For now, however, they still had a trace of their experimental past about them, and this is thus the last Cabs album to which I'm willing to give anything more than token attention.

There's still a more pop-oriented sound about this album, but it's still Kirk and Mallinder through and through. All the electronic bleeps you want to hear are present and correct, Mal's still got that slightly unnerving whisper laid thick over most of the songs and the drum loops are particularly strong in places, switching from the dancey to the outright funky. In other words, it's a great dance album. But how does it sound when I'm sitting down and typing?

The opening track, 'Don't Argue', is also one of the strongest, rightfully chosen as the album's leading single. The use of a number of little synthetic flourishes and understated guitar strumming gives a vague new romantic feel to the usual bout of simple, enigmatic vocals and solid electronic accompaniment. 'Sex, Money, Freaks' continues along similar

lines, but it's more adventurous in scope, incorporating some heavy voice processing, a saxophone and (real) bass guitar into the mix.

Next up is 'Thank You America', probably the catchiest track on the album. It may have a shameless synth-pop feel about it, for once not even trying to agitate the eardrum of those not of an industrial disposition, but it's highly successful nonetheless. I'm still not sure what they're thanking America for (guessing its irony?), but I guess once I work out where they took the samples from, I'll get some idea. Following this is 'Here To Go' – another pop-oriented track, also the second single from the album. It's pretty good, but the slightly limp chorus (featuring a brief burst of Stephen Mallinder actually SINGING) lets down an otherwise strong track.

'Trouble (Won't Stop)' opens with a short, moody burst on guitar that sounds like something lifted out of an old Western film, but the song itself is the usual mid-tempo electro number. Following this is the short burst of 'White Car', a more uptempo track that lets the high-frequency synths that hang over most CV tracks come to the forefront for a change, though the vague guitar noodling going on the background keeps the track firmly in the spirit of the rest of the album. Then we get 'No One Here' – a generally dull and bitty track that tries to pack in too many ideas in and not letting any of them really develop.

The more straightforward 'Life Slips By' is an improvement – the chorus utilising an intimidating chord progression that gives a track a climatic tone, whilst Mallinder's vocals are more melodic than they've been at any point to date. The main part of the album ends with the title track, 'Code' – the piece that best encompasses the industrial-electro-funk-fusion the duo have tried to achieve throughout the record. It may not be a personal favourite in terms of its genre options, but apart from a few jarring samples laid randomly about the place, this is quite enjoyable and an interesting diversion from the norm.

The CD version of the album features a couple of bonus tracks – neither to the best of my knowledge released in single form. 'Hey Hey' is another one of those bass-heavy electro dance numbers, quite proficient but nothing really special. The 'little dub', meanwhile is a more minimal mix of the original (as dub mixes usually are), though it does emphasise the strong drum loop underpinning the track, at times not unlike the one that eventually formed the basis of NIN's 'Head Like A Hole' (was Trent a CV fan? I'm guessing he probably was).

And so ends the last in a series of strong, hard electronic albums from the Sheffield duo, their following efforts having a dancier, less confrontational (and hence slight weaker) impact. It's not quite as good as 'The Crackdown', but it's a match for any of the others, and certainly has it's own distinct sound. I wouldn't suggest it as a first purchase, though, as stylistically it's a little way distant from their best known full-length efforts.

## **Carved Souls – Waveform (2011)**

This is the third album for the Carved Souls, though also their first for several years, and also their first for Conzoom Records, a label who are starting building themselves something of a reputation as a source of polished, quality synthpop. And that's what we get here. Polished quality synthpop. Despite the projects Californian origins, I can't help comparing them to various UK projects, Depeche Mode in particular.

Now, I know it's practically impossible to write synthpop and not sound at least a little bit Mode-like at times, but the singer Suede (no other name given) is VERY Dave Gahan-like in his delivery, and they go one step further by sampling a Speak & Spell machine on the album's title track. If that isn't a blatant reference to a key influence, I don't know what is! I'm not saying that any of this is a bad thing, but it is an obvious thing. Speaking as one still reeling from the self-indulgent Mode-offshoot VCMG album, it's actually something of a

relief to hear what I actually hoping said project would deliver – seductively morose songwriting built on a base of synthetic ear candy.

There's still a lot of competition in the genre, and hence the strength of such albums is therefore largely dependent on the quality of the songs rather than some over-arching concept. The album opener 'Broken Soul' works particularly well, making good use of the 'schaffel' rhythm which has characterises many a popular tune over the years – I could quote anything from Iggy Pop's 'Nightclubbing' to Covenant's 'Like Tears In Rain'. The other highlight is the combination of sweet melodics and hard supersaw synth leads in 'Dream Of You', a mere three minutes in length and significantly better for sticking to 7" single time limits and not deviating off into lengthy dancefloor dynamics in the style of just about every other band to combine said techniques.

The real club hit of the album is 'Box', a plain-sounding title, behind which hides a floorfilling combination of thumping beats and heavenly strings that you've probably heard several time before, but it's done as well here as anywhere else. And the aforementioned Speak and Spell samples in 'Waveform' actually serve a valid function. Far from sounding gimmicky, they actually serve as a counterpoint to the rather resigned tone of the actual song. Of the remaining songs, I found the downtempo, slightly menacing 'It's Not The End' memorable enough, and I also enjoyed 'Dependent', but by now I'm running out fresh ways of saying 'This Is Good'. It's just a good, solid synthpop tune with no need for further justification as to why I happened to like it more than the others.

I say this as I get the feeling that other may well find other tracks on here more to their tastes ? it just depends which lyrical device, chord sequence or melodic motif appeals most to your own ears. I didn't care much for the disjointed structure of 'Lost Inside', but there's probably someone out there who sees it as a refreshing diversion from the norm. The lyrics of 'Feel' and 'She's All Alone' had no affect on me chmaltzy , but you may just find they resonate with one of your own life experiences.

This cannot be said to be a criticism of this particular band, rather an inevitable limitation of the style. Virtually every 'pure' synthpop band I've encountered has had to face the 'Diversify Or Die' scenario eventually. Even Mesh, the yardstick for modern-day synthpop hopefuls, had to resort to adding guitars and live drums to their sound in order to stay ahead of the competition. But within these limitations, this is still a reasonable collection of songs. It just lacks a special something.

## **Caustic – The Man Who Couldn't Stop (2012)**

Love him or hate him, the industrial scene needs people like Matt Fanale of Caustic. A genre which is both highly technical and non-mainstream simply invites humourless elitism, serious subject matters and hours obsessing over the minutiae of production. It would be wrong to call Caustic a 'novelty project', but neither is it one you can take too seriously either. It's the light relief we all need once in a while.

A sizeable track-listing is always cause for concern – could I really make through 18 tracks? I was pleasantly surprised that I not only could, but actually enjoyed a lot of what I heard along the way. The opening piece "Failing at the School of Life" was a messy two minutes of shouting over breakbeats, but it was a mere precursor to "Laugh Like Mutants". I was not expecting a six-and-a-half-minutes Godflesh-esque grind, all jackhammering drums and walls of guitar noise (yes, a real guitarist! Normal instruments still have life in them!), but somehow the Caustic touch seems to add a certain something to this largely-forgotten style.



Elsewhere we get a more conventional (aka “Combichrist style”) stompathon, with “Bury You Alive” and “Bigger Faster NOW!!!” both carrying off the kick drum pulse, searing leads and shout-it-out vox with conviction. The ingeniously titled “Demon Seed Semen Deed” follows a similar style, adding both a hard acid techno synth line and a descending chord sequence that actually make the track sound like a bona-fide song. Yeah, there’s more to nailing this style than a bunch of kick drums, synth presets and shouted insults (such releases are regularly crucified on these pages, none of us are fooled by it!).

There’s also a more experimental side to Caustic. Matt seems to adopt a ‘throw it and see if it sticks’ mentality, stuffing his albums full of deviations from the stompy norm and letting the listener pick out the bits that work. For me, the extreme vocal processing and hard, blunt melody of “Graver Guru” won me over (and I even get what he’s trying to say about scene DJs). The collaboration with Android Lust “Bleed You Out” also works well, the Caustic instrumental palette sitting well with the female vocals and producing something that is surprisingly musical for a Caustic album. Although really it just sounds like an out-take from an Android Lust album. That’s OK with me, though. I like Android Lust.

I didn’t get what some of the other tracks were trying to do. The iVardensphere vs Caustic colab “Ghost Like Swayze” goes for a spacious, minimal electronic texture, which is technically well-executed but lacking a certain “flow”. “Internet Model” tries to make some kind of valid social statement, but the sparse musical accompaniment, amounting to a few clicks and cello flourishes (another real instrument!) just seem to tell me to file it under “filler”, as there’s just not enough substance. The syncopated stabs and fluid bassline of “We Never Learn” create an atmosphere quite unlike anything heard in the industrial scene to date, but the standard-issue shouted vocals sound misplaced. And the album finale “Fin (Again) Begin (Again)” seems to want to recreate “Pimpf” from the end of ‘Music For The Masses’. Nice try, but not quite hitting the mark depth-wise.

So something is still amiss with Caustic’s quality control, that’s for sure. I’ve found most of his albums outstay their welcome, this one being no exception, and it’s not the most polished production either, the lengthy list of producer credits going some way to explaining the lack of any real unity to the albums sound. But there’s a lot to enjoy along the way, and unlike some projects, there’s actually a feeling that the whole hopping between genres thing is an essential part of the project appeal rather than an a self-conscious attempt to sound ‘diverse’. Shoehorning unrelated influences into songs isn’t always a good thing, but Matt Fanale seems to get away with it.

## **Celluloide – Numeriques (2012)**

Believe me when I say I was excited to discover I was reviewing this. A two-part compilation (this review covers the first half) by an as-yet undiscovered French electronic pop outfit. And I’ve always believe that the French (and possible some allied Belgians) have a ‘way’ with synthpop that the non-Francophone world can admire but not copy. There must be plenty here to get my teeth into. The promise of some chiptune influence was the icing on the cake. I can’t get enough of 8-Bit soundwaves.

And yet several listens later, and I’m struggling for any opinion whatsoever about this album or this band. And that is a reviewers nightmare. Good or great albums give me a chance to wax lyrical. Poor albums give me something to tear apart in verbal terms. Good-but-flawed albums are the best of all, as they inspire some of my most original terminology. Albums like this inspire no such wordsmithing. The fact that I manage to dredge up several paragraphs nonetheless is testament to my commitment to the cause, but says nothing about the music.

In purely descriptive terms, what we have here is a female vocal synthpop band, with both French and English lyrics. The synths are strictly old-school analogue style, with some lo-fi melodies that resemble chiptune recordings. The vocals are delivered in an garden-variety half-sung, half-spoken sort of way. And that's really all there is to it. Bassline throbs along. Melodies get played. Words get sung. Odd bit of ear candy. Move on. The fact that some of the songs on here are remixes and others are originals means little to a newcomer, they all amount to pretty much the same thing.

The nearest equivalent I can think of to this band are Client, that three-piece girl-synthpop band who were big in the mid-00's, in the era between electroclash and whatever style it was that Lady Gaga popularised. Record label backing and a devoted niche following got them some lucrative gigs and a couple of well-distributed albums, but everything I heard from them barring their first single (the catchy 'Price Of Love') left me cold and unmoved. Nice dresses, shame about the song. They were the band the word 'Meh' was invented for. And now Celluloide proved that this shoulder-shrugging was not a one off. At least they got the right label. BOREDOMATIC.

I did eventually reconcile why I didn't 'get' this band. Analogue synthpop is one of the easiest style of music to record. My own musical experiments have largely amounted to the style. And if you're going to get attention, you need some quirks or imperfections. The tinny drum machines of Clarke-era Mode, Andy McCluskey's pullovers and Geography-teacher-at-school-disco dancing, Marc Almond's risqué undercurrent all drew attention from the simplistic nature of the music. Even the more recent bands heard on the Conzoom roster have something notable to set them apart. Celluloide just seem too pedestrian in comparison.

A few tracks made a marginal impression in the end. "This Aching Kiss" opened the collection well and set the band's mission statement with a mid-tempo throb and a dismissive subject matter that suits the languid vocal style. The extended mix of "People Like Me" is six minutes of charging bassline and chip blips, the most energetic track of the eleven here. And then I could pick any of the others. A track like "Ordinosaure" is an example of my disappointment. Despite some very obvious chiptune influence (taken from an Oric Atmos emulator, apparently), the end result is a rather turgid composition, lacking the shameless 'fun factor' that anything involving a retro sound chip should have.

That said, by no means are Celluloide a musical atrocity (I save such damnation for anything to do with dubstep). But it neither does it deserve praise. It's just another band for the synthpop landfill. If you used to be a Client fan, or used to own one of those Oric computers, this might be just the thing you're looking for. Everyone else can probably find something more interesting.

There is a second part to this compilation. When I can assemble some words that aren't a repeat of this review, you can read about it [here](#).

## **The Chemical Brothers – Exit Planet Dust (1995)**

So they had to stop calling themselves 'The Dust Brothers'. Didn't really hurt, and it gave them a neat album title in 'Exit Planet Dust' to boot. The Chemical Brothers already had a following when this album came out, and so were nicely positioned to consolidate their underground following with a collection of their works so far. They actually did quite a bit more than that, dragging in fans that might never have previously considered listening to 'dance music' – but besides from influencing the CD-buying millions, what exactly does this disc do of musical merit?

The first half of the disc is given over to what might now be described as the Chemical Brothers 'sound'. Big, electro-rock styled beats are the foundation, over which all kinds of creativity is forged. Opener 'Leave Home', for example, consists of throbbing synths, the now-legendary sample 'Brothers Gonna Work It Out' and plenty of electronic ear candy. Structurally, the piece is ideally suited to the unpretentious dancefloor, rhythmic, certainly, with all the buildups and breakdowns needed to play a crowd up for a bit of no-nonsense bouncin'.

'In Dust We Trust' offers us a droning, didgeridoo base, snatches of various samples and pretty much everything else typical of a chemical-generation floorfiller. 'Song To The Siren' slows things down just a little, a live track from the 'Sabresonic' club night, built round a softly metallic drilling sound and waving fem-vox samples. Back neatly on to this is 'Three Little Birdies Down Beats', touching more on acid house, but the multiple layers of beat science give the piece a very mechanical feel.

It softens a little towards the end, leading us into 'Fuck Up Beats', a quick blast of some fiercer, more distorted loops (though nothing in comparison to the rhythmic noise genre), which then leads us into 'Chemical Beats', lots of piercing synth and yet more stadium-sized drum loops. It might be worth mentioning that these six tracks are all mixed seamlessly on the CD – not exactly beatmatching, but certainly qualifying as a 'Chemical Brothers' suite.

Part two of the disc offers some more distinctive 'songs' – as in pieces intended for places other than nightclubs. The first 'Chico's Groove' is indeed groovy, a neat 'walking' bassline and wave of crystalline synthesiser providing the first evidence of the duo's real 'crossover' appeal. Even better is 'One Too Many Mornings' – a delirious composition, a gently throbbing sequence and insubstantial female vocals rising up from the mix.

Now for something that has since become a Chemical Brother's trademark – a guest vocal (recorded bespoke, not sampled) from a rock star – in this case Tim Burgess from The Charlatans, on the track 'Life Is Sweet'. He gives an accomplished 90s-indie type performance, which sits in reasonably well with Tom and Ed's musical creation, a piece fairly typical of the album as a whole. It's not my favourite of the disc, the vocal not doing enough to set the track apart from the rest, though someone must like it as they released in on single.

The most surprising track at all is 'Playground For A Wedgeless Firm'. Slow, a slow, stripped-down instrumental. It's a very hard track to describe – seemingly to rely on heavily modified samples of string instruments and the odd orchestral burst. Or it might be all be synthetic – how would I know? This leaves second guest singer Beth Orton to play us out with 'Alive Alone' – where the Brothers get as close as they ever do to a full-on pop song, Beth's vocal doing more for the track than Tim Burgess' did for the track-before-last.

So, a landmark album? Yes, it was. The Chemical Brothers weren't the first band by any means to have a track at fusing dance and rock musics into a cohesive whole, but their approach the whole idea was a valid one. So maybe this style is getting a little dated now? Maybe there's too many similar beat patterns (and they aren't THAT similar)? It's still a good album, and certainly has more crossover appeal than most of the other stuff I deal with here.

## **The Chemical Brothers – Further (2010)**

The Chemical Brothers were one of the key names during the mid-90s 'big beat' dance craze – a rare example of a dance genre that crossed over into rock and alternative circles, an arena where the artist behind the music was more important than who operated the

record deck. I, like many others lost interest come the 00s – I easily acquired their last two albums for peanuts on eBay and a run through each indicated an increasing reliance on guest vocalists and (in the case of ‘The Salmon Dance’ from the last album) gimmicks. The Chems had jumped the shark. Or, if you prefer, the salmon.

But now they’ve returned with what I can only describe as a back-to-basics effort. Eight tracks without a celebrity cameo in sight – Tom Rowlands himself provides male vocals, US singer Stephanie Dosen provides some fem-vox, but neither of them provide contributions equivalent to the full-length songs heard on previous albums. After all, the forced crossover of dance beats with rock and pop vocalists is no longer a relevant strategy, so go back to what you do best – produce dance music! Or rather ensure the first five minutes of the album are completely devoid of drum beats! Actually, five seconds was all I took to know how good this album would be. The blast of harmonics, the falsetto vocals, the gradual introduction of layer upon layer of sound. Why let a drum machine come along and spoil it all?

This is a precursor to ‘Escape Velocity’, a twelve-minute epic, based around a surprisingly orthodox house beat, over which a whole host of rough, lo-fi synthetic goodness is laid. Melodic in places, grating in others, it’s got all the hallmarks of Tom and Ed’s production style, without at any point trying to be a radio-friendly lead single. And I like that! If you’re looking for the block rockin’ Chemical Beats, you won’t find them until the fourth track ‘Dissolve’. Combine them with the shimmering, swirling synths and Tom’s understated vocal delivery and we’re starting to verge on psychedelic rock territory, not the first time they’ve done so but the execution of the style here is as it always has been.

The other track of note is ‘Swoon’, mainly due to the distinctive portmanteau synth lead which seems to have been swiped from Orbital’s ‘Lush’. I don’t mind as it brings together two of the most distinctive dance acts of the 1990s into one song released in the 2010s. I didn’t much get into the last two tracks on the album – ‘K+D+B’ came across as somewhat lightweight compared with what had come before and ‘Wonders Of The Deep’ made good use of some indie rock guitar strumming and synthetic shimmer, but without equalling the impact of what came before. If you bought the album off that fruit-flavoured music service, you might have got a bonus track or two, but I didn’t so I can’t tell you what they sound like.

But the important point to draw from this album is that The Chemical Brother are relevant again. They’ve made an album that plays on their own strengths, not on the strengths of whichever vocalists their music industry connections could procure for them. If you were a fan of the Chems back in their mid-90s heyday but have lost track of, or lost interest in them since then (and I don’t blame you), now would be a very good time to rediscover why you got into them in the first place.

## **Cinemascope – The Falling Impossible (2012)**

There’s two places in this world where one can almost always locate a nugget or two of quality synthpop. Sweden and the Conzoom Records roster. And it just so happens that said label have issued a version of Cinemascope’s début album. This particular Scandinavian quartet actually manage to stand out before you’ve listened to so much as a note of their music, eschewing the abstract artworks dished up by the majority of their modern day contemporaries in favour of a decadent, nay garish, group shot on the cover.

I’m even more convinced that I’ve been teleported back to the early-to-mid 80’s upon listening to the first track, “Night Vision”. A quasi-orchestral string loop, a one-keyed bassline and a singer treading the fine boundaries between effete and out-and-out camp. Have we uncovered the missing link between Soft Cell and Erasure? Perhaps not. “Modern Death” brings us back to earth, an essentially solid, cynical mid-tempo pop

number spoilt by some overly-forced wordplay. I'll give you an example ? "Modern Death. Modern Life. Modern Husband. Modern Wife". No, not quite up to Marc Almond standards, I'm afraid.

But there does seem to be a genuine effort to push boundaries here. Admittedly, there are some example of garden-variety synthpop (Maskless, Names of Things, The Falling Impossible) so bland and generic that I can barely manage to write one line to describe the lot of 'em, and other tracks that rely on over-practised techniques, like the up-n-down arpeggios of "The Sky". But how many synthpop tracks can you name recorded in waltz time? Other than "Maid Of Orleans", I mean. Cinemascope have managed it with "Face The Night". Whilst the implementation of the song is sloppy in places, not transitioning cleanly between it's various parts, it at least creates the electro-cabaret feel that I think they were after all along.

But Cinemascope are especially strong when when they go unashamedly retro. "I Won't Come Home Tonight" is pure Vince Clarke style synthy ear candy, of the kind that makes me want to dance like Andy Bell, whilst the songs lyrics are a wonderfully dismissive parting shot delivered to a high-maintenance ex. "Bloodstained" goes even further back, with a lead synth that harks back to Wendy Carlos or mid-70's Kraftwerk. Give it a solid beat and some symbolic lyrics and you've secured a fast track to my iPod playlist. And from there, maybe a DJ setlist. Must do that retro-electro night some time.....

Darker in tone is "Suicidal Teenage Boy", a hint of social awareness coming from a band who aren't afraid of a little bit of dubious taste to get their message across. Another stand-out is "Boulevards In The Rain", meshing a noisy, rock-styled beat with more melodic elements. Meanwhile, "Deep Waters" is notable for showing a good deal more creativity in programming and integrating that up-and-down arp device that stuck out too much and duly spoiled "The Sky".

This album therefore bears an interesting comparison to the Carved Souls album I reviewed a few weeks back, both bands sharing the same label. 'The Carved Souls' album delivered a "pure" form of synthpop that was more consistent throughout it's duration, but ultimately got "samey" toward the end. This album doesn't quite offer the same quality control, but it's certainly more varied in style and therefore more interesting to listen to from start to finish.

## **Cinemascope – Cold Heaven (2013)**

I've already reviewed Cinemascope's first album on this site, and I do remember it as a largely enjoyable if somewhat haphazard affair. But first albums are usually like that – the flaws are forgivable providing there is some talent and creativity at the core and that was certainly there. It was with some enthusiasm that I grasped the opportunity to review their follow up effort. Get some of that Swedish Synthpop Style with the benefit of experience to smooth the rough edges? Couldn't go wrong, could it?

But no, I once again seem to have drawn the short straw amongst the BR reviewing team and received a "difficult second album" to review. I knew something was wrong about half a minute into opening track "Second Coming". Downtempo beat, low-key synths, little guitar flourishes and a vocal performance that is competent enough on a technical level, but sounds for all the world like someone scribbled down a bunch of synthpop platitudes on the back of a used bus ticket and is now singing them dead straight. No hook, no catchy turn of phrase. Nothing.

"Private Property" is a slight improvement with it's melodic electronic and sputtering hi-hats providing some hint of the Vince school of synthetic pop success formula, but once again

the song lacks any real charm. The next pair of songs, “Frantic” and “Silhouettes” make an attempt at bringing some rhythmic creativity to the album, but neither song has any real substance, with “Silhouettes” incorporating the naffest and most forced key change I’ve heard for years.

We finally get a beacon of hope with “Frozen Ground”, a mid-tempo track that marches along confidently with a solid backbone that demands that this track at least be heard again. The bands obviously realise this and made it the lead single from the album. “Nuclear Heaven” also sound promising, multiple layers of synth providing an atmosphere of sorts, though their incorporation of melodic guitar into the mix isn’t as neat as it could have been, resulting in a disappointing sloppy end result.

“Trespassing” stands out as my second favourite track from the album, and all it took was a solid rhythm, a rich, detailed mix and a chorus that punches through the speaker cones and actually stands out from the rest of the song – no clever tricks, just a good old-fashioned pop song with all the usual tricks in play. “High Hopes” is at least interesting, a tense, nervous style of drum programming injecting rhythmic uncertainty alongside pretty synth melodies, though the final product is only just the sum of its parts and by no means more.

“Deep Ravine” is strong instrumentally, a prominent lead melody and forceful drum loops driving the song forward, though once again the songs lyrical content and delivery just leaves a whole “Will this do?” feeling. The menacing “In The Company Of Strangers” throbs away with a chorus that really bursts out and demands attention. It’s the last act of note on an album which now only offers the harsh, grating “Ran” and the very I usage of a heartbeat rhythm and piano+strings closer “Artifacts”.

So yes, having heard their first album, I’m disappointed. There are some good concepts at work, but only occasionally do the actual songs grab hold of said concepts and take the recording to a new level. There’s just a real lack of charisma coming across in these songs. And if you’re a ‘dress up and act theatrical’ synthpop band, that’s a real flaw.

## **Cinderella Effect – Cinderellicious (2010)**

This is the second album from the Cinderella Effect project (a Blutengel spin-off, in case the name of creative driving force Constance Rudert means nothing to you), but the first to contain original songs. The first album was simply a collection of cover versions of various schwarze-scene ‘standards, though in fairness, some of these did prove to be an interesting creative twist on the originals (like that cabaret-esque ‘Timekiller’ cover). But cover albums are always going to be an easy option. How is Cinders gonna cope when she has to find her own way to the ball and write her own songs along the way? That’s largely the question this album answers. There ARE three covers here, but they are all of distinctly non-scene tracks, thus requiring a greater degree of creative input than your average dark dancefloor hit.

Yet I have to admit, a few tracks in and I’d nearly given up hope. This was going to be another pleasantly bland female-vocal pop-rock project, inoffensive but lacking in any real creative substance, the musical equivalent to chewing gum. The fourth track ‘Always’ woke things up – and a memorable synth hook was all that was needed. And then things really got interesting – ‘The Crown Princess’ comprises of glockenspiel and tubular bell chimes which worked well weaved into the overall concept of the song, whilst ‘To Keep The Golden Mean’ saw a refreshing upping of the overall tempo level and even managed to build up to a climax of sorts. (The previous songs just sort of ‘ended’).

The later stages of the album still saw the occasional return of the insubstantial fluff that characterised the first three tracks, but amongst these we at least got the Lee Hazelwood cover 'Summer Wine', a duet featuring Carsten Klatte, a jobbing guitarist in the German scene who also played on three tracks on this album. The match-up works well, in much the same vein as the old Nick'n'Kylie strain 'Where The Wild Roses Grow'. There's also the menacing electronic backbone and wailing, disconcerting strings of 'Uninvited', which is apparently an Alanis Morissette cover. I didn't notice until I read the inlay, and that's a good thing. Can't stand Alanis.

So what's the moral of the story? Projects like this can only succeed these days if they really push the boundaries of possibility. We really don't need another moody fem-vox electronic pop project, at least not unless they're willing to break out of their comfort zone and create something which isn't self-consciously 'nice' in order to appeal to the lowest-common denominator.

## **Clan Of Xymox – Breaking Point (2006)**

With a previous album called 'Farewell' and a 'Best Of' a year later, one might have predicted the closure of the Xymox saga. Yet Ronny Mooring is back once more, and in many respects this album is a continuation of it's predecessor. Synths are once again pushed to the forefront of many of the tracks, although guitars do still make their presence felt elsewhere. The uptempo beat and future-poppy synth lead of album opener 'Weak In My Knees' might again lead one to accuse Ronny of bandwagon-jumping, but some growly guitar and those uber-dreary vox leave the listener in no doubt that there's a proper, bona-fide goth at work here.

The slower, more menacing 'Calling You Out' follows, possibly an attack against Ronny's former home town of Amsterdam. It's only after this that we get a taste of the CoX sound of old – the new-wave melancholy of 'She's Dangerous' followed by the serene gloomfest of 'Eternally' and 'We Never Learn', two songs echoing of their 4AD years, all shimmering guitar and funereal synth-texture topped off with resigned vocals from the terminally morose Ronny, the elements from which some of the finest of the Clan's tracks were made.

Things get a little more upbeat for the 'O Fortuna' sampling 'Be My Friend', before the synth-led gloom of 'Cynara' (I guess they had to refer to a girl's name at least once) and the pretty instrumental number 'Pandora's Box' before veering back onto club-friendly territory with 'Under The Wire' and finishing on 'What's Going On'. Even if this collection doesn't really represent anything new for Clan of Xymox, it's still an impressive effort that should offer something to all facets of the band's fanbase. They've still got what it takes to cut it in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century scene, which is more than you can say from some 80s goth survivors.

## **Combichrist – The Joy Of Gunz (2003)**

'I Only Came To Dance', he sings. Having spent the past few years fronting of Icon of Coil, hardly the most confrontational band in the scene, Andy LaPlegua clearly has more than a little steam to let of, and Combichrist is the means by which he achieves that aim. A hefty proportion of this project debut effort consists of highly rhythmic industrial dance tracks, laden with samples and distorted drum loops. It's almost power noise in some respects, though the underlying loops are not quite complex or intense enough to stand alongside the likes of Converter or Imminent. A few, such as 'Joy To The World', come close, but this is clearly not the project's key aim.

It's tracks like 'Intruder Alert' that really indicate Combichrist's true calling, combining the aforementioned vicious rhythms and looped samples with ominous pads, melodic synth

phrases and some surprisingly understated vocals from Andy. 'Play Dead' sees a more abrasive vocal and an exceptionally hard-hitting drum loop, juxtaposed with a delicate descending synth melody, whilst 'God Wrapped In Plastic' goes for a terror EBM style sound, minus most of the vocals (it's not like anyone ever listens to them anyway). It's a pity the rest of the album isn't quite as adventurous, as this project already seems able to develop a sound of it's own – it just needs to avoid imitating the Ant-Zen and Hands collective, who do the power noise thing a whole lot better.

## **Combichrist – Everybody Hates You (2005)**

The second Combichrist album comes less than two years after the first (and we had Panzer AG and another Icon of Coil album in the interim), something a little hard to comprehend when you consider the substantial leap forward the project has taken. None of the tracks here are trying to emulate the Hands/Ant-Zen power-noise brigade, instead taking the harsh, stompy beats that sits at the music core and dressing them up with all sorts of synthetic ear-candy – whether it be a future-poppy synth lead, new-school EBMish arpeggios or a catchy sample loop, virtually every tracks has a hook of some description. And that in many respects is why the album succeeds – There's nothing pretentious, elitist or subtle about this recording – it's industrial-strength dance music, pure and simple.

Every track has it's own appeal – the computerised female voice and searing lead of album opener 'This s\*it will fcuk you up' delivers an instant anthem, for instance. Bespoke vocals from Andy LaPlegua on the likes of 'Enjoy The Abuse' or 'Blut Royale' (the most loC-like track on here) don't leave much to the imagination, whilst tracks like 'Lying Sack of S\*it' and the Full Metal Jacket-inspired 'This Is My Rifle' use sample loops to achieve a similar effect. Some of the more 'uber' members of the industrial fraternity will be left aghast at some of the 'gimmicky' techniques at work ('Happy fcuking Birthday' springs to mind immediately), but somehow in this context it seems excusable. Combichrist doesn't make much of a statement about anything, and it's originality is limited to finding new combinations of I techniques. It's just tailor-made to get a hell of a lot of people dancing.

NOTE: If you manage to find the limited 2CD digipak version, you'll also get a second CD with nine additional tracks. With the exception of 'The Undertaker', these bonus tracks are almost completely unlike the main album, instead offering a combination of minimal techno and darkambient compositions. It's fairly easy to ignore alongside CD1, which is far more instantly accessible, although there are a few highlights, the moving 'The Corps Under My Bed' the best developed. This isn't so much a bonus CD as an entirely separate project, and really should have been given a touch more development and released as such.

## **Combichrist – Get Your Body Beat (2006)**

Having now become Andy LaPlegua's most high-profile project, Combichrist's 2006 EP leads on a track for the upcoming movie 'The Gene Generation'. The song is notable for the clear influence of 80s EBM, the shouted vocals and repetitive synth pulses sitting alongside the more typical Combichrist ear-candy. It's a reasonable enough direction for the project to take, but as with most recent Combichrist output, it's better danced to than listened to. There are three other songs here, but 'Products' and 'What The Fuck' both sound like 'Everybody Hates You' rejects, whilst 'DNA AM' is a minimal electronic piece that really didn't need to be stretched out to seven minutes. The selling power of this thing is all in the title track.

There are six remixes of the title track included, including a version from KMFDM, upping the percussion quotient of the original with some proficiency, though the best mix is a pounding, pulsating, no-compromise assault from Manufactura. Attempts by Amduscia and



Spetsnaz to adapt the original to their own way of doing things (melodic helleketro and Ebbish EBM respectively), prove to be listenable but ultimately disappointing, however, with the Spetsnaz version wasting their chance to re-work a song that really could have worked with an in-your-face 'That Total Age' style treatment which I know they're fully capable of.

## **Conspiracy – Electric Bitch (2002)**

Scene newcomers from Leicester, Conspiracy released their debut single in time for their London live debut, supporting Sique Sique Sputnik at The Garage in December 2002. The sound of their debut effort is along the lines of recent Assemblage 23/Icon of Coil efforts, and proves to be a quite accomplished piece of contemporary EBM/future-pop, laden with bright synthesizers and a pounding four-beat. The guitars from in their live show aren't present, but they've otherwise got to grips with their overall sound fairly quickly.

A couple of remixes are included. Monsects version drives the original further down the robotic EBM road, nice and robust with a plentiful supply of bleeps and bleeps, if that's your kinda thing. The 'Philtrator Remix', meanwhile, takes a more minimal electronica-esque approach, which isn't one I think is particularly suited to the song. It's a perfectly valid musical approach, but Conspiracy's tones seem to demand something a little more substantial.

One final song rounds out the single, 'Solitude', opening in sombre fashion before morphing into something altogether more faster and more aggressive. It's actually fairly good by recent B-side standards, thankfully not the usual run though a 2<sup>nd</sup>-rate drum loop plus one-keyed sequence. So Conspiracy appear at least to be off to a good start. What they need to do now is work out where to take their sound from here (maybe including their as-yet live-only guitars into the studio recordings), as they still need to find a way of pulling away from the pack.

## **Converter – Exit Ritual (2003)**

This is the third release from Scott Sturgis' Converter project, a setup that is technically an offshoot of Pain Station, but has since developed a cult following all of it's own. The first two albums 'Shock Front' and 'Blast Furnace' have become standards in the so-called 'power noise' scene. Assembling dance tracks out of the most hideous noises imaginable, the likes of 'Death Time', 'Flower' and 'Conqueror' remain the upper limit of what dance music can achieve before becoming pure patternless noise.

Those albums did both have another face, however. The dense, crawling behemoth of 'Memory-Trace' might not have got anyone moving, but it's capability to drown out all other sounds with a half-mile radius deserves at least some attention, whilst the eerily minimal 'Be Broken' is proof that given the right combination of sounds and effect boxes, less really can be more. This album, for the most part, continues that line of creativity.

A step forward it may be, but ironically anyone wanting to draw parallels might need to look back some way into their industrial history books to establish where Mr. Sturgis was drawing his influences from here, as this one reaches back to the days before industrial music had a beat of significance. The fact that a sampler or audio software is used instead of a tape machine these days is a minor point, as both can be used to achieve similar ends. This is that strange no-mans of 'ambient industrial', the paradoxical attempt to strip down a particular intense form of music to it's bare essentials.

Describing such music is tricky at the best of times. Such is the state of modern music technology that any given sound can theoretically be morphed into any other. The source

of such noises is not of interest to me however – only the final result. Take opening track ‘Dronr( itual)’ – which, as the title hints, is a track built of one long drone, from out of which various indescribable noises leap at regular intervals. It’s sort of like the way industrial used to be like, only more listenable.

‘Bloodsex’ is next. This one actually has a beat, but the slowed-down electro loop employed isn’t exactly power noise, though you’ll find many parallels in the label’s backcatalogue. The other notable feature of this one is the almost-melodic synthesizers played over the underlying loop. A Converter track with a tune in it?!? Whatever next?

‘Nightmare Machine’ is what’s next, people, and this one takes minimalism to new levels (or should that be depths?). Distantly familiar of ‘Blood and Flame’ era NON or the very early works of Cabaret Voltaire, it’s a piece built around what appears to be a slowed-down diesel engine sample, with insubstantial motifs fading in and out as the track progresses. Every now and again you half-expect the thing to explode into life and take off, but it never does, showing remarkable restraint for an artist more renowned for blowing your ears to bits.

Oh, you wanted your ears blown to bits, did you? Is this not loud enough for you? OK, give ‘Cloud Eye’ a go then. It opens up innocently enough, a minute of shimmering synth pads thrown into sharp focus with a jerky, mechanical noise loop, finally reviving some of the rhythmic intensity found on Converter’s earlier works. It doesn’t quite reach ‘Death Time’ levels of full-on aural suicide, giving way to a second, more organic loop come the 3:45 mark, but hey, there’s a load of people who have been waiting the whole album for this!

‘In Ruins...’ takes us to the halfway point, and for a moment, it’s back to the damnience. It’s drone-based, in a similar vein to the album opener, but the drone in question is a rather dull buzzing sound, more akin to an ungrounded record player than anything bespoke. Eventually, another noise-beat loop appears from out of nowhere, before moving on to some terminal-sounding oil-drum bashing, the only highlight in an otherwise confused and schizophrenic sounding composition, which drags on to ten minutes with yet another distorted percussion variation.

‘Order/Creature’, the most danceable track on the album, follows this monstrosity. Much-akin to Snakedressed-era Dive, it’s distorted kick-drum antics should provide scene DJs with at least one dancefloor hit to take away from this album, even if it’s hardly typical of the disc as a whole. Next is ‘Gateway Rite’, which opens with some windswept, cosmic-style synth, but soon gives way to another downtempo electro affair, similar in many respects to ‘Bloodsex’, but with a greater feel of ‘development’, the main loop morphing in several directions before tracks end.

‘Soulstealer’ takes us back into the realm of pure noise, sounding as it does like it was recorded whilst travelling through some fearsome assembly line, moving from a piercing jet engine tone to a funereally slow, noisy grind, becoming increasingly minimal as the piece progresses, eventually decaying to a single disembodied stomp, as if there was but one man working in a darkened factory, late at night, working on some hideous construct to be used against humanity.

‘Night Swallows Day’ continues down the path of barely-structured noise to such an extent that it could only be described as a morass of drawn-out pandemonia, eventually joined by a somewhat misplaced drum loop, a crackly beat played with no regard to the rest of the aural palette, as if there were two tracks being played at once. The percussive elements in question do eventually twist themselves into something more capable of scything through the layers of indeterminate sound, but the track ends up being several minutes longer than it needed to be, stopping a few seconds shy of twelve minutes.

The album finished with 'Fallen'. Opening with the seemingly customary 'droning' intro (if you've listened to the rest of the album, you'll understand where I'm coming from), it then switches to one final electro-burnout, a head-rush of distorted everything – drums, synth patches, samples, all of em!! In terms of sending the album out with a bang, it's questionable whether this one really succeeds. It has the required intensity, rhythmic charm and all the other bits and bobs you'd expect. I'm just in two minds as to whether it's cohesive enough, often switching between different lines of attack when a little more development might have sufficed.

I'm going to end with a warning: this album is a long, long way from 'easy listening'. It's certainly harder to get into that 'Blast Furnace'. After all, on 'Blast Furnace', you usually knew where you stood, even when it had you blown right down. Here, tracks grow, mutate, and transform themselves in a most disconcerting way. The increasing number of 'ambient' tracks is possibly indicative of limits of the drum-loop-plus-distortion formula, but it also gives lie to the fallacy that 'ambient' means 'chill out'. This one's more likely to freeze you solid.

## **Covenant – Dreams Of A Cryotank (1994)**

Even at this early stage, Covenant show the promise which they would later realise to great effect. Opening with the seething classic 'Theremin', Clas, Joachim and Eskil take us on a cold but inviting journey through their Cryo-world, a mix of distorted EBM/electro-industrial rhythm, offset by surprisingly 'clean' vocals, avoiding extreme Skinny Puppy/FLA style effects or Ebb-school drill-sergeant bawling. The band aren't afraid to hide their influences – 'Void' is heavily reminiscent of Front 242's 'Tragedy For You', whilst 'Replicant' is a Bladerunner tribute, though both songs succeed having been given the Covenant treatment.

Other tracks of note include the uptempo surge 'Edge of Dawn', 'Voices' and 'Speed' (though in the case of 'Speed', the version presented here is not the best). Some of the songwriting is a little weak in places (the lyrics to 'Shipwreck' are far too self-consciously contrived to truly impress), whilst the epic-length ambient excursion 'Cryotank Expansion' is over-indulgent to put it mildly, but the album as a whole still a worthy first attempt.

## **Covenant – Sequencer (1996)**

Building on the successes of the first album, this follow-up collection sees our Swedish friends really push the boat out (pun intended) with 'Figurehead', an eight-minute long shimmering epic that really proved what potential the Covenant sound had. Other highlights include the more rhythmic 'Stalker' and 'Slowmotion', the first 'slow' Covenant song of note, featuring one of Eskil's most heartfelt vocals so far. There's even an interesting attempt at a breakbeat styled piece with 'Storm'. There are also a number of highly insightful lyrics, often utilising water-related metaphor to chmaltz the transitory (and often futile) nature of human existence.

The album isn't perfect, however – 'Phoenix' seems a little pedestrian, whilst the songs that form the later part of the album, whilst still generally good, don't seem to quite match what has come before, with 'Tabula Rasa', 'Luminal' and 'Flux' all falling into the 'good but not great' category. It's still the strongest of the early Covenant albums, and still symbolic of the way EBM was developing into a more 'pop' oriented sound during the mid-to-late 1990s, though this disc still retains sufficient 'industrial' credentials to be classed as such.

## **Covenant – Therenin (1997)**

This 7-track EP is effectively an extended version of the 'Figurehead' single repackaged for the US market. As it stands, it's one of the more attractive non-album releases by Covenant. The club versions of 'Therenin' and 'Speed' are both stronger than their equivalent album versions, with the former livelier and more direct than the album version, whilst the latter utilises a more forceful rhythm and just has more of everything. The 'Optocoded' version of 'Voices' strips out the industrial elements of the original, instead featuring plenty of sweet synths and other ear candy – an interesting contrast.

'Figurehead' (Plain) is the true highlight. Whilst the production on this version is not as rich nor developed as the album version, it has the side effect of pushing Eskil's vocal to the forefront of the mix – with the fine details stripped away, the true power of this song becomes apparent. The EP also features a US remix of Therenin and an 'Optodecoded' mix of 'Speed', though neither of these tracks do any favours to the original. The album version of 'Void' is also included – unlikely to be of interest unless you never bought 'Dreams of a Cryotank', but it fits in nicely with everything else here.

## **Covenant – Europa (1998)**

The simplistic sleeve design translates to more simplistic music by Covenant standards, the stripped-down sound a noticeable contrast to the rich expanses of 'Sequencer'. The icy, spoken-word brood of 'Go Film' is probably the strongest song on offer, whilst the Kraftwerk-inspired electro-pop 'Wall of Sound' makes for an effective coda (there's even a brief reference to the rhythm from 'Numbers' in the middle eight). Album opener 'Tension' is also works in it's stripped-down and simplistic manner.

However, the early-to-middle stages of the album are generally quite weak – Clas' one attempt at songwriting (Wind of the North) fails to excite, whilst the likes of 'Leviathan' and 'I Am' sound like second-rate remakes of 'Sequencer' songs. 'Riot', meanwhile, has interesting lyrics, but doesn't really deliver everything it promises – the noisy loop underpinning the song doesn't seem to have the impact you want it to. All in all, this album generally sounds like an uncomfortable transition between 'Sequencer' and 'United States of Mind', though a few good songs save it.

## **Covenant – United States Of Mind (2000)**

Undoubtedly one of THE EBMwave albums of the last few years, this disc is more symbolic of the 'future pop' sound than any other barring 'Empires' by VNV and 'Welcome to Earth' by Apop. The 'simple but effective' sound is finally mastered on the Kraftwerk-esque 'Dead Stars' and hands-in-the-air anthem 'One World One Sky', whilst album opener 'Like Tears In Rain' masterfully combines a mournful, Bladerunner-inspired lyrics to one of the bounciest schaffel rhythms the scene has witnessed to date.

Other club hits include the autobiographical 'Tour De Force' and the harder, more minimal 'No Mans Land'. Away from the anthems, songs like 'Afterhours' and 'Unforgiven' showcase other aspects of the Covenant sound. There are a few down-points – 'Helicopter' is a brave experiment that ultimately fails to come off, whilst 'Humility' and 'Still Life' are not as good as slow songs as the other songs are as anthems. Despite this, the appeal of five dead-cert hits makes this album a more-or-less essential purchase for anyone vaguely interested in the club-friendly face of the modern EBM/future pop sound.

## **Covenant – Synergy: Live In Europe (2000)**

Covenant's first live album captures their 'Tour De Force' supporting their album 'United States of Mind'. They don't actually do much live to make the songs sound different from the albums (though a number of songs appear in remixed or extended form), although Eskil's 'dramatic' live vocal style at least offers some 'value added' aspect. The setlist consists of songs from 'United States Of Mind' as well as a number from 'Europa' and 'Sequencer' and the B-side Babel. Curiously, two of their biggest hits to date ('Theremin' and 'Figurehead') are both omitted from the set, in place of more obscure tracks such as 'Flux' and 'I Am'. Whilst the quality of these recordings are good, there's ultimately not much that we learn from them either.

## **Covenant – Northern Light (2002)**

Having cracked the scene big-time with USOM, Covenant followed up their success with this, their (for the want of a better phrase), their 'maturity of sound' album. Produced by Jacob Hellner, this album is darker in tone than its predecessor but nonetheless brings the very best out of the individual songs and the sounds that form them (you can almost feel the bitterly cold Scandinavian winter during which this album was recorded). The immaculately produced 'Call The Ships To Port' brings back happy memories of 'Figurehead', whilst more recent converts to the genre will be won over by the anthem 'We Stand Alone', a song so symbolic of what makes Covenant so appealing that it became a club hit almost immediately.

The more subtle, textured aspects of Covenant sound become apparent in 'Monochrome' and 'Rising Sun'. 'We Want Revolution' takes a more straightforward four-beat approach, proving that simple-but-effective still remains a remarkably valid songwriting approach. 'Invisible and Silent', meanwhile, demonstrates how Covenant have now also mastered the art of the 'slow' song, soaring high in a zone where many of their contemporaries have nosedived. Once again, a few of the more experimental tracks fail to make a real impression, though they don't interrupt the flow of the album as badly as similar tracks did on previous albums.

## **Covenant – Skyshaper (2006)**

Covenant's return with their first studio album since late 2002. With VNV having gone analog and Apop having gone rock, there was naturally a lot of interest as to what direction the Helsingborg trio were going to take their sound. Album opener and lead single 'Ritual Noise' offers few clues – a breathtaking pad-and-vocoder intro leads only to a slight tinge of disappointment when the actual rhythm loop kicks in, proving to be fractionally too minimal (harking back to Europa days?). It still amounts to a good song in the final reckoning, though debate will rage as to whether this version (actually the oldest of all those released) is better or worse than the EP versions (this take is less reliant on percussion and has an extended intro dropped from later versions).

In terms of dancefloor hits, it's joined by 'Brave New World', a synth-pop inspired song with a hint of e-piano-led dream trance, as well as '20 Hz' – an anthem the commuting masses which can only be described as vintage Covenant (you'll understand when you hear it - ). Also of note is the awesomely opaque 'The Men', a short, repetitive piece that nonetheless features one of the densest loops I've encountered in this genre (you need a good system for this one – forget your active speakers and iTunes playlist!).

The band also show they can still pull off the slower tracks – 'Spindrift' is what 'Helicopter' should have back on 'United States of Mind', whilst the conclusive 'The World Is Growing

Loud' is probably the best closing number on any Covenant album to date. There a hint of 'retro-electro' analog noodling on 'Pulse' and 'Happy Man' – the former track pulling off the buzzing sawtooth style with a degree of proficiency whilst the latter is an overly twee Bob Moog tribute. The only really weak track is 'Sweet and Salty', a pointless spoken-word track seemingly thrown together to show off a revolutionary new bass drum sound. Otherwise, this is another strong showing for Covenant, who seem to have least held their own at a time when the 'future pop' bands they clearly influenced are seriously starting to fall out of favour.

NOTE: A 2CD digipak version is available. The bonus CD primarily consists of the 42-minute long 'Subterfuge For 3 Absynths', a tedious, self-indulgent morass of perpetually looped electronics. Sit through the whole thing without any additional stimulus and you're a better man than I. Survive (or more likely skip) this and you'll get a passable bonus track 'Relief' and a listenable techno mix of 'Ritual Noise' by Calico. Don't lose any sleep if you missed out on this, but pick it up if you can – even if you don't like the music, it'll fetch more on eBay in the years to come.

## **Cryo – In Your Eyes EP (2013)**

My attention was first drawn to Cryo when I heard them described as being like 'Sequencer-era Covenant'. That guaranteed my attention given that the production style of that album was somewhat unique in the canon of mid-90's industrial, being an album similarly laden with noise yet unusually melodic at the same time (i.e. damn near impossible for a reviewer to describe). And on hearing Cryo's material for the first time, I generally thought the description was pretty close, at least in terms of defining who might like this, even if their songwriting wasn't up to the standards of their fellow Swedes.

This 5-track EP is intended as a precursor to a forthcoming album 'Retropia'. The title track appears in three versions, with the "Club Version" the most definitive. The mid-tempo kick drums, bassline throb and Euro-snarl vocals ensure this song classes at the harder end of Cryo's spectrum, with a synth in the chorus that hints at the darker fringes of 90s rave. Whilst it falls short of being a dead-cert anthem, this is certainly good enough for the club play the title suggests, and flies a flag for a production style that is often sidelined in the 'Oontz Arms Race' that seems to be going on in some quarters.

Two remixes are provided, and as an established project, they've secured two relatively big names in Haujobb and Leaether Strip to handle the task, even if they are also two serial industrial scene remixers that seems to crop up on B-sides and remix albums all the time. Haujobb's remixes unfortunately falls into the same trap as many of his mixes, cutting every fourth measure from the bassline and stripping down the original to deliver a percussion-dominated mix that is technically sound in Daniel Myer's beard-stroking production-meister manner, but somewhat dry and static in terms of artistic merit.

The 'Strip put on a stronger showing, replacing the original chmaltz with a slow, sludgy crawl but avoiding any temptation to mess with the song structure, thus producing what sounds like a Leaether Strip song with a guest vocalist. It is therefore a competent showing, but ultimately I still get the impression that the presence of these remixers in name does more for the validation of this release in the eyes of the industrial-music buying public (yes, many of us still spend money on this kind of thing!) than they do for the musical qualities of the EP.

Two other tracks are present. "Higher" followed the same lines as the titles track but is lyrically repetitive and adds nothing to EP. The real gem is "The Portal". Shuffle rhythms always offer a safe path to synthetic success, but with the trippy synth hits and a vocal that harks back to golden-era Apoptygma Berzerk (as in 'I had to check Stephan chmal

wasn't guesting on vocals'), this is a composition indicative of the quality level I hope to find on Cryo's next album. It's the step forward they need to take, and might well make it with tracks like this.

## **Cryo – Retropia (2014)**

I reviewed the 'taster' for this album, the In Your Eyes EP, a few months ago, and it was good enough to whet my appetite for the forthcoming full-length. The band have been well favoured on these pages in recent years, but with several releases behind them, I was hoping for something more to say than 'if you liked the last few you'll like this one'. And sure enough, they've come up with something. Several somethings, in fact.

The two highlight tracks from the EP reappear here, with the excellent schaffel-style of "The Portal" as welcome here as it was on the EP, whilst the KLF-esque synth lead of EP title track "In Your Eyes" appears here preceded by an extended intro, opening up the album in rousing style. But strength of depth is what I'm here to judge, so let's see what Cryo have to deliver for those of us who still have time to devote to full length albums.

I'll break from my usual style and kick off with the weak points. "Believer" is a tiring four-and-a-half minutes of suffocating bass swamping whatever else is going on – that said, this may just my ears tiring of such aural schmaltz. After all, this kind of thing is very 'in' right now, so you might like it if you're "cooler" than I am. "I Use You" attempts the slow, menacing build-up dynamic, but despite some VERY Jean-Luc De Meyer vocals, it takes too long to build up to what isn't really that much of a climax. The EBM inspired "Shelter" is dynamic enough, certainly one of the most beat-driven Cryo tracks to date, but apart from that achieves little of note musically.

But these downsides are more than compensated for. "Common Man" is the perfect antidote for "Believer", a slow, minimally synthetic composition that rediscovers the seemingly-lost art of reverb to remind all that a less-is-more approach can do wonders to give your recordings space to breathe. "Too Much" brings the two extremes of Cryo's sound together, a rough, jarring series of verses interspersed with a lush chorus that sums up in a single recording everything I like about this project.

It's towards the end of the album that things really get interesting. "Yesterday" is little more than a filter-swept synthline and swirling atmospherics, sitting stylistically between that Male or Female 242-offshoot and mid-70s Tangerine Dream. And in case you think I have no business mentioning dinosaur krautrock bands on these pages, just wait until you've heard the album finale, a three-part suite entitled "So Close", with all parts (but particularly the first) featuring some seriously old-school vocoder action (always an earworm for me), and acting as a microcosm of the album's overall sound through it's duration.

So yes, Cryo deliver once again, and they've found some legitimate paths forward in terms of aural texture and song structure without needing to break from their core sound. The only downer is I've already heard certain influential (?) figures herald my least favourite track from the albums, "Believer" as the potential club hit of the eleven! Seriously, if you're Djing anywhere near me, pick one of the others. Any of them. Even one of ones without drums.....

## **Cryptic Romance – Remembrance (2013)**

This is the debut album from the latest project of Vanson Sichelstein, a Czech musician probably best known to readers of this site as the creator of Warsickle. Maybe that means something to some of you, but all I know is that I don't hear much music from this

particular country, and I'm always keen to search out new creative territories. None of this means anything, of course, if the project can't bring some decent music to the scene.

And I have to admit, on first listen, I'm pretty sure I've heard something like this before. Chris Pohl, he of Blutengel fame is openly stated as an influence, along with the 'Mode (not again?) and Rabia Sorda (not totally misleading), but despite the obvious temptation, I'm not sure Blutengel is the best comparison. It's more reminiscent of Seelenkrank, the pre-Blutengel Pohl Project, before the vampiric atmospheres were seduced with female voices and other poppy influences. This also means the project sounds dated, but that isn't always a bad thing. 90's style darkwave still has an appeal to some of us (did you read my Bella Morte review of The Best Of Bella Morte (1996-2012)?).

So what we have here is melodic minor key arps, mid-tempo drum beats, solid basslines and the harsh vocal style adopted by (at least) half of the worlds industrial musicians. And Cryptic Romances take on the style is certainly pleasing to the ear on initial impression. Unfortunately, after a few songs, it becomes clear that it's not particularly musically advanced either. Too many one- and two-note sequences, little experimentation with rhythmic structure and no "how did they do that?" moments. Having read Wolf's review of the new Warsickle, I'm thinking presets are called upon rather too often.

This doesn't make the album bad, just average. And three highlights do stand out. "Something" is the most obvious DJ choice – upbeat with a melodic hook that really develops over the course of the song. "You Cant" utilises plaintive cries in place of the usual vocal gravel, reminding me of various tracks by The Eternal Afflict. And for the Pohl fanatics amongst you, "Moondance" makes the best job of melding together arcing string ups, funereal atmospheres and e-piano melodies into a dark dance delight.

Elsewhere, things are rather more ordinary. Three instrumentals tracks (the first, fourth and final tracks) give the album structure but aren't especially elaborate recordings heard on their own. The same can be said of songs like "Heart Of Hurricane" and "Hano!", which are essentially competent compositions lacking any real artistic impression, just sort of pulsing along, doing their thing. I've used the term 'landfill synthpop' on here before – please don't make me invent 'landfill darkwave'.

On the other hand, maybe Vanson is better off not mucking around with the formula too much. Two tracks in the later stages of the album show an experimental tendency that isn't quite hitting the mark. "Schizofreniak" is what it says it as, a stop-start assembly of musical ideas that sound attractive enough on their own but amount to less than the sum of their parts on the recording. "V hlubini èerného lesa" utilised a guest synthline from Necrocock (who?), but they fail to nail the 'quiet bit into loud bit' transition with any real style. It's a common error, sure, but I've never liked songs that come and go as they please. The secret to successful songwriting is getting stuff like this to hang together.

In conclusion then, it's a reasonable enough deviation from Warsickle, but I don't feel like I've been treated to anything special, either. So, yes, worth a try once, and some good songs emerged as a result, but I'm not convinced there's much more creative potential in the concepts chosen here. Herr Pohl and his clan of vampiric followers sucked it dry years ago.

## **The Cure – The Cure (2004)**

There were a lot of rumours that The Cure would be an ex-band following the release of 'Bloodflowers' in 2000. A lot of rumours that a lot of fans had heard before and conveniently chose to ignore. And whilst Robert Smith's posse did indeed take a sizeable break from prolonged sessions in the studio, they didn't split either. The obligatory 'fill the



big gap between albums' Best Of came in 2002, before the boys returned with this, the self-titled release that most bands eventually get round to at least once. Killing Joke did a couple, but enough about them.

The thing about self-titled albums is that you expect them to sound like the band on the cover. And let's get one thing straight. This definitely sounds like The Cure. Despite enjoying cult legend status whilst still raking in enviable royalties and tour fees, Robert Smith is still finding stuff to complain about. And we wouldn't have him any other way. The band, meanwhile, has kept the same line-up as the last album', but seem to have woken up a little in the process. 'Bloodflowers' certainly made all the right noises, but it was a bit of a drag dynamically, a fan favourite for sure but perhaps not one for the casual listener to listen to all the way through.

And The Cure offer us their statement of intent from the very moment you press the play button, as opening track 'Lost' is very much indicative of a band that have rediscovered their roots. Robert Smith's plaintive calls of 'I can't find myself' becoming increasingly desperate as the band slowly erect huge walls of noise, surrounding him on all side. It's like post-punk had never gone away. 'Labyrinth' is no less disturbing, not unlike a parallel universe version of 'Burn' where things have got worryingly fucked-up. The use of vocal effect only serve to make Smith sound more disconnected from the world around him than usual.

The next three songs, however, see a return to The Cure's more accessible 'angst-pop' song style. 'Before Three' is a sentimental tale of better times now gone, whilst 'Truth Goodness and Beauty' sings of a hope that is probably unrealistic but might yet be realised. It's 'The End of The World' that stands out, though. A prominent melodic bass line, cheesy synth solo and ever cheesier 'Ooo-eee-ooo' vocals. Despite this, repeated listening reveals these songs as merely 'good attempts' rather than absolute classics. They'll keep the fans happy, but they're nothing really new.

'Anniversary' next, and time into a trip into the lush, dreamy textures which long-time Cureheads refer to as the 'Disintegration' sound. Played through a good system (as you can't enjoy tracks like this without one), this multi-layered opus certainly ranks alongside their better-known 'atmospheric' works. Backed onto this is 'Us Or Them', the most visceral track on the whole CD. Furious drumming and discordant instrumentation set the scene, whilst Smith's vocal spews out the kind of utter revulsion that we haven't heard from him in many a year. If ever.

The oddly titled 'alt.end.' sounds on the surface like your usual angst-o-rama, but the lyrics hide an unusual sentiment, the view that restarting, reincarnating and re-anything for that matter just isn't what it's cracked up to be. Why bother when you did it all the first time round? Following this is '(I Don't Know What's Going) On' a fairly ordinary guitar-pop love song, and 'Taking Off', a cheery little number that reverses the sentiments of 'alt.end.', whilst making good use of synth string plus bright guitars to recreate the 'Friday I'm In Love' feel without resorting to out-and-out self-plagiarism. Just very slight self-plagiarism.

'Never' is dominated by an oppressive bass line and dirty guitars, singing of a relationship that isn't going to be and was never meant to be. The penultimate song is 'The Promise', a painfully slow crawl through a marshy squall of dense guitar noise and wandering bass, which will doubtlessly please those die-hards that wished that all the mid-80s Cure chart pop material was no more than a bad dream. We finish with 'Going Nowhere', all piano and understated guitars, and a suitable (if predictable) way to tie up all the loose ends and bring the album to a close.

If you got in there quick, you might yet have a 'making of' bonus DVD to enjoy. It's nothing critical – just studio footage of the band set to instrumental versions of 'Lost' and 'The Promise' plus an early take of 'Truth Goodness and Beauty'. Unless you have to have it all, it's a nice bonus and no more. It's the kind of limited edition bonus record come up with to guarantee quick first-day sales. Not realising of course, that The Cure have a very large and very loyal following that would have bought it on release day anyway.

The album, however, is altogether more significant. Long-time Cure aficionados will probably enjoy at least some of it, whilst newcomers to the realm of miserable guitar rock would do well to pick this up and learn from the established masters. It's not exactly a start-to-finish masterpiece, with the 'pop' songs in particular not amongst their best. But it still sounds like The Cure we know and love. Or know and endure, if you came here for the industrial reviews but keep getting force-fed Robbie Smith whenever your girlfriend's around. But you love 'em really, don't you?

### **Current 93 – Black Ships Ate The Sky (2006)**

After six years of live recordings and compilation, David Tibet returns with his first full-length collection of new material since 2000. The liner notes explain that the whole concept of the album, inspired as it was by a series of Tibet's dreams. Eight versions of the Methodist Hymn 'Idumaea' punctuate the album, each version performed in a different style by one of eight different vocalists. Highlights amongst these include Anthony Hegarty's trademark falsetto (the only singer to go for an a capella treatment), folk-styled performances from Shirley Collins and Clodagh Simonds, more straightforward stripped-down acoustic performances from Marc Almond and Tibet himself and a particularly haunting banjo performance from Will Oldham (performing here as 'Bonnie Prince Billy').

The remainder of the album is given over to actual describing the aforementioned dreams. One can only suspect that the inner reaches of Tibet's mind is not a pleasant place to be, if the delirious, stream-of-consciousness lyricisms on offer here are anything to go by, varying from the philosophical to the utterly insane. A thematic thread can be traced through all of these compositions. The musical accompaniment, provided by the usual cast of guest musicians, is for the most part minimally acoustic, though Current 93's penchant for audio manipulation is still apparent in places. The album's title track is an exception to this rule, building a raucous, entropic wall of guitar noise. Of course, you'll need a special type of audio endurance to actually make it this far – this style of music is the very antithesis of 'easy listening'. But as a glimpse into the disturbed psyche of David Tibet, it can't be faulted.

### **D.A.F. – Produkt der Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft (1979)**

This is one of those 'swept under the carpet' albums, a genuine 'before they were famous' exhumation from the archives. D.A.F. are, after all, better known as a minimal synth-duo. It therefore might come as a surprise that this recording is essentially guitar rock. Instrumental guitar rock. Freeform instrumental guitar rock.

Sure enough, D.A.F. vocalist Gabi Delgado-Lopez was otherwise occupied during the recording of this album. This left Robert Gorr in charge, plus a bassist, guitarist, a synthesizer and a two-track tape machine. Two track. Not four, and certainly not eight (chew on that, White Stripes!). So it's lo-fi then. No-one's paying any attention to virtuosity or fidelity. Just crank out the bloody tunes, OK?

Hardly surprising that it was recorded 'as-live', too. It shows – the sound quality is certainly around demo-tape levels, and even the group's trademark minimalism is absent here – what we here essentially amounts to noise. There's a hell of a lot going on in a very short space of time. It's just it doesn't seem to be going on in any order. We don't even get track titles.

No track titles? Nope. In fact, it's often hard to distinguish one piece from another. They all generally sound like a group of wannabe musicians gathering for a jam round a tape machine. It's just you never know at track start whether it's going to fade away by the thirty second mark or play on and on until everyone gets bored and stops. By the end of this album, three minutes starts to sound like a very long time indeed (but remember the Velvet's and 'Sister Ray' – they kept at it until there was no room left on the record).

So is there anything of musical worth here at all? Well, yes there is. Hell, it's as noisy as fuck, but that IS the idea. Despite their limited means, the group members do seem to keep on finding fresh ways of making a lot of noise. The tracks, short as they are, never sit still for long and whilst the likes of the Velvet Underground and co might have pioneered the guitar side of D.A.F.'s sound palette, the use of piercing analog synths was relatively new.

Yes, I know synths were around since the late 60s. But it took a long time for anyone to get the best out of them. By no means is this the pinnacle of the 'electronics as a weapon' technique, but it does add an extra layer of anarchy, the synthetic portions of the sound setting this work aside from its American and British cousins. They weren't the only Germans to try this trick, nor the first, and certainly not the best (any Krautrock fans reading?), but this at least gives them an ounce of musical integrity.

That said, I really am reluctant to endorse this one. Significant as it was, it's not exactly typical of the group, whilst more developed example of this proto-industrial style can be found in the back catalogues of bands who devoted whole careers to stuff like this. It does ultimately prove to be listenable in the right frame of mind, but this band needed some serious sorting out, and soon.

## **D.A.F. – 15 Neue DAF Lieder (2003)**

In an interview in 1982, Gabi Delgado Lopez described the reasoning behind the initial split of Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft. "It's like when you are painting a picture. Once it's ready, why keep adding things to it?". He was pretty much on the ball there. Having spent many years getting their act together, DAF then went on to record three albums in quick succession, and then with their musical concept exhausted, split. And nothing either of them has done since then has garnered more than token attention.

Meanwhile, a whole host of electronic acts have picked up on the punk-to-synthpop-bridging concepts they instigated to create their own variants on DAF's minimalist electronic style. Most notable amongst these are Front 242, who's early beat-driven works owe a great debt to this duo, whilst on the other side of the pond, the early stars of the techno scene would often name-check DAF alongside Kraftwerk and Numan as one of their primary influences.

Not that they or any of the other myriad electro-heads sat still on the innovation front. Gabi and Robert return in 2003 to find the bar substantially raised. We live in times where anyone can replicate vintage synths on a PC, whilst software sequencers dwarfing their hardware grandparents are so powerful that even the entry-level versions are sufficient to give even the absolute beginner half a chance of producing something respectable. It's getting too easy.

Which makes the return of DAF seem all the more dubious. Maybe this ever-politically-aware band have reformed to protest against the increasingly contentious actions of George 'Dubya' and friends. Or maybe they thought their simplistic, sex-charged synth-pop may have some place in that oh-so-trendy electro-clash niche. Or maybe they'd run out of money, as I don't remember either DAF/DOS or Görl solo ever being particularly big sellers. Since I haven't really got the inclination to go searching round for interviews to translate, we'll assume for now it's all three. Maybe the music will give us some kind of clue.

The music? You'd thought I'd forgotten. Sorry, I had two decades of absence followed by a sudden comeback to explain. One paragraph wasn't enough. The first thing that obvious is that DAF aren't going to leave much to the imagination here. '15 Neue Lieder' is offered, and 15 Neue Lieder is what we get. Each one is themed, so we get a 'Liebesleid' (Love song), a 'Kriegslied' (War Song) and so on. Barring one foray into Gabi's native Spanish tongue, everything is in German. Fortunately, as the songs are fundamentally quite simple, a little experience and occasional references to a dictionary is all you need.

DAF haven't moved on much musically, either. None of your modern modular-semi-subtractive-modular-hybrid indulgence here. Just lots of analog sequences that vary from the cheesily squelchy to the almost-metallic, with the odd tinkly melody hidden away. No real need for endless layers of sound either, as they generally keep the sound stripped down to two or three synth lines max. The rigid percussion isn't all that complex, either, whilst the chord progressions (not that there's any real polyphony at play here), keep strictly to the basic school of synth-pop songwriting. The only real difference is the switch from live to programmed drumming, which seems a pity given the lack of live percussion in any form of industrial these days.

Vocally, Gabi retains his throaty, lusty voice which helped bring out all the sexual innuendo inherent in many of DAF's songs. There's a fair few here keep to that template, notably the skirt-obsessed 'Rock Hoch', as well as the pleasantly melodic but overlong closing track 'Ich Bin Morgen Wieder Da', which repeats too many of the same lines over and over again. Nine minutes is too long for a track built round such sparse music concepts.

More notable is the band's sense of political irony. The band's name might well mean 'German American Friendship', but since the opening track 'Der Sheriff' is subtitled 'Anti-Amerikanisches Lied', one must continue to take that moniker with a pinch of salt as Gabi cried "Alle müssen respektieren was der Sherrif sagt!". Another hugely cynical number is 'Der Präsident', which deals succinctly with the issue of first world greed.

Whilst the bulk of the album is given over to songs about either sex or politics, there are a few variants of theme. 'Kinderzimmer', from what little can translate, is a song about so-called modern day 'superheroes' (I'm guessing there's some cynicism hidden in there my German isn't good enough to dig it out). Also of note 'Leibezimmer', a track which sounds as innocent and I as anything else here, but those you observant enough to spot the subtitle 'Hexenlied' might realise that it's really all about witchcraft....

I'm still in two minds about whether I really like this album or not. Once translated, many of the songs do appear to have a valid message. The lusty, testosterone-fuelled sentiments of Lopez still have a place in this world whilst their observations of the outside world are nothing if not grimly relevant. But the fact that I (not a native German speaker) sussed all but a few of them out relatively simply might indicate that the DAF boys are overusing the simple-is-effective route here.

They've certainly done so with the music. This much old-skool synth on this side of the millennium can do serious damage to one's tolerance of anything that goes 'bleep',

'squelch' or 'plonk'. I've heard it said that whilst a synthesiser could conceivably create any sound theoretically possible, 99% of those sounds are of a cat chewing a wasp. Admittedly, DAF have done well with the remaining 1% of sounds that their machinery have to offer, but this is seriously dated stuff now. Of course, it's also fashionably dated.

## Darkmen – Living On Borrowed Time (2012)

It's good to know there's still Belgians out there keeping the old-school heritage of Front 242 and A Split-Second alive. I was starting to worry that the country had forgotten about the style. But Darkmen have made it to album number two, and this time there's no bleeding obvious Depeche Mode covers. It's good, solid, classic EBM all the way.

And for those of you who know the genre, you already know what this album sounds like. Throbbing, pulsating basslines, layers of percussion and metallic crashing providing the body beat, and an angry man belting out the lyrics over the top. Yes, sure, it's nothing new for the genre, but after spending the bulk of the last WGT in mosh pits with angry Saxons and Swedes, slugging it out to exactly this style of music, I know what frequencies brutally resonate this body. And I'm listening to them right now.

After several listens through, I found three tracks stood out. Two of them – "Legs Like Gold" and "No Pain No Shame" are just solid, in-your-face EBM blasts of the 'That Total Age' school. They don't try to be clever and are better for it. More notable is "We Are Hard", one of the fastest tracks on the album, but managing to squeeze in some of Combo's rants from 'This Is England'. Recognition that whilst Belgians may make the best body beats, we Brits produce the best thuggish antagonists, bar none.

There's a few other interesting elements. "Stahlwerk" is the instrumental opener, with the reverbed metal bashing loops taking the forefront, a surprisingly listenable composition. "Scheissmusik" appears to be a tongue-in-cheek DAF tribute, because it sounds exactly like them and, well, if you don't know what the title means, Google Translate reveals all. "I Feel It In Me" sees the most successful take on the slower, menacing side of EBM, even if the kick drum sounds worrying like someone bashing a plastic wheelie bin.

There's a few disappointing tracks. The language barrier impedes songs like "Liar!" and "Run And Hide", as forced wordplay and over-used expressions stick out more than anywhere else. "Open Your Eyes" is initially more promising, but some clumsy breaks make it all sound too stop-start. The closing number "Bitch!" is probably the weakest track of all. It just sounds like they'd run out of ideas by then.

Five remixes appear at the end of the album proper, with "Legs Like Gold" and "We Are Hard" rightfully chosen as the tracks most suitable for a rework. A couple of the mixes are reworked by bands that sound too similar to the original artists (Nordar and Grandchaos) and hence they can't really do much with them. Mechaload turn in an interesting take on "We Are Hard", adding some orchestral string sounds to the mix and turning the feel of the original on its head. Sounded misplaced at first, but it eventually struck a chord.

The only tribute to the more modern EBM sounds come with K-Bereit's take on "Legs Of Gold". For those of you unfamiliar with this projects origins, one of the members used to be in Cobalt 60. No, not Jean-Luc De Meyer. The other one. Anyway, the C60 link probably explains how they got this particular remix job, but the "fuller" electronic sound, flying strings and melodic motifs work well with the original vocals line and rhythmic concept. As a 'added value' remix, it does the job just fine.

I'll end this review with a warning. If you're not into old-school EBM, this won't convert you, at least not yet. Come back in a few years when you've tired of whatever-it-is-you-kids-are-

into-right-now. But if this is your sound of choice, you could do far worse than adding some Darkmen to your collection, and here's a good place to start. Admittedly, I could say that about any number of projects, so if you really want to confuse me, why not send your old-school EBM promos in and see if I can keep finding fresh methods of describing them?

I am SERIOUSLY going to regret that last line one day.....

## **Dawn of Ashes – Anathema (2013)**

I first heard Dawn of Ashes on an Out Of Line compilation back in the mid-00s. What I heard was a standard-issue form of aggrotech, terror EBM or whatever name the genre has these days (the militant Wikipedia mods with their old-school ideals have prevented any one term gaining dominance). Anyway, I was heartily tired of said genre by then and duly forgot about them. Fast forward many years, and I read a promo e-mail that informs me that Dawn Of Ashes have 'gone metal'. Then this thing crops up for review, I get curious and here I am reviewing it.

Now, I've heard the aggrotech+guitars combination before. It should work, but it takes more talent than you may expect to allow the two styles to work together without one swamping the other, so what we usually end up with getting was a kind of Hocico with power chords, or Ministry with Access Virus supersaw leads. Dawn Of Ashes have decided to side-step this issue by deriving influence not from the industrial rocks school of processed riffology (though ironically they got Chris Vrenna, ex-NIN, to mix it), but instead the highly technical world of extreme metal.

Luckily, such things are not totally lost on me. OK, my own collection doesn't extend beyond Cradle Of Filth (sorry, did I just admit to something I shouldn't have?), but thanks to an ex from a few years back, I got a decent grounding on the most extreme fringes of the metal scene. And in case you're already feeling nervous, let me assure you they're exactly like us industrial fans. Two hundred odd turn up at a basement venue, crowd round the merch stall picking up rarities and then various elitist discussion commence between (and sometimes during) the live parts, and the aftershow party is a complete sausage-fest. Dawn Of Ashes are treading safer ground than you may think.

So what Dawn of Ashes has delivered here is a 12-track 'suite', with the three 'Anathema' interludes sitting at the start, middle and end of the album, and nine actual songs in between. The song structures generally avoid the dance-inspired stompathon of industrial dance, instead adopting very technical structures, which build, break and rebuild, attacking from many angles and never quite settling into a predictable pattern. They keep one foot in their industrial past by ensuring the guitar parts dominate only on occasion and rarely reach the playing speed of the traditional extreme metallers, whilst still using the arcing strings and choral parts typical of melodic black metal. As an equal parts hybrid of the two styles, they've nailed it.

Of course, one of the downsides of adopting such a technical approach is the lack of a real 'anthem' to seal the albums greatness. "Sex, Blood & Black Magic" gets closest, but what would normally be the songs middle eight becomes a one minute diversion into a descending synth line, disconnected from the rest of the song. Full marks for surprise value and tonal variation, but marks off for choking when a sure-fire anthem was in the making. Only on "Torture Device" and potentially "Insidious (Of The Judas Breed)" do they keep their experimental tendencies in check and offer up a straightforward industrial-melodic-black-death-extreme-metal composition that I could safely spin in a DJ set without judicious cueing.

Sometimes, the extended structures work in their favour, though. The penultimate track “Scars On Scars” brings in Gary Zon from Dismantled, and together they develop an awesomely drawn-out build up from nowhere to a cathedral-sized climax. Sometimes the hook simply isn’t there, though – “Ending a Harrowing Wish” just sounds hurried and muddy for the duration, whilst “Morphine Addiction” is merely turgid. The individual songs are hit and miss, but their use of the ‘suite’ concept does result in an album that amounts to more than the sum of its parts, and whilst some parts don’t really work out of context, there is enough content of quality to make these twelve tracks a worthwhile trip into the dual hells of aggrotech and extreme metal.

## **Deathboy – Music To Crash Cars To (2003)**

Deathboy emerged from seemingly nowhere in mid-2002 and didn’t waste much time in stamping their mark on the London industrio-goth scene. The casual observer might wonder exactly how they managed to build a following so quickly. It might have something to do with the fact that whilst this act are relatively new as a live proposition, the project itself actually stretches back several years, with Scott Lamb (the ‘Deathboy’ in question) home-recording several MP3-albums before this particular disc saw the light of day.

To confuse things further, one of those albums was also entitled ‘Music To Crash Cars To’ – many of the tracks from that particular collection appear here also, but so do songs from the other ‘free’ albums. Naturally, a full release of this nature typically demands some work in a proper studio and the support of at least some kind of record label, and Cheltenham’s cheap-n-cheerful mavericks Wasp Factory stepped in to assist, with Lee Chaos himself helping the band see this album through to its completed form.

Admittedly, I do have mixed views on the various productions available on Wasp Factory. In theory, I’ve got a lot of support for what they do. In practise, I’ve found that the bargain-basement quality of production often compromises the band’s output. Whilst the purely electronic acts can get away with this (Swarf’s excellent ‘Fall’ EP springs to mind), any wannabe axe-wielders needs to watch out, lest their finished product resembles the homogenous wall of noise that has ruined many a Chaos Engine album over the years.

Fortunately for all involved, the sound quality here surpasses pretty much anything I’ve heard on this label to date. True, I’d like the guitars a bit further up the mix in places, but otherwise all the elements of the Deathboy sound meld together to form a convincing, effective whole. Their signature sound generally involves snarling guitars, industrially-tinged electronics, fierce broken beats (more Pitchshifter than anything hip-hop) and Scott’s punk y, in-your-face vocals – deep-down, maybe not the voice of world’s greatest vocal talent, but certainly the one of a man with a lot to get off his chest.

So what about the songs then? Highlights include opener ‘We Will Destroy’, a big, filthy anthem for the munted generation (and I promise that’s the only time I’ll use that phrase in a review), deservedly becoming something of a signature track for the band as a whole. ‘Computer #1’ mixes spoken word insights on the wired-in world, interspersed with some more abstract observations in the verses, with a big ‘I am Computer #1 – I Am The Future Going Wrong’ chorus holding it all together.

‘Decimate’ deals with the issue of attention seeking, whether it being by decorating ourselves (‘We Spend a Fortune on Make-up, So We Can All Look The Same’) or just by killing and raping people. ‘Lost Again’ sums up the feeling of wandering through life aimlessly, something we all feel at sometime, and ‘Demons’ handles how (not) to cope with uncontrollable lust. ‘Sick World’ meanwhile, brings together a series of observations about the fucked-up state of planet Earth into a fucked-up electro-rock stormer.

Whilst these tracks all contain enough ideas to keep them distinctive, they do all follow a similar musical line. Things get interesting when they deviate from their sound of choice. 'Parasite' features Scott attempting a softer, less antagonised vocal – generally successful but not totally 'there'. 'Killer' goes for a vicious drum'n'bass tone, landing somewhere between early Prodigy and Digital Hardcore – a little bit bitty but achieves something by it's conclusion.

More successful is the Apocalypse Remix of 'Change', where the breakbeats and dystopia are put aside while the boys have a go at sounding like an electro-pop band, elements of Numan and Assemblage 23 both very much in evidence. 'I Know You Know' also tweaks the percussion side of things, going for a big, metallic industrial loop – a bit 'static' in how it plays in with the rest of the music, but on second thoughts, that was probably the whole idea.

The title track, meanwhile, introduces some decidedly ravey elements to the Deathboy sound – chmalt, though this is quite a long way away from that long-distant attempt by the Utah Saints to fuse guitar riffs to the music of E-culture. The untitled 'hidden' track, inevitably found at the end of the CD is another one that initially recalls days of white gloved pill-poppers and big yellow smiley faces, a brief burst of an 'Everybody In The Place' style intro, before it goes very nasty on us indeed. If Trent Reznor ever remixed 808 State, this is what it would have sounded like.

Now I might be prone to bias, of course. This is, after all, the first CD in which I got a mention in the inlay (look....I'm in there somewhere!). But I doubt I would have made it had I not been brought into contact with members of the bands when I wrote a not-entirely-bad review of what turned out to be their first ever live show. OK, they don't always hit the bullseye every time, but as first albums go, this is pretty damn good, stepping over the chmalt without going all self-indulgently experimental.

## **Deathboy – End Of An Error (2006)**

The first Deathboy album might have been impressive for what was then a new band, but it did lack a certain 'longevity', ultimately providing us with a few obvious anthems surrounded by a number of tracks that seemed like interesting musical ideas than fully developed songs. But Deathboy have grown and matured, as has the sub-genre which they now seem to belong to (it's called 'futurepunk', apparently). With a few decent producers on board (Rico and John Fryer namechecked on the sleeve) and a more professional looking product, it's pretty clear that they're set on taking a step forward. They are no longer plucky newcomers.

And in many respects, they seem to have succeeded. The punk'n'bass core of their sound remains intact, though even songs like 'Cheap Shot' and 'Smile You Fucker' combine their cynical, dismissive and often foul-mouthed vociferation with a more developed form of songwriting and a harder-hitting production that demands more repeated listen than the likes of 'We Will Destroy'. The more straightforward industrial rock of 'Black Morning' and 'Angel On My Shoulder' work equally as well. Thinking back to my review of their 2003 debut on Wasp Factory, it's simply everything I originally said they had to do.

But there's another part of the overall Deathboy concept which is realized to great effect on this album – believe it or not, they also have a sensitive side. 'Money And Confidence' is best described as a breakbeat Cure, whilst 'Lullaby' does an alternation of stipped-down melancholy with Aphex Twin-style beat rushes. The sweet, melodic synths of 'Something' were probably unexpected by many, but mesh well with the songs more brutal undercurrent. For me, however, the undoubted highlight is 'Slip'. It seems to be one of the



albums more 'personal' songs, the blunt synth/bass stabs opening out and developing into an oddly uplifting chorus, despite its bleak lyrical tone.

It defines how far this band have come – all concerned must now be hoping that they haven't hit the glass ceiling that afflicts so many UK bands. There's a fanbase to be found beyond the confines of scene clubs and slots at Black Celebration and Whitby Gothic Weekend. Time for a shot at the big time, boys.....

## **Deine Lakaien – White Lies (2002)**

The German duo of Ernst Horn and Alexander Veljanov are minor legends in their homeland. They compete with international corporate megastars at the top of their countries charts and attract huge crowds wherever they happen to be playing live. And unlike the other 'borderline mainstream' scene acts (I'm looking at you, Wolfsheim), they retain their reputation for being a little bit 'odd', that little bit 'quirky', the thing that keeps their sound distinctive. This despite hardly ever singing in their native tongue. At least it means that me, muggins here, can understand it.

Which brings me to 'White Lies' – Deine Lakaien's 2002 album. The first thing to strike me level of 'accessibility' – the ratio of 'weird to conventional' is similar to that of 'Kasmodiah', but even the really experimental tracks don't take THAT much effort to get into. Not that this is any bad thing in moderation – I mean, face it, who really ever got their head round 'Winter Fish Testosterone'? It's not like DL have suddenly discovered the art of songwriting (we always knew what they could do), it more that they've achieved balance over an entire album.

And where better to start than album opener 'Wunderbar'. And no, they are still singing in English. Mostly. It's no more than a gentle ballad, Veljanov's soft, sonorous voice detailing the love affair between a wandering drunk and a lamp post! With delicate strings floating past in the background, and Horn's keyboards and piano filling in the gaps, it makes for strong introduction – deceptively innocent, impeccably produced but with a dark undercurrent.

'Generators' takes us to a more familiar Lakaien territory. The lead single from the album gets a fresh treatment here, a subtle, pithy little synth-ballad, the kind of thing this duo do so well, and do so many times on this CD. Like all the best songs, it seems to have some kind of hidden meaning which may or may not exist – which of course results in many a repeated listen. Picking up the pace is 'Where You Are', the other single from the album, a sort of life-changing tribute to person or persons unknown.

Things start getting odd with 'Prayer'. It makes vague reference to advances in genetic engineering, specifically cloning technology, and trying to out-do Mother Nature at her own game by creating some kind of master race. I might have misread this one totally, but this interpretation does make the song sound just a little unnerving to the ears that are mine. Then we get the diversion of 'Stupid', a purposefully silly synth-popper, cynically answering those that dare criticise the songwriting talents of others (guilty? Moi!?). As 'joke' songs go, this one is at least acceptable in its mere existence.

Now we get 'The Kiss', a hurdy-gurdy driven folk song about cheating on one's lover during a dirty weekend in France. Veljanov is in his element here, really getting behind the songs dynamics and driving it through to it's conclusion. The following track 'Silence In Your Eyes' is something of an *schmaltzy*. The minimalistic approach they opt for is one that can be made to work under the right circumstances, but this particular song is too insubstantial and vague to really succeed, despite some nice melodic keyboard work from Horn.

The next song is 'Hands White (Mani Bianche)', the point at which the album reaches it's least accessible point. The trick here is Sabine Lutzenberger (from the Helium Vola project) echoing Veljanov's vocals in the form of an Italian translation. It's a reasonable attempt at trying something different, not particularly catchy but a fair attempt at what appears to be a left-of-centre anthem for political unity.

'Lost' is another one of those low-key ballady affairs, but still effective as tribute to one's failures, building up to an increasingly complex and chaotic sound as the song reaches it's climax. Now on the home straight, 'Fleeting' deals with the impending end of a relationship in almost resigned fashion. Featuring the return of live string instruments, it's a rich, professional-sounding number that's typically the sign of a band at home with themselves and their music, even if the song itself is not their strongest.

The penultimate track is also the best, which is surprising as it's not even a 'new' song as such. The track is 'Life Is A Sexually Transmitted Disease', the latest part in the 'Reincarnation' series and the closest we've got to a remake of the lead track from the ancient 'Dark Star' album. This version drives the song to new levels, with that title line remaining the single most memorable aspect of the whole album. The album then just fades out quietly with outro track 'One Minus One'.

It's very tricky to try and work out who to recommend this album to. Unlike other so-called 'darkwave' bands (and to a lesser extent, some of Deine Lakaien's earlier songs), it's not really music for dancing to. Symbolising as it does Deine Lakaien's 'maturity of sound' in full bloom, it's the kind of album you need to sit back and listen to, and in that respect it works both within the musical remit of this site and possibly outside it as well. I can quite imagine your normal, everyday German music lover, popping into Saturn or Media Markt to bag a copy. I guess that's a suggestion that you should now go to your local German-import friendly vendor and do likewise. Unless you're already in Germany, in which case you probably already have this anyway...

## **Depeche Mode – Speak And Spell (1981)**

Where a legend began. Cheesy but effective 1980s electro-pop with a strong sense for a catchy melody. The production values may be little suspect, this being indicative of a band that hadn't yet mastered electronic instruments. The only real hit from this album was 'Just Can't Get Enough' – a song barely recognisable as the Depeche Mode we know today, but still catchy enough to survive where the others have been forgotten, though the moody 'Puppets' and 'Photographic' as well as album opener 'New Life' are still worth the occasional airing.

They fall down when the songwriting gets cringeworthy and trite, with the dire 'What's You're Name?' the definite low point. It's worth noting that the songs on this album were mostly written by Vince Clarke, who would later leave to form Yazoo and Erasure. Martin Gore makes his first tentative songwriting efforts with 'Tora Tora Tora', which tries hard but falls short of greatness, as well as the indifferent instrumental 'Big Muff'.

## **Depeche Mode – A Broken Frame (1982)**

More sombre, but nothing on what was to come. The true Depeche Mode sound wasn't defined here, but it was a step in the right direction. Still very much a 'transition' album, Martin Gore proving that whilst he was pretty good at writing dark, brooding songs (i.e. Leave In Silence), he should have left pure pop to Vince Clarke and Yazoo – 'A Photograph of You' is particularly embarrassing, whilst 'The Meaning Of Love' is probably their weakest single of all. The rest of the album is hit-or-miss throughout, indicative of a

band making a serious effort to find their way in the music business, but not yet truly succeeding.

## **Depeche Mode – Construction Time Again (1983)**

This is the first of Depeche Mode's industrially-influenced albums, but more significantly, it's the point where they started to come of age following the departure of Vince Clarke some years ago. 'Everything Counts' sums up everything that makes Depeche Mode so great, a nursery-rhyme melody matched to some very serious social commentary, whilst 'Love In Itself' was the first step in establishing Martin Gore's habit of perverting the traditional concept of a 'love song'.

At the same time, they still seem to not entirely at home with creating consistent albums rather than just hit singles – 'Pipeline', for instance, tries to sound 'experimental' with various Neubauten-inspired metal-bashing samples, but just comes over as being overly preachy and directionless. Alan Wilder contributes a couple of songs – neither is exactly bad, but in retrospect it still seems that he made a wise decision in leaving the writing to Gore whilst he got on with the production side of things, as working out who-did-what-the-best would lead to a series of the most notable Mode albums of all.

## **Depeche Mode – Some Great Reward (1984)**

Their first truly great album, another one carrying a significant industrial thread throughout, but also one on which the songwriting has improved over 'Construction Time Again', with no obvious filler in sight. The throbbing opener 'Something To Do' is simultaneously electrifying, grim and very slightly perverted, and this time the album doesn't let up from start to finish.

Other highlights include the ever-so-slightly bitter piano love ballad of 'Somebody' (the kind of thing only Martin Gore could write), the metaphorically kinky social commentary of 'Master and Servant', and the punchy, metal-bashing 'People are People' (where even some rather trite lyrics fail to upset the flow). The most moving song of all, however, is left until last – 'Blasphemous Rumours' questioning the whole concept of divine justice in a manner which few if any of their contemporaries would have even dared to consider.

## **Depeche Mode – Black Celebration (1986)**

This album demonstrates better than any other how enjoyable gloomy music can be. The title track is a huge, aching tribute to the utter futility of day-to-day existence. Things lighten slightly for the ballad 'Sometimes' and the upbeat but dubiously themed synth-pop of 'A Question of Time', but the real highlight (or lowlight, depending on your mood) is 'Stripped' an utterly bizarre (and distinctly perverted) but totally infectious piece of dark-synth pop – probably one of the most influential DM tracks, certainly if the sound of the European darkwave scene over the past few years is anything to go by.

## **Depeche Mode – Music For The Masses (1987)**

This is the point where Depeche Mode really hit the mainstream and did so 'their way'. This one has the superb 'Never Let Me Down Again' kicking things off, a song which successfully introduced guitars and rockier percussion to the bands repertoire without compromising the integrity of their sound, plus the terrifying epic 'Little 15' and the brooding 'Behind The Wheel', as well as the more straight-ahead synth-pop of 'Strangelove'. Also watch out for the clever innuendo hidden within the confines of 'Sacred', whilst grandiose instrumental track 'Pimpf' is also impressive when played through a decent system.

## Depeche Mode – Violator (1990)

Probably the most blatantly ‘pop’ DM album since the early 1980s, which probably explains why it spawned four singles, including ‘Enjoy The Silence’ with THAT guitar line, arguably the most recognisable (and most covered) Depeche Mode song of all. We also get the bluesy stomp of ‘Personal Jesus’, once again bringing religion and fetishism dangerously close. The non-single tracks are also quite strong, with ‘Sweetest Perfection’ the best of the bunch, though fans more devoted than me would insist ‘Halo’ was worth a mention, so here I have. In many respects, this is the kind of album best enjoyed without a reviewer telling you why you should, so just ignore me and go and grab yourself a copy.

## Depeche Mode – Songs Of Faith and Devotion (1993)

The most guitar-heavy of all the Depeche Mode albums, this disc demonstrates what one of the world’s most-loved synth bands had to do to survive in a climate of grunge and lo-fi recording values. The screechy intro and dirty riff of opener ‘I Feel You’ offer instant proof that this no longer a happy, bleepy pop band, as if they ever were. The murky expanses of ‘Walking on My Shoes’ then gives some clue to the pain the band went through to produce this album, as well as showing how far they’ve advanced since their days as a badly-dressed pop band.

It’s an album laden with surprises – the gospel-tinged ‘Condemnation’ for example, or the Uilleann pipes featured in ‘Judas’, whilst ‘Rush’ offers hints of NIN-style electronics, signifying the then-growing industrial rock sound. Despite this, it’s still very Depeche Mode in terms of the songwriting, slightly morose, ever so slightly pervy – it’s just that the environment in which those songs are set is so different.

## Depeche Mode – Ultra (1997)

Now without Alan Wilder, there were questions about whether the group should even continue, but they did, and this was the product. Given the circumstances it was recorded under, it was never likely to be an absolute great, though they still come up trumps several times – especially with the dense, claustrophobic ‘Barrel of a Gun’, one of their best guitar-heavy songs, whilst ‘I Feel You’ provided at least one piece of classic Mode mastery for those that didn’t care for all this musical progression.

The redemptive Gore-sung ‘Home’ and the melancholy ‘Sister of Night’ are the other key highlights, though the album is let down by a number of rather aimless instrumentals that seem to serve only to boost the track listing. There are also a number of songs which are largely forgettable, with the country-tinged ‘Freestate’ and the turgid ‘The Bottom Line’ resulting in the album crawling towards its conclusion rather than building up to any kind of climax.

## Depeche Mode – Exciter (2001)

Depeche Mode seem to have lost some of their teeth since all their turmoils have been sorted. Martin Gore can still write a decent song and David Gahan has lost none of his singing talent. It’s just all seems a little bit low-key. There’s nothing actually WRONG, for example, with the delicate acoustic guitar and percolating electronics of opening track (and lead single) ‘Dream On’ – it just doesn’t seem to want to impress you.

Most of the rest of the album follows similar lines – the elements are all there, they just don’t gel into something indicative of greatness. ‘The Dead of Night’ is the one exception,

a harsh gothic stomper that makes up for some of the rather thin, unmemorable songs that surround it. There is the occasional memorable turn of phrase, a couple of songs (second single 'I Feel Loved' and the subtle biblical references of 'Breathe') that are at least quite good, but generally the whole album just sounds too pedestrian, making the title sound ironic at the very least.

## **Depeche Mode – Playing The Angel (2005)**

The first Depeche Mode album in four years, and the first since both Martin Gore and Dave Gahan took time out to record solo efforts. Thankfully, they've rediscovered a little of their old magic, something which was missing from 2001's ironically-titled 'Exciter'. The delivery is more committed and the overall sound is richer than its predecessor. The anarchic opener 'A Pain That I'm Used To' brings back happy memories of the dirty rock textures of 'Faith and Devotion' era Mode, whilst the delicate, melancholy lead single 'Precious' will please most long-time 'Moders.

This is one of several tracks that sees Gore's regular 'riske-but-not-quite-blasphemous' forms of religious and questioning (the scathing 'John The Revelator' probably the most memorable of these). Dave Gahan contributes three songs, though these (Suffer Well, I Want It All and Nothing's Impossible) are not amongst the album's strongest. These and a couple of wobbly Gore tracks (the confused 'Macro' in particular) keep this album from being regarded as a particularly great one – a partial return to form, but the glory days still seem increasingly distant.

## **Depeche Mode – The Singles 81.85 (1985)**

A useful summary of the 'Mode's early years. Some of their early pop efforts sound rather simplistic dated up against anything they've done recently, but with the likes of 'Everything Counts', 'Master & Servant' and 'Leave In Silence' on board, you can forgive them for twee uber schmaltz like 'The Meaning of Love'. This disc is also the easiest way of obtaining the non-album singles 'Shake The Disease' (excellent – a must for all fans of the 'Mode) and 'It's Called A Heart' (weaker by a long way). An interesting early version of 'Photographic' is included as a sweetener.

## **Depeche Mode – 101 (1989)**

A good live collection of Depeche Mode's work so far. Not all the songs deviate that much from the albums, but this double set survives on it's own merits – it captures the live essence of a DM concert. It's clear which songs worked out best on stage – 'Never Let Me Down' is clearly an Anthem with a capital 'A', whilst the version of 'Everything Counts' is probably one of the best live recordings of all time, the sounds of ten of thousand Mode fans singing long after the band had stopped playing signifying exactly how huge this band had become.

## **Depeche Mode – The Singles 86>98 (1998)**

About the safest bet going for a classic compilation. This two-disc set summarises Depeche Mode during their most successful era, reeling off the classics one by one, from 'Stripped' right through to the new song 'Only When I Lose Myself', not a single weak track to be found, and climaxing on the '101' live version of 'Everything Counts', placed here to highlight exactly how massive this act has become.

## Desdemona – Endorphins (2012)

The Polish project Desdemona present their fourth album 'Endorphins' amid a confusing mass of genre definitions within the accompanying promotional material. A band capable of opening for VNV Nation, Type O Negative and Deine Lakaien must have some interesting stylistic hybrids up their sleeves, mustn't they? Either that or they're short of viable opening bands in Poland. For once, I had no idea what to expect from this album before I scrolled through my 'to listen to list' and gave it a run-through.

Things initially seem quite promising – "Bring It All" is a nice combination of chugging riffs, snaring female vocals and blunt synth melodies. "desDREAM" sees the aggression level creep up a notch, the guitar more cutting, the vocal style varying from softly-sung to punky shouting and an assortment of electronic styles somehow coming together to form a seething electro-rock composition, not dissimilar to the stronger Angelspit tracks.

But it's strength of depth on which such albums are scored, and the interest level begins to slip with "Poison". It tries to build from a slow, menacing synth buzz (with added blippy bits) into a crushing riff-o-rama, but the song doesn't quite pull off the build-and-release dynamic as well as it needs to – there's just something wrong with the subtlety of the composition that means the track as the whole doesn't have the impact you think it should.

"Jealous Sky" is a more straightforward electronic punk rocker, wobbling slightly in it's opening phase, but a strong, raging chorus and a consistent underlying sense of energy rescues the track as a whole. But the slide resumes with "Devil's Game" – a brutal in-yer-face riff tries and fails to mate with a complex shower of synthetic noodling, and then throws in a middle-eight which resembles something from an early-00s electro-goth collective. So many concepts at play, but they struggle to make them work together sometimes!

Next is "Sorrow", which again tries to mix two immiscible elements – sombre piano/strings and IDM-style breakbeats. The song actually sounds like it might have worked during the phases where they lay off the drums, so why didn't they do that all the way through? The bizarre stylistic combinations continue with "Let's Play Love", a promising mid-tempo stomp with a chiptune-style synthlead, though it occasionally drowns itself in it's own aggression. "In Flames" follows similar lines, but this time the actual song is rather too turgid and a minute too long for it's own good.

And then comes "Euphoria", and my personal anathema of the moment, yet also the darling of most other critics. Dubstep. It may be flavour of the month in the music industry, but I see it as both the musical equivalent of an invasive species (there's no escape – even Side-Line are covering it these days!) and an incredible irritating fad that I sincerely hope will be chma come 2013. What annoys me is this song actually sounded like it might have had a climatic, rousing chorus. But the wobble bass ruins it all.

Oddly enough, the albums final track "XXX" proves to be surprisingly sound, the synth clicks, Ministry-grade riffs and vocal layering see the album out on a high. But it was still a rough journey. It's admirable to see a band try to break down the genre barriers and go for a real crossover sound, but the disparate elements have to be made to play nicely together, and you still need some decent, old-fashioned songwriting at the core. Desdemona, for all their efforts, fall short more often than not.

## De/Vision – Subkutan (2006)

De/Vision's 2006 album initially offers a ray of hope but it ultimately proves to be a disappointment. The opening track 'Subtronic' features a relatively catchy 'We gonna rock

you right' structure that kicks nicely, showing a degree more 'edge' than their usual style. This is followed by 'The End', a proper, dismissive rock-afflicted pop song with a dainty uptempo beat and plenty of melodic touches (both on synth and guitar), building into a suitably climatic chorus. They then try to do a 'slow ballad building in a slow, dirty rocker' on 'Star-Crossed Lovers', fall slightly short of greatness, and then never really recover. The remainders of the album generally consists of either competent but rather bland synth-pop ('Addict', 'Still Unknown') or minimal moments of indifference ('No Tommorrow', 'My Own Worst Enemy' and the utter tedium of album closer 'Summer Sun').

The only exception this rule is 'E-Shock', a weak attempt at utilising vocal effects as a token attempt at sounding 'industrial'. De/Vision's clean, crisp production style is still much in evidence – there's no doubting their professional approach in an era still infected with lo-fi electronic acts thinking poor quality control allows them to pass for 'electroclash' (dream on....). But despite all their efforts, the album simply isn't interesting to listen to. The songs just drift past, a frustrating experience once the early momentum is lost. You could do worse if pixel-perfect synth-pop is your thing, but that's about the limit of it's appeal. Attention-grabbing it is not.

## **De/Vision – Popgefahr (2010)**

Have you ever spotted a member of the opposite sex (or the same sex, if you're so inclined) that was essentially your 'type', bore all the features that you usually find attractive, but you simply didn't find attractive for some undefinable reason? I'm like that with De/Vision. I usually love morose European synthpop bands, but this one has always lacked a certain something, despite (or maybe because of) the polished, professional quality of their output. Every now and again they do something to catch my attention, only for me to realise shortly after that I didn't like it that much at all.

Looks like I was fooled again. 'mAndroids' gets everything right – it's got a catchy rhythm, a fuzzy electronic backbone and a good enough usage of the ever-so-slightly geeky 'man-machine' songwriting concept that punctuates this genre. This is followed by 'Rage', which is unusually robust and aggressive by De/Vision standards, and thus highly refreshing for a band who seem to be stuck in second gear most of the time. And then comes 'What's Love All About?', a fairly typical sub-Mode mopeathon, and then you realise that maybe things haven't changed that much after all.

'Time To Be Alive' works well enough thanks to a inverted synth motif and a throbbing backbone providing the song with both the style and substance it needs to succeed. And then they just sort of throw the towel in. Their second attempt at getting 'tough' (Ready To Die) isn't as successful as 'Rage' and the remaining five tracks just don't do anything that your common-or-garden variety synthpop band couldn't do given enough time with some decent kit and a proper studio. Despite a promising start, this ultimately proves to be 'just another De/Vision' album. I might go back to the first few tracks a few times, but otherwise it's time for me to go back to ignoring them again.

## **Diary of Dreams – Cholymelan (1994)**

If there's one word I'd use to describe this debut album from ex-Garden of Delight bassist Adrian Hates, it's 'desolate'. Reverb-heavy percussion, sombre synth strings and the occasional flourish from pianos, organs or guitar forms the accompaniment to Adrian's awesomely dreary vocals, suitable basis lyrical themes typically based around helplessness, betrayal and resignation. The minimal arrangements are certainly effective at generating atmosphere, but it's clear that they've not yet come of age as songwriters, many of the tracks coming over more like poems set to music than actual songs.

There are a few songs that stick out – primarily the pairing of ‘Holier Than Thou Approach’ and ‘False Affection, False Creation’ during the middle portion of the album, the latter being the most guitar-heavy track on the album, the effect-enriched riff combining nicely with the synths and metronomic percussion to create a fine relic of the darkwave sound of the time. The remainder is perfectly listenable in small doses and does occasionally provide moments of stark beauty, but the percussion grates after a while and there isn’t really enough substance here to keep the album fully engrossing for the duration. No doubting the potential, though.

Note: The original 1994 Dion Fortune edition of the album has ten tracks, though the version you’re most likely to find these days is the Accession re-issue, which offers four additional tracks at the albums conclusion. Three of them follow a similar path to the main album, although ‘Bird Without Wings’ is a surprisingly up-tempo affair, the pizzicato-style strings creating a real feel of ‘urgency’ that’s otherwise lacking from this album.

## **Diary of Dreams – End Of Flowers (1996)**

The second Diary of Dreams album is a touching, rather personal affair, but nonetheless one which is a notable advancement on ‘Cholymelan’, mainly as it now seems like Adrian Hates is actually writing songs rather than simply setting poetry to music. Some of the songs are also more dynamic musically – the title track (which opens the example) is a fine example of the progress this project has made, softly fluttering synths paired with a metronomic electronic rhythm, later enhanced by a few crushing power chords.

This is followed by ‘Victimised’, not dissimilar but relying on the ‘washing machine’ guitar style so commonly found in trad-goth recordings during the same era, though the albums real centrepiece is ‘Retaliation’. One of the few truly ‘confrontational’ Diary of Dreams tracks, this track succeeds on all levels. An intricately composed darkwave classic, the lead synth motif and up-tempo drumming providing the basis, whilst the spoken-word bridge leads into a scathing chorus, singing of ‘Sweet, sweet, revenge’ that becomes increasingly powerful with each passing.

The album is not perfect, however. With eleven tracks, none clocking in lower than 5 minutes 44 seconds in length, even Adrian Hates struggles to keep the listeners attention for the full duration of the disc – there are simply too many tracks that mope without any true purpose. As ever with this project, there is no shortage of sinister atmospherics, and there are several moments of forlorn beauty (especially during the carefully orchestrated ‘Oblivion’), but despite this, the album doesn’t quite succeed as a complete package, even if songs like ‘Retaliation’ and the title track give the best indication yet of this project’s ultimate potential.

## **Diary of Dreams – Bird Without Wings (1997)**

‘Others Cry For Help, Like It Would Change Anything’, sings Adrian Hates at the start of the eight-minute plus album opener ‘Stimulation’, an awesomely expansive track that sets the scene for the strongest Diary of Dreams album so far. It’s the most guitar-heavy of the three albums to date, but also makes more use of electronic elements, both in terms of bassline and melody. Or to put it more succinctly, this album simply has more of everything.

‘Bird Without Wings II’ turns the brief snippet on ‘Cholymelan’ into a fully-realised darkwave number, the drum programming, guitar riffs and those oh-so-tragic lyrics coalesce into suitably resigned title track. And it only get gloomier from here, reaching both it’s nadir and it’s peak with ‘But The Wind Was Stronger’, another huge. Drawn-out affair,



delicately structured with hypnotic electronic loops and melodies in such a way that the 8 minutes and 26 second duration doesn't seem a second too long.

This may be the album's centrepiece, but there are still a few surprises – 'Ex-ile' is the most up-tempo track (with only 'Aphelion' coming close), an angry, dismissal of an unforgivable traitor, its confrontational nature sealing its position as the album's most obvious 'anthem'. The album closer 'Flood of Tears' is even more of a surprise, a softly-sung acoustic ballad, very different from any song by this outfit to date, but touching in its own unique way. There's still a few tracks like 'Dissolution' and 'Legends' that never really take off and really drag as a result, but they are exceptions to the rule.

## **Diary of Dreams – Psychoma? (1998)**

The fourth Diary of Dreams album sees an expanded line-up, two songs in their native German tongue, and a tracklisting laden with twisted wordplay. Having realised their potential of 'Bird Without Wings', Adrian Hates and co now throw their assembled fanbase a curveball. The band's sound is still recognisable for what it is, but they've moved in a more electronic direction than before, elaborate keyboard arrangements, synthetic textures and delicate rhythms, the guitars still in evidence but less prominent in the mix than of many of the 'Bird Without Wings' tracks.

The album's cerebral nature means it does lack an anthem equal to 'Retaliation' or 'Ex-ile' ('Methusalem' comes closest), but it springs a fair few surprises along the way. The female and speech-synth voices in '(Ver)Gift(Et)?', the softly-sung 'Never Freeze' and the obligatory eight-minute epic 'E.-Dead-Motion' all do their thing with a degree of proficiency. The guitars do re-appear late in the album for 'Wild' and 'You(-das)', though these songs otherwise don't rank as the album's strongest. Ultimately, this is an interesting album to listen to but in many respects it tries too hard and therefore falls slightly short.

## **Diary of Dreams – Moments Of Bloom (1999)**

The first Diary of Dreams compilation sums the most prominent 'Moments of Bloom' from the first four albums, but Adrian Hates was seemingly unwilling to put out an album without getting his hands dirty and has duly reworked two tracks from each album as well as providing four previously unreleased tracks. Whilst most DoD fans pick their own favourites, the tracks chosen for this collection seem like a sensible enough cross-section of the band's work for date, featuring their two out-and-out anthems (Ex-ile and Retaliation) along with their most notable 'epics' (such as End of Flowers and But The Wind Was Stronger).

Whilst new vocal takes were recorded for this collection, the only songs to see a substantial overhaul are the two 'Cholymelan' tracks, both given a treatment consistent with the electronic palpitations of the 'Psychoma?' era material. The more recent material has seen only a slight rework, such as a new, richer guitar part for 'Retaliation', a Bladerunner-esque intro to 'End of Flowers' and other tweaks to the mixing and synth patches in a number of the other songs. It's even odds whether you prefer these versions or the originals, there's often little to choose between them, but as this collection was only intended as a compilation, it's not worth worrying about.

The four unreleased tracks are all reasonable variants on the Diary of Dreams sound. 'Moments of Bloom' and 'Touch II' are delicate, rather minimal compositions, reminiscent of the 'End of Flowers' sound, whilst 'Reality of Mine' is more up-tempo, echoing of 'Ex-ile' in places. The album closer 'Predictions' is another one of those drawn-out affairs, built out of piano motif and reverb guitar, stretching to nine-and-a-half minutes in length. This is possibly a little too long – the awesomely percussive climax may be worth the wait when

you finally get there, but some less patient listeners never will. As a whole, the collection is a decent summary of Diary of Dreams's early years – not a truly authentic account, but a highly listenable one at least.

## **Diary of Dreams – One Of 18 Angels (2000)**

The very epitome of Diary of Dreams numerous achievements, 'One of 18 Angels' is an 11-track journey through a world built from the very darkest electro-gothic landscapes imaginable. Constantly lamenting the futility of our lives, questioning every aspect of our existence, this uber-gothic mope-fest succeeds because for once EVERY song makes a mark. There is no filler, no never-ending darkwave epics (which have sometimes worked in the past, but more often do not). Musically, the project has now perfected its use of electronic rhythms as the driving force, supporting by haunting keyboard textures and occasional use of guitar, the latter often switching from the reverb-heavy trad-goth style towards snarling power chords, an astute stylistic switch given the increasingly rhythmic nature of the music.

The album opens with 'Rumours About Angels', a ghostly piano line hammering into submission by reverberating percussion and doom-laden keyboards, sandwiched by 'Dark City' samples. The urgent pulses that signal the arrival of 'Butterfly:Dance!' lead into what must be the most synth-poppy Diary of Dreams song to date, whilst 'Mankind' combines delicate e-piano, hard guitar stab and forceful drum programming, with lines like 'What is this faith for...if there's nothing to believe in?' sticking in the mind long after the song has run its course. The real highlight, however, arrives a few tracks later in the form of 'Chemicals'. Their most obvious 'anthem' to date, the darkwave groove and hypnotic chorus form a truly compulsive combination – synthetic gloom has never been so appealing.

Even then, there are yet still more surprises to come, such as the piano ballad 'Colorblind' – scarcely an original concept, you may think, but this particular leid is capable of forcing a tear from even the most cold-hearted internet music critic (do I need to point fingers?). This precedes a final trio of 'People Watcher', 'Darker' and 'Dead Souls Dreaming', each one sounding more conclusive, indeed more terminal than its predecessor. The album finally closes with the spoken word fragment 'Are you dreaming?', one final twist in this elaborately spun tale. Whilst the direction this project has taken will not please all, there is no doubting that what Diary of Dreams achieve on this album places them at the very peak of their genre. They've successfully modernised gothic music, a hard act for even themselves to follow.

## **Diary of Dreams – Freak Perfume (2002)**

The follow-up to 'One of 18 Angels' had a lot to answer to, and in some respects it almost lives up to its predecessor. The album opener 'Traum:A' (how's that for a bit of bi-lingual wordplay?) sees us straight back on familiar territory with the horror movie samples, eerie piano and cathedral-sized rhythms. From there it's straight into 'The Curse', a pulsating electronic number, a (dis)missive from the tortured to his torturer and a surprisingly catchy song to boot.

This album offers a number of other successful dance-oriented tracks (more than usual, in fact), including lead single 'O'Brother Sleep', 'AmoK' and 'She', all combining electro-gothic rhythms with occasional ingenuity in Adrian Hates' twisted lyricism – 'AmoK's turn of phrase especially memorable. It's when they move from away from this style that things get a little inconsistent, however. 'Traumtänzer' is the best of the 'slow' tracks (and their best German-language song to date), the mesmeric repetition of 'Wirst Du mich nie

verstehen?’ one of the albums most memorable moments. ‘Play God!’ also has an appeal of it’s own, even if it’s not one of the band’s finest.

On the downside, the overly minimal ‘Chrysalis’ fails to really get the best out of Adrian’s ‘softer’ vocal style’ – ‘Verdict’ and ‘She And Her Darkness’ make a better job of it, but they’re still a little anonymous. ‘Rebellion’ is an interesting experiment with growled vocals buried deep in the mix which seems to fall short of what it wanted to be (though the melodic guitar that appears towards the songs conclusion is worth waiting for), although it’s better than the confused ‘Bastard’. It’s these tracks that prevent this album from equally the heights of it’s predecessor, but the good seems to outweigh the bad.

NOTE: The original digi-pak version of this album included three additional tracks – a radio edit of ‘The Curse’ and remixes of ‘AmoK’ and ‘Rebellion’. The edit is OK but I feel the two remixes are quite weak and the tracks are now available on the ‘Dream Collector’ compilation if you have to have them, so only the most fanatic collector need seek this version out.

## **Diary of Dreams – Nigredo (2004)**

‘Nigredo’ sees a further stylistic shift for Diary of Dreams. With guitarist Gaun:A now working alongside Adrian Hates, this latest opus is concept album of sorts, based around a semi-fictitious Icelandic mythology. The sleeve notes provide a few clues as to the background behind the piece, although it may prove to be heavy going for all but the most devoted fans. In terms of music development, there has been a slight shift away from the blatantly danceable rhythms heard on the last few albums, moving back towards the poetically desolate keyboard atmospherics of early works.

There are a few energetic moments – the cacophonous lead single ‘Giftraum’, for example, sinister whispered vocals leading to an equally raucous climax in ‘Reign of Chaos’ or the caustic guitar stabs and ‘Fight! Fight!’ refrain in ‘UnMensch’. ‘Psycho-Logic’ is also memorable, reminiscent of the ‘Panik Manifesto’ in more than one respect, though my personal choice cut is ‘Kindrom’. Adrian Hates, for all his apparent despondency, is always willing to take the fight to his personal demons at least once per album, and the repetitious declaration that ‘All the rebels in the world can’t bring me down!’, accompanied by Gaun:A’s power chords and the typically mesmeric electronics stand to remind all listeners exactly what drew them to this project in the first place.

It’s just a pity that the rest of the album doesn’t quite rise up to these standards. ‘Dead Letter’ is a reasonable attempt at reviving the ‘Cholymelan’ era of reverb-heavy drumming, but the middle portion of the album proves to be more successful at generating atmosphere than as exercises as songwriting – ‘Charma Sleeper’ and ‘Tales of the Silent City’ rather too pedestrian for my liking, whilst the closing stages of the album make all the usual noises without really providing any memorable moments. It’s almost like Diary of Dreams have got too clever for their own good, despite a multitude of enticing moments, the disc as a whole falls short of the standard I have come to expect.

## **Diary of Dreams – aLive (2005)**

The first Diary of Dreams live album came largely due to fan demand, and it came at exactly the right time. This disc documents the 2005 ‘Nigredo’ tour, which saw the band replace the drum pads with acoustic drum and also saw Adrian Hates play a second guitar on certain songs, all of which contributes to an increasingly ‘live’ sound from a band that had often been accused of being over-reliant on a backing track when on stage. The versions of songs played here are still for the most part rooted in the original album recordings, but they do enough live to justify issuing a live CD such as this.

Despite the tour's name, the setlist here features only two songs from 'Nigredo' itself, as well as the explosive title track from the subsequent 'EP' 'MenschFeind' which opens the set. It's the previous album 'Freak Perfume' that features most strongly here, with one track from each of the previous four albums – the crowd-pleasing 'Chemicals' sandwiched by 'Methusalem' and 'But The Wind Was Stronger', two songs rarely featured in DoD setlists in recent years. It's the two final songs that ultimately stand-out – an extended outro for 'Traumtänzer' to allow for an audience sing-along, followed by an piano version of 'AmoK' which works better than you might expect, proving the strength of the original song.

## **Diary of Dreams – PaniK Manifesto (2002)**

This is a seven-track EP, though one consisting entirely of exclusive tracks rather than remixes (it thus may better be regarded as a mini-album). It is perhaps most notable for the three songs that stand as some of the most club-friendly Diary of Dreams tracks to date. The klaxoning lead synth and urgent drumming 'PaniK?' is rather more attention grabbing than your average Dream sequence, whilst the sinister whispered repetition of 'Never go, Never Let Me Go' in 'Soul Stripper' works well as a refrain to hold the whole piece together.

The other dance-friendly track is the synthpoppy 'The Scream', though this song is fractionally weaker due to a synth lead that sounds just a little too cheesy to be in keeping with the sinister atmosphere of the rest of the CD. The remaining four tracks are lower-key and more typical of what we have come to expect of this project, although some well-structured melodic piano and synths help 'Drama' to stand out. The only weak track the album is the closing number 'Monsters and Demons', too dependent on electronic texture and overly-melodramatic vocals. The CD as a whole is still a quality product, by no means the 'Freak Perfume' rejects some may have expected, and hence should be picked up by anyone who's enjoyed this band's more recent albums.

## **Diary of Dreams – MenschFeind (2005)**

As with 'Freak Perfume', 'Nigredo' sees a 7-track appendage released a few months after the main album. Despite bearing a mere seven tracks, there appears to be a conceptual theme of sorts running through many of the songs, particularly frequent references to the number 5 (those into mythology can chew over that one as long as you like, but I've got reviews to write). The important thing is that this collection proves to be a somewhat more palatable affair following the excesses of the parent album.

Indeed, the EP's opening (title) track is probably the most confrontational track this project has produced during its current creative phase, weighty, metronomically precise percussion, some well placed guitars and the persistent whispers of 'Menschfeind' ensure the song is a memorable one. The pulsating electronic of the band's early 00s era is revisited on 'Haus Der Stille' and 'Triebsand', whilst 'Killers' does the sinister vocal hiss and eerie piano thing better than 'Rebellion' ever managed. The overly drawn out 'Pentaphobia' is unnecessary, but otherwise this EP stands up well on its own. It is by no means rejects from the 'Nigredo' sessions.

## **Diary of Dreams – Dream Collector (2004)**

This album was released as a limited edition on the South African Alter Ego label, and thus was difficult to obtain elsewhere. It is an almost-but-not-quite-complete collection of loose leaf pages from the Diary of Dreams itself, compiling tracks from compilations, limited editions and elsewhere. The remixes and alternate versions vary from the impressive (Upgrade 03 of Exile opening with descending piano intro which leads neatly into the song

itself) to the reasonable (the 'extended' version of O'Brother Sleep) through to the unnecessary, with three very minor reworks of songs from 'One of 18 Angels'. Yes, they're great songs, but they seem to be 'token' reworks, teaching the listener nothing new.

There's also four non-album tracks here. 'PrisonER' is listenable, but is overly dependent on forceful drum programming and a rather dirge-like guitar, whilst 'Forestown' is good enough but slightly pedestrian. 'Now This Human' (replacing 'Babylon' on the US Edition of 'One of 18 Angels') is the best actual Diary of Dreams song here, but even this is put into the shade by a cover of the 'Bladerunner End Titles', a successful dark dance adaptation that captures at least some of the 'spirit' of the Vangelis original. It's the highlight of a shameless miscellany, good enough to be of interest to fans, but as ever with such discs, unlikely to garner much attention further afield.

NOTE: Dream Collector has now been given a full release on Accession. The tracklisting is much the same as the original, but also includes a remix of 'AmOk' that featured on the limited edition of Freak Perfume. I personally don't think much of this mix (the revised bassline spoils it), but anyway, you now have another chance to grab a copy if you missed out the first time.

## **Dismantled – Standard Issue (2006)**

The third Dismantled album sees Gary Zon drops still more of his remaining Front Line Assembly influences. His vocal tone (and, indeed, the entire 'feel' of the project) is now closer in sound to the kingpins of all-American industrial rock – certainly Reznosque in places, but by no means an NINpersonation, either. There aren't any guitars, for a start, but neither is this your straightforward distorted-beat, distorted-vocal EBM affair. The influences are obvious, but at least there are plenty of them.

Indeed, when the four-to-the-floor kicks in during 'Get It Through', it's only intended as an attack against the unimaginative nature of the current industrial scene (indeed, the lyrical focus of the entire album seems to be one big cry for attention in an ever-growing ocean of tediously loud music). Other points of interest include album opener 'Anthem' and it's piano-based reprise during the title track, the savage rhythm of 'No Effect' (including a loop reminiscent of Imminent Starvation) and the electroclash-styled analogue indulgence on 'Preset'.

The album's strongest tracks come towards the end, with 'Recall's carefully-assembled structure and piano-led chorus providing the strongest actual song on offer, 'Attention' offering a loud, fast and uncomplicated industrial floorfiller whilst album closer 'Thanks For Everything' finally hits upon how to integrate the hands-in-the-air breakdown dynamic into industrial music. It's still a little tricky to work out how serious one should take this album when it could just as easily be regarded as an attack against a style of music which you may particularly enjoy, but there's still the feeling that even if Gary Zon is mimicking others, he's certainly doing it with a touch of class.

NOTE: The limited edition of the album includes the 5-track 'Anthem EP'. There are two remixes of the title track, including one from Rotersand which does indeed make the song very 'Welcome To Goodbye' like. The instrumental of 'Recall' is slightly more interesting than most tracks of it's kind as it gives more emphasis to Gary's piano than the original – it's really only of curiosity value, though.

## **Dulce Liquido – Shock Therapy (2003)**

This is Racso Agroyam's second solo release as Dulce Liquido. It comes at a time when his parent band Hocico are hot favourites in the current industrial scene, providing a

comfortably fearsome respite for the more elitist industrial dance-heads from the many VNV-dominated dancefloors which they themselves once filled. Extreme as Hocico's style is, the idea of a side project that takes these concepts that much further still is certainly of interest.

Anyone's who's heard the first Dulce Liquido album, *Disolución*, will probably know what to expect here. Kick drums with distortion set to the max, blast of noise and sparse vocals, with the odd sequence or pad finding its way into the mix. This album isn't so much a route via which this project is taken forward, but is instead more of a consolidation project, taking the best elements from the debut and generally making a better job of putting them together. It just seems like more of an effort has been put in this time round.

And, true to the form set by the previous album, there are points where it sounds exactly like Hocico. Three points, to be precise. The ones where lyrics are printed for your perusal in the inlay. The three tracks in question – 'Pissed Off', 'Anticristianos' and 'Under The Silence' are in every respect Hocico tracks under a different name. The throbbing sequences, searing leads, up-tempo kick drums (admittedly with a greater-than-normal degree of clipping on 'Under The Silence', ominous-sounds pads and screeching, distorted vox are all very much present. Altogether, it's essentially a brief indulgence for those who secretly wanted this side-project to sound like it's parent band.

And the rest of the album? You could call it any number of things, but it's ultimately power noise. Distorted beat music. Rhythmic noise. Sampler-having-a-heart attack type material. There's no denying that Racso is fairly accomplished at the style – it's as cutting and raucous as it needs to be. Stylistically, it's closest to the Winterkälte 'Structures of Destruction' school, driving percussion lines with the noises fired over the top. And that's no bad thing. It's just I've heard it all before.

Whilst some of the tracks keep firmly to this template, others do make at least a little bit of an effort to stick out, utilising more imaginative mixing techniques or rhythmic patterns, even though most have a parallel elsewhere. Of particular note is 'Infernus', whose jarring bassline, unnatural humming and piercing underwater-radar noises might well have fitted in nicely on one of Imminent Starvation's, possibly alongside 'Lost Highway 45' on 'Human Dislocation'.

The other track I remember best is the swirling, disconcerting 'Spy Eye', a mind-numbing sequencer matched to resonating synthesiser, the 'noise' elements here used to create additional texture before finally succumbing to the more conventional 'distorto-drum-loop' approach (possibly echoing some of the concepts heard way back on Sonar's first album). The only percussion-free tracks come at the end of the album – 'Lanif', a short burst of layered noise, with an unlisted 'Track 20', a synth solo which sounds like the intro to a Hocico song, but without the song following on afterwards.

In the final judgement, one really has to decide how creating Racso is being here. As previously mentioned, three of the songs just replicate Hocico. Oh, they do it well enough, but if that's what you want, there's probably a Hocico CD out there you haven't got yet. And as for his power noise material – well, it's certainly a match in places for the career knob-twiddlers of Ant-Zen and Hands Productions, but neither does it advance on anything they've already done.

## **Earth Loop Recall – Compulsion (2004)**

Not content with dealing with electro-punk, electro-pop and electro-metal on the one label, Mr.Lee Chaos of the Wasp Factory Label has also elected to sign up this collective. And guess what? They're already proving to be the best thing they've taken on board to date.

Sorry Deathboy, I really like your songs and stuff, but you've got a competitor now. Their name is 'Earth Loop Recall', and this is their debut album.

So what's so good about it? Maybe it's because they actually play their guitars. Play as in 'get a tune out of them'. Play as in 'not just bludgeon the mix with loads of power chords'. Even with shitloads of effects, the talent still shines through. And when they do switch into overdrive, the resultant wall of noise actually counts for something. It's a trick that the likes of Arkham Asylum and Psychophile are going to have to learn pretty damn fast if they're gonna have half a chance of keeping up with this lot.

Not that this alone makes a good album. The entire shoegazer scene of the late 80s-early 90s was built round such hugely elaborate six-string craftsmanship, and look what happened to them. Oodles of talent and nothing to carry the concept beyond a (admittedly quite sizeable) niche interest. Here's where ELR (as they'll be referred to from now on) play their trump card. Their beats may be programmed, but they cut the air just perfectly, giving the whole album a structure in which chaos can reign. Add a touch of bass guitar, a host of synthetic details, and of course Ben McLees vocals, a wide-ranging vocalist with a more hint of Billy Corgan about him in places (you'll understand when you actually hear them), and the sound of ELR is complete.

Not that the whole album is built round such concepts. In fact, opening track 'Reconnect' is more of a stompy industrial metal monster than the textured-guitar-plus-drum-loop formula laid out above, with a metallic electro-rock rhythm, huge lumbering riff and edge-of-seat vocals pushing the limits of the band's technique before they've even started. 'Mesh' follows, fractionally more melodic, but every bit as aggressive in it's own way, alternating between the disconcertingly quiet and the eardrum-shatteringly loud. It is here, of course, where the ELR sound really starts to reveal itself.

Things get claustrophobic in 'Petra Lena', an immensely complex track twisting and turning through more musical elements than I dare describe here. After this is 'Please Stop Hurting Me', which switches from a Disintergration-era Cure texture to a KMFDM-style riff-o-rama pretty much as it pleases, with Ben vocal range suitably varied enough to fit in with what he and his band are playing at the time, with a well-placed vocal cameo from keyboard player Joanna Quail serving as a much needed refresher from the angry snarls.

'Slowly Going Under' finally takes the tempo down a notch, a seething, crawling behemoth which takes us to the halfway point. Next up is 'Let Yourself', a sneering indie-rocker sort of thing that's probably the closest they get to mainstream rock without actually crossing the stylistic boundary. Then comes 'Wake Up Shaking', a relatively accomplished instrumental, the quartet successfully finding enough musical elements to prevent the usual 'we're out of ideas' syndrome inherent with many a rock instrumental. 'Optimism Creeping In' follows right after, a tense, seething uptempo track that starts off grindingly mechanical and eventually gets eaten up in a huge wall of guitar noise, getting the pulses ready for the grand finale.

Grand finale? I'm referring to the almighty expanse that is 'Like Machines'. Words alone cannot describe exactly what goes on here, but I'll try nonetheless. Fully eight minutes in length, yet not a moment too long, it's the kind of track that unfolds in a deceptively gentle style, like a ship sailing on clear water before hitting the kind of audio maelstrom that only the song itself can describe. Not content with pulling the trick once, they do so again to an even greater intensity, before finally winding down to it's conclusion, driven all the way by a central loop resembling a palpating heartbeat. All that remains after this is 'Remember Me', a instrumental lead-out, resembling some kind of nursery rhyme gone severely wrong, and pretty much the only thing you're fit to listen to after what came before.

And so it ends, the finest album released so far on Wasp Factory, and the most impressive debut album by any band for as far back as I can remember. OK, there's a couple of places where the mix gets rather muddy, where they overplay their hand just a tiny bit, but you're generally able to make out all the individual component sounds within the song as a whole. But I'll forgive them for the few minor flaws. I'll finish by saying that you probably have to appreciate the merits of both guitars and electronics within the confines of the same song to really get into this album, but that's still a potentially big and highly desirable fanbase to have. Here's hoping they'll get it.

## Ego Likeness – East (2012)

Probably the most predictably titled EP I've ever had to review, given that the last three such releases from Ego Likeness were called 'West', 'South' and 'North'. This is the longest of their 'compass point' releases at 10 tracks, but follows the trend of containing a few new songs plus a selection of remixes. I have no idea what they'll call their fifth EP (Middle? Up? North-East?) but that's a puzzle for another day.

The three new tracks are varied in style and quality. "-geist" (their spelling, not mine) goes for the slow, menacing dirge aspect of the Ego Likeness sound, but it's a flawed composition, meandering structurally before hitting a noisy climax that sound more like poor production than genuine crescendo. 'Persona Non Grata' is a more upbeat darkwave rock number, throbbing synths driving the song through to choruses that actually prove to be quite anthemic. 'Tea In The Sahara' is an interesting little oddity, lush layers of synth strings and ethereal vocals with hardly any percussion. Ambient tracks such as this often amount to little more than album fillers, so it's actually a relief to find such a track that I listened to more than once.

The remaining seven tracks are given over to remixes. Ego Likeness are quite a well-connected band, which thankfully means there are a decent range of artists providing the alternate versions. Rather than another EP full of aggrotech bands remixing another aggrotech band. Vanguard VST only has so many presets. That doesn't mean to say that some of their more adventurous remixing selections pay off.

Whoever thought borderline power noise project Terrorfakt could remix "The Devils In The Chemicals" must have been punch drunk. Sure, the resultant mid-tempo stomp that was eventually delivered is far from unlistenable, but only at the cost of suffocating all the life out of the original song. Angelspit take on the same song, and whilst the original track is at least more evident here, I was expecting these Aussie electro-punks to deliver a rework with a little more edge. As it stands, the remix they delivered certainly beefs up the original with jagged guitars and rough synth lines, but it never really grabs the original track and forces itself on the original audience like you'd hope it would.

The one remix that does achieve this effect is the Komor Kommando remix of "Inferno". Seb Komor has a decent track record in remixing electronic rock songs into full-on floorfillers, and he's pulled it off again here, adding a thumping bassline and raucous leads, whilst leaving the essential core of the song intact. This, my friends, is how remixing should be done. Bella Morte remix the same track, but their vocally-processed version pales is grating in places and pales in comparison.

There are also two remixes of 'Severine', and they're both pretty good. ThouShaltNot assemble a 'Floodland' mix, which is code for saying they've gone all trad-goth on us, and the song isn't any worse for the conversion. Rick Burnett utilises cleaner guitar tones in his version, duly assisting in the mission to prove that remixing isn't just about programming a dance beat and flying in a few vocal samples from the original. Because the remix of 'I'm



Not Mary Ann' by The Dark Clan commits exactly that sin, burying hints of the original in a dreary, generic techno-dance production.

Anyway, as a 'bits and pieces' collection, 'East' has its appeal. If you've got the other parts, I wouldn't discourage you from completing your compass points by acquiring this release. If you're new to Ego Likeness, however, you'd do better by starting with one of their studio albums (any of them will do, they're all pretty good). And if you're a DJ looking for a decent floor-filler, just go straight for the Komor Kommando remix.

## **Einstürzende Neubauten – Perpetuum Mobile (2004)**

Despite their undoubted reputation for being one of the few 'industrial' bands to sound 'industrial' in terms of the non-musical definition, it shouldn't come as any surprise to hardcore Neubauten followers that this album isn't the flurry of metal-bashing excesses that some critics make all of this group's work out to be. Ever since 'Tabula Rasa' back in 1993, Blixa's boys have been practising a more 'controlled' form of musical experimentation, to the extent that some of their material actually sounds like regular songs that you'd hear on the radio. Well, possibly German radio.

They slipped up a bit on previous album 'Silence Is Sexy', however, its moments of brilliance separated by meandering sections of minimalism that never allowed the album as a whole to pick up momentum. And in many respects, 'Perpetuum Mobile' is Einstürzende Neubauten having a second go at the stripped-down sound that this previous album tried but failed to master. And the general impression is that they make a better job of it this time round. The slower tracks actually manage to achieve something this time, whilst there's still enough of the 'hitting stuff' fury to keep the old fans happy.

We open up with 'Ich Gehe Jetzt', a fairly low-impact lead in track, led by the 'air compressor and plastic tube' combo that'll be familiar to anybody who's seen these boys live. Blixa's vocals are as enigmatic as ever, gently articulating a bizarre series of German phrases that only purport to mean anything in the songs later stages. Even with the English translations supplied, it's not entirely clear what they're thinking of, though the line 'Ich habe mein Vokabelheft Verloren' (I have lost my vocabulary book) might suggest that that's the whole idea.

This leads into the first real epic of the album, 'Perpetuum Mobile'. Clocking in at 13 minutes and 41 seconds, it's a series of alternating loud and quiet sections, regularly reprising itself, combining grinding bass with metallic percussion and whole variety of 'miscellaneous sounds'. The lyrics are once again vintage Bargeld esoterica, with a vague 'transport' theme running through them. I'm not sure if the song really needed to be that long, but it's still more interesting that some of the more indulgent extended-length tracks that these boys used to knock out.

Next up is 'Ein leichtes leises Säuseln', a slow, balladic song which is for the most part Blixa Bargeld solo, having possibly learn the art of writing such songs of former colleague Nick Cave, playing some delicate Rhodes piano, with only a bit of bass guitar and the rustling of leaves and a survival sheet in the background this time. 'Selbstportrait mit Kater' (Self-Portrait with Hangover) then wakes things up again, a song full of alcohol-oriented metaphor, driven along by bass guitar, which in turns provides a solid base for the percussive elements. There's a real feeling of progression here, the song climaxing on the cries of 'Life on Other Planets Is Difficult', mysteriously switching to English for the song's final line.

'Boreas' is another Bargeld-dominated track, laying his vocals over a sea of disembodied sounds, including vocal loops, electric fans, more Rhodes flourishes and an 'amplified

steel wire' (whatever that is). This flows effortlessly into 'Ein seltener Vogel' (A Rare Bird), which starts off with all five band members humming, before bringing out the Pythagorean steel tubes, which klingen and klang throughout the songs duration. It's another one of those really long tracks, and seems to repeat itself a little bit too much, even if the texture of the piece as a whole is generally quite pleasing.

The only instrumental on the album, 'Ozean und Brandung' (Ocean and Spray) follows, an abstract piece comprised solely of heaving noise, a reasonable bridge to 'Paradiesseits' (Paradising), another pithy little low-key number that makes a better job than most of disguising the origins of its component sounds. This takes us on to 'Youme & Meyou', one of the more 'conventional' sounding songs on the album (as one of the comparatively few English ones), thanks a driving bass line, slide guitar and a string section replacing some of the more usual car tyres, amplified springs and other percussive miscellany. The circular logic portrayed by the lyrics and rich texture ensures it is nonetheless successful.

'Der Weg ins Freie' features some interesting multi-layered vocal, as well as some discordant piano and the usual cornucopia of junkyard rhythmic. The penultimate track is 'Dead Friends (Around The Corner)', another one of the those 'near-mainstream' style songs which works relatively well, barring a rather jerky middle section where the thing just grinds to a halt for no apparent reason. We fade out with 'Grundstück' (floor piece), a sparse track where everyone plays metal percussion one last time, prior to picking up their other instruments and fading out with one further 'slow song', the lethargic bass guitar leaving Blixa's vocals in pole position.

Early version of this album may come with a free audio DVD, containing 5.1 and PCM Stereo mixes of four of the CDs songs, which might be worth picking up if you're into fancy soundsystems and the like. But it's the main album that matters, and I'm relieved to say that after the inconsistent 'Silence Is Sexy', an album which never really decided what it wanted to do, Neubauten are at least back on form here. They don't make nearly as much noise as they did in the older days, but the mere achievement of getting a tune out of a stack of pipes, an old tyre and an air compressor is in its own way impressive, the trick being turning such unconventional sounds into songs people might actually want to listen to.

## **Eisbrecher – Eiszeit (2010)**

Whilst Rammstein are busy filling arenas around the world, it's worth remembering that there are plenty of other bands out there practising the 'Neue Deutsche Härte' (as it is now called), and some of them are knocking out the albums at a rate that put Till and Co to shame. This is the fourth Eisbrecher album in six years, outpacing both the project they emerged from (Megaherz) and those firey Berlin superstars who I'll try to avoid mentioning by name again in this review. It's not that a comparison is fallacious (in fact it's pretty close to the truth). It's just that it's so bleedin' obvious!

And the reason I enforce such a restriction on myself is that this album deserves to be reviewed on its own strengths rather than compared as an offshoot or poor-second-cousin of something else. Compared with previous Eisbrecher recordings, this is a fuller, more dynamic, and more consistent recording. The keyboard melodies are more prominent in the mix, the female backing vocals add accessibility without stripping any artistic integrity in return. The chunky, mid-tempo guitars and deep Teutonic snarl that features on all Eisbrecher (indeed all NDH) recordings is still very much in evidence, it's just now they've got better company.

If I was to pick a highlight, I'd naturally go for the one in the most dubious taste. 'Gothkiller' not only suggests a subject matter I'd rather not delve into further, but it breaks from

tradition by being in English. Oh, what the hell – it's simply got the catchiest hooks, a guitar solo and just screams 'I'm An Anthem And I Know It!'. There are occasional slip-ups – 'Bombe' comes across as too much of a grind for a song little over 3 minutes in length – but they're not frequent and certainly not sufficient to upset the flow of the recording.

Or to sum it up in one simple sentence – 'Put your copy of 'Liebe Ist Fur Alle Da' aside for a minute and learn that there's more to German-language industrial metal – and this'll do more than nicely for starters'.

VERSION NOTE: There's a few limited versions of this album out there. The digipak version has a few remixes, though Daniel Myer's 'Renegade Noise' remix of 'Amok' kicks all the life out of the original (like most of his remixes, to be honest) and the TLP remix of 'Schwarze Witwe' (a song dating back to the first album!) has 'meh' written all over it. The Box Set version has a 3-track DVD, which is well-recorded but given that this is the closest I'm probably going to get to seeing this band live, I think a more generous tracklisting might have won me over more.

## Escalator – Out Of My Ego (2011)

I've had something of a revival in interest in anything associated with old-school EBM and other early electronic styles of late, which is a pity as interest in said genre seems to be dying a death in my native London, which not only means I have to look further afield for live shows (and indeed potential DJ set opportunities!), but also need to spread my net wider in order to search out new territories where interesting bands may be located. And Escalator from Hungary, despite being a quarter of a century old, have escaped my radar until now. Even then, this eight-song collection is a couple of years old, but that's no reason not to give it a go and offer my opinions here.

First things first, every classic EBM album needs at least a couple of unsubtle, in-your-face, energising anthems in it's tracklist, lest the collection as a whole get mistaken for some analog-elitist hipster art-wank project, and this collection has "Rew Stop Play" and "Shut Me Off". They both deliver the punchy beats, throbbing rhythms and vocal snarl that make a legitimate EBM classic, with enough variation throughout their length to remind everyone that classic EBM isn't just a case of programming one synth line, one drum loop and shouting over the top. Yes, I tried that trick myself to be sure. Anyway, that's the DJ selections sorted out. Now to see if there's any variety in their sound.

"Deeply Buried Psychosis" is the most interesting diversion, utilising a combination of varying beat patterns, dark synth chords and well-placed samples to produce a final product not dissimilar to the more accessible Skinny Puppy or X Marks The Pedwalk recordings. I'll admit that the Puppy comparison was actually made by my girlfriend, but she knows this particular school of industrial music as well as I do, and she didn't demand I turn it off, so I'll call it a compliment.

The opening track "Bad Constellation" also borrows heavily from this school of dark elektro, a discordant, high-frequency synth click driving the track into the double-time drumming that provides it's eventual climax. There are also two tracks ("Out Of My Ego" and "Biological Countdown") that get remarkably close to a Belief-era Nitzer Ebb sound. And my comparison of these tracks to the aforementioned anthems is the same as my comparison of 'Belief' to 'That Total Age' – specifically, wins on technical merit and musicology, but not on artistic impression. Sometimes simple is best.

There are the occasional misguided experiments. "Strike" is too static rhythmically and it's over-reliance on a scratchy, high-pitched motif makes it quite tiring to listen to. "Gépek

lesztek” is the most significant deviation from the EBM norm, journeying off into a minimal techno territory, which might have worked had they not indulged themselves in a 9:40 song length that results in a track that stretches out too few ideas for too long.

But when they do what they’re best at, Escalator ensure the EBM flag is flown proudly on Hungarian territory, and thus contribute to my growing theory that I need to head eastwards into Europe in search of interesting new (and old!) music that I had previously been unaware of. And I won’t be satisfied with just Leipzig this time!

## **Faetal – [sic] (2004)**

My first encounter with Faetal came at the Devilish Presley-organized ‘Pity For Monsters’ gig at the Water Rats in February 2004. That of course, was the night where fast rising local heroes Deathboy occupied the headline slot like they’d been there for years, the even-faster rising Earth Loop Recall blew away the assembled masses with one of the most powerful half-hour sets I’d ever seen, and even the Devilish duo managed to get themselves a stage invasion. Opening up the evening were Faetal, who seemed a little nervous in comparison. But the potential was clearly there. I spotted it, and so, it seems, did Lee Chaos, signing them up to Wasp Factory later in the year.

Faetal are of course likely to attract comparisons with the aforementioned ELR and Deathboy. Not only do all three bands share a label, but they also occupy a undefined (yet musically productive) grey area of the UK scene – not deathrock, not really industrial, not metal either – a sort of electro-alterno-rock that continues from where the likes of Trent Reznor and co REALLY left off (all those 2<sup>nd</sup>-rate American industrial metal bands objecting to this comment are welcome to send me a demo).

Of course, each band have their own stylistic combo to make them distinctive. Deathboy do their thing with punky vocals and breakbeats, ELR give noise-rock an electronic backbone, whilst Faetal seem to be doing their thing with a combination of schizoid drum loops, indie rock guitars and vocals plus a hefty dose of electro-pop. Their studio sound is definitely heavier on the synths than their live show, but even if they’re not thrashing the guitars at every available opportunity, neither do they ever sound like they’re getting comfortable or complacent. It’s a tightly coiled beast of an album, never entirely sure as to whether it’s going to purr sweetly or bite your head off.

They open with ‘Liquid Hate’, laying down an indicator for the album ahead with it’s spluttering drum programming and quirky structure, featuring a false ending followed by an extended outro that initially sounds like an outtake separate song that wandered into the room accidentally and then tried to sneak out unnoticed. Following this is ‘21’, a more straightforward slowed-down angst-anthem, with a nice combination of electronic and guitar textures, and then ‘Like A God’, a synth-poppier number with a pretty retro-melody in the chorus.

‘Bad Orb’ is another synth-heavy one, but this time with more of a drum’n’bass feel, potentially a good choice for DJ play even if it’s not a personal favourite. This leads us into the album’s centrepiece, ‘Darkness’, a song with ‘Epic’ written all over it, thanks to the soaring, string-and-power-chord laden chorus and Pete Boyd’s finest vocal of the album, really getting behind the song and carrying to the height at which it truly belongs. ‘Sadistic’ then takes us back to the realm of cynical electro-rock, a sneering vocal and dirty guitar stabs giving this otherwise electronic track a really ‘rocky’ feel.

‘Phosphor Sky’ is another one of those really schizophrenic ones, opening up with a minute of abstract electronics, before the biggest riff on the whole album appears from nowhere. They then proceed to alternate the two styles, switching between this low-key

vocoded concept and an industrial metal thash'n'shout chorus, an ambitious combo that they carry off skilfully and effectively. Following this is 'Can Anybody Hear Me?', a song with a particularly strong new wave feel, two interplaying guitar lines, sweet synths and a rich, expansive chorus.

Two more to go, starting with 'Losing Control', opening up like it's going to turn into a sweet, little, insubstantial synth-popper, but it redeems itself with a big, meaty chorus, the growling guitar and stompy kick drum giving the song the backbone it needs. The album closes with 'Divide By Zero', a huge, cathedral-sized piece, the demented clang of a piano smashed into a submission by a slow, seething percussion loop, the grind of guitar and Pete's voice somehow managing to climb over the top. The song eventually builds to a truly chaotic climax, before fading to nothing.

It's an ambitious album, certainly – refusing to pigeonhole itself into an established genre, which is something most bands claim to do, even if in practise few of them actually achieve it. It's not always an easy listen, often hopping between styles faster than the casual listener is able to cope with. But something tells me this album isn't really for the casual listener anyway. It's for those die-hard music fans who think they've heard it all. And along with the recent ELR album (and possibly Deathboy's from 2003), this album seems to sum up Wasp Factory's current mission statement. I have no idea what that mission statement might be, but regardless, this album fits it well. It's Electro-rock for those tired of electro and tired of rock.

## **Fear Factory – Soul of a New Machine (1992)**

A rough run for the real thing (even if you count 'Concrete'). The early stages of the album are quite strong, with album opener 'Martyr' and track three 'Scapegoat' most indicative of the industrial/death metal hybrid direction the band would later take, making best use of the alternating growled/sung vocal style that would become one of the band's trademarks.

Sadly, most of the remainder is still common-or-garden death metal with only a slight hint of the jackhammering riff science they would soon master. The slow crawl of 'Scumgrief' and the pummelling assault of 'Self-Immolation' are the only real highlights as the band starts to run out of ideas and get lost in a swamp of fury.

## **Fear Factory – Demanufacture (1995)**

It was clear that Fear Factory were onto something good on their debut album, even if the potential was not fully realised – here they not only deliver on that potential but produce one of the most intense metal albums in history. The addition of industrially-inspired keyboards and high-fidelity production make all the difference – the riffs cut the air like machine guns, the beats pound relentless, the vocals are actually intelligible amongst all this, whilst the keys add an extra layer of macabre to the mix.

It's almost impossible to pick out a highlight – the positive 'stand up for yourself' message behind 'Self-Bias Resistor' is a personal favourite, though the riffastic 'Replica', anti-establishment title track and god-doubting fury of 'Zero Signal' all run it close, as does 'Pisschrist', the Terminator-style intro eventually building to a soaring climax with one of the best vocal performances of Burton C. Bell's career. The slow, drawn out closer 'A Therapy For Pain' (actually a rework of an old demo) sees the album out in a wall of noise, the only occasion where a band like Fear Factory could include a nine-minute track and make it work.

## **Fear Factory – Remanufacture (1997)**

Finally! A remix album that lives up to the expectations of its parent. Rhys Fulber handles the bulk of the remixing duties, and comes up with the goods almost every time. From the savage electronically-enhanced reworks of 'Demanufacture' and 'Self-Bias Resistor' to the darker, more minimal takes on 'Pisschrist' and 'Bound for Forgiveness' – two remixes that may be criticised for leaving too little of the original song intact, but they stand up well on their own.

He's not the only remixer to have a go Junkie XL, Kingsize and DJ Dano offer even more extreme interpretations of the other Demanufacture tracks. In particular, the Fear Factory-gone-hardcore remix 'T1000', a rework of 'Hunter-Killer'? works a treat. Easily one of the best remix albums out there – capturing the spirit of the original songs whilst adding a new flavour to all of them.

## **Fear Factory – Obsolete (1998)**

The follow-up to the De/Remanufacture pairing, this album is a soundtrack to a fictional film storyline provided in the inlay – detailing the fight of the 'Edgecrusher' against a futuristic society run by machines (I dystopian sci-fi, I know, but it fits in so well with this band's overall 'vibe'). The music is everything you'd expect from Fear Factory over these years, the machine-gunning riffs, sung/roared vocals and synthetic undercurrent all much in evidence. A few additional influences have crept in, but the band's core sound follows the same lines as 'Demanufacture'.

'Shock' is a suitably electrifying opener, whilst 'Edgecrusher' incorporates some rap influence to generate a dead-cert mosh-pitter. This leads into the more traditional Fear Factory sound evident on 'Smasher Devourer' and 'Securitron', prior to the slower, self-doubting 'Descent'. The album remains strong throughout its duration (with a spoken-word cameo from Gary Numan prefacing the title track) though without doubt the highlight is 'Resurrection', incorporating a 12-piece string section to create the most uplifting song this genre has ever seen. The guitars fade the albums very close for 'Timelessness', giving us a rare, welcome chance to hear Burton sing sans metal. It's not quite as consistently stunning as it's predecessor, but it works well as a concept piece, rare for album in the metal genre.

## **Fear Factory – Digimortal (2001)**

Fourth studio effort from Fear Factory, and it sounds a lot like the last two really, complete with all the pummelling cybermetal rhythms and man/machine metaphor. It's still GOOD, it's still everything any self-respecting Fear Factory fan could have expected, all things being equal. But all things are not equal, and the opposition, are steaming off into the distance whilst Fear Factory are standing still. The only real difference is increasing evidence of high-frequency electronic squeals, presumably driven by the need for the electronics to be heard over the persistent, driving riffology.

The likes of 'What Will Become' and 'Damaged' are notable example of good songs that still fail to advance on what came before. It's still a fine album, though, and the token rap track, 'Back The Fuck Up' doesn't ruin the flow of things. There is one track that does stand out – 'Invisible Wounds (Dark Bodies)' – initially sounding like the usual 'slow' track before building up to an awesomely intense climax.

## **Fear Factory – Concrete (2002)**

Technically, the first Fear Factory album, though would ultimately be the last of those released from the original line-up. Really of interest to those into Fear Factory's death metal roots, as there is little of the polish heard on their later releases, though it's also significant as an early production effort of Ross Robinson (later to become a legend in his own right). Early versions of 'Self-Immolation' and 'Big God, Raped Souls' are the key area of interest – unfortunately, the best songs even from 'Soul of a New Machine' were written after this album was recorded. The demo-level recording quality and a number of songs which seems to be little more than thrashy, growly bands workouts keep this album firmly in the 'curio' category.

## **Fear Factory – Hatefiles (2003)**

A miscellany containing alternate takes, remixes and obscurities. It's about as good as albums of this kind get, with some interesting 'never to be' versions of 'Invisible Wounds' and 'Resurrection', and two songs from the original version of 'Demufacture' (the album later re-worked with a different producer), as well as a number of songs from the bands final days – 'Terminate' actually assembled after they'd split!

The album will be of particular interest to those of you into the 'Remanufacture' era remixes, as a number of unused remixes from those sessions appear here. The liner notes tell a number of interesting stories about the band and the history of their recordings – the number of 'rejected' tracks that here seem perfectly listenable indicative of their exacting standards in the studio.

## **Fear Factory – Archtype (2004)**

Fear Factory reformed with a revised line-up. A shift of lyrical focus away from the future toward the present had the potential to take the band forward, but they're at a loss for fresh ideas musically – opening duo 'Slave Labor' and 'Cyberwaste' just blast past without leaving a mark, lacking the structural focus that made many of this bands finest songs cut deeper and harder than their competitors, whilst the later stage of the album is especially in want of some fresh musical direction.

Every now and again they show a hint of their past glories. 'Bite The Hand That Bleeds' is amongst the band's better slow songs, whilst the title track features some of Burton's best harmonies to date. The album is otherwise fairly standard FF fare, though the soaring chorus of 'Undercurrent' shows more willingness to varying guitar styles than elsewhere. They do attempt a Nirvana cover at the end ('School'), but the styles of the two bands aren't particularly compatible. All in all, it's a bit of a let-down, clearly the work of a band undergoing a not-entirely comfortable transition.

## **Fear Factory – Transgression (2005)**

Fear Factory release their second post-Dino album, and also their second in as many years. The accompanying DVD gives some clues to the bands intentions when recording this disc, but somehow the stripped-down, back-to-basics approach fails to strike a chord with me in the same manner of 'Demufacture' and 'Obsolete'. Christian is starting to experiment more with different guitar styles, but the one thing he can't do as well as Dino is that machine-gun style riff that characterises many of the bands best songs. The full-throttle '540,000 Fahrenheit' and 'Moment of Impact' sandwich the album nicely, but ultimately don't quite equal the bands finest.

The album is actually more successful when they deviate from their usual style. 'Echo of My Scream' is a surprisingly successful attempt at a Fear Factory ballad, whilst 'Supernova' goes for a more straight-ahead hard-rock sound, with some strong vocals from Burton (both of these songs feature Billy Gould of Faith No More on bass). It's questionable whether the two cover versions (U2's 'I Will Follow' and Killing Joke's 'Millennium' really work, however), whilst some of the other tracks will appeal to fans of 'Soul of a New Machine' ('Transgression' is VERY reminiscent of 'Self-Immolation'). This album will therefore appeal most to those who prefer the rockier side of Fear Factory's sound (which in reality is the majority of their fanbase) – their industrial/crossover appeal is waning.

## **Fear Factory – Fear Is The Mindkiller (1993)**

A mini-album (or EP, if you like) containing five remixes of tracks from 'Soul of a New Machine', courtesy of Bill and Rhys from Front Line Assembly. Rhys would later move to full keyboard duties in the band, whilst Bill continued with his various projects. For now, they came up with remixes of Martyr, Scapegoat, Scumgrief and a couple for Self-Immolation, the original track provided for comparison/to pad out the disc. It's hard to know whether to define this as a mini-album or EP – I really thought they could have come up with a little more material for this, seeing as though the parent album had 17 tracks (though truth be said, maybe only five of them were worth remixing).

The remix of 'Martyr' is straightforward. A dancey beat that could have been coaxed out of any semi-decent drum machine in five minutes, the original vocals, repeated and extended to last over seven minutes, some of the original guitar parts and a few samples thrown in. It sounds remarkably generic. It's still not a bad mix of one of 'Soul of a New Machine's' better tracks, but I really don't think I've been treated to anything special.

The 'Vein Tap' mix of 'Self Immolation' is rather more innovative, at least to start with. A sample from the chorus is looped with the drums laid over the top, before some slightly jugged guitar samples and the original lyrics play in over the drum machine. The loopy bit returns later on, thought like the Martyr mix, they do seem to run out of ideas. The 'Pigfuck Mix' of 'Scapegoat' (do they have to be so predictably explicit?) is fairly linear, but succeeds in strengthening and adding to the original. Also, they've got a drum beat worthy of the tune this time.

Next up is the 'Deep Dub Trauma Mix' of 'Scumgrief'. It opens with background noises similar to those later heard on 'De/Manufacture', before breaking into a slow version of the original (if it wasn't slow enough as it is). The odd effect added in makes for an OK experience, but again, it doesn't stick. The only track to substantially develop on the original, though, is the 'Liquid Sky' mix of Self-Immolation. The looped sample from the other mix is here, and they've introduced a new deep electronic bass line, as well as the customary drum loop. The previous mix of 'Self Immolation' is provided to give the album a little bulk.

Personally, whilst I think this EP was significant in the respect that it gave the first hints of the sound which eventually became 'De/Remanufacture', as a musical release in its own right, it feels like something of a non-event. We all know now that better things came from this quartet. This one seems a little too easy to skip over.

## **Fictional – Fictitious(+) (1999)**

Fictional is in many respects a continuation of Gerrit Thomas' Ravenous project, though there's also a heavy influence from his work in Funker Vogt. It's in many respects the point where the two projects meet, featuring vocals sung rather than shouted or otherwise



distorted, but with the throbbing EBM rhythms giving the whole album a solid backbone. The ex-Ravenous vocalist Tim Fockenbrook provides vocals on two songs – ‘Dream of God’ and ‘Blue Lights’, both of which are amongst the albums highlights, ‘Blue Lights’ in particular an unbelievably catchy piece of melancholy synth-pop, with one of the most memorable refrains in the whole genre (the (+) version of this album released on Metropolis also includes a live version of these two songs). Gerrit Thomas provides the rest of the vocals himself, and whilst he’s not the most accomplished singer, his Germanic monotone is at least a fitting match for his own trademark pulsating electronic undercurrent.

The lyrics are once again penned by Kai Schmidt (who also writes most of the Funker Vogt lyrics), though there’s thankfully a little more stylistic variety, with songs criticising the mass media (The System), capital punishment (Hangman) and, despite the obvious Vogt influence, no songs about soldiers (what a relief!). There’s also a surprisingly accomplished, almost ethereal synth-instrumental in the form of ‘Your Dream’ and a big, portentous piano number ‘Future’ seeing the album to a close. The limitations of the project are still plain for all to see, but somehow the synth-poppy spirit of the project means one is able to enjoy these songs for what they are rather than complain about what they are not.

## **Fictional – Fiction (2003)**

Fictional’s second album sees the arrival of the Scottish singer Jason Bainbridge, giving Fictional it’s first full-time singer. On paper, this should be sufficient to advance the project from the debut, although it doesn’t really work out in practise. Jason is a reasonable enough synth-pop vocalist, but his voice doesn’t really carry a great deal of character. Fictional has grown from a slightly flawed but generally likeable side-project into a clinical, pixel-perfect pop band, kind of like a child that stops being cute once it matures.

A decent run of songs in the middle of album, including ‘Intencity’, ‘Little Girl’ and the Funker-esque ‘Hunting Machine’ saves the album from disaster, with the decidedly groovy ‘Voyager’ the best of the albums later tracks, although the closing track ‘When The World Is Dying’ does that huge, mournful thing that crops up at least once on any album Gerrit Thomas produces. The remainder is listenable but rather bland and not especially memorable.

## **Freudstein – Mass Market Misery (2006)**

Brighton’s electronic horror duo return with their first album in five years (also Wasp Factory’s first in quite some time), an 11-track attack against the state of the modern world. Hardly an original concept, you may think, but as a band who apply their horror movie aesthetic to a variety of musical styles, they are best viewed not so much as a ‘band’ as they are musical alchemists, brewing up bizarre stylistic combinations in a darkened soundlab. And that, dear readers, is the key appeal of this album – strong underlying concepts supporting a sizable musical vocabulary.

The album is sandwiched by two instrumentals, opening with ‘Return To The Old Forest’, distantly reminiscent of Project Pitchfork school darkwave, and finishing on Laura, a more cinematic ambient piece. Between this, we get songs as varied as the dark synth-pop of ‘Misadventure’, the seductive, lusty and rather amusing ‘Sister Sleaze’ as well as a few guitar-heavy tracks – ‘Come With Me’ resembling angsty industrial rock and ‘Wings Of Death’ offering a truly unique combination of death metal and dark electronics.

The centrepiece of the album is their fight-against-capitalism ‘Robots’ trilogy, previewed on a Wasp Factory compilation some years ago. The instrumental Pt 1 gives way to the uptempo four-beat and distorted vocals of Pt 2 (subtitled ‘Murder Spate’, with suitably

uncompromising lyrics), before the slower, more reflective Pt 3 ('Face The Truth'). This trilogy, like the album as a whole, proves to be an interesting listen, but somehow it falls slightly short of greatness – the vocals and the songwriting aren't exactly the strongest I've ever heard, although this is more than compensated for by their stylistic ambition.

## **Fleisch & Waffeln – Meat EP (2009)**

As one of the least vegetarian figures in the entire dark-scene, as well as something of a fanboy for any band trying to recapture the spirit of old-school EBM a la Nitzer Ebb, 242 and various less well-remembered names, the chance to review the 6-track 'Meat EP' for a Danish band who's name translates to 'Meat and Waffles' wasn't one I wanted to miss. The bands name and their minimal online presence seemed to indicate a certain sense of humour, so I loaded the tracks into my player innocently expecting a form of irreverent tomfoolery set to an old-school body beat.

Sucks to be wrong, doesn't it? The first track 'Den Glade Emo' (The Happy Emo) consists of a four minute synth pulse that doesn't even switch chords for the duration of the song, a crude drumloop that resembles one's first experiments with rhythm programming and an overly-reverberated vocal grunt that resembles an angry drunkard in an underpass. Maybe there's some out there that believe that a purposely lo-fi production is in some way indicative of 'retro chic', but in an era when anyone can acquire a passable demo-standard studio via a Computer Music covermount disc, standards have risen and this does not meet them.

It's only when we get to the third track, the appropriately named 'Dans Med Stovlen Din' ('Dance With Your Boots') that we finally begin to hear what this project could achieve if they'd attempted a little more quality control. Whilst it's still noticeably lo-fi in quality, it's a forceful, dynamic delivery at least hints that this collective could yet fill dancefloors if they could only manage to get all the knobs and faders in more-or-less the right position come production time.

Another slip-up occurs when we get to 'Maskinsvin' – the track is mastered (?) at a noticeably lower volume than the rest of the EP, neutralising any impact it I. Whilst the final song 'Robotlullaby' at least makes a effort to combine a filter sweep, processed female vox and a five-minute duration, it's still a thing of patchy delights at best. There are still hints that this project might yet dish up an appetising take on vintage EBM at some later stage (and there are some promising newer tracks on their Facebook and MySpace pages), the 'Meat EP' itself is simply in too raw a state to be fit for public consumption

## **Fleisch & Waffeln – Svin (2014)**

"Learn From Your Mistakes" is a often-repeated mantra, and when a Brutal Resonance writer tears your release apart on these pages, the message is not to give up, but to produce something better next time. And having vented my disappointment at Fleisch & Waffeln for their terrible 'Meat EP', it seems the band agreed with my appraisal of this piece of chmaltzy and chmaltz submitted their new EP for review. And I'm happy to give them a second chance.

The "Svin" EP (it means 'Swine' or some other pig-related term) clocks in a mere 7 minutes total, a good sign for a genre that's supposed to be short, sharp and to the point. And the title track, a mere 2 minutes and 8 seconds in length, makes all the right EBM noises – blunt bassline, deep throaty grunts for vocals and percussion panned across the stereo channels, just the way it was on Front By Front. Two mixes are offered, the title mix marginally the stronger of the two, with the 'Mit Pommes' version (gotta love that fast-food

menu title) coming across as slightly muted and thus less impactful. Believe it or not, we Brits don't always like everything with chips.....

The final track is the G9 mix of "EBM Soldat". I don't know the original, but this track sounds somewhat 'static' compared to the title tune, not terrible but taking the 'mechanical beat' concept too far and sounding a touch lifeless as a result. Anyway, Fleisch & Wafflen have at least passed into the realm of EBM acceptability now, and they benefit from not getting too clever conceptually, and songs about meat are always welcome round my way. The whole thing is available on Bandcamp for a 'Name Your Price', so if you're after some old-style body beats and have seven minutes to spare, you could do worse than grabbing this.

## **Front 242 – Geography (1982)**

Early Adventures in EBM with Front 242. It's an interesting rather than incredible debut, as the Belgian boys get to grips with their drum machines, monophonic synths and martial vocals. Highlights include early anthem 'U-Men' (their first real EBM creation), the danceable gloom of 'Operating Tracks' and the creeping doom of 'Kampfberiet'. The rest is mixed to say the least – it's for the most part listenable, but they spend a lot of time sounding like a slightly angrier and less methodically polished version of Kraftwerk – that might have been what electronic body music was meant to be all along, but it'd take a few albums before they got the sound 'spot on'. Nonetheless, the experimental tendencies shine through, which is reason enough to give it a go.

If you do purchase this album however, I suggest picking up the 2004 Alfa Matrix edition – the album has been re-assembled using current technology to compensate for the lo-fi production of the original, though the songs themselves haven't changed. The limited edition Alfa Matrix version comes in a DVD case and includes a 2<sup>nd</sup> CD containing a number of Front 242 oddities for completists (including good alternate versions of 'Take One' and 'Controversy Between'), as well as tracks from Prothese and Underviewer – these being the two projects that combined to form Front 242 in the first place, likely to be of particular interest to fans of early electronic music.

## **Front 242 – No Comment (1984)**

The second Front 242 album, and probably one one most acclaimed as a 'fan favourite'. The songs here are generally longer and more complex in structure than 'Geography', even if they're not as immediately accessible. The opening tracks, 'Commando Mix', clatters along for nearly nine-and-a-half minutes, for example, trying to progress from its percussive beginnings but really just failing to ever build into anything special (a slightly less grating version can be found on 'Politics of Pressure').

The highlight is probably the relentless, metronomic stomp of 'No Shuffle', though this track too suffers comparison to the EP alternate version, though 'Lovely Day' and the two-part 'S.FR Nomenklatura' also have their moments. The later versions of this album do however benefit from the strongest version of 'Body to Body' to date, finally becoming the up-tempo lust anthem it was always meant to be. The template was laid down here, but superstardom would have to wait an album or two.

## **Front 242 – Backcatalogue (1986)**

An assortment of tracks from 242's early releases, selecting what are generally thought to be the most important tracks from 'Geography' (including U-Men, Operating Tracks and Kampfberiet) and No Comment (S.FR Nomenklatura the strongest here), and adding the

complete 'Endless Riddance' and 'Politics of Pressure' Eps and live versions of 'Take One' and 'U-Men' from a rare 7".

Whilst the value of this disc is lessened somewhat if you have the albums, it's almost worth it for the Eps, both offering a better hit-rate of decent tracks (Take One, Controversy Between and a good version of 'No Shuffle') than either of the two albums. Failing that, it's probably the most cost-efficient way of checking out the formative years of Front 242. Some of these songs sound quite dated now (particularly when the primitive drum programming leaves little room for the other sounds to breathe), but others are important indicators of the direction they later took.

## **Front 242 – Official Version (1986)**

This is where the sound of the Front 242 that achieved cult status really began to crystallise, where their experiments with drum machines and early sequencing technology really started to come together to produce the industrial dance floor-fillers for which they were best known. The album opens with the seven-minute epic of 'WYHIWYG' – and what you hear IS what you get – a metronomic beat, a descending synth line and a perpetual repetition of 'They're Coming Down' is all they needed!

The centrepiece of the album is probably 'Masterhit', which sets about perfecting the ominous sequences that would feature heavily on the next two Front 242 albums. The other really notable track is 'Quite Unusual', which has more of an apocalyptic synth-pop feel (if that isn't a contradiction in terms, I don't know what is!). The album has other interesting aspects, but some of the tracks feel slightly underdeveloped, often coming to a premature end just when you think they were going somewhere.

## **Front 242 – Front By Front (1988)**

Central reference point for EBM. It was here that Front 242's body beat concept was finally equalled by their musicianship, with a more melodies and hook-lines than ever before and an added dimension in terms of production. It's also the first Front 242 album that feels truly cohesive – whilst there are still a few weak tracks around the middle part of the album, it can be listened to from start-to-finish without feeling like you've suffered an overdose of 80s drum machines.

The EBM standard 'Headhunter' is the most obvious stand-out track, although it's in good company. The menacing 'Until Death -Us Do Part-' opens the album in authoritative style, followed neatly by the string-heavy doom-mongering of 'Circling Overland' – a track that proved highly influential to a certain VNV Nation. The full-throttle 'In Rhythmus Bleiben' and the throbbing, televangelist mockery of the finale 'Welcome To Paradise' seals this album's status as an industrial standard.

NOTE: Subsequent reissues of the album offer the single 'V1.0.' version of Headhunter (the traditional favourite amongst EBM DJs) and the 'Never Stop!' EP, which along with a couple of the versions of the title track offers alternate mixes of 'Work' and 'Until Death' - not absolutely essential, but a nice bonus nonetheless.

## **Front 242 – Tyranny >For You< (1991)**

Having established their signature sound on 'Front by Front', Front 242 needed a new direction and this album is, for the most part, at least a match for it's predecessor. The Belgian quartet go for a richer, denser sound with waves of throbbing arpeggio and ominous synthetic texture, with De Meyer lead vocals taking on a new aura of menace,

especially apparent on the slow, cavernous opener 'Sacrifice', which starts off gloomy and eventually builds into a cathedral-sized anthem for post-apocalyptic times.

The songs following this are more upbeat, but remain every bit as bleak and tenebrous. The pulsating body beats and enveloping waves of synth that dominate 'Moldavia' and 'Neurobashing' are probably the most characteristic examples of the 'Tyranny-era' 242 sound, but the albums crowning glory is undoubtedly 'Tragedy For You', the whirring electronics bearing the load of one of the most poetic Front 242 lyrics to date. There's still a couple of largely meandering tracks that don't really know where they want to go, but the hit rate of good tracks to apparent filler is still better here than ever before.

## **Front 242 – 06:21:03:11 Up Evil (1993)**

Having spent the best part of a decade producing albums which defined 'electronic body music', Front 242 decided it was time for a stylistic shift. The addition of guitars brought their sound closer to that of their American contemporaries, whilst the use of external lyricists (Jean-Marc and Pierre Pauly) and a extra-large helping of attention-enhancing ear candy helps contribute to the very 'different' feel of this era of the band. The lush chords signalling the opening of 'Crapage' are the first of many curveballs thrown by our Belgian friends, soon giving way to a thunderous assault of jackhammering percussion and guitar feedback, with various bleeps and burbles squeezing into what little sonic headroom remains.

The subtle but intimidating intro to 'Motion' soon gives way to one of their most hard-hitting body beats to date, whilst the screeching guitars and incendiary chorus of 'Religion' has 'anthem' written all over it. Other tracks demonstrate a more subtle side to the 'new' Front 242 sound, but unlike previous albums, I don't regard any of them as being weak or superfluous. Whilst this album's contents may well have angered certain EBM purists (and it's not so radically different that the band is unrecognisable), this is more than compensated for it's added crossover appeal. Whatever genre it sits in, the fact remains that this album is damn fine at what it does and is best appreciated as such.

## **Front 242 – 05:22:09:12 Off (1993)**

This was the second Front 242 album to be released in 1993, containing three remixes from the previous album as well as a number of new tracks (with a few versions of each in evidence). Whilst it's predecessor (06:21:03:11) was a change of direction of sorts, it was still recognisable for what it was. This disc, however, is the most un-Front like thing released under the band name to date, moving away from their EBM core to experiment with other electronic styles. The most important change concerns the singers – Jean-Luc's vocals feature only occasionally, Richard 23's hardly at all, with a female vocalist ('99' Kowalski) brought in to handle the lions share of the voices.

The band's subsequent live favourite 'Happiness' appears here (as well as it's parent track 'Modern Angel'), though the version present here isn't yet the anthem that this song would later become. The real highlight is 'Crushed', where Kristine's scathing, abrasive vocals still carry a semblance of melody, with some carefully constructed lyrics and shimmering electronics at least allowing this song to stick in the memory. The remainder of the album feels rather patchy – moments of delicate ambience alternating with blasts of techno/industrial beats make the whole thing sound rather bitty, but there's still enough material of interest to those who understand that there's more to Front 242 than six billion remixes of 'Headhunter'.

## Front 242 – Live Code (1994)

This was the first 'proper' Front 242 live album ('Live Target' was an bootleg later given a limited release by the band). It's not quite the same as seeing them for real, and as ever with bands like this, it does sound quite lo-fi compared with the studio albums. However, it's important to note that whilst there's still an obvious use of a backing track for some aspects of the performance, these are not exact note-for-note renditions of the studio tracks, with the 'live' nature of the performance still apparent. The highlight of the set is a no-nonsense, in-your-face version of 'Headhunter', one of the most anthemic takes on this oft-reworked song.

## Front 242 – Mut@ge Mix@ge (1995)

Front 242 jump on the mid-90s 'remix album' bandwagon, boasting mixes from the likes of Underworld, The Orb and The Prodigy, three of the biggest names in 'electronica' at the time. One might have expected Front 242's status as dance pioneers and the high-profile nature of the bands contributing mixes to mean that this disc might transcend the usual 'exploitation' reputation most remix discs have, but closer investigation reveals this not to be the case.

Firstly, the majority of the mixes here have appeared on previous releases, with some of them dating back to the 'Tyranny'-era Eps. Secondly, the majority of the remixes are of the kind where little of the original song remains. In some cases, such as The Prodigy mixes of 'Religion', the final product is a competent and energetic mix, albeit one of more appeal to fans of ravey hardcore techno than anything EBMish. Add a number of rather aimless minimal 'soundscape' type mixes, and somehow this package no longer seems all that appealing.

## Front 242 – Re:Boot (1998)

This album documents two shows from Front 242's 1998 tour. They hadn't released any new material in a while, but instead took the opportunity to rework a number of their songs, a more modern techno/90s electronica style. The most impressive rework is 'Happiness', which is given a new acidic edge, turning it into the floorfilling anthem it was always meant to be. It's also good to hear the likes of 'Body To Body' and 'No Shuffle' free from their rather thin 80s production. Some of the other reworks (especially 'Melt' and 'Religion') come over as being rather sloppy, however, the 'techno' elements never really meshing with the core song. A few songs (such as 'Headhunter') haven't seen much work since the days of 'Live Code', though you might argue that this particular song didn't need a rework. Yet.

## Front 242 – Headhunter 2000 (1999)

Front 242 decide to celebrate the new millennium by getting their signature track remixed by almost anyone that seemed willing and able to do so. An impressive array of remix artists were brought into the fray, and the results vary in both quality and style. The most impressive remixes include Apoptygma Berzerk proto-future-pop version (that might very well have laid the foundations for an Icon of Coil cover several years later) and Empirion's uncompromising hard techno version. Space Frog's version also makes for a good stand-alone dance track, though it loses points for not actually incorporating much of the original song.

Other versions go for a more linear treatment, with Funker Vogt and Project-X dishing up straightforward 4-beat treatments that neither capture the true feeling of the original nor

replace it with anything revolutionary. [Peak] try to do a version with live-style drum sounds, don't really carry it off due to rather insipid production. The weakest mix of all is Haujobb's minimal IDM mix – utterly destroying the track in his pretentious attempt at bringing 'intelligent techno' to the industrial scene, and, IMHO, failing miserably.

NOTE: Several versions of this release exist – I have covered the 12-track European release on Energy Records. US listeners get a 16-track version, but the core mixes are common to all versions.

## Front 242 – Pulse (2003)

Front 242 'return', but those quotation marks are deliberate. It may have the legendary band name on the CD case, but in many respects this CD sounds more like one of Patrick and Daniel's side-projects with guest vocals from De Meyer than a 242-release proper. A bizarre tracklist that see ten 'songs' divided over 20 tracks doesn't help a listener who would probably have settled for a few more remakes of 'Headhunter'. Their opening shot 'Seq666' clocks in at approximately 12 minutes in length, spanning 5 tracks of the CD. It's a sequence-driven, knob-twiddling epic which progresses nicely, though in truth it's really a rework of one of the Male or Female tracks.

We get a hint of 'vintage' 242 on Together, with a classic De Meyer vocal and a gigantic breakdown dynamic that's just screaming out for live play. After that, they go 'experimental' on us, alternating moments of synthetic brilliance with over-indulgent audio trickery that entertains it's creator more than it's listener, with a number of the two-part compositions that form the latter part of the album sounding a little bit too 'random'. There's no doubting the talents of the musicians involved here, and they are several interesting moments, but despite this the album as a whole comes across as being something of a rambling stew of ideas rather than a hard-hitting comeback from one of electronic music's biggest names.

## Front Line Assembly – Civilisation (2004)

Whilst the Delerium project might continue to bring the greatest quantity of readies into the Leeb coffers, anyone who knows anything about him will appreciate that Bill's No.1 project is Front Line Assembly. We are, after all talking about a former member of Skinny Puppy. OK, he jumped ship early on, but that only allowed him to take Cevin and Ogre's concepts and mould them into an danceable backbone which went on to inspire everyone from Funker Vogt to Velvet Acid Christ and a whole bunch of industrial wannabes with stupid band names appended with superfluous numbers and letters in a vain effort to appear 'technologically advanced'.

However, having successfully defined a danceable form of Skinny Puppy on 'Tactical Neural Implant', added guitars on 'Hard Wired' and 'Millennium' and then incorporated electronica elements on 'FLAvour of the Weak', Mr.Leeb then spent two albums running on the spot, devoid of fresh ideas. There weren't any real flaws with 'Implode' and 'Epitaph' on a technical level, it's just they didn't do anything to excite. The industrial goalposts had moved, and Front Line Assembly appeared no longer to be the 'in thing'.

Perhaps that's what inspired Bill to call up former colleague Rhys Fulber. Having patched up their differences over Delerium's 'Chimera', there was nothing stopping them from getting back in the studio and reliving old times. And sure enough, lead single (also track 2 on this CD) Maniacal, brings back memories of early-90s EBM, pounding kick-drum, yelled verses, droning choruses (oh, happy days of Tactical Neural Implants!) and some power chord action thrown in to beef up the middle frequencies.

That indulgence out of the way, the duo were now left with a clean slate to fill up the album with something more imaginative. The above-mentioned track aside, the album is notable for the continued absence of straight-ahead four-four EBM beat patterns. The use of pads, samples and vocal effects remain as typically Front Line Assembly as ever, though rhythmically the album hovers on the border between industrial and hard electro. This is not necessarily a bad thing, of course, particularly when you realise that the act have some fresh ideas as to how to realise the concept.

Opening track 'Psychosomatic' is the most breakbeat-oriented track of the lot, but it still manages to keep its industrial credentials intact, for despite that title, the fucked-up drum pattern and the use of a wailing middle-eastern backing vocal from Leah Randi, the song still sounds more like FLA than The Prodigy. Those looking for a more industrial form of beat science should instead check out 'Strategic', two minutes of throbbing sequencers, cold choral pads and a schmaltz loop that'll keep the uber-heads that have recently turned to obscure Ant-Zen signees happy.

Perhaps more notable is what they manage to achieve when they slow things down a bit. The title track 'Civilisation', for instance, is a huge, drawn-out affair, a slowed-down techno beat, vast expanses of moody electronics, and a guest appearance from ex-Fear Factory man Christian Olbe Wolbers on guitar. It's a moving song, a sort of anthem of resignation, singing of a world that has already gone too far down the road to destruction. The chorus line 'These Islands Collapsing' conjures images of an apocalypse already in progress.

Gloomy as that was, however, it's nothing compared to the expanse of utter despair created by 'Vanished (Going Under)'. Featuring a touch of acoustic guitar and another ethereal vocal from Leah Randi, it's an unusual rare combination of the Delerium and Front Line Assembly styles, combining the atmospheric elements of the former with the dystopian elements of the latter. It's strange that it's taken so long for them to get this stylistic fusion to work, given how accomplished they are with the component parts, but frankly I'm just glad they've finally cracked it.

The other element of the Delerium sound which they've tried to work in here is the use of classical compositions as a musical base for something more contemporary. First 'Eternal Odessey' ('Chimera' CD) utilised Barber's Adagio for Strings, and now 'Fragmented' builds itself round elements of Vivaldi's Four Seasons. Not content with merely incorporating a sampled chunk of said work into the song as a kind of self-conscious middle eight, Bill and Rhys manage to loop a tremolo from 'Allegro Non Molto' into one of the songs key motifs.

Of the remaining tracks, 'Transmitted', another to incorporate a classical trill or two, but otherwise fulfilling its duty as a mechanised anthem for unity, with lines like 'Let's All March Together' delivered with Leeb's vocal processed in places beyond all connections to humanity. The penultimate track 'Dissident' meanders in places, though few could ignore a chorus like 'Work It Out – Why Don't Kill Yourself?'. This leaves 'Schicksal', a slow, crawling dirge to fade out on, vocally sparse but a fitting coda for the album as a whole.

There is an unlisted tenth track at the end of the album, a sort of hard dancey thing that appears to have been put in as an afterthought, as it doesn't appear all that well placed. It sound reasonable enough, but should have been saved for a B-side or polished up at slotted in on the album somewhere. I might add that I think that my CD tracklisting is a bit messed up. 'Transmitted' and 'Fragmented' are swapped round (the former is track 3 on my CD, the latter track 7), and I suspect that the track I think is called 'Dissident' is really 'Schicksal' and vice-versa. I can't tell as the lyrics for track 8 aren't that legible in the booklet provided.



But enough about structural flaws – how’s the music? Well, it’s definitely more involving and more dynamic than ‘Epitaph’ ever was. That said, it’s not really eligible for the hall of the all-time greats, either. Front Line Assembly might again be a going concern, but there’s a few things that need a tweaking. They could start by getting the tracklisting right to start with, and there’s no song that simultaneously excellent in terms of lyrics, musical content, technical merit and artistic impression. But with Rhys back in the gang, the FLA machine is at least back on the move again, which, being really honest now, wasn’t what me, the cynical reviewer, was expecting.

## **Front Line Assembly – Artificial Soldier (2006)**

Whilst recent FLA output has met what could politely be described as a ‘mixed’ response, primarily due to the increased influence of the members many side projects leaking into the main band’s sound, ‘Artificial Soldier’ seems to be an attempt by Leeb and co. to please everyone. Bill Leeb’s processed drones sound as dehumanised as ever, whilst the ‘all-star’ line-up (Leeb joined by Rhys Fulber AND Chris Peterson this time, as well as newcomer Jeremy Inkel) ensures that at least some influence from all of Front Line Assembly’s creative phases find their way onto this disc. Or at least that’s the idea.

Certainly this outfit’s ability to dehumanise just about any lyrical theme is very much in place – ‘Lowlife’ a particularly dismissive account of Hollywood, for instance, whilst other songs feature references to such things as ‘Caustic fornication’ and ‘Chemical Mind Fuck’. The cybernetic electronics support this approach nicely, and they could certainly teach some of the young pretenders on the NoiTekk and Out of Line rosters a thing or two about programming complex industrial-friendly rhythms without sounding pretentious. There’s a couple of tracks featuring guitar, ‘Dopamine’ working better than the slightly cluttered ‘Decsention’. The album does seem to lack an out-and-out anthem of the Mindphaser/Plasticity calibre, though.

They also utilise a couple of guest vocalists later on in the albums. Jean-Luc De Meyer falls slightly short on ‘Future Fail’ (though many will simply be relieved to hear his voice on vaguely industrial-sounding music again), though this is compensated for by Eskil Simmonson’s contributions to the ‘The Storm’, with his fleeting vocal performance and additional keyboards successfully meshing to form a decent Covenant/FLA hybrid sound. But these tracks are exceptions to the rule – the focus of this album is a return to the Front Line Assembly of old. If you’d tired of this kind of thing in the mid-90s, there’s probably little here of interest. But if it’s the dual-headed behemoth of future pop and terror EBM that’s boring you senseless, this disc is a decent enough example of how electronic industrial USED to sound.

## **Frozen Plasma – Artificial (2006)**

This album represents the effective continuation of the earlier Vasi Vallis project NamNamBulu, replacing Henrik Iversen with Diorama member Felix Marc. The album gets off to a vibrant start with ‘Irony’, all melodic synths and a note of resignation in the lyrics – all fairly I stuff, but nonetheless hard not to like. Next up is ‘Crossroads’, working in the album’s first trance breakdown. It’s at this stage that you start to think this album might be alright after all, no matter how much of this kind of thing you’ve had to put up with the last few years. Unfortunately, as the listener will soon hear, the album has already peaked.

A tolerable instrumental ‘1980’ followed by the overly pedestrian ‘War/Flashbacks’, featuring the rather forced inclusion of G.W.Bush samples, though also a few really heartfelt vocals from Felix. The e-pianos and delicate vox of ‘A Second Of Life’ next, before the album really gets caught in a cycle of repetition, that melodic synth-pop/trance

hybrid repeated several times again as the album strolls to its conclusion, briefly interrupted by an Iris remix of 'Betrayed' (which, suspiciously enough, sounds like, erm, Iris) and another instrumental 'Unborn Faith' – built round downtempo beats and a clean guitar sample, it makes for an interesting stylistic diversion but at 7:43 in length, it outstays its welcome by a few minutes.

## **Funker Vogt – Thanks For Nothing (1996)**

Funker Vogt's debut album offers a club-friendly EBM/electro-industrial sound, not unlike some of the more danceable LeætherStrip tracks. It's essentially a mix of gravelly vocals, punchy four-beats, throbbing synths and lots of war-related metaphor (the band name is derived from a Army Radio Op friend of keyboard player/programmer Gerrit Thomas). The basic concept is at least sound, but the execution lets them down. The album's tone is unremittingly harsh, the melodic and textural elements buried too easily in never-ending assaults of distorted rhythms.

The result is an album which sounds at least vaguely promising for a few tracks, with 'A New Beginning' and 'Black Hole' amongst the strongest songs on offer here, but also an album whose interest level fades with each passing track. The rather muddy production quality doesn't help, as it only makes it harder to differentiate between the different songs.

There's a couple of deviations from this relentless stomp – 'Animals' alternates doomy keyboard passages with high-speed electronic head-rushes, whilst the slower 'Remember Childhood' is a rare touching moment on an album which is otherwise numbing in its cold, bleak outlook.

## **Funker Vogt – We Came To Kill (1997)**

The second Funker Vogt album is a slight improvement on the first – the production is slightly cleaner (but still rather murky compared with other scene bands of the time), the individual sequences more detailed, there's a greater variety in terms of sound (including some sampled guitars in places), the lyrics seem more purposeful and a great proportion of the songs are in some way memorable. At the same time, however, it's still the same dancefloor-oriented industrial dance music that they've been producing since hooking up their first synthesiser.

It's hard to pick a highlight as most of the songs follow the same basic concept, although 'Take Care!' is probably the album's 'defining' track, singing of a resignation towards environmental catastrophe, a sentiment all too easily understood in these self-centred times. Other personal favourites include 'Father', 'Killing Fields' and 'Funker Vogt 2<sup>nd</sup> Unit', but such is the homogeneity of the Funker sound that you could pick any of the others. And that is the album's (and some might say the band's) key weakness – there's simply not enough ideas to last the length of an album.

## **Funker Vogt – Execution Tracks (1998)**

Execution Tracks is the third Funker Vogt album, and marks the point where they begin to step back slightly from the relentless torrent of industrial beats and start weaving a few more melodic, some would say 'pop' influences into their sound. This is most apparent on the album's centrepiece 'Tragic Hero', whose distinctive fanfare-like synth lead and infectious refrain combine to form the first great Funker Vogt anthem. As usual, the bulk of the album's songs keep within this theme of war and destruction – be it 'Civil War', 'Pure War' (aka 'Nuclear War') or the 'Fortunes Of War'.

There are a few thematic variations – ‘The International Killer’ deals with issues such as AIDS, pollution and the greenhouse effect, whilst ‘Shaven’ is the gratuitously ‘sexual’ track, featuring some of the least subtle lyrics I’ve ever encountered (‘Shaven Cunts Fuck Much More Horny’ indeed.....). The album as a whole is generally more listenable as a complete work than previous efforts, mainly thanks to the added melodic elements and a cleaner overall sound, but even here it begins to get rather monotonous towards its later stages – and that ‘Shaven’ song is a definite low. At least this time, however, there’s plenty of fun to be had along the way.

## **Funker Vogt – Maschine Zeit (2000)**

‘Maschine Zeit’ continues where ‘Execution Tracks’ left off in terms of refining the Funker Vogt sound into something palatable to those who never really got into their harsher, more severe early works. It still thumps hard enough to be classed as industrial something-or-other, but most of the album’s tracks carry a tune of sorts, Jens Kastell’s vocals are less of a rasp and more of a drone, and there’s plenty of ear-catching bleepy bits. It’s still not exactly an ‘original’ sound, but at least now the Vogt concept sounds as attractive as it’s ever going to be. On this occasion, most of the album’s songs are in some way memorable. For example, ‘Gunman’ is a ‘Tragic Hero pt 2’ in many respects – the big, cheesy synth lead and an energized delivery sufficient for you to briefly forgive them for otherwise sounding quite I, even managing to mimic themselves.

The real call to arms is the title track – a English/German affair that combines multiple rhythmic various and lyrical devices into one of the most musically advanced compositions the Vogt have ever devised. Other songs of interest include ‘Black Market Dealers’, which conjure vivid images of the difficulties facing post-WWII Germany, the spy vs spy dynamics of ‘Cold War’ (there had to be a song with ‘war’ in the title somewhere) and the ice-cold ‘doom ballad’ ‘Nuclear Winter’.

There’s a few tracks that really don’t know what they’re doing (‘Nothing To Include’ sounds especially confused) but otherwise this is probably the one Funker Vogt album where you’re able to enjoy their limitation rather than complain about them. Nothing wrong with a bit of bleepy, droning, war-inspired electro-industrial once in a while, is there?

## **Funker Vogt – Survivor (2002)**

Having reached a creative zenith of sorts on ‘Maschine Zeit’, it’s at this stage that Funker Vogt are left with the question ‘where to now?’ ‘Survivor’ is a firm indication that Funker boys either don’t know or (more likely) don’t care. Instead they just get on with doing what they do best, producing their stompy-yet-slightly-melodic mid-tempo electro-industrial. Jens Kastell drones and grinds his way through the twelve songs on offer, whilst Gerrit Thomas throws in all the obligatory bleeps and bloops that you’d expect. As ever, the majority of the album’s songs revolve around a ‘war’ theme, with the remainder dealing with other ills of modern society.

Picking out a highlight is tricky – there really isn’t much difference between the individual songs. ‘Date of Expiration’ was chosen as lead single, but they could just as easily gone for any of the others, with the other candidates being ‘History’, which makes poignant references to the Doomsday Clock scenario, or ‘This World’, which is really just Funker Vogt doing what they always do, but sometimes pressing all the right buttons is enough.

There are a few tracks that make a token attempt to differentiate themselves. The lethargic slog though ‘Compulsions’ (dealing with an ex-soldiers drug habit) works well enough, though it’d help if they could pronounce ‘morphine’ correctly (the English language never was their strong suit). ‘Fallen Man’ sees a rare use of guitar, but the song is essentially no

more than the usual Vogt thing with a common-or-garden chug-a-chug riff replacing one of the synths. Guitar also appears in closing number 'Red Queen', the band's first 'real' ballad, and probably the only truly distinctive thing on offer here.

The remainder of the album is really just the usual Funker thing, although they do it well enough to at least acquit themselves, even if this album does nothing to win over anyone who didn't like their last couple of albums. It's an album best enjoyed for what it is, not one for getting bothered about what it isn't.

## **Funker Vogt – Navigator (2005)**

I'm not sure if it shows, but each subsequent Funker Vogt album is harder to review than the last, as it's harder and harder to find fresh things to say. When you think about it, they've come a long way since the days of 'Thanks For Nothing', but the changes are incremental, and have become smaller and smaller with each passing album. Truth is, 'Navigator' is still a perfectly enjoyable run though the usual mix of stompy beats, bleepy bits and war-inspired imagery. But then again, so was 'Survivor'. And 'Maschine Zeit'. All these albums are enjoyable for what they are, but do you really need to listen to all of them?

A few token changes have taken place – live guitarist Thomas Kroll has been replaced by Frank Schweigert, who makes a fractionally more significant contribution to the band's recordings with lyrics on one song and guitar on three of them, with his bridge on 'No Tomorrow' easily the most Funker-unlike thing on here. With the exception of that and actually getting to hear Jens Kastell 'sing' on 'Für Dich' (the obligatory 'doom ballad'), the rest is a straight run through the schmaltz, including a follow-up to 'Tragic Hero' in 'Fallen Hero' (sigh) and a title track which just repeats one verse over and over, yet that single verse catchy enough to be the album's highlight.

## **Funker Vogt – t (2000)**

't' is a double-disc offshoot from 'Maschine Zeit', containing a series of remixes plus 'Subspace' and three other unreleased tracks. It's puzzling why they spread it across two discs when all the tracks would have fit onto one, but I guess they have their reasons, beyond confusing the listener as to whether this thing counts as a double EP or an album proper, of course. 'Subspace' is the best of the new tracks, a tribute to online first-person shooter games. It's on the poppier side of the Vogt spectrum, but it's enjoyable enough. The remainder of the new tracks follow a similar musical path, but measured alongside Funker Vogt's album tracks of the time, they're still nothing really special.

The majority of the remixes are in-house reworks by Gerrit Thomas. He offers four 'Maschinen' mixes, representing a harder industrial sound, plus three 'Traum' mixes, which go for a dancier, synth-pop concept. All these mixes are fairly linear, not really advancing far enough from the originals. There are three 'external' mixes at the very end of the set. Das Ich's version of 'The Last' is disappointingly pedestrian by their standards, though Beborn Beton's breakbeat remix of 'Under Deck' is at least distinctive, whilst L'Âme Immortelle's 'Bunkerromantik' downtempo, piano-and-string based mix of 'Black-Market Dealers' is probably the strongest mix on offer here, the only one that does anything radical with the original whilst keeping the original song intact. It's a patchy collection, all in all, best left to those fanatic Funkers who seem to lap up everything this band produces.

## **Funker Vogt – Revivor (2003)**

This is a reasonable attempt at a remix album for 'Survivor' – the first Funker Vogt album to spawn a full-length offshoot (although 't' certainly came close). The original album was a solid effort, but really needed some original musical concepts and a bit more variety to

really bring it to life. A decent and varied selection of remixing artists have been brought in from various futurepop, electro-industrial and techno acts, and for once none of them fall into the self-indulgent trap of killing off the original song in an effort to how clever they are (though a couple get dangerously close).

The album opens with straightforward mixes of 'Final Thrill' and 'History' by Christian Michael and Icon of Coil respectively, both aimed firmly at club playlists. As the album progresses, we get a vicious breakbeat mix of 'Faster Life' from XPQ-21 (a bit over-the-top, but a brave effort!), a mix of 'Stolen Thoughts' by Haujobb that gets extreme on the vocal effects and a surprisingly restrained mix of 'Red Queen' by T.O.Y. The limited edition also offers four extra fan mixes of 'Final Thrill' in MP3 format (an interesting curiosity if nothing else). Generally, this remix album is no better or worse than the album that spawned it, but at least that doesn't mean it's the cash-in exploitation other remix discs have been known to be.

## **The Galan Pixs – Boredom International (2003)**

We've been waiting a long time for this. The Galan Pixs released their preview EP for this album, 'Crackerjack' on their UK tour in the summer of 2000. That's three years!! Since then, the title of the album has changed from 'Shameless' to 'Boredom International', whilst the band re-recorded a couple of the tracks from the EP and got themselves on a major label. What do you mean 'not another one?'. Yes, well you might not agree with the principle, but believe it or not, some bands do actually get there on merit!

It'd still have sold more that 'Pink Film Edition', though. It's found that sweet spot known as 'crossover appeal', that creative nirvana where genre definitions get blown out of the window and a band actually gets round to writing some decent songs with no credit given to stylistic boundaries. Their days as an industrial band aren't quite over, but they're now drawing heavily from the sound of more mainstream alternative rock (an oxymoron I know), and even a touch of synth-pop, lead single Kopelski even making substantial changes to his vocal style to fit the new material (in a nutshell – less growly, more melodic).

The bands development is best showcased by the three 'previously released' songs, which give at least some hint as to the ins-and-outs of the development process. Take the opening track 'Crackerjack – Return of the Faith Healer', for instance. It might still pass as industrial in rockier circles (in the sense that it has synths and guitars, both playing loudly, in it), but the fiery guitar stabs and ultra-hooky 'Can I Put My Hands On You?' refrain leave you in no doubts that this is a now a rock band, the songs best elements all pointed up thanks to the re-recording.

The other two 'old' tracks are 'Acid Anger Again' and 'Pearl Necklace', standing out here as the only clue as to what The Pixs USED to sound like. The all-encompassing riff of 'Acid Anger Again' cuts scars across the synth-poppy business going on underneath, whilst 'Pearl Necklace' is that much more aggressive again, a techno backdrop struggling gamely to fight through the jagged guitars and snarly vocals (the only point Kopelski's voice really turns nasty on the whole CD), this new version clearly another beneficiary from the reworking process.

But to really get an idea of where The Galan Pixs are heading musically, tune in to the REALLY new tracks. Album closer 'Can't Get Enough' is a fine example, sounding for all the world like a long-lost indie-rock anthem, with it's cheerfully angsty vocals, walking bassline and sing-along-chorus. Don't like the sound of that? Let's just say it isn't MY usual style by any means, but it never fails to raise a smile whenever I give it listen. It really is that good!

The other big indie number is 'Another Country – Another Name', which sounds like Placebo in the amped-up-bits but then distinguishes itself with all the sitar-sampling, clean-guitar versey bits. Any song that hard to describe can't suffer for the want of a genre to place it in. Backed onto this is 'The Universal Route', a joyous synthy piece with a mind-blowing chorus that reminds one simultaneously of New Order's legendary Blue Monday and the Orgy cover of that self same song.

'Komakino' is a very slightly weaker track. The rock-styled chorus is as big and as rousing as all the others, but the keyboard-based verses sound a little ordinary compared with everything else here. 'Saturday Night Vibe', meanwhile, is good, strong indie-rock with a party-hungry edge, though admittedly not far from a sound that belonged in the Brit-pop scene circa 1995 (oh, happy days.....). Anyone remember that far back? When there were some half-decent bands getting media attention and the like?

Things get interesting when they tone down the guitars a bit and play the pure pop game with a couple of cover versions. Their cover of 'Hey Little Girl' (originally by Icehouse) is reasonable, featuring a Depeche Mode style vocal and prominent bass line (one of many on the album, I might add) that gives the song a real 'groove'. Thomas Dolby's 'Leipzig Is Calling You', meanwhile, features guest vocalist 'Suzie Q', an infectious but slightly silly girlie pop song. This just leaves the bizarre but tolerable indulgence of 'David Lynch', a lounge-styled electronic number, featuring some rich synth textures and a trumpet solo.

Apart from John Fryer-produced versions of 'Another Country' and 'Crackerjack' (both giving greater emphasis to the percussive elements of the mix), that is essentially it. And pretty damn good it was too. There's a couple of shaky moments here and there, but no out-and-out 'bad songs'. What's more significant is how the drums, synths, bass, guitars and vocals all sit together without one getting to dominate for anything other than short periods. It's not a perfect album, but it is both distinctive AND complete. That's reason enough to give it a go.

## **God Module – Empath (2003)**

God Module have been one of the quieter successes of the electro-industrial scene of late. Critics might have been waxing lyrical about European faves :Wumpscut: and Suicide Commando for quite some time now, whilst the endless praise for Mexican duo Hocico over the last couple of years has gone from welcoming to predictable to downright tedious. And the view on God Module, American Jasyn Bangert's project? Well, yeah, they're pretty good too.

'Empath' is the second God Module album, following on from debut 'Artificial' and it's catchy-as-hell lead track 'Resurrection'. Then there came the 'Perception' EP, which whilst technically a precursor to this, doesn't contain any common tracks. Encouraging as it is that we don't have to pay for the same songs twice, one might also cynically wonder if this disc was just a place to put all the tracks that weren't good enough for the EP.

Fortunately, that doesn't appear to be the case. Opener 'Catalyst' is a slow, jerky electro-gothic instrumental with gloomy keyboard lines and a stew of various movie samples that just want to cry ':Wumpscut:!' It serves it's purpose, however, leading neatly into 'Telekinetic', and vintage Access Virus country. The trance-like lead, driving beat and hoarse vocals offer a pixel-perfect portrait of the industrial dance sound of 2003 – fiercer than VNV or Apop, but not as vicious as Hocico. If that's what you want, you've got it. If it isn't, tough.

'As The Night Falls' is built on similar lines, again bordering on the divide between hard trance and harder EBM without falling on one side or the other. The pace changes nicely

for 'Entranced', a slow, soaring song, which successfully does the sweet synths-fucked-up-rhythm combo that all artists in this genre need to master (had the drums been taken out, it wouldn't have been far off 'Angel' from 'Embryodead').

It all gets nasty again come 'Reverse Inversion' – the lead synth line and pounding beat giving the track a hard techno feel. The lyrics and vocals are as strong here as they are anywhere, with the female-vocal chorus somehow strengthening the track rather than spoiling it. It's a track that manages to achieve everything it tries to, and rightfully serves as the album's centrepiece. Following on from this is 'Curse', which is OK, but apart from the nursery-school chiming middle eight giving a nice melodic touch to the tune, it's really just like all the others.

'Levitation' next, and another one of those 'hey, listen to my favourite synth presets' tracks, though admittedly the airy stabs that dominate the song serve their purpose. The ominous 'Dear Dead Flesh' is also of the 'good but not great' school, as is 'Ever After', which also does what all the other songs do. The album ends on 'Lunacy', a slow-burning closer which once again makes good use of Courtney Tittiger as a contrast to Jasyn's scratchy, digitally processed tones.

And so it ends, and pretty good it was too. The album does suffer from the flaw that the four best songs are grouped together between Track 2 and Track 5. But the others aren't exactly bad – just an anti-climax. The use of occasional female vocals worked well, though it's not exactly an uncommon technique (maybe some undistorted male vox, or even some spoken word would have helped?). But no worries, it's still a worthy effort. I just hope Jasyn's got something up his sleeve for when people get tired of this sort of thing.

## **Grooving In Green – Stranglehold (2012)**

I've heard plenty of odd genre definitions in my time, and probably dreamt up just as many myself. This English three-piece are now responsible for yet another sub-sub-genre being added to my armoury – Groove Goth. As a relatively young collective, having only been formed in 2008 (though consisting of ex-members of Children on Stun and Solemn Novena), it's clear they've done pretty well for themselves, having clocked up some credible live performances and backed it up with a couple of studio albums, the second of which is reviewed here.

And it's on a second album that a band's signature sound needs to crystallise if they have any hope of standing out from the vast army of 80s goth rock copyists that fill the lower echelons of WGT line-ups. Certainly the fundamental elements of Grooving In Green's line-up aren't anything noteworthy. Singer, guitarist with a stack of sound-enriching effects, bassist, and a drum machine programmed to provide the aforementioned 'groove'. They've even given 'him' a name – Dr Toxic. Didn't Garden of Delight hit upon this two parts-Nephilim to one-part Sisters combo a couple of decades back? Actually, you could have inserted the name of pretty much any European goth rock band there!

But there's something subtly different going on here. So many so-called bands in this genre just love to lose themselves in occult references and other esoteric concepts that probably make sense to theologians and goth-scene die-hards, both of whom probably have bookshelves stuffed full of ominous tomes about such subjects. But having given this album a listen through, I get the impression that this isn't the Grooving In Green way. These boys just want to rock out. They're goth rockers that are tired of goth.

Sure, when they want to, they can call upon the clichés. The cathedral-sized instrumental album intro "Breathless" conjures images of smoke machines and guitar-wielding silhouettes, but it's on the second, title track that the tone for the album is set. The bands

vocalist, the outrageously named General Megatron Bison has a decent range, able to switch between garden-variety growling, a more strident hard rock and a conventional indie rock tone with ease. Whilst the band's instrumentation isn't any other than a slightly different combination of elements we've heard many times before, it's well executed and in places (particularly on tracks such as 'A New Vessel') seriously intense in its impact.

It's therefore on the subject of songwriting that bands such of this need to score, and fortunately the band had the good sense to write some lyrics that real people not educated in obscure philosophies or belief systems could understand. Sometimes they resort to blatant social commentary ("Fat Cats") or attacks against the mass media ("More News About Nothing"). "Lucid" makes a particularly plaintive cry about the effects of domestic abuse. But the real joker in the pack is "King Mediocre", which cries out for a quote to best sum up its intended target:

"Never stray from laws laid out by those who came before  
It served them well enough, guess I'm a fucking scene whore?"

A timely comment indeed, given that I've not exactly been impressed by a significant quantity of recent scene output, which either rehashes well-worn territory or makes ill-fated attempts to shoehorn previously-unrelated styles together to create something that apparently can be passed off as originality. Grooving In Green aren't exactly solving either of these problems with this album, but they do succeed in making valid statements, both musically and lyrically, and in a genre that's got very little creativity left in it, they've done the best they could under the circumstances. If you're looking for some no-nonsense, scene-friendly rock numbers, this would be a pretty good choice.

## **Halo In Reverse – King O (2013)**

It's a bit of a reviewers I to say something "sounds like Nine Inch Nails", but I've generally found what they mean is "synths, guitars and angry man behind the mic". But in this case I can't really avoid it. The early Halo In Reverse material had a competent but somewhat generic industrial rock feel about it, but now Joshua Steffen (where have I heard one man = band before) has nailed the Nails sound. Which is odd when you consider the projects name comes from a Depeche Mode song, admittedly one from the same era.

It's an EP, so we only get two original songs. The title track is the one that best defines the Halo direction of the present. The song is led by an aggressive, in-your-face fuzzy lead line, which I think is a synth but it might as well be a heavily processed guitar line (where have I thought that before?). The anguished snarl that provides the vocal is a decent backbone for the song, a middle-fingered slice of 2010's social commentary that is reminiscent of the latter-day NIN sound heard on "Only" and "Survivalism".

That's surprising, given that Halo In Reverse's official promotional material claims comparisons are more often made with early NIN material. This may just be a populist move... I mean who seriously likes the 00's NIN material more than the early stuff? As in listens to it more often, not just claim the fact in order to sound like they're more of an outlier than the average NIN fan that might have enjoyed 'Pretty Hate Machine' but ends up listening to nu-metal and dubstep because his local HMV doesn't sell any other industrial.

There's a decent haul of remixes on the EP, but being Alfa-Matrix, most of them are drawn from the same limited pool of bands who are seriously starting to delivery diminishing returns on each successive release from the label. One of the best remixes is from Josh himself, who delivers a simple-but-effective dance remix, more melodic and more DJ-friendly but otherwise leaving the original song intact.



Of the hired hands, Helalyn Flowers win the prize for messing around with the original song the least, replacing the original music with a thumping kick drum and throbbing synths, but letting the original vocal through the mix largely unscathed. The other mixes aren't as strong. Aesthetische provide a new musical backdrop that just doesn't fit the vocal neatly, while Crashtv show promise until they utterly screw up switching time signatures midway through.

The Diskonnekted remix is good in parts with a solid dance core, though the breakbeat interludes tend to disrupt the flow rather than add variety. Psy'Aviah take it too far the other way, relying too much on a dull bass pulse that knocks too much life out of the tune. Avi Ghosh's mix might mean something to those of you who actually get bowel-churning basslines and stop-start dynamics, but to me it's just a too-obviously adoption of current dance trends. Sorry, Avi. You got the wrong reviewer for that kind of stuff.

There is one other original song here called "The Tyrant", and it's certainly more akin to the Halo In Reverse recordings of old, a nice combination of riff blasts and a cheesy synth solo, the later being both a personal ear candy of mine and a nifty means of getting me out of having to compare this song with Broken-era NIN, Stabbing Westward, Sulpher, Gravity Kills, et al. Because none of them had the nerve to resort of a hook this tacky AND make it work.

Given the choice, I'd have liked a few more remixes of this one, but for now I'll have to settle for one. Luckily, it another one of Josh's home-brews, replacing the guitar bursts with an electronic pulse that adds a real groove to the original, a good variation. It certainly bodes well for whatever the next Halo In Reverse album is going to be called. But I'm in two minds as to whether I'll treat myself to the deluxe edition with the six billion remixes from the same ten artists. I'm in the bizarre situation of keenly anticipating the main album, yet already knowing exactly what the bonus disc sounds like!

## **Hanzel Und Gretyl – Born To Be Hailed (2012)**

The industrial metal band that everyone think are German but are in fact American. Yes, they write plenty of German lyrics, the band name refers to a Grimm fairy tale, and their synthetically-enhanced industrial metal stomp is a sound much associated with the Fatherland, but they are definitely All-American nonetheless. This album follows four years after '2012: Zwanzig Zwolf', which (confusingly enough) was actually released in 2008, but was still a welcome release in a year when quality industrial metal was very hard to come by.

The opening track "Hanzel Und Gretyl Fur Immer" is a ponderous crawl, but they soon rediscover their form on "Unterstützung 87", an equal-parts hybrid of Germanic industrial and early-80s heavy metal, a combination previous mastered by the likes of Rob Zombie but few others. The leather-clad biker feel is upped further on "Blitzkriegerz Und Hellriderz", the kind of track that makes me think that Motörhead and Mötley Crüe's umlauts should have meant they sounded a bit German, not just an unimaginative attempt to look all hard.

"Hammerzeit" features some metal bashing noise and a more mechanical drum and guitar style, which is technically well-executed but sounds quite static and dynamically lacking compared with what came before. "Der Furor" is two and a quarter minutes of stop-start extreme metal fury, alternating vocal snatches with blasts of insanely fast guitar thrashing, reminiscent of Ministry's own trilogy of "TV" songs. Sorry, I didn't like those ones either.

"Born To Be Heiled" serves as the title track, centrepiece and a welcome return to a catchy metal groove. The band's tendency to use bilingual vocals works particularly well here, cries of "Get Up! Stomp Baby!" and suchlike meshing perfectly with the drawn-out

“Töööööööööööööööt!”. “Holy Shiza” rocks just as hard, though by now I think they’re trying too hard to write songs in two languages at once – “So let Hölle freeze over” is forcing this Deutsche-Amerikanische Partnerschaft just a little bit beyond its comfort zone.

“Mötorschwein” is disappointing, again trying too hard to sound like Ministry but seriously in the need of loosening up and letting the song carry itself forward. “I’m Movin’ To Deutschland” is another highlight, embracing classic rock dynamics to the extent that it even features a retro organ and guitar solo. “Ironstar Outlaws” shows the band’s sense of humour with a burst of banjo, though it’s more often than not buried in the guitar riffs. I can’t work out if rhyming “Wolf 424” with “Down To The Core” is evidence of brilliance or the ultimate act of contrivance, but hey, it caught my attention, didn’t it?

The album ends with hard electronic stomp “More German Than German”, which serves as one final attempt to totally confuse the listener as to which country this band actually comes from. But what does it matter? Hanzel and Gretyl have delivered another fine album, showing plenty of humour along the way. It hasn’t quite got the consistent brilliance of ‘Zwanzig Zwölf’, but they haven’t lost their touch, either, and with a decent pool of influences to draw from, it never gets dull either.

## Heimatærde – Gotteskrieger (2005)

Well, I’ve heard it all now. Ever since that bizarre experience that was M’era Luna 2002, I’ve had this thing for bands that bear some kind of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century influence. I’ve seen martial neofolk shows, crazy, over-the-top medieval metal performances, as well as some bands so esoteric that they seem to exist purely as some kind of competition to see who can boast the most obscure influences. And now we have Heimatærde, a band that could have easily have joined the over-populated VNV-backlashing terror EBM/electro-industrial scene of the moment, but seem to have chosen a uniquely old-fashioned method to make themselves sound distinctive.

The album sleeve makes a few suggestions as to the content – darkened images of armour, chainmail and a complete absence of any of the digitally-enhanced photoshopped-to-fuck techno-dystopia imagery that’s oh-so-common on so-called industrial albums these days. The booklet also offers background info on the concept behind each individual song. It’s all in German, but they’ve kindly provided an English translation here. I think it loses a little in translation, but frankly I’m really just appreciative of the effort that has clearly been put in. This project clearly has a purpose of sorts, beyond the obvious creation of bangin’ industrial dance music.

Oh, yes. The music. Almost forgotten about that. The album opens with the brooding intro of ‘Non Nobis’, a dismally dark, mantra-like opening, with sounds of medieval battle in the background. It sets the tone of the album, but it’s all really just a precursor to ‘Die Offenbarung’, with its genuinely ‘bouncy’ industrial rhythm topped off with the sound of choirs and wailing pipes! Imagine Corvus Corax remixed by Suicide Commando, and you’d be close, but let’s face it – short of any major advancement in sound synthesis, this is about as distinctive as this genre gets these days, so enjoy it.

The beat continues to pound heavily through ‘Endlos’, though this time the traditional instruments are kept to the intro, prefacing a hard, fast and strong dose of harsh EBM, complete with the heavy vocal distortion and slightly cheesy lead synths (you know the routine by now). They then abandon the traditional influences entirely for ‘Du Fehlst Mir’, which also makes this one of the least distinctive tracks – it’s a little repetitive and possibly suffers from over-sparse vocals. It’s not exactly weak – just lacking the edge that other tracks on the album have in abundance.

'Gott Ist Mit Uns' takes the tempo down a notch or three, laden with spoken word samples, minor-key pads and a plucked-string style lead. It's a little bit :Wumpscut:-esque in places, but it also reminds me of one of the more downtempo Velvet Acid Christ tracks, though I can't for the life of me remember which one. Then it's time for the catchiest track on the whole album – 'Deus Lo Volt'. It's another uptempo stomp, but this time set to the sound of the 'Palaestinalied' – a song that'll be familiar to anyone who's into the 'mittelalter' scene and all the traditional adaptations that come with it. 'Mörder' completes the first half of the album, another fully contemporary EBM track, but making more use of bespoke vocals than most of the other tracks on offer.

The second half of the album essentially offers more of the same. The full-throttle surge of 'Gib Mir' sticks out as the most obvious anthem, though depending on your tastes, you may prefer the slow, drawn-out stompy duo of 'Immortalis' and 'Ich Hab Die Nacht Geträumet' or possibly 'Wiedergänger' (though I personally thought this track was a little bit 'fragmented' in structure). The traditional instruments are less conspicuous in the later stages of the album, though 'Die Läuterung' creates a spine-tingling mixture of male choirs, whistling winds and a haunting piano melody.

It's only on the penultimate track 'Gibt Es Wirklich Einen Gott' that the pipes make a return, appearing late in the song as a means to drive it to it's conclusion. This links in nicely to the album's code 'In Nomine Domine', the only fully 'traditional' track on the album, with few synths, just pipes and a good deal of mittelalter-style drumming (it ain't ALL pounding beats, you know). It's an interesting way to see out the album, but in some ways it makes me regret that there wasn't MORE medieval sounds on this CD, with a greater variety of instruments appearing on more tracks. Heimatærde are clearly onto a good thing here, and this is a really enjoyable CD to listen to, but I'm hoping this is just the beginning.

## Heimatærde – Kadavergehorsam (2006)

Ashlar Von Megalon brings us the second Heimatærde album less than two years after the first. It is in many respects a continuation of 'Gotteskrieger', the enclosed booklet continuing the story that seems set to thread together this project's entire work. Since no English translation is currently available, however, I'm unable to establish exactly what progress has been made narrative-wise. So instead I'll turn my attention to the music, and into those respects at least, Heimatærde do not disappoint.

The shawm and choir pad intro 'Gedanken' sets the tone, leading into 'Lebloser Koerper', demonstrating once more Ash's talent for combining a hard beat core with medieval melodies. The song features contributions from the Austrian band 'Winterstahl', one of five 'guest stars' to cameo on this album. Elsewhere, X-Fusion help build 'Morituri Saltant' into a no-holds-barred aggrotech head-rush, even squeezing in growling guitar in amongst all the rhythm loops. ASP and Die In Winter guest on vocals in the very late stages of the album, offering some respite from the harsher vocals heard elsewhere, although the most successful collaboration is with Xotox on 'Die Schalcht', the funereal chord progressions and soundbites a surprisingly neat match for the relentless underlying rhythm.

Even when working along, Ashlar comes up triumphs – be it another two further fine examples 'mittelalter-meets-EBM' on 'Jerusalem' and 'Verflucht', the 'schaffel' rhythm on 'Koenig Von Thule', the more chmaltzy e y stomp'n'snarl of 'Eins Sein' (echoing of Snuff Machinery-era [:SITD:]) or the stripped-down 'pax vobiscum' version of 'Gott Will Es'. Even the more straightforward tracks usually see some kind of string or choral enhancement. It's one of those albums that renews your hope in a dying genre – rather than loading itself full of dancefloor smashes that can be hard to tell apart come sunrise,

this genre-hopping concept album might yet be the best thing to happen to the harder end of the industrial dance spectrum in years.

## Helium Vola – Liod (2004)

The first Helium Vola album gave us the minor (but highly significant) hit 'Omnis Mundi Creatura'. Odd as it was to dance to Latin chants in the middle of Slimelight, it was nonetheless significant in proving that Ernst Horn was still every bit as keen in continuing his medieval/electronic fusion work post-Qntal. This is just as well, as with the future-pop/harsh EBM bubble clearly only a few more years away from bursting, any alternative goth-friendly dance styles need to be taken on board and nurtured rather than left victim to contractual squabbles.

Of course, nothing Ernst Horn ever does comes out quite the way you expect it too. And the debut album proved that point very effectively, for whilst it had moments of beauty and ear-catching creativity, it also suffered from some overly indulgent moments, the instrumentation either too minimal or too bizarre to adequately support the vocals. An hour in length, it was simply an album that needed a bit of trimming down. And has he learned his lessons for the follow-up? Well, not really!

If anything, this beast is even more of a epic sprawl than the last one. 20 tracks, clocking at a grand total of 71 minutes, 23 seconds! Sabine Lutzenberger once again stars as lead singer, her classically-trained voice carrying a sense of authority and confidence, essential qualities if you're going to be singing ancient texts in obscure languages that few members of your audience are likely to be familiar with. She is ably accompanied by a number of other vocalists, each getting an occasional solo to themselves.

In terms of lyrical content, excerpts from Carmina Burana and the Merseburger Zaubersprüche, both favourites for medieval revivalists across Europe, make regular appearances, whilst the remainder are drawn from old religious texts and traditional European poetry. Additional pre-20<sup>th</sup> century flavour is provided by Ricardo Delfino on harp and hurdy-gurdy, with Jost Hecker providing cello. All the ingredients are thus in place. What's Ernst and his vast bank of keyboards going to do about it?

First let's deal with the songs that really stand out – scattered as they are across the album. Lead single 'Veni Veni' is probably the most accessible track on the CD – a kind of mid-tempo synth-pop sung in Latin, multiple layers of vocals with a simple-but-effective electronic pulse plus a fierce and wholly unexpected drum break. Anyone who can take divine verse 'Veni, Veni, Venias' and turn it into the key hook in a dark electro number must be worthy of some attention.

Other highlights include the closing number 'In Lichter Farbe Steht Der Wald', a huge, rollicking jig, an electronic recreation of folk dances of old, with alternating vocalists driving the song on and on through its near-eight minute duration. Another one that grabs you is 'Pritemps', a light, floaty thing that dances around the speaker cones, Sabine's voice dancing around Horn's delicate little rhythm in a playful fashion.

Also notable are a couple of the harder-edged songs – 'Vagantenbeichte', for instance, featuring the only entirely male vocal of the album as well as a thumping beat that'll keep the dark'n'dancey crowd happy should any DJ have the courage to play such a thing. Also falling into this category is 'Chumemin' – an ominous darkwave-style piece with a rumbling bassline, some angry industrial percussion and staccato-type vocals.

And no Horn-assembled album would be complete without some moments of out-and-out electronic weirdness. We get one in the form of 'Ich Was Ein Chint So Wolgetan', which

starts off innocuously enough, but eventually transmutes into a form of synthetic quiriness that reminds one of Laurie Anderson's 'Big Science' opus (anyone else know that one?). I might also mention 'Zur Heilung', which turns a Merseburg except into a schizophrenic 'what the hell is it going to do next?' concept that no words can adequately describe.

This still leaves a large number of tracks that go for a more minimal, dare I say 'ethereal' sound. Highlights amongst these include 'La Fille', a largely a capella arrangement, featuring four vocalists switching from singing in unison to a round-style structure and back again. Also notable is 'Frauenkalge', which opens with Sabine solo, with an ever-advancing rhythm eventually marching into earshot to match (but never dominate) our lady's virtuoso trills, before fading once more to give the song a symmetry of sorts.

So far, so good, you might think. There is still of course the problem I hinted at earlier, namely that of structure. Because in addition to these aforementioned highlights, we also get four short instrumentals ('Liod 1-4'), all of which are fairly typical Ernst Horn self-indulgence. Despite occasional moments of promise when the cello or harps player, they're otherwise rather insubstantial, and really don't add anything to the album as a whole, breaking up the flow of a CD which already has enough for even the most fanatical Vola fan to get their teeth into.

The same applies (but to a lesser extent) to a number of the songs that go for the more authentic traditional sound. Whilst there's no doubting that the renditions of 'Lucente Stella', 'Engel' and 'Dormi' (a several others) are accomplished in a musical sense, they often sound rather lost in amongst the more outspoken tracks. If anything, there's enough material for two separate projects here, because whilst these songs have moments of beauty reminiscent of Dead Can Dance, they tend to get lost in the ebb and flow of the album.

This album is still likely to be of interest to most 'mittelalter' revivalists out there, and it's often heavenly tone could attract a much larger audience if the right people hear it, though the idiosyncratic use of electronics here isn't likely to allow Ernst to 'do a Delerium' and start climbing the charts again, unless he gets a VNV remix or something. But that would be contrary to the whole spirit of this project. It's not easy a listen as it might have been, but it'll reward those prepared to dig out the highlights. Though I've already done that for you, haven't I?

## High Level Static – Carrier Waves (2011)

My main memory of 'Shining', the first High Level Static album released in 2003, was a track called "Shine (Four Words)". Musically, it was the usual European trance/synthpop/EBM thing we used to call 'futurepop', but the track utilised some interesting turns of phrase. It's something of a factor when bands write in English as their second language that they often tread the fine line between 'trite' and 'inspired', and this song ticked all the boxes. I therefore set about listening to their latest recording with sincere hopes that lightning could possibly strike twice.

And once we got past the fluttering synths, Steven Hawking samples and movie clips of "Prana", there was indeed a return to High Level Static's rather unique command of the English language on 'Thoughtforms I'. The opening lines "I Have A Gift For You, But I Don't Think You'll Like It" is hardly memorable, but as the soaring chorus strings join the mix, the lyricism becomes more and more inspired, finishing on a "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star" reference that is nothing if not charming.

I say this as "I Am Beneath Your Skin" is just a succession of lyrical clichés backed by the usual mid-tempo thump, succession of arpeggios and filter-swept chords. It's standard

issue futurepop of the most tedious variety. “Psygon” uses much the same techniques, but it’s up-tempo nature actually results in an improved song, the various synth parts coalescing well to drive the song onward through it’s duration, even if the end result is something that is technically sound but lacking in any real spark.

The tempos stay high for ‘Eloise’, which I was pleased to find was not a cover (let’s face it, that would NEVER have worked), but the song they deliver is just a dull assault of kick drums, yet-more throbbing synths and vocals buried so deep in the mix that it actually took me three listens to work out that it wasn’t a cover after all. And that’s too many times. More interesting is “FTL Drive”, an enjoyable enough mix of power chords, samples and various cybernetic bleeps and burbles.

“Energy Drain” finally sees High Level Static leave their preferred four-beat behind and program something more breakbeat-oriented, whilst retaining the trancey synth parts. It was certainly an interesting experiment, but the various elements of the song just didn’t always sound like they were intended for the same song. Then comes ‘Blade Runner’, which isn’t as exciting as it sounds – a reasonable Eurosynthpop composition, sure, but with lyrics so generic that I couldn’t tell if the song was about until the overused Roy Batty sample at the end. Maybe the point with lyrics so nebulous is that the song can be about whatever you damn well please?

“Ghosts (Inside)” is the last track of note on the album, making good use of a chiptune lead and a more confident vocal performance, this pairing guaranteeing that this song at least needs to be heard again. After that the album never recovers, with “Wounded” proving that High Level Static just can’t do the ‘slow and menacing’ concept that is required once on every album of this style to provide the necessary variation in ‘feel’ to prevent monotony creeping in (Hint: It already has. Long ago).

“Tone Tron” is three minutes of synth pulses, spoken word vocals and various snatches of ear candy that should have sounded interesting but never really achieves much. “Vorax” makes another attempt at programming an aggressive breakbeat, but once again the song comes across as a conceptual mish-mash, hopping from idea to idea without ever really letting anything develop. “Thoughtforms II” bears some musical similarity to it’s sibling track earlier on the album, but the synth programming is less inspired here, and is hence a lesser track. This just leaves quasi-classical outro “01:12” – nice try, but I’m afraid VNV Nation were ending albums like this as far back as the mid-90s.

So, in summary this is a disappointing showing for a project that really should have advanced its sound more than it has in the past eight years. Of the fourteen tracks here, I’d say I’d only return to “Thoughtforms I” and “Ghosts (Inside)”, with at most three others I could listen to again without getting bored in the first 30 seconds. Or to paraphrase my favourite High Level Static song from the first album.....”Four Simple Words – I Love You Not”.

## **HIM – Love Metal (2003)**

Finland hasn’t always been seen as a breeding ground for rock bands, but the truth is that they’re getting better at it year by year. You’d have to ask the German chart compilers for a precise analysis, but it’s suffices here to say that I no longer think of Finland as the ‘dull bit’ of Scandinavia. And if there’s one band that synonymous with this recent rise to international recognition, it’s The 69 Eyes. Sorry – H.I.M.

This is in fact the fourth album for Finland’s finest. There was ‘Greatest Lovesongs’ – a rough run for the real thing on ‘Razorblade Romance’. Then came ‘Deep Shadows and Brilliant Highlights’ – the point where the songwriting had fully matured, but at a cost to the

level of 'oomph' – the production was just too 'nice'. On this album, however – they manage to combine the best elements of all their previous works to make one cohesive experience.

The differences strike you before you've even opened the case. No more teen-goth baiting images of Ville with his shirt open and a fag in his hand. Just a black sleeve with their trademark 'Heartagram' logo in gold. It doesn't escape references to cigarettes ENTIRELY – they've only done and copied the JPS colour scheme. The fold out inlay isn't all that readable, but it doesn't matter as you can make out most of the words in the actual songs anyway.

Musically, too, the band seem set on making their mark straight off with opener 'Buried Alive By Love', launching straight into a up-tempo riff and arching harmonics, giving lie to rumours that they've gone all soft on us. Ville's singing is still as heartfelt as ever, with the 'If I Die Before I Wake...' chorus working better than you'd expect such a cliché line to do. They calm down a bit after this, but 'Soul on Fire' does feature bursts of frantic rock energy between all the sentimental bits.

The band are happy to toe their own line where it suits the song – the rich, yearning 'The Funeral of Hearts' for instance, is every bit the H.I.M. meisterwork the title suggests. The sound of the album is naturally still guitar-led, with an impressive range of sound coaxed from the stringed axes in question – the cheesy fuzzbox lead of 'Sweet Pandemonium' commits a crime for which lesser bands might be hung, but Ville's boys get away with it.

The bloopy keyboards heard intermittently on previous works are present here more prominently in places, most notably on 'Beyond Redemption', where a delicate synth does a neat call-and-reply with the guitar before building up in a swirling mass into a well-placed guitar solo (maybe the best middle eight I've heard in a song by this group). The keyboards also make notable contributions to 'The Sacrament of Hearts', which also features a driving piano line, and also to 'Circle of Fear' (which also features verses with a very Floodland-era Sisters of Mercy tone, though the chorus is pure H.I.M.).

'Endless Dark' is another track that invokes a trad-goth feeling, this time sounding like something The Mission came up with some year back (and do I like it? Hell, yeah!). And of course no album with 'Love' in the title would be complete without a couple of really slow ones, and we get them in the form of 'This Fortress of Tears' (which to be fair intersperses the oh-so-soft love song with some thick, grinding guitar) and also the final track 'The Path', a vast, anthemic closer underpinned with some delicate electric piano.

The digipak version features a bonus track 'Love's Requiem', notable for being one of the few bass-led track in the H.I.M. repertoire – fortunately, it's also climatic enough not to inflict an *chmaltzy* on 'The Path'. In fact, the whole album works consistently enough for this not to be a danger. The only flaw I can find is the inevitable one – these are LOVE songs, at the end of the day, and too many of them might make you sick.

But it's still a great album. It rocks harder than 'Deep Shadows....' whilst keeping the musical integrity. Sure, it'll sell massively to all the obvious markets (angsty teenage rock chicks, goth rockers, the Germans) but that's no bad thing. This is GOOD music, and whilst they're not going to revolutionise rock or anything like that, there's no doubt that H.I.M. are onto something good here, and in terms of balancing their 'love' and 'metal' elements, well, it looks like they've finally cracked it.

## Hocico – Hate Never Dies (2003)

Ten years of Hocico! I would like to sing 'Happy Birthday' for 'em, but as that song is copyrighted with royalties still being actively collected, I don't think that'd be a good idea. Well, I could scratch up the vocals, true to the spirit of this duo, and it'd scarcely be recognisable, but I still reckon the original authors would have me up in court. Fun as it would be to make a courtroom listen to electro-industrial music, I just don't have time for shit like that. I've got reviews to write.

Oh, sorry....got a bit lost there. Back to the plot.....

Hocico have chosen to mark their decade of sonic terrorism with a couple of celebratory releases. There's a limited edition boxed set, containing the CD reviewed here plus three further CDs containing the band's old demo tapes. A little research indicated exactly what those demos were recorded with, and since I have to buy the CDs I review (unlike some), I elected to skip over 'the big one'. I'm mean, I still haven't listened to the last bit of that Velvet Underground 5-disc box thingy yet.

For those without the desire to hunt down the remaining copies of this set, as well of those reading in the far future when this'll be fetching Burning Empires-like sums on E-Bay, there's also this, the remix album sold on it's own. A quick scan over the tracklisting reveals that most of the songs chosen for remix are relatively recent creations, with only triply-remixed 'Without A God' pre-dating 'Signos De Aberracion'. Even then, they managed to skip 'Instincts of Perversion', a track ripe for a high-class remix.

Meanwhile, the remixers of choice here are, let us say, 'safe choices', or at least as safe as skull-fucking electro-industrial can be. It'll surprise no-one that Suicide Commando makes an appearance. CombiChrist crops up, too. God Module – present and correct. Aslan Faction? Welcome to the party. And no industrial-remix album would be complete without a Daniel Myer contribution, and sure enough, Haujobb is a player here as well. And case you were wondering, cyberkiddies, VNV Nation were turned away at the door. No place for future-pop here.

What we're essentially left with here, then, is a bunch of similar sounding musicians trying to rework music by an act that sounds a lot like them. And lets be fair about it, most of 'em make a pretty good job. Altering the drums, vocal effects and synth lines, each remixer manages to incorporate at least a little of their own style into the originals, whilst still showing due respect to the original. The appeal of this album thus lies in hearing tweaked versions of select Hocico tracks, getting a feel for what they might have sounded like had they been produced in an almost-recognisable parallel universe.

And, yes, there are highlights. Suicide Commando does a pretty good job at powering 'Forgotten Tears' to a new level, whilst Haujobb succeeds in not fucking it up like they did with 'Headhunter 2000' a few years back (still my most hated remix ever), going for some quirky drum pattern variations and equally odd mix-science. The three takes on the antediluvian 'Without A God' are generally successful, despite some overpowering kick-drum distortion on KiEw's version.

Aslan Faction's attempt at 'Untold Blasphemies' is a reasonable exercise in increasing the stompiness factor, whilst CombiChrist and God Module take 'Ruptura' in two different directions, with Jasyn Bangert winning out over Combi with his 'melodic noise' slant. The only really radical approaches are by Terminal Choice and Solitary Experiments, the former throwing lots of power-chord action into 'Ladykiller', true to recent TC style, whilst Solitary Experiments present the only concession to EBMwave, producing a soaring epic trance lead, whilst still keeping the vocal screeching and pummelling drums intact.



There's also a bit of live material to sweeten the package. There's a reasonable take on 'Forgotten Tears' following on from the remixes, a fairly accomplished 'extended' version of the original, but also indicative of a band that sound too much like the studio when on stage. There's also two MPEG video clips. The 1996 Mexico City shot of 'Hell On Earth' is poor in terms of sound, picture and camerawork, though the version of 'Odio Bajo el Alma' from Hildesheim's aircraft hangar in 1999 is watchable, benefiting from an altogether more professional production.

And so ends the mini-celebration of the Hocico legacy so far. A greater selection of remixer styles would have helped, as would have a wider selection of tracks to remix. What's done is done however, and if the full box set really isn't for you, this'll do nicely to fill in the collection gap until Racso and Erk come up with something new. Now, if someone would lend me the full version, I might actually be up for tackling that one after all....

## How To Destroy Angels (2010)

Trent Reznor is obviously making up for lost time. 2005's 'With Teeth' saw a creative return for Nine Inch Nails after a 6-year gap. A succession of NIN releases would follow thereafter, only for the project to go on hiatus in 2009. And now Trent surprises us again, in the sense that one of his side-projects actually sees release, and after only a year of waiting, too! And it's free! Angels 1, Tapeworm 0.

Of course, as Trent Reznor is/was/will be Nine Inch Nails, you might wonder why he's bothered with a different name for the project. It's probably due to the fact that whilst Trent may still be the brains behind this project, he's not fronting it in addition. He's got his wife (Mariqueen Maandig) to handle lead vocals, whilst Trent and latter-day NIN collaborator Atticus Ross. The name 'How To Destroy Angels' dates back to an ancient Coil single, which was either chosen to indicate that yes, Trent and Co DO know what 'proper industrial' music is, or just because it was a snappy title. Given the number of insane suggestions out there about what 'Nine Inch Nails' really means, I'm inclined to believe that they just thought it sounded 'right'.

What we have here is a six-track collection with the strongest tracks bookending it. 'The Space In Between' kicks off with menacing layers of synth, off-centre drum stabs, with the song building up to a climax by it's conclusion. 'A Drowning' concludes the set with delicate piano melodies and a delicate synth throb, a track that brings back memories of 'Right Where It Belongs' from five years previous. Many have copied NIN's industrial rock with varying degrees have success, but it seems only Trent can apply his own techniques to downtempo resignation.

The central portion of the collection (can I call it an eEP?) thus consists of four tracks which hit upon the sound most people were probably expecting from the project – namely NIN tracks with a female singer. Musically, they aim for the complex rhythmic patterns, bespoke textures and processed guitar sounds which formed the basis of most of the 'album tracks' on recent NIN releases. Or to put it another way, these tracks are certainly of interest to those into the Reznor School of Music Production, but they're not exactly the kind of anthemic floor-fillers in the vein of 'Head Like A Whole', 'Closer' and 'The Hand That Feeds'.

Of these track, 'BBB' is probably the most memorable due to it's 'Big Black Boots' finale, where a hitherto-complex track pulls everything together for one final march towards the song's conclusion – the remaining three songs I could take or leave, and given that my mp3 player is nearly full, I'll probably pick 'leave'. The collection as a whole, however, is probably worth the effort of downloading – it's an indication of an interest new musical

direction for Reznor and Co, even if here they've only partially escaped the obvious comparisons with their better-known alias, and didn't quite manage to hit all the right notes along the way.

### **Icon Of Coil – Serenity Is The Devil (2000)**

The first Icon of Coil album might be classed as EBM by some, but the degree of influence from genres such as trance, techno and synth-pop is such that such a classification actually seems to be rather far-fetched. There's obvious influence from fellow Norwegians Apoptygma Berzerk, as well as the increasingly ubiquitous VNV Nation, although Icon of Coil have enough ideas of their own to avoid being accused of being a blatant rip-off. Andy LaPlegua's vocals are relatively competent (considering he was previously a hardcore punk vocalist), although lyrically he tends to alternate between a rather catchy turn of phrase and a rather nebulous collection of lyrical snippets that masquerade as songs.

'Regret' is probably the most successful track here, getting the mix between hard beats, synthetic ear candy and song structure just about right. Other dancefloor-friendly offerings include 'Former Self' (my personal favourite in a lyrical sense) and the hammering finale 'Floorkiller'. There are a couple of slower tracks of interest, including 'Down on Me', reminiscent of Underworld's more subtle moments in both an instrumental and vocal sense, as well as the Computorgirl-sung 'Situations Like These'. They do slip up on occasion – 'You Just Died' is just tedious, whilst 'Fiction' represents a weak attempt at a harsh distorted-beat concept which comes over as a clumsy attempt to keep at least some of their elitist industrial credentials intact.

### **Icon Of Coil – The Soul Is In The Software (2002)**

The EBM/synth-pop/trance crossover sound practised by Icon of Coil now has its own categorisation – future pop. Whilst the term was originally intended to describe the output of VNV Nation and Apoptygma Berzerk (the influence of both still very evident here, of course), it seems to fit the sound of Icon of Coil even better. This is, after all, a form of 'pop' music (it's way too melodic to pass itself as industrial anything), admittedly a type of befitting a futuristic culture full of robots, computers, Access Virus synthesiers and clubs full of cyber-chicks with day-glo hair extensions. The album does seem to get off to a shaky start, though, with opener 'Thillcapsule' (preceded in the track listing by the pointless 27-second 'Comment') sounding directionless and confused, pointing up rather than offsetting the doggerel-like lyrics.

Luckily, the album gets up to speed soon after this is out of the way, with the centrepiece undoubtedly 'Access and Amplify', the hard beats and trancey stabs an affirmed call to arms for the worlds glowstick-waving population. 'Other Half of Me' also succeeds along similar musical lines, whilst 'Disconnect' makes a better job of the harder-edged beat concept that they overplayed on 'Fiction' from the debut. My personal favourite is 'Stimulated', the impassioned closing number which stands out as one of the most 'purposeful' Icon of Coil songs to date, a welcome development for a band whose lyrics can often seem quite vague. Not that things like that matter when the drinks'n'drugs are flowing, the glowsticks glowing, the lights are shining, the smoke machine is billowing and this Norwegian trio are proving the soundtrack.

### **Icon Of Coil – Machines Are Us (2004)**

'Machines Are Us', the third Icon of Coil album is for the most part a continuation of the sound they developed on the last two, but with fourteen tracks instead of the usual ten, they've had to diversify a little to survive, even this is still for the most part out-and-out

future pop. Andy LaPlegua offers a more strident vocal stance on a couple of tracks, including opening track 'Remove/Replace' and lead single 'Android', whose jarring chorus really shows the teeth behind IoC's 'weiberelectro' smile. 'Mono:Overload' also tries to sound harsh and discordant, but it's a confused mess that simply takes too long to achieve anything.

Of the more melodic tracks, 'Existence In Progress' is the most 'typical' of the groups established style, although the real out-and-out anthem is 'Dead Enough For Life', proof if any were needed that originality is optional if the song is strong enough to stand on its own. Another personal favourite is 'Shelter', mainly thanks to the spiralling, hands-in-the-air chorus whose dynamics are pitched just about perfectly. A couple of decent slow songs in 'Not Important' and 'Less' help bring a little more variety to proceedings, although 'Pursuit' fall a little short in terms of getting a 242-esque call-and-reply concept going, whilst the ridiculous 'Wiretrip' should have been shot at birth. It's therefore not quite as consistent as 'The Soul Is In The Software', but at the same time Icon of Coil needed to try something at least vaguely new considering the increasingly saturated state of the future pop scene, and they've at least done enough here to keep a step ahead of the advancing imitations.

NOTE: The limited edition of this album comes in a nice but slightly unwieldy double-length case, with the exclusive 'SoundDivEP' included, featuring one exclusive song plus 5 remixes, although these are generally derived from the albums lesser tracks, so don't really have much lasting value.

## **Icon Of Coil – Uploaded & Remixed (2004)**

With both Seb Komor and Andy LaPlegua busy working on their side-projects, the Icon of Coil flag is kept flying by this remix collection, offering a series of remixes of songs from the first two Icon of Coil albums by a number of relatively high-profile scene names, plus a couple of 'exclusive' songs to round the thing off. Impressive as the tracklisting looks, the results prove to be a comparative disappointment. One might have expected Icon of Coil's songs, which are generally structurally sound but sometimes coming over as rather generic in terms of execution, would lend themselves well to remix treatment. But it wasn't to be.

Only a few of the remixers really manage to keep the spirit of the original songs alive, Combichrist and Funker Vogt putting in competent but not exactly worldshaking mixes of 'Regret' and 'Stimulated' respectively, whilst the Isle of Crows remix of 'Everything Is Real' features some amusing retro-analogue noodling. Some contributors suffer from the lack of a particularly interesting song to work with – for example, Apoptygma Berzerk's talents are largely wasted on the indifferent B-side 'Repeat It'. Other remixing artists just tear the guts out of the originals – the Fgfc928 mix of 'Access and Amplify' left a gutless shadow of its former self, for instance. The two exclusive tracks 'Been There' and 'Tb Memory' as also disappointing, both trance-oriented tracks that really don't have much to do with Icon of Coil, and don't stand up too well in the genre they're trying to mimic either.

NOTE: If you manage to pick up the limited edition version of this album, you also get the 5-track 'Shelter EP' as a bonus. This was one of the strongest tracks from 'Machines Are Us', and hard-edged 'quasi-noise' remixes from Combichrist, Analogue Brain and Soman are a nice bonus, though they're not good enough to truly justify searching this version out.

## **Icon Of Coil – Android (2003)**

This is the preview single to Icon of Coil's 'Machines Like Us' album, an album which could either launch the Norwegian trio to VNV-like levels of fame, or sink them in the future pop

ocean. Frankly, I was starting to get just a little bored of Icon of Coil. Good at what they do, but not enough variety to be worth listening to for more than a track or two at a time.

Thankfully, it seems, they may just be about to save themselves, if this single is anything to go by, thanks to a menacing bassline, whirring elements of discord and the angriest chorus Andy LePlegua's sung since his punk-rock days. The lyrics, as always, may or may not mean something, but ultimately it's all in the delivery, and a band that looked like they were slipping into vocal trance territory seem to have reclaimed some of that industrial anger.

Of the B-sides, the most notable is the band's cover of 'Headhunter', a favourite at their live shows but only now released on CD. Considering that it dates from their 'Serenity Is The Devil' era, it's doesn't sound all that dated, sharing more than a few similarities with Apoptygma Berzerk's remix of the original. The Icon of Coil treatment might therefore be anathema to hardcore fans the EBM classics, but I just find it intensely catchy. I know I should hate it, but I don't!

There's also two remixes of the title track, one each by Moonitor and Combichrist. Those who know their Norwegian electronics will be aware that both of these are side-projects of Icon of Coil members, which is surprising considering that these boys are probably well regarded enough to get their pick of the remixers. It wouldn't have hurt, either, as the Moonitor mix is a fairly standard progressive trance treatment, knocking all the stuffing out of the original, whilst the Combichrist version just sticks the vocals over the top of a run-of-the-mill noise loop, the two never really meshing.

So, as singles go it's not all that bad but still indicative of exactly why the singles market is declining. The title track is good, and it was nice to get 'Headhunter' at last, but the remixes aren't up to much. Buy this now and you'll be getting a song that out on album by the time you read this, a song that should have been released three years ago, and two homebrew fillers. If you have to have 'Headhunter' (as I did), then pick it up, otherwise just buy the album.

## **Imminent Starvation – Nord (1999)**

The genre once known as 'power noise' (and now by more tags than I care to mention, at least not here) is an extreme musical style which naturally attracts extreme opinions. Those who have a taste for synthetic aural pain seemingly can't get enough of it, whilst pretty much everyone else wouldn't touch it with someone else's. There is a caveat to this – some power noise can often border stylistically with the IDM/Braindance style, the realm of the Aphex Twin and his ilk, knob-twiddlers all of them, yet not so inclined to inflict quite as much damage to their listeners ear-drums (and thus can actually be found on the shelves of regular record stores).

It is for this reason that Imminent Starvation's 'Nord' album remains the most recommended of all starting points one can have when trying power noise for the first time. Oh, sure, it's got some pretty lethal pounding industrial dance tracks on it, some OF the best there are. But rather than load his album with such cuts, Oliver Moreau has included some less intense, less repetitive pieces, just to prove how diverse a genre this is. The only guarantee is that every piece on this CD is likely to piss at least one person off within a 10-mile radius, and it's my belief such adventurous audio craftsmanship should be rewarded.

However, those of you eager to find the dancefloor need only flick straight to 'Tentack One', take whatever drugs you're planning on taking, turn up the volume and then move your body in whatever way takes your fancy. It's the kind of track every album of this kind needs

– no matter how much experimentation you indulge in, you need at least one solid, distorted, mid-tempo beat pounding away for practically forever, over which are laid as much banging, crashing, seething and scraping as you can squeeze out of your sampler. ‘Tentack One’ does all that, and does it for eight minutes. It’s the nearest thing any Ant-Zen project has got to an anthem, and thus stands as a pretty essential part of any collection of extreme electronic musics.

The man’s mastery of the loop doesn’t stop here by any means. ‘Lost Highway (Exit)’ proves that in sometimes is beneficial to re-tread old ground, the jerky loop from the previous albums ‘Lost Highway 45’ finding a new home amid the deep drones of this particular update. The use of pad-oriented chords (choral, stringed or ‘miscellaneous’) is a technique much in evidence on the album, with the gothic tones of ‘Vni’ adding a new dimension to the tinnitus-inducing electronica on top, whilst the stuttering ‘Parle’ also uses a softer FM-esque chord progression in the one track where you’d least expect it.

As for the IDM connection, there’s ‘Aries’, an sharp, airy percussion line mated to some electronic squeaking and a slightly-less-fucked-up-than-usual bass drum creating the kind of semi-structured cut that wouldn’t have gone amiss on an Aphex Twin 12”. ‘Ren’ is the other track that owes at least something to the Warp/Rephlex brigade, a mix of metallic creaking, bowel-churning bassline and an almost bouncy drum beat, later bringing in a surprisingly bright and clean synth chime, which tinkles away underneath as if nothing else was going on.

There’s also a couple of ventures into ambient industrial territory – lots of breezy, windswept echoes fading in and out with other sounds brought in as and when they are needed. The desolate ‘Of’ is one such example, focusing as it does on one echoed percussion sound, repeated ad infinitum. The other ‘quiet’ one is the closing number ‘Please’, a short burst of wavering distortion with a rare audible vocal – ‘Please Contact Us – We Are Your Friends’. Well, that’s nice to know.....

There’s three more tracks to cover. Album opener ‘Nor’ is particularly strong – it fades in bleeping like an radio-alarm clock without an ‘Off’ switch, but as additional noises are mixed in and tweaked accordingly, we eventually find ourselves listening to the warning klaxon to forewarn the end of the earth, an almighty wall of sound that doesn’t even need the drum loop it doesn’t have. ‘Oise’ builds itself round lots of submarine noises plus an increasingly noisy loop that’s fairly typical of the album of a whole. This leaves the 10-minute tour de force of ‘Ire’ – which sort of does everything all the other tracks do, only for longer.

So, who should buy this album. I see three key markets: 1) The people who thought that ‘Braindance’ was becoming too trivial and tongue-in-cheek. 2) Long-term industrial fans who have been dismayed by the increasingly pop-oriented direction their chosen style has taken. 3) People who just, for whatever reason, have a taste for this kind of noise-laden headfuck. Ok, so it’s ain’t gonna sell as much as some of the discs I’ve reviewed here, even those I’ve given relatively poor marks to. But who wants to do that? This is real underground music, and if all Ant-Zen releases were this good, the label might just get the attention of the three market groups mentioned above.

## **Individual Totem – Kyria 13 (2013)**

It’s been a while since I had a release this hard to review. I have a degree of familiarity with Individual Totem’s on-off existence, this being their first album in six years and only their second of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. And everything I’ve heard from them before (not every album but a representative sample), follows the same pattern of not keeping to a pattern at all! You’ll have to look elsewhere for obvious club anthems or accessible song structures.

That's no bad thing of course. Industrial music started out with the intention of breaking down the standard techniques of the music industry. But you still need to understand why the rules are there in the first place before you break them, and on opening track "Croxxers", they fall short of mixing the immiscible. The cries of the song title combined with disembodied murmurs of "We Are Immortal" and various other statements, set to an unobtrusive beat and little melodies SHOULD be a route to a decent dark electronic soundtrack. But it doesn't quite work out in the final mix. And I can't quite put my finger on what's wrong.

And then all lines up again correctly on 'Lost Souls', the harder rhythm providing a structure over which which the synth bursts and snarling cries can really fly. The composition employs a false ending halfway through before hitting back harder than before, a real demonstration on how to get stop-start dynamics to work. "The Great Mistake" goes for a synthpoppier vocal, again succeeding on putting a novel twist on a often-used style, though the vocals are too far down in the mix when they should be the most prominent part of the song.

"Council Of The Wise" takes us firmly back into 'weird' territory, a kind of retro-ambient chord progression, new age synth washes and unintelligible processed vocals, with a cameo from a wildly effected drum loop in the later stages. I don't even know if I actually like this one. And just when I thought they couldn't manage any more surprises, they go all neofolk on us with "Go To War". Acoustic guitar, martial drum rolls and touches of orchestration? Is there anything they won't do?

"Mindworms" is probably the closest we get to a 'typical' Individual Totem track, in that it reminds me of the more memorable aspects of their previous albums, a solid-if-intermittent backbeat over which various electronic devices are fired, though the overly repetitive shouts of "You, Get Out Of My Head" grate after a few minutes. "Bluesky" heads back to the disembodies synthpop style, but lyrically it's just too bizarre for me to be able to relate to.

Three short tracks see us to the end, "No Pressure" resembling elements of about four different dance tunes from 1990s without actually resembling any of them, "Astral" totally nailing the slow, atmospheric, beautiful, redemptive, whatever-words-you-use-to-describe it style, and then finally "Wintermute" brings us home with a minimal composition, the use of chorusing resulting in the only moment on the album where the vocals really sit at the front of mix (only "Go To War" got close).

And that's as close as I can come to describing the indescribable. Credit is definitely due, of course, for showing absolutely no regard for current production trends, faddish musical devices or hackneyed song structures. It's a really cerebral affair, this, and that could either be a good thing or a bad thing in your books. Part of me is glad I heard this, part of me is glad it's all over and is relishing the concept my next review, where I'll be back in old-school EBM country. Another part of me is disappointed with myself for thinking that I'd rather review something predictable than something creative like this. And yet another part of me is pleased that I was disappointed at myself for thinking that.

And if you thought that last paragraph was a bit of a mindbender, just wait until you've heard this album. It achieves much the same effect.

## **Inertia – Black Ice Impact (2004)**

I keep thinking Inertia are a relatively new band, though a quick flick through the inlay of Cryotank indicates that they are in fact celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Cleopatra are even putting together a 'Greatest Hits' compilation to celebrate the occasion! Naturally,

the ever-busy Inertia aren't about to sit still, with this disc appearing a mere two years (rather than the usual three) after it's predecessor 'Advanced Revelation', a collection had it's moments, at eighteen tracks it was a bit of a sprawl, the instrumental interludes competent but never really meshing with the songs.

They've kept themselves to a mere thirteen this time out, still a more than wholesome collection. The band line-up seems to have found a little stability, with Reza and Alexys forming the core, with live member Andrew Trail contributing to the odd song. The key change is that Alexys B is now handling more of the vocals than ever before. This is no bad thing – whilst Reza's cybernetic drone sits in well with his trademark Cryonically-cold production style, a bit of feminine warmth does them no harm whatsoever.

Any of you looking for the 'classic' Inertia sound, however, still have a fair bit to choose from. 'Slow Motion' and 'Blank Stare' are probably the closest you'll get to 'typical' Reza, uptempo techy elektro with gravely vocals and plenty of analogue resonance (if you've ever heard an Inertia record, you'll know exactly what I mean). 'Hypno-suck' follows similar lines, though some fairly simplistic lyrics let it down a bit. You might also want to check album closer 'Violate', offering echoes of Mindphaser-era Front Line Assembly.

There's also a few slower, dare I say 'stompier' tracks, pieces that remind one of Inertia's favourite Scandinavian tour buddies, Project-X. They're obviously keen on the style, opening the album with a seething title track closer to the true spirit of 'electronic body music' that anything they've done before, before pushing the envelope further come 'Faith on Fire', growling from the depths of his voicebox, just like his many European counterparts.

There are a few experiments that don't work quite as well, however. 'Truth or Lies' is a little minimal for it's own good, utilising a very flat-sounding lead synth, whilst their version of The Cure's 'Hot Hot Hot' is delivered in predictable style. OK, it's scarcely like the original, but I've never found a Cure cover that really captured the essence of the source material, and this one is no exception. 'Slider' is interesting in that it features a cleaner-than-usual vocal from Reza and a move towards broken beat country, but despite this, it doesn't strike me as anything revolutionary.

Whilst Alexys offers backing vocals on many of the above songs, she also has a more substantial role on the remaining four. 'Hold Your Soul' is a little pedestrian, but 'Judas' showcases the contrasting styles of both singers in a classic high-speed Inertia blast. More distinctive is 'Seven Sin VII', which might be the second catchiest track this act have recorded to date, an entertaining little shuffle which is indicative of a band finally getting to grips with putting a hook or two in their songs.

And the catchiest? That'd be 'Shakalaka Baby'. That's right. They're covering a song from a Bollywood musical. It's a more appropriate choice than you might imagine – Inertia are after all one of the few scene bands not to have an entirely white line-up (more due to cultural reasons than any inherent racism, I might add), whilst the band's studio is based in Whitechapel, also home to a particularly large Asian community. Alexys really gets behind this one, with some ethnic drumming and a sampled sitar completing this most unexpected example East-meets-West musical fusion.

Well, I have to admit to really quite enjoying that one. There's enough musical development to keep old-time fans happy, and there's enough variety to attract the casual industrial listener. To be fair, the Cryonica production style isn't to everyone's taste – it often comes across as being rather cold and soulless. But this album makes better use of that style than 'Advanced Revelation', which is probably reason enough to give it a go,

even if they could have dumped three of the weaker tracks and still have a complete yet more consistent album on their hands.

## **Inkubus Sukkubus – The Beast With Two Backs (2003)**

I have this compilation buried deep in my CD collection called 'Dreams In The Witch House'. Issued by Grave News in 1995, it features such UK trad-goth dinosaurs as Vendemmian, Die Laughing and This Burning Effigy, plus a long-discontinued configuration of Revolution By Night. Heading up the disc, however, was a band called 'Incubus Succubus'. The spelling might have changed, but this group appears to be the only one still going strong (as opposed to just 'still going') today in its original form.

OK, they've got their deriders, and many of them. Neither have they developed all that much musically. This album is no exception. Their music is a combination of their driving, tribal drum style, Tony McCormack's wrenching guitar lines, folk-oriented backing strings and Candia's lead vocals, with the key focus on the band's strong Pagan beliefs. It's an approach which has earned them a relatively small but devoted fan base, the kind of support that keeps a band like this in business. Inkubus Sukkubus are guaranteed to draw wherever they play.

Of course, it does help to know a little bit about Paganism yourself, particularly about the Wiccan branch, if you're planning on interpreting the songs in the way they were intended. That said, this album is a slight step back from the spiritual core of this band. The title should have been your first clue, 'The Beast With Two Backs' serving as a metaphor for this album's central theme. Sex. Being practitioners of one of the world's more open-minded faiths, with a moniker taken from the male and female devils of sexual temptation, the Inkies are on a mission to celebrate life's simpler pleasures, pleasures long since labelled 'sinful' by some of the world's more zealous holy orders.

Of course, they're not exactly new to writing songs about such carnal matters. There's a fair few scattered across their back catalogue. It's just here it's the central theme. Songs such as the title track, 'Vampyra' and 'Star of Venus' take the band's form of spiritual eroticism to new levels. And when they're not singing about sex, they're paying tribute to other forms of indulgence. The spectacular 'Hedonistic Gene' serves as justification for all those who live their lives in pursuit of pleasure for all, whilst album closer 'Jägermeister' is a rollicking tribute to their favourite tipples.

There's a couple of points on the album where they keep to their more religious themes. The traditional chanting of intro track 'Hecate Cerridwyn' takes us into 'Lily Bolane', the story of a witch tormented by the god-fearing wiccaphobes that surround her, which reminds those of us outside of the Pagan faith that such ancient beliefs still don't sit comfortably amongst many practitioners of post-Christian piety. There's also the cautionary tale of 'City of the Dead', a story of a girl who fled her simple rural existence to end up as a drug-addled prostitute in the big city.

There's also a single acoustic track in the form of 'She Is Gone', a touching requiem to a person unknown. Even here, the message is 'accept it, get over it, and get on with the rest of your life'. Despite the subject matter, it feels a little bit lightweight in comparison with the rest of the album, almost as if it was a self-conscious attempt to break the endless succession of tracks built from the usual Inky Sukky elements, the aforementioned guitars, drums, programming and vocals all sounding pretty much the same as on the last few albums by this band. And that's the key weakness to this CD. Musically, it offers us nothing new.



What it does, offer, however, is a more accessible subject matter. It's also indicative of a band having fun. Exactly whether I can take a song with a title like 'Vampire Punk Rockers From Hell' seriously is one thing. Whether I can genuinely grasp the fact that this bunch have only gone and covered Kylie Minogue's 'I Just Can't Get You Out of My Head' is quite another. Their conversion is a surprisingly strong one, with Candia particularly well suited to all the 'ah-na-na-na-na-na' nonsense, whilst Tony has rewritten some of the lyrics to fit in more closely with the theme of both the album and the group. It's a crazy, out-there, OTT, kind of cover, and trust me, it just works.

I have to admit that I really enjoyed this album. In fact, I've listened to it many more times than I thought I ever would. But a haphazard trip through the Inkubus Sukkubus back catalogue reveals the bitter truth. They're not exactly rich on musical ideas. Their combination of spiritual and hedonistic themes gives them no shortage of lyrical concepts, but their attempt to deviate from their established style aren't really all that inspired. If you're new to this group, this is a good a starting place as any, even if die-hard fans might suggest you start with one of their more 'religious' ones. Long-time IS fans might want to consider adding this to their collections. But if you never liked this group in the first place, I don't really think this is going to win you over.

## **Insekt – Teenmachine (2006)**

U2's favourite industrial band return with their first full-length album since 1993's 'In The Eye', having included three new studio tracks on their 2003 live album 'Ohrwurm'. Industrial music has moved on since these two last worked together, but nonetheless there still seems to be some merit in the coupling of the punky snarl of Mario Vaerewijck and the electronic machinations of Eric Van Wonterghem. The album opener 'Damage Done' is a slow, dense affair, the bass throbs and smoky synth lead setting the scene from the outset. We then get the straight-ahead four-beat industrial stomp of 'Teenmachine' followed by 'Pain Machine', a filthy, twisted breakbeat affair with Mario delivering a very Reznor-esque vocal.

The album continues along these lines, touching on a number of industrial music styles throughout it's length whilst keeping the hard rhythms flowing throughout. There's a few moments where Mario's lyrics seem a little too obviously 'influenced' by others (references to Die Krupps and The Smashing Pumpkins were certainly apparent to me), plus a few moments where it's hard to take them seriously – the amusingly gratuitous 'Bambifucker' may be acceptable in these post-Combichrist times, but 'Where Is The Party' just sounds ridiculous – if songs could get drunk, this would be the one crawling around looking for a park bench to fall asleep on. For the most part, however, this is a decent comeback effort.

## **In Strict Confidence – Cryogenix (1996)**

Following a series of well-received tapes, In Strict Confidence make their full-length debut with 'Cryogenix'. The formula at this early stage in the bands career essentially involves Dennis Ostermann's caustic vocals performed over a background of ominous, percolating electronics, laden with grim melodic elements. As with Project Pitchfork and Das Ich (and this disc could certainly appeal to fans of either band), ISC develop a goth-friendly incarnation of electronic industrial.

There are still rough edges. A number of the songs pulse away at a languid pace, impressing at a conceptual and atmospheric level, but less so at a structural one. They're at their best on 'Become An Angel' and 'Burning Angel', where the EBM rhythms kick in and drive the whole along. Also impressive is 'Dementia', which places it's samples well and employs a hypnotic loop to keep the listeners attention. Whilst their influences are

fairly obvious, ISC have still done enough here to begin defining their own sound. They just need a few more top tracks to get the best out of it.

NOTE:

If you have the Metropolis edition of the album (the one most easily obtained these days) you get three bonus tracks and a re-ordered tracklist. Of these three, two tracks are remixes, whilst the third is a cover of Depeche Mode's 'Stripped', which they managed to stretch out to nine minutes. It's nonetheless a respectful enough take – both bands practice a form of industrial-age synthetic gloom, but their varying executions make validate the choice of cover.

## **In Strict Confidence – Face The Fear (1998)**

The second ISC album follows similar lines to the first, a darkwave/electro-industrial hybrid, characterised by Dennis Ostermann's gravelly vocals, cold electronics and minor-key pads. The album unfolds slowly with 'Empire' and 'Alles In Mir', reaching an early peak with the quickfire delivery of 'Prediction', 'Industrial Love' and 'Hidden Thoughts', three socially-aware songs with concepts and synth motifs both reminiscent of 'lo' era Project Pitchfork.

Sadly, these early strengths are not replicated in the album's second half. The noisy stabs of 'Room 101' are initially interesting, but ultimately comes over as a structural mess, whilst 'Way of Redemption' and 'I Don't Care' both come over as being underdeveloped musically and too simplistic lyrically. We also get a couple of instrumentals, both of which are listenable but largely unnecessary. It's a pity as we really start to see the potential of this project during the album's early stages. At the moment, though, they can only make it work for half an album.

## **In Strict Confidence – Love Kills! (2000)**

In Strict Confidence finally come of age on their third album – what the first two albums promised, this one delivers. Their dark electronic industrial sound has shown real refinement since the first two albums, best exemplified on 'Zauberschloss', the rhythms and ascending synth melody set to a backdrop more resembling a dark dungeon than a hi-tech industrial studio. They've come close in the past, but Dennis Ostermann's project finally has its first outright anthem. The project has also found room for development in other areas – both 'Heaven Is The Place To Be' and 'Kiss Your Shadow' make good use of guitar samples (though in the latter case, it'd still be a damn fine song without them), whilst the synthpoppy 'Silent Memorial' introduces female vocals to the project.

There are also the two parts of 'Spread Your Wings', alternating murmuring synth sections with Aphex Twin style beat rushes, with some choral elements somehow squeezed into the mix. Even when they go for a more straightforward melodic EBM/darkwave sound (as on 'The Truth Inside Of Me'), they still usually manage to pull it off. Whilst the album does start to lose some of its focus towards the end, it's not nearly as anti-climatic second half of 'Face The Fear'. Whatever way you look at it, this project is definitely a sizeable step forward for the ISC project. It's their first really 'complete' album.

## **In Strict Confidence – Mistrust The Angels (2002)**

Having finally delivered on early promise on 'Love Kills', In Strict Confidence deliver another round of dark electronics here. The album's artwork depicts forlorn, topless angels, certainly suggestive but in reality appropriate in their own way for an album whose lyrical content is laden with 'fallen/dying angel' metaphor. The foreboding walls of synth and cutting rhythms set the tone nicely, with the coarse tones of Dennis Ostermann now often

accompanied (or even replaced) by a female vocalist (Nadine Stelzer). 'Herzattacke' is the most remarkable track, mainly thanks to the flying strings and cries of 'ANGRIF! HERZATTACKE!' in the chorus – as an anthem, this one could even topple 'Zauberschloss'.

The other obvious floor-filler is 'Engelstaub', an uptempo throb alternating male verses with a female chorus – an obvious dynamic perhaps, but one pulled off with great skill. A couple of more straightforward EBMish tracks like 'Horizont' and 'Lost In The Night' and the more mournful 'When The Heart Starts To Bleed' help keep the album interesting. The album does start to lose it's way towards it's conclusion – 'Der Vampir und Dessen Verwandlung' tries to sound creepy and ominous but sounds too much like a 'made it up as they went along' affair – this is followed by an instrumental 'Der Tag an dem es Frösche Regnet' which seems to achieve little more than dragging the album out a further 3 minutes and 36 seconds. The remainder is up to the band's usual standards – anyone who enjoyed 'Love Kills' would do well to pick this one up too.

### **In Strict Confidence – Holy (2004)**

From angel breasts to nun breasts. In Strict Confidence aren't afraid to be provocative with their album artworks. The music meanwhile, continues to develop – more guitars and more prominent female vocals are both in evidence. The combination of downtempo electronic bleeps and crushing power chords on 'Eye of Heaven' get the album off to a strong start, leading neatly into 'Seven Lives', the chorus of which sees Dennis Ostermann use a surprisingly 'clean' vocal style, rarely heard on previous ISC recordings. Of the other Dennis-fronted tracks, the best are lead single 'Babylon', which combines melodic piano with the usual ISC staples, and the riff-heavy stomp 'Another Night' echoing of recent Terminal Choice (but with better lyrics).

There are a couple of tracks where Dennis duets with Nadine Stelzer, with 'Closing Eyes' scoring fractionally over 'The Darkest Corridors' (though this song does offer the most profound religious critique of the entire album). There are also a couple of songs sung by Antje Shultz, with 'Emergency' combining carefully constructed harmonies with a throbbing industrial backbone which resembles what Delerium might have sounded like had Leeb given his guest vocalists an FLA-style backdrop. The album's flaws are few and far between – the only real disappointment is the 13-minute 'Alpha Centauri', a low-key 'ambient' instrumental that sounds rather misplaced and certainly anti-climatic.

NOTE: The limited edition version of this album comes with a 1-track bonus CD, a 12-minute track 'Alpha Omega', another 'ambient epic', though this time with a few spoken-word vocals. It's no better or worse than 'Alpha Centauri' – both simply carry the whiff of self-indulgence.

### **In Strict Confidence – Exile Paradise (2006)**

Fallen angels, topless nuns and now a Garden of Eden concept for the artwork of 'Exile Paradise'. Musically, Dennis Ostermann's project is moving further away from it's EBM/industrial influences of old, instead developing their darkwave/electro-goth side. This involves increasing the female vocal quotient once again, smoothing out Dennis' own vocal contribution and ultimately concentrating more on songwriting than harsh rhythms and audio trickery. It's not a direction that'll please all their fans, but there's no doubting they make a pretty impressive job of must surely be their 'maturity of sound' in full bloom.

The album is sandwiched by two audio fragments entitled 'The Harder They Come...' and '...The Harder They Fall', but the collection's key track is 'Promised Land', preview on the earlier 'Where Sun and Moon Unite EP'. It's a near-perfect darkwave pop song, with

Dennis providing the verses (his hoarse delivery toned down compared with previous releases) and Antje Schulz singing the chorus. They also duet on the more EBMish 'Fading Light' to equal effect, and Antje also gets a song to herself in the form of 'Away From Here', as well as providing backing vocals to an number of other songs.

Other highlights include the slow, power-chord enhanced 'Forbidden Fruit' (the song closest in theme to the albums 'Adam and Eve' concept art), the seething 'Regicide' (the song that harks back most to the projects industrial days) and the very beautiful 'Wintermoon', the kind of song where genre definitions don't really seem to matter. Even the albums lesser tracks, such as the slow-building 'Der Teufel' and the lengthy 'In Favilla' have an appeal of their own. In Strict Confidence have therefore stood their ground when many of their contemporaries seem to have either lost direction or got stuck in a cycle of repetition. There's something to be said for that.

NOTE: Two limited edition versions of the album are available. The 2CD version comes in a rather nice digipak with a bonus 3-track CD (though these songs are listenable but ultimately nothing special). The 3CD box-set features various bits of ISC paraphernalia, plus the video for 'Forbidden Fruit' and some remix kits. Pay over the odds if you wish, but there's nothing here that'll distract you from the key attraction – the album itself!

## **In Strict Confidence – Holy (The Hecq Deconstruction) (2004)**

This limited album (1,111 copies) comes in a fetching metal case and takes the form of a track-by-track rework of the 'Holy' album by German electronic musician Hecq (Benny Boysen). The remixes are all relatively extreme, typically leaving little of the originals barring the vocals intact (and sometimes not even that), replacing ISC's music with abstract beats and minimal electronics. Whilst such a treatment is interesting for a few tracks, an entire album of mixes from the same person does tend to drag, though the relatively strong vocals of 'Seven Lives', 'Sleepless' and 'Emergency' are still able to shine regardless of whatever's going on in the background (generally, the female vocal tracks are better suited to the Hecq way of doing things). If abstract electronica is your kind of thing, maybe you'll find this thing worth a listen – those expecting anything ISC-like should stay clear, however.

## **Killing Joke – Killing Joke (2003)**

Killing Joke were always one of those bands who (refreshingly), refused to let anyone pigeon-hole them into any one style. They started out as punks, hovered around the new wave/goth area for a bit, then bordered on industrial, yet always seemed to get kudos within the metal and grunge scenes. Which meant of course that when they reformed for a new album in 2003, no-one really had much idea as to what they might sound like.

Except of course, that the news was out that Dave Grohl (yes, he of Nirvana and Fooz) was guesting on the drum stool. Various 'Eighties/Come As You Are' similarity arguments had raged over the years, but this issue has now clearly either been put to one side or forgotten totally. The line-up was otherwise that of the original band – Jaz Coleman, Geordie, Youth and Raven (though Youth's return to his old band is believed to be only a temporary one).

As for the issue of what this band actually sound like nowadays, well, anyone hoping for 'Love Like Blood Pt.2' is going to be in for a shock, because this album is a fierce and evil proposition, their most visceral since their original self-titled debut from 1980. They've tightened up their act since then, of course, with the general feeling that they've gone back to their roots, but at the same time drawing inspiration from all the styles they've played with since then.

So the key elements to this incarnation of the Killing Joke sound are jagged riffs, huge walls of guitar noise, Grohl's hungry drumming and Jaz Colemans's cathartic vocals, delivering most of his words in a throaty metallic bawl, occasionally switching to a droning half-sung, half-spoken style, and (yes, really) some bona-fide singing. And, despite the rock-oriented slant of the album as a whole, there's also a liberal use of keyboards scattered across the disc, which add important details to the overall sound.

And if you're looking for the one track which bring all these disparate concept together to form one unified whole, look no further than opener 'The Death & Resurrection Show', which may yet become a classic in the left-of-centre rock field. From the fiery riff that underpins the whole song, through Jaz's 'Burn, Burn – Burn Brightly' refrain, right up to the soaring, mythological chorus, climaxing on that cry of 'O Beloved Mother of Liberty!'. Even if the rest of the album was filler, this song is proof that the 'Joke ain't dead yet.

But the rest isn't filler – far from it. It's from track two that the album's real subject matter rears its head – politics. You can hardly blame them – a lot of shitty things have been going on in the world lately, and this isn't the kind of band to ignore what's going on around them. A personal favourite of mine is 'Implant', an excursion through the hidden agenda of ID cards and DNA databanks as a means of total government control. Some neat 'prog-shock' style bass and carefully toned keyboards, matched with an in-ye-face chorus ensure their message gets the required attention.

Of course, the real focus of the world circa 2003 is the war on Iraq, and indeed any other nation that doesn't conform to George Dubya's Christian Right ideals (which, of course, are neither Christian nor Right). The slow-burning track 'Total Invasion' deals with this most directly, with Jaz's vocals sounding in places like something's ripping his throat out (who remembers 'Wardance'?). The more approachable (at least by the standards of this album) 'Seeing Red', meanwhile, points up the irony of a country going to war when the people for the most part, don't agree with the idea. And this is supposed to be a democracy?

There's also a couple of tracks handling the capitalism-motivated agenda behind these and other events. The grating guitar of 'Blood On Your Hands' leads us through an analysis of the world's rich/poor divide, whilst 'Dark Forces' questions our entire way of life. Musically, it's amongst the more adventurous of the album's songs, a vaguely orchestral loops leading us through this exceptionally slow, funereal crawl.

There's also a couple of straight-ahead rockers for those of you tiring of all the clever stuff. 'Asteroid' is my favourite of these two, mainly because it reminds me of something Ministry once did, only even more raw and vital. The other 'simple' track is lead single 'Loose Cannon', a bludgeoning rocker which maybe wasn't the best choice for a single, but serves its purpose as a big, testosterone-fuelled anthem. Those of you who bought the 'special' edition, will also find bonus track 'Inferno', which is similarly full-throttle.

There is one piece of respite for those you desperate for a bit of the 'Joke's softer side – 'You'll Never Get To Me'. An almighty anthem sailing on a sea of shimmering guitar noise, this is the nearest this group are getting to balladry anytime soon. It sings of the struggle of existence, and offers some fleeting hope in its chorus that merely surviving counts as victory. The other 'personal' song, album closer 'The House That Pain Built', however, is as raw and biting as all the others.

It's going to be interesting to see exactly what kind of response this album gets from the record-buying public over the coming months. The music press have lapped it up, though one wonders whether this is down to Dave Grohl's presence, as anything ex-Nirvana is usually guaranteed some kind of critical attention. But he's not the one who's made this

album, and indeed this group what they are. Killing Joke are back, and this is no cash-in. One listen to this, and you know they mean business.

## **Killing Joke – Hosannas From The Basements Of Hell (2006)**

Following on from their successful ‘comeback’ album in 2003, Killing Joke now seem comfortable taking more risks on this follow-up effort. Whilst it doesn’t quite have the scathing impact of it’s predecessor, it is more adventurous in terms of structure and concept, as if Killing Joke wanted to not only create a recording that was truly ‘them’, but enjoy themselves in the process. The essential elements are all here – the animal rage from which the finest ‘Joke moments were formed is still much in evidence, whilst Geordie Walker’s awesomely chaotic guitar style still drenching the mix without actually needing multiple overdubs in order to do so.

The highlights come thick and fast – album ‘The Tribal Antidote’ is classic, riotous Joke akin to their ‘Revelations’ era-material, before the title track (also the lead single) adds an ominous synth and rumbling bassline to things up a gear, whilst the third track incorporates Beirut-sourced strings and percussion to turn what would have been a dull mid-tempo stomp into the ‘Invocation’ the song title suggests it is. ‘Implosion’ and the eco-anthem ‘Majestic’ keep the adrenaline flowing, though the most notable songs lie on the mid-to-late stages of the disc, with ‘Walking With Gods’ reminiscent of ‘The Death And Resurrection Show’ gone freestyle and ‘Lightbringer’ best described as ‘Asteroid’ and ‘Wardance’ colliding to form a 9 minute 38 second epic.

The album does tail off towards the end. The anti-war ‘Judas Goat’ tries really hard to make you like it but falls short of the greatness you’d initially hope it may achieve (anti-war sentiment is SO 2003!), whilst ‘Gratitude’ oozes rather than scythes it’s way to the end of album. It’s also apparent that production values have slipped slightly since the last album, with the absence of the all-star cast (well, Youth and Dave Grohl) apparent in the loss of a certain ‘edge’. Nonetheless, this album still captures Killing Joke in their ‘purest’ form, regardless of a slight drop in standards. It may not help spread their words any further afield, but if you consider yourself in any way a fan of this band’s music, this disc is more-or-less essential listening.

## **Killing Miranda – Blessed Deviant (1999)**

Some people hate Killing Miranda. Mind you, some people hate all goth-rock. Some people hate all music with guitars in it. So that first phrase is a bit irrelevant. After all, some people hate me, and I haven’t even got up on stage to insult people yet. Well, I have, but that’s another story (and I wasn’t in a band at the time). One might have cause to wonder what all the fuss is about? What makes Killing Miranda so different from the rest of the black army of goth band knocking around on the scene, unaware of the advances of EBM and cybergoths on this previously trad-goth dominated candlelit genre.

Maybe it’s because they AREN’T unaware for developments on the scene. Maybe it’s because they’ve got a frontman who actually bothers to state an opinion. Maybe it’s the underlying sense of humour and social awareness in everything they do. Or maybe it’s just their diverse influences make for genuinely diverse music. It’s all these things and more. The scene is set right from the start when ‘H8Red’ bursts through your system. The big riffs and uncompromising goth-rock-anti-hero vox might not be anything special, and they are dulled a little by the Nightbreed school of production, but when coupled to the lush electronics and retro organ, you realise that just this once, it might actually be worth listening to the whole album, rather than filing it away in your CD case next to your All About Eve collection (Why did I bother? Why?).

'Burn Sinister' follows after this, a tale of necrophilia that in album form sounds like some kind of perverted glam-synth-pop (the live version amps the guitars up considerably). The songs strength is the lyrics – 'Is This Stiffness Rigor Mortis?' and 'Reach For Me Below' are two highlights from a song that hasn't got a single weak line in it. They'd write heavier tracks, they'd continue to climb the musical highs, but I still regard this as their first 'great song', even if they did later disown it. 'Pray' follows – it's more industrial in tone, but it goes on far too long and the song loses its way once it gets going. Interestingly, they still sometimes give this one a go in their live show, and for some unknown reason, it works much better that way.

'Kelly Told Me' sees a return to the safe haven of metal guitars, but the subject matter is uncompromising as ever – the sexual abuse of a seven-year old child. 'The Game' has a more ambiguous subject matter, but the dark atmospherics are surprisingly competent for a band that doesn't even employ a full live keyboard player. Adding a new string to their already comprehensive musical bow, 'Nailed' sees the Hackney Symphony Orchestra called into action, though ironically they have to fight for attention over Killing Miranda at their hardest, Richard clearly fancying himself as the anti-Elvis in flesh and blood form.

'Veil of Seduction' sings of the sex and drugs escapism apparently so typical of the goth-rock lifestyle. The song features the first prominent acoustic guitar on the album, but the songs lighter feel doesn't disguise it's somewhat 'bitty' feel. 'Whipping Boy', meanwhile, is the seemingly inevitable S&M song, the one that gave us the 'Tie Me Up and Set Me Free' T-shirt which sold out before I could get one myself, the songs message reinforced by the fact that it's sung from a 1<sup>st</sup>-person perspective. Takes a while to get going, but once it kicks in, it has the desired effect.

Then we get 'Blackeyed' – the first of two 'political' tracks found here. The crunchy sub-goth bassline and cheesy synths provide an interesting accompaniment to Ricky's vocalisation of the worlds chm – obviously a band that plays serious goth-rock humorously would conversely play Manson-esque shock-rock with a meaningful seriousness, if you follow my (il)logic. 'Send In The Clowns' serves as a sister song to this, Rikky doing his best Halloween horror movie voice for his second political rant of the day.

It's time now for one finally concession to synth-pop, but one that'll need explanation if you're not familiar with the London goth scene as a whole. 'The Ballad of Torrens St' deals with the gothic equivalent of picking up pretty women in darkened nightclubs, the club in question here being the Slimelight, which for many years has been the band's hang-out of choice. I admit I've tried what this song suggests, and I've got pretty much exactly the same response. But if it doesn't make sense, just substitute the location of your favourite goth club wherever you read 'Torrens St' and it'll soon all make sense. To be fair, it does sound rather naff when you consider what Slimelight is REALLY like these days, but never say these boys can't take a joke.

'Dreaming' rounds out the 'main' part of the album in style, relying on the piano pad style beloved by certain darkwavers, but ultimately resembling the cinematic soundscape of Tangerine Dream rather than anything more sinister. There is a bonus track – an Intra-Venus mix of 'Touched By Jesus'. The original is on a long-lost EP, but IV's treatment creates an up-tempo EBM feel, but the treatment of the subject matter, dealing with the misinterpretation of religion and the subsequent fall from grace, is unmistakably Killing Miranda.

I'm not sure exactly how to round off this review, as what I've heard has pushed me to several different points of view, and I don't know which one to settle on. It's not like there's anything wrong with this album, it's just having decided to recommend this album, I now need to work out 'who to?'. Tell you what – you buy it and tell me. That way, I get some

new opinion for the site, you get an excuse to buy a new CD and the band might actually choose to reissue the thing after all (it's been deleted for a while, but you can still find it in most goth-friendly outlets).

## **Killing Miranda – Transgression By Numbers (2001)**

I never worked out what 'sophomore' means, but I think it's a pretentious way of saying '2<sup>nd</sup>'. And since Killing Miranda are not in the slightest bit pretentious (unlike some other gothic bands I know), I'm going to resist the opportunity to call this their 'sophomore effort'. It's their second album, damn it, and it's better than the first one. The guitars sound like they really mean something now, and this time the album doesn't let up once from start to finish.

'Discothèque Necronomicon' kicks things off in suitably controversial style. The squelchy electronics mixed with industrial-grade guitar stabs and a pseudo-gothic vocal slant leads to a song like no other. As you might guess from the title, it's a drug-laden celebration of the goth/industrial/rock culture from which this band was conceived, and sure enough, this songs starting to develop into the mating call for the 'sex war children' with their 'white line fever' and 'amphetamine logic'. As a non-drug user, I'm already starting to think I'm missing out on something good here.....

'Spit' is this groups attempt at taking on the nu-metal brigade at their own game with a hate anthem of their own, coming up with some kind of shock-horror techno-punk, a bit like what Slipknot might have sounded like had they actually bothered to learned to play like Ministry rather than just try and earn kudos by claiming them as an 'influence'. Things don't calm down for 'Angelfly', despite it's more gothic undercurrent. They still rock as hard as ever, not in the slightest bit afraid to sound like a metal band if that's what's needed to get their message across.

'Salome' provides something of a respite from all this, the effeminate title appropriately leading to the guitars being toned down to the levels of an 80s goth song, as opposed to the more contemporary industrial/goth thrash that we've heard so far. Sure enough, they do a good Sisters of Mercy impression, too. The presence of 'Blessed Deviant' is somewhat confusing, as it's the title track from the wrong album. Fortunately, the techno-metal surge that forms the bulk of this track fits in much better here than on their last disc, so I'm not complaining.

The objective of the track entitled 'Meat' is somewhat dubious, though the :Wumpscut: -esque sound they come up with is an appropriate setting for their pro-veggie rants, if that's what they're on about. Much more up my street is 'Teenage Vampire', the Uks answer to 'The Beautiful People'. Most of the people reading this site will understand the vibe beneath this song – and so will their parents. You know the way we all were (and probably still are)? Dressing in black, donning make up and thus conceivably upping ones sex-appeal? Pretty fly for a dead guy? Here's the song for you.....

'Blood/Seed' has a more serious feel about it, like 'Salome' but without the 80s goth throwback feel. If anything, it's reminiscent of Type O's 'October Rust' tracks (yes, I like Type O as well!). Things harden up once more for 'See You In Disneyland', a gothed-up Americanised rocker that has the feel of a big rock star prancing around the arena stage. One wonders where Killing Miranda fancy themselves in five years time.....as for the album, it ends neatly enough with the retro-electro-plus-guitar of the title track 'Transgression By Numbers'.

It's a shorter album than the first one, and one by a smaller group, but ultimately it's also a much better one. Killing Miranda have managed to trim themselves down to a lean, mean



4-piece unit capable of filling the gothic dancefloors of the western world. Their live show is something else, however. There's no gimmicks, no stunts, just a bit of good old-fashioned punk spirit plastered on top of the goth/metal/industrial sound of their music. Just look at the number of bands and styles I mentioned in the course of this one review. Imagine them all rolled into one band. That's Killing Miranda key attraction. (It's also what drives so many people away, but I'll skip the scene politics for now).

## **Killing Miranda – Consummate (2004)**

It was a long time coming. Killing Miranda's last album, 'Transgression By Numbers' appeared way back at the start of 2001. Back then they were on Nightbreed, a label which almost guarantee any band who signs to them gets stuck with the 'gothic' tag. Since then, the KM foursome have played countless live shows, went on tour with Paradise Lost, got embroiled in all kinds of controversy and somehow managed to get themselves on a major label and bag some time in a decent studio to record album No.3.

And this is the final result – three and a half years toil resulting in an album bearing a mere eight full-length songs, three instrumental interludes and a unlisted bonus cover version. Surely in these days of CD technology, one should pack every single CD to it's 80-minute limit, to give the listener maximum value for money in these enlightened days of single track downloads? Nope. I won't tell you exactly how many albums I've given up on half way through, with later tracks that might never make it as far as my speaker cones, but it's a fair few. I now understand the meaning of 'quality not quantity' better than ever before.

And here's the next shock – Killing Miranda don't even sound like a 'gothic' band any more. I'm trying to think if they ever were one in the first place, but there's a girls name and a reference to death in the band's title and I think I remember them writing a song about necrophilia at one point, so they probably were at some stage. Anyway, If 'Trangression...' suggested that these boys were desperate to pull themselves away from the miserable core of the scene and poke fun from a safe distance, this thing proves it.

And what better way of proving the point that opening number 'Conspiracy Theory'. The ominous bassline rumbles along, the keyboards washing around disconcertingly in the background, whilst Rikky snarls his cynical blast against those critics who had already cast off Killing Miranda as a valid musical concept. And when those big riffs cut in, the logic of spending the best part of two years getting the album sounding 'just right' suddenly seems to make a lot of sense. This thing rocks harder than anything they've done to date. The days of lo-fi garage recording are over. If you wanna play with the big boys, you gotta start sounding like them.

But you ain't heard nothing yet – just get a load of 'I Know What You Want'. Preceded by the short electro-orgasm of 'Five Minutes Freeview', this high-speed metal monster does exactly what many bands never dare to do and delivers a tribute to wild and meaningless sex that's totally free of oh-so-intelligent metaphor. It's a full throttle, four-minute ride across the most base and carnal elements of human nature, topped off with a series of primitive synth bleeps that have no logical place in the song, but only seem to highlight the songs simple-but-effective nature as a result.

Those in want of something 'goth' friendly might find what they're looking for on 'Embrace'. That title belongs with the velvet n'black lace brigade for starters, it's certainly not as in-your-face musically as the last song, whilst the songs subject (suicide) is in keeping with the band's past. But they're really just taking a very slightly disguised dig at the whole concept – pretentious wordplay is interspersed with lines like 'My arrogance becomes my epitaph' indicating that self-termination isn't really anything to be proud of after all.

Time now for a bit of fun in the form of 'No More Love Songs', the second sex-oriented song on the album, this time taking a dig at that most indulgent of rock star perks, groupies. It's a huge, floor-stomping beast that builds on the sub-gothic glam-metal sound that got the likes of Marilyn Manson and Rob Zombie where they are today. Taking us up to the halfway point is 'Disposable', sludgy bass and huge walls of guitar soundtracking a more generalised attack on the ways of the music industry. To be honest, it's probably my least favourite of the eight actual songs on offer – it lacks a real hook, but it's still good enough not to break the flow of the CD.

The second electronic interlude follows in the form of 'Saint of Blasphemy', which takes us into 'Bastard/Heretic', another big-riffing hate anthem offering a chance to anyone still left with enough residual anger to let off a little steam. Then comes 'Boy Meets Gun', a slow, grinding attack on gun culture, with the particular reference to the way it's infiltrated American youth. The song utilises a nursery rhyme parody to great effect – the 'See the children falling down, falling down' remains one of the most poignantly daring lyrical devices that they've used to date.

'The Shadow Over Innsmouth' provides a suitably apocalyptic atmosphere in its role as precursor to 'Enter The Dagon'. It's the final track on the CD, and it's suitably climatic. The combination of fluid bass, tribal fury and end-of-humanity tone bear a certain hint of that other great band with killing-in-the-name (Killing Joke, if you hadn't guessed), with elements of Tool's heavier moments in there too, though this is still very much Killing Miranda firing on all cylinders, their Lovecraft-inspired soundtrack to the end of reality proving to be a highly suitable climax to the album. Barring, of course, the unlisted cover of 'Anaconda' (sung by Irish Dave instead of Rikky in a kind of musicians musical chairs), poking one last bit of fun at any goths still listening.

It's a short album, but it's a highly impressive one despite this, and maybe even because of it. It's a tightly packed collection of ass-kicking songs that show all of the signs of a band proclaiming 'Fuck it, we'll play what WE want to play now'. Which is ironic, as this album is still likely to gain more attention than the last two, and probably would have done even if they were still on a minor label. It's got that rare mix of technical professionalism and middle-fingered 'rock star' attitude. It takes the raw six-stringed fury of metal, the pulsating oppression of industrial and the foreboding feel of goth and somehow force the three styles to cohere.

## **KMFDM – Kreig (2010)**

So it's a remix album. I was going to say 'That is SO 1990s', but then I realised KMFDM were also 'SO 1990s' and so the concept kinda suits them (this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> album in a row where they've released a companion remix collection). But here's the real triumph card – they've been around for so long that they've got a following scene-wide, and hence they've got access to a much wider range of remixers than your average Alfa Matrix bonus disc. I was amazed to find that LeætherStrip didn't actually feature on this collection (Claus will remix anything these days). The other piece of good news is the 'created an unrelated track and fly in some samples from the song you were given to work with' school of remixing is dead. You can actually hear the bloody songs.

And there's no better proof of this than 'Never Say Never'. In its original form, it bore one of KMFDM's catchiest girly-vox hooks in years. And here it gets twisted in 3 radically different directions – Ivan de Prume (ex-White Zombie) toughens up the original riff to create a full-on industrial metal riff-o-rama, Seb Komor delivers the kind of post-futurepop Virus-toting stomp-fest you'd expect him to, and Dave 'Rave' Ogilvie (a legend among industrial scene producers) throws everyone by transforming the track into a saccharine

pop song. Against the odd – every remix actually works. I've been listening to them on repeat since I first got the album.

The other big anthem from 'Blitz' was 'Bait and Switch', thanks to the unexpected use of 'Hark The Herald Angels Sing' as a hookline. And who did they pick to remix it – Combichrist and Prong. The overlord of mid-00s bleep vs a groove metal legend from a decade previous? What more could you want? This stylistic offset doesn't always work – 'Davai' is a track high on industrial rock substance but low on flair, and neither Tweaker (aka Charlie Clouser) nor Assemblage 23 seem to know quite what to do with it.

Some of the tracks actually seem to improve on the original – 'Strut' never made much sense in it's original form, but Andy Selway's 'Disco Balls Mix' is aptly named – drawing upon the cliched string flourishes and muted guitar from Disco's Golden Age and actually making it work. And then there's Kochi Fukuda's stripped-down piano take on 'People Of The Lie' which plays on the strengths of the original song better than KMFDM's own version. Not something I'd expect from a Static-X member....

The mixes of 'Bitches' and 'Potz Blitz' fail to impress – Seismologist's mix of 'Potz Blitz!' ends up sounding like a Godflesh-esque grind, which is not an approach that suits the KMFDM songwriting style. But I'm not going to get picky, as it's been a long time since I've found a remix disc where there's more than a couple of worthy mixes. There's some bands that really need to learn that to get any kind of value added from a remix collection, you need to look beyond your immediate contemporaries.

## **KMFDM – Kunst (2013)**

It's time for the 2013 KMFDM annual. They've released some form of release every year since 2005, alternating between new songs and remixes. And as it's an odd-numbered year, it must be time for fresh cuts from the studio! Keeping with the only-occasionally broken five-letter album title rule (I'd love to play bilingual Scrabble with these guys), it's time to get to grips with 'Kunst'.

And it's on the opening title track that we get the ultimate example of KMFDM's obsession with referencing themselves in their own songs. The up-tempo industrial metal riff is competent but otherwise standard issue for the group, and I'm sure I've heard those synths before. And the lyrics? It's just a list of their songs titles, a brief "Thank You Brute", arranged into rhyming couplets, and then finally revealing that the band name actually means "Kill Mother Fucking Depeche Mode". I've never worked out what self-plagiarism actually is, but this as close as you're ever going to get. And against all the odds, I'd still call it a masterpiece!

"Ave Maria" sees yet more abuse of old concepts, devising a Lucia-and-Sascha sung duet set to a throbbing Schaffel chmal and a lyric that seems to be only loosely derived from the Catholic verse of times past. Of course, the synthetic shuffle is the safest route to catchiness, and KMFDM have been long around to know how to not muck up a decent refrain when there's one the making. Tempos reach their fastest on "Quake", a well-executed but wholly unoriginal mix of revolutionary ranting and jackhammering riff blasts that seem not-so-distantly derived from Ministry's "Thieves".

By the time we hit track four, "Hello", we're definitely in the 'I'm sure I've Heard This Riff Before' territory. This wouldn't be so bad if it wasn't for the fact that the original, electronic part of the song sounds rather insipid against the crushing wall of guitar noise, failing to provide the counterpoint that the whole loud vs quiet dynamic should deliver. And for their next cliché, KMFDM do the 'guest musician' thing and present William Wilson from Legion Within on "The Next Big Thing". His voice is your standard industrial gravel, not adding

anything artistically to the bands sound, and probably doing more to promote his own career than KMFDM's.

Lucia grabs the mic back for "Pussy Riot", and there's nothing like a good protest song to wake up an album that's getting predictable. This is a snarling, scathing, bitching middle-finger from every angry woman who's picked up a microphone and set her frustrations to music, and that's exactly why KMFDM recruited her into the band full-time. That's just as well, given the following track "Pseudocide" is one clever piece of wordplay away from being a KMFDM-by-numbers album filler.

"Animal Out" is another Lucia-front track, heavy on the electronics but weak on any real spark. The second guest appearance on the album follows in the form of "The Mess You Made", featuring 'Morlocks' (whoever they are), but the members this outfit don't offer anything that the KMFDM regulars can't. Whatever happened to people like Nicole Blackman or F.M.Enheit appearing on KMFDM albums? Vocalists and musicians who actually provide distinctive variations. Even the rapper who appeared on 'UAIOE' made a difference to the regular sound of the band and hence prevented the collection from descending into predictability.

The final song "I (Heart) You Not" is a marginal improvement after a tedious trio of late-album songs, the throbbing electronics and guitar bursts purposefully marching the album to it's conclusion. But I still get the feeling that this album falls into all the traps that the every other KMFDM album of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has... a good basic concept and three or four rousing anthems, but not enough good ideas to pad out an entire album. And their instance on playing this filler material live has driven me away from their live shows. And that's a real pity, because when KMFDM get it all pointing in the right direction, which they manage for just under half the album length, the 'Ultra Heavy Beat' has no equal.

## **Komputer – The World Of Tomorrow (1997)**

Just about every electronic band on the planet claims Kraftwerk as an influence these days. It's about as common as indie bands swearing allegiance to the Velvet Underground (whether they've actually listened to any is another thing). However this album is something else again. It's so totally Kraftwerk that the group themselves even chose to spell their name with a 'K' rather than 'C' (ironically, 'Computer' is one of the few German words that DOES begin with a 'C', but let's not debate the Teutonic Tongue here).

The music on offer here is basically analogue synth-pop. Lots of bleepy synths, repetitive but well-tempered drum loops and a selection of effects thrown in where appropriate. The groups musical concepts aren't exactly advanced either – the general trend being repetition of the songs title (vocoded or otherwise 'processed') with spoken-word vocals in between proving to be the dominant style. The albums title track is up first, a kind of 'vision of the future' affair, using all the above techniques to create a relatively enjoyable (but also very dated) piece of electro-pop.

'More Automation' is musically very similar to this, but doing away with all the spoken word stuff and utilising different vocal treatments on the oft-repeated song title. We then get the synthetic silliness of 'Bill Gates', a ridiculous 'tribute' to Mr.Microsoft. OK, an anti-Gates song would have resulted in a pretty heavy court case, whilst a pro-Bill approach would have cost the band all their credibility. But if that's the case, why not just do away with the concept entirely, rather than coming up with a lame remake of 'The Man-Machine'?

'Valentina' is thankfully a substantial improvement on this, a laid-back number that pays tribute to the first woman cosmonaut. However, the best track on the album is next – 'Looking Down on London'. It's a collection of enigmatic sound-bites designed to conjure

up images of Komputer's home town (yes, they're British – despite the name, I would have thought the accents would have been a dead giveaway), and it's also where the band get their vocoder chorus concept working just about perfectly.

'Terminus Interminus' fails to improve on this. Unlike the two previous songs, which deal with topics that might be classed as 'interesting', this one's based on that most boring of places to spend time – airports. 'Which one?', I hear you ask. This song's sole purpose appears to be proving that they're all as boring as each other, so it scarcely matters. 'Singapore' offers more potential for creativity, but they screw it up, seemingly unable to rhyme anything with the title except 'Hear the Tiger Roar'. Their attempt to forge an electro-anthem might have worked otherwise.

It's all pretty good from here on, though. 'The Perfect Pop Band' serves as a good advert from the group's manifesto. One might class this as a pretentious act of self-indulgence, but they get away with it somehow. 'Komputer Pop' is also self-referential, and whilst one is reminded of old Kraftwerk songs all the way, it's still a pretty handy autobiography of the then-three-piece Komputer.

'Motopia' is the album's only instrumental, the lack of any need for vocals and the breathing space they require giving us a chance to hear a richer, more elaborate Komputer at work. It's nothing special, but at least it makes a (very slight) change from the songs that came before. We end on 'We Are Komputer (Version)', the third track in which the group sing about themselves. It reminds me of something I've heard before, something I like by a German band beginning with K.

Anyway, time to sum up. It's an old-fashioned synth-pop album. Even its visions of the future belong firmly in the past. But at the same time, it's comforting to hear all these sounds again, so anyone irked by Kraftwerk's lack of new material might want to give this a go instead. The group still clearly needed to move on if they were to establish themselves, and sure enough, come 2002, they did, so anyone hoping to hear 'Looking Down on London' at a Komputer show these days will be sorely disappointed. Unless of course you like their new stuff. Which I did.

## **Kraftwerk – Autobahn (1974)**

Kraftwerk had already made themselves pretty well known in the arty German rock scene. Their electronic experimentation was hardly unique – we already had the likes of Can and Tangerine Dream finding their feet in the realms of avant-garde cosmic rock. But the Düsseldorf boys had something different in mind. Why write music inspired by the expanses of deep space we'll never see? How about writing music about the wonders of the world around them – namely Germany. It's like they went 'Forget space exploration and all that American rubbish. We have a perfectly good road network to zing about instead'.

So then, how does one write a song about a motorway? Well, one evaluates the qualities of a motorway and converts it to musical form. Simple, long and repetitive is what they eventually decided were the key elements. And that's pretty much what the album's title track is. Twenty-two minutes of music about a glorified strip of tarmac. Actually, the whole *Autobahn* issue has a history stretching back to the days of Hitler's world domination projects. He commissioned the system to help deploy his armies of destruction. Ironically, it's one of the few really good things the man did for the German people (the roads, not the armies).

The track opens with the sound of a car starting and driving off into the distance. Utilising a subtle drum loop (that fades in and out constantly) and an unobtrusive bassline, they then

proceed to build up an awesomely drawn-out electronic symphony. The opening third of this epic is simply a repetition of the main theme, the sole lyrical contribution being 'Fahrn, fahrn, fahrn auf der Autobahn'. It then progresses onto other, related themes, continuously reprising, always developing, if only at a snails pace. There's the odd vocal scattered around the place, but they're a mere background detail here.

The success of the track is partly down to the sheer hypnotic nature of the music. The rhythm loop is simple and delicate, lulling you into some kind of trance state that pretty much justifies the length of the track. Despite the primitive nature of their equipment, the quartet come up with a number of interesting effects, actually synthetically recreating the 'doppler' effect experience when cars zoom past you. This is trance music without the overpaid DJ, this is progressive rock without the rock star excess, this is synth pop without the cheesy lyrics and cut-down-for-radio song structures. This song IS Kraftwerk.

There are four more pieces of music on this album, all of them slightly less structured than the title track (and hence more akin to Kraftwerk's earlier albums than any of their better known works). There are two 'Kometenmelodie' (Comet Melody) tracks, two very contrasting audio experiments. The first is a gloomy electronic mood piece, featuring a harsh, throbbing bass sound that wanders around in a seemingly random manner, with some distant piano noodling and a primitive whistling noise fighting for attention. The second is a bright pop-oriented piece that's so totally catchy that I'm amazed no-one's bothered to do a dance remix of it yet.

Of the remaining two, 'Mitternacht' (Midnight) is a haunting piece of avant-garde sonic experimentation, using some demented violin tones (courtesy of temporary group member Klaus Roeder) and intimidating bursts of electronics to create a real desolate 'horror movie' type atmosphere. This just leaves 'Morningspaziergang', featuring a blend of synthetic tweeting, a beautiful pastoral flute melody and little flourishes on various other instruments (primarily piano), giving a surprisingly organic ending to an otherwise mechanical, precise album.

It's true that this album sounds a little dated now, in terms of decades rather than years. But it doesn't sound cheesy or twee like some of the neo-classical stuff around at the same time. The title track and 'Komtenmelodie 2' are just primitive versions of the electronic music we listen to today. The other three tracks are pieces of Teutonic sonic experimentation that are independent of any musical time-scale. I've said all I can now. I'm not going to go out and buy it for you, though. That's your job. Go on, it's practically historic.....

## **Kraftwerk – Radio-Activity (1976)**

The second of Kraftwerk's albums to showcase their new streamlined, pixel-perfect electronic pop sound, but also a curiosity in their discography, as whilst many of the tracks here clearly have commercial appeal in mind, featuring as they do the groups first English-language vocals and a host of catchy pop-oriented hooks, other tracks skew off in the experimental direction, echoing the sound of traffic-cone era Kraftwerk, something many thought they'd left behind via 'Autobahn'.

So we've got two languages (English and German) and two musical concepts (electro-pop and avant-garde). In what appears to be a co-incidence rather than a truly inspired piece of design, there's also two themes to the album, hence the hyphen in the albums title. The concept of nuclear power (this album written long before anyone had even heard of Chernobyl) and the concept of radio communication. Some songs deal with one or the other, some with both.

Anyway, we open up on the nuclear side of the fence with 'Geiger Counter', a brief Flürry of clicking from which emerges 'Radioactivity', an icy-cold slab of ahead-of-it's-time electronic pop, full of distant chorals, morse-code clicking, and nonchalant vocals, a steady one-fingered sequence holding it all together. Even if all of this albums other tracks have (for better or worse) been forgotten, this track remains as an example of Kraftwerk's ability to sum up a seemingly lifeless aspect of modern culture in the confines of a song, and make it listenable.

Following on from this are two further 'songs' – that is, they have words (again an Anglo-German mix), rhythms, occasional concessions to melody and all the other bits n'bobs that turn random noise into something relatively ear-pleasing. Both of them concern the 'radio communicating' side of album. 'Radioland' the slower of the two, lots of radio-esque twittering and other bits of sonic tomfoolery getting an unobstructed path through the speaker cones, while 'Airwaves' is more upbeat, a bright little number with wavering synths and a vibrant proto-techno beat.

Now it's time for the experimentation. Keeping with the radio theme for the time being, we get 'Intermission', a primitive electronic chime of the kind I last heard while fiddling with a short wave radio myself. 'News' is exactly that, a recording of a news bulletin (concerning the building of nuclear power stations, if you must know) with a few synthetic flourishes added on top. Then we get 'The Voice of Energy', giving us an early sample of the 'robot' voice that Kraftwerk would later use to a much greater extent.

Back on solid ground with 'Antenna', another lively, pulsating example of Kraftwerk's fast-developing synth-pop sound, offering as it does some clever 'metaphorical' lyrics that are indicative of the act's increasing ability to write real songs as well as master all their machinery. It is the last 'real' song on the album however, with next track 'Radio Stars' consisting of little more than lots of synthetic tweeting and vaguely audible vocals.

'Uranium' is probably the real stand-out of the 'experimental' tracks, vocals down to an ominously hoarse whisper, here concerning the concept of radioactive decay. 'Transistor' next, a layered collection of jolly little synth riffs that float past without leaving too much of a mark. This just leaves 'Ohm Sweet Ohm' – it's mantra-like introduction leading into a remarkably melodic ditty that's catchier than any words I can write here to describe it.

And where exactly does it leave this album. Is it a landmark piece, a developmental work or a forgettable piece of experimentation? Probably the second of those three – Kraftwerk's first attempts at compressing their synth-pop creations down to a radio-friendly song size were generally successful. The 'experimental' tracks, however, were less consistent, many of them either not fully realised or just a little on the dull side. They don't drag the album down with them, though, so the disc as a whole is far from a total loss.

## **Kraftwerk – Trans-Europe Express (1977)**

This is the one Kraftwerk album everyone talks about. OK, their first hit was a couple of albums back, their best know song (The Model) still an album away. But this is the one disc everyone quotes as an 'influence'. Having made their first grasp at the electro-dance-pop sound when recording 'Autobahn', then experimenting a bit more on 'Radio-Activity', 'Trans-Europe Express' is the quartets attempt to encapsulate all they have learned in a series of tracks more accessible to the masses than anything they've done before, but still breaking as much new ground as possible along the way.

The title track is naturally the one everyone talks about the most, here mixed seamlessly into 'Metal on Metal' – the two are effectively one 13-minute piece (some versions even add a third 'Abzug' split, though the music is the same). The dominating force here is the

loop, the subtle beat that plays away for pretty much the entire length of the two tracks, with the most distinct part being the hi-hat sequence, which chugs away like some age-old steam engine (despite being the band of the future, Kraftwerk weren't exactly ignorant of the past). It is over this that they lay the rest of the music – the main theme, the nonchalant vocals, the electronic sequences, the doppler shifts and, as salute to German industry, a quick Flürry of banging and crashing (that's the 'Metal By Metal' bit, as if you needed telling).

The impact this track had on the dance scene was quite sensational. Tim Barr's biography (an excellent read, I might add) tells stories of DJs buying two copies of the record so they could mix it into itself, making the track as long as people could keep dancing to it. The black music culture also embraced it, Afrika Bambatta famously using elements of it (as well as 'Numbers' from Computer World) to form the basis of his breakthrough single 'Planet Rock'. The band themselves kept typically calm and cool amid all the furore. After all, making music was their job. Why shouldn't people dance to it?

'Europe Endless' is another track that celebrates the achievements of the bands home continent (ironically, the US market was totally unfazed by all this national marketing). The song is built round this merry little synth-pop march tune that plays over and over, over which additional synths and repetitive vocals (partly sung in the conventional manner, partly processed using whatever means they had available to them) are added. At nine minutes plus, the track certainly does seem like an endless advert for their (and my) mother continent, as it does seem to go on for a bit too long, but as it's Kraftwerk I'll let them get away with it.

Related to this track is the paired duo 'Franz Schubert/Endless Endless', utilising a similar form of electronic recurrence, but with a slightly more abstract feel, the piece free from distinctive vocals or any kind of percussion. The 'Franz Shubert' portion plays some classically-styled electronics over this loop, distorted and filtered to sound like some old radio transmission or maybe a gramophone record. This eventually dies away, the 'Endless, Endless' sample from 'Europe Endless' (now even more heavily processed than before) played a couple more times at the end to give the album some kind of symmetry.

The remaining two tracks are attempts by Kraftwerk to make a more radical social statement. The shimmering synths and heavy echoes of 'The Hall of Mirrors' offer a trance-like feel, whilst the song is probably one of their strongest yet, a profound statement of the group's intense dislike of the very public lives other rock stars seem to lead. Notably, they don't use any kind of vocal distortion here, nor 'deadpan' the vocals as if they were spoken by an automaton. It's only an idea, but it's possible that they wanted to give this one track a more 'human' feel than usual.

This leaves the long-time live favourite 'Showroom Dummies'. The beat here is more mechanical than at any point on the album, the instrumentation sharper and less expansive than previously. Despite this, the song does convey a wry sense of humour, the lyrics telling the story of how the dummies in question escape from the shop window so they can go out clubbing. But hold on a mo – didn't Kraftwerk unwind in nightclub after a hard day in the studio? Didn't they often feel like the whole world was watching them? And they do sound quite mechanical, don't they? Maybe this is a very subtle attempt at a brief musical autobiography?

OK, I've gone through all the songs here, but the question remains – Is this album as good as everyone says it is? Certainly it played a major role in introducing electronics to dance music culture, helping move the clubbing scene on from the dull disco sound of the time, and inspiring many musicians to try their own drum machine/keyboard based experiments. There's really only 5 different musical concepts here, many of them stretching out the



musical ideas to their absolute limits. Kraftwerk's appeal does lie in the simple, uncomplicated nature of their music, though, so as a piece of music history it's still worth getting hold of.

## **Lacuna Coil – Karmacode (2006)**

Lacuna Coil return in 2006 to find the female-vocal metal genre (a style of music they themselves helped popularise) more swamped (sic) than ever before. The photogenic nature of singer Cristina Scabbia and her subsequent ubiquity in the rock media is such that many forget she is but one of two joint lead vocalists alongside Andrea Ferro and they both give as much as the other. Question is – how do they stand up against the competition? One thing is clear – their association with 'gothic' metal (whatever THAT is....nobody seems to know) seems more tenuous than ever. The keyboards and string arrangements are often quite low in the mix, with hard, blistering guitars the dominant musical element.

Powerful as they are, neither do these riffs carry much musical 'character'. Some middle-eastern flourishes help brighten a few songs (especially album opener 'Fragile'), but such moments are rather fleeting. 'One Truth' was a reasonable enough choice for a lead single, with Cristina's Arabic wailings soaring nicely above the guitars, though the Korn-style bassline, soloing in the middle eight, whilst well-executed, sees a shift to a US school of metal that won't be welcomed by all. They end the album with a cover of 'Enjoy The Silence' – the kind of cover where you know exactly what it sounds like before you hear it. This album will still appeal to those who jumped on the girl-fronted metal band bandwagon from the already-crashed bandwagon of nu-metal, but in the process, they've lost some of their magic, which may drive away just as many long-time fans.

## **Laibach – WAT (2003)**

The Slovenian collective Laibach have been rather quiet over the last few years. Their last full studio album was 'Jesus Christ Superstars' in 1996, with even their side-projects fading post-1999. It's therefore with some interest, and not a little enthusiasm, that I snapped up this, their 'comeback' album of sort, notable for their first for many years to be formed from a majority of self-written material. Some might argue that this bunch are at their best when radically reworking the material of others, but that only makes the concept of a whole disc of bespoke material all the more intriguing.

The album isn't completely self written, with the opening track serving as a adaptation of a Tomi Meglie composition, whilst the final track 'Anti-Semitism' was composed by the DJ duo 'Temponauta'. The rest is all Laibach, in both a lyrical and a compositional sense. The production keeps the vocals very much to the front of the mix, to the extent that you can hear every little bit of vocal chord vibration, which, with a deep, throaty style like Laibach, combined with comparatively stripped-down musical accompaniment, is something that starts to grate after four tracks or so. This is a pity, as in many cases they appear to be voicing valid political sentiments, and I want to listen more than my ears suggest I should.

Despite (or maybe because of) being a classical adaptation, our intro 'B Mashina', is suitably grandiose, a spoken-word focal point, with walls of strings building up around that base, with the drums, sequencers and choirs blending in one by one, a suitably spectacular entrance for a band that have been away for too long. The album proper then starts with lead single 'Tanz Mit Laibach', a mid-tempo marching song, which, if the liner notes are to be believed, was inspired by German-American Friendship. The German-language drill-sargeant vocal fits this particularly militarist song to a tee, with the gradual

introduction of choirs over the grinding main loop once again gifting the song a spectacular finish.

Unfortunately, having got the album off to a flying start, our NSK comrades now seem at a loss about where to go from here, as highlighted by 'Du Bist Unser', a directionless techno track of the kind last heard on 'Kapital'. 'Achtung!' is a slight improvement, punchier and more direct, though not really in the same league as 'Tanz Mit Laibach'. Then we get 'Ende', a slow, bitty track, once again ploughing the 'minimal techno' furrow that I'd kinda hoped this band had long since left behind. Vocally repetitive, I just found the whole thing very annoying.

The best track of the album's middle section now – 'Now You Will Pay'. Successfully combining the bands industrial, symphonic and techno elements into a cohesive whole, with a 40s radio jingle style chorus, the song stands as one of the bands more profound political statements. Following on from this, we get 'Hell:Symmetry', which features some interesting textures, but otherwise a few noisy synth stabs short of a form mechanical mediocrity oh-so-typical of this album, again falling for a rather uninspired form of lyrical repetition, in the form of 'Love Me, Love Me Not'. Spare me.....

'Das Spiel Ist Aus' makes better use of synth pads and sequences than many of the songs that came before, though despite this it still isn't very anthemic. Then we get 'Satanic Versus', a disjointed number where the vocals, drum loop and synthesiser all appear to be from different songs. At points it almost hangs together, but not frequently enough for the song to earn even the lowest form of the EOL seal of approval. After this, 'The Great Divide', which sort of sounds like all the others, in such a way that is sheer hell for a reviewer such as myself, as I simply don't have any way to describe it without repeating myself.

Fortunately, the albums saving grace follows directly after. The title track, 'WAT', sums up everything that is (or was) great about this band. It's a sort of biographical mission statement, loaded full of historical, political and sociological references. It's also the strongest track in terms of structure, building up to a couple of false climaxes before finally building to the magnificent orchestral climax, multiple layers of vocals uniting in the cries of 'We Are Time'. This just leaves 'Anti-Semitism', a clanging, pseudo-orchestral piece that harks back to pre-Opus Dei Laibach rather than anything they've done previously. Interesting, but after 'WAT', it's also something of an *schmaltzy*.

I have to admit to being rather disappointed with this album. For me, the appeal of Laibach has always been the larger-than-life splendours of their production. Huge, militaristic productions are a proven way of delivering ones political message, and yet Laibach still seem set on using ambient techno structures instead, often instead of, rather than in addition to their more bombastic sonic palette. Every now and again, when the choirs sing and the drums roll, such as on the title track, 'B Maschina' or the later stages of 'Tanz Mit Laibach', we get a brief glimpse of what this band can do if they try. But then again, why not just pull out 'NATO' or 'Jesus Christ Superstars' again? Quite literally more bangs for your buck there. Yes, with multiple cover versions they might lack full-on musical integrity, but they are just so much more fun to listen to!

## **Laibach – Anthems (2004)**

This was a release that was very much needed. Laibach have been around since the early 80s, though the bulk of their early career was spent on the Slovenian underground, performing secret shows and releasing their music wherever possible. Whilst Mute have done a fairly good job at releasing most of the old material, they still have a sizeable and highly complicated discography, with no one 'essential' album, and opinions differing wildly

as to the best place to start. This thing should in theory solve that problem. A 2CD set, packaged in a rather fetching book-style package (which includes an interesting biography and analysis of the band), with one disc of hits and another of remixes.

It's inevitable that whenever a disc like this appears, one asks 'what got left off?'. And scanning through the first disc, I could only say 'Not very much'. The disc is organised in reverse chronological order, the most recent material appearing first. They open with a reworked version of 'Das Spiel Ist Aus', which has a 'fuller' and more explosive feel than the album version, finally sounding like the bombastic anthem it was always supposed to be. 'Tanz Mit Laibach' is next – as a march that has made regular appearance on industrial set lists over the last year or so, it was always going to make it on, and no-ones complaining.

That's it from 'WAT' – personally, I'd have liked the title track, too, but enough complaining – on to the NATO era, with that outrageously over-the-top take on 'The Final Countdown' followed by their more respectful version of DAF's 'Alle Gegen Alle'. We also get their version of Status Quo's 'In The Army Now', this appearing after 'Wirtschaft Ist Tot' (the sole appearance from 'Kapital', my least-liked Laibach album) and 'God Is God' from 'Jesus Christ Superstars' (a good choice, the title track might have made an appearance, though). Then onto the sole representative from their 'Let It Be' re-creations, 'Get Back', which was certainly one of the few tolerable covers on that particular disc (I preferred 'Across The Universe', but then again, I think the same of the originals).

'Sympathy For The Devil' next, appearing in one of the more linear versions, and definitely one of several 'improvement on the original' Laibach cover versions. Then comes the three key songs from 'Opus Dei' – 'Leben Heisst Leben' linking neatly into 'Geburt Einer Nation' (aka 'One Vision' by Queen) and then 'Opus Dei' (aka 'Life Is Life'). Whilst the first and third of these songs are effectively the same thing sung in two different languages, they are still both relevant parts of the Laibach manifesto and both deserve to make it in. Getting seriously old school now, we get 'Die Liebe' (one of the first songs that resembles the band we know today), plus 'Panorama' from the same album.

Now we get two songs from the very first Laibach album, released in 1985, when they were still recording in their native tongue (as opposed to their subsequent use of English and German). 'Drzava' sounds rather confused and cluttered compared with the rest of the material here, whilst 'Brat Moj' sounds a little underdeveloped and probably needs a translation of the spoken word portion to make sense. We end with the one completely new song on the album (every hits collection has one), namely a cover of Nana Mouskouri's 'Mama Leone' – and against the run of form regarding retrospective 'bonus' tracks, this thing actually justifies purchase of the compilation on it's on. It's a delicate little thing, with spoken male and sung female vocals. I can't describe exactly what goes on here in advance – it show a more restrained face of Laibach that indicates that behind all the OTT cover versions, there is a very serious group that makes valid and thought provoking music.

Now we get to the remix disc. Most of these mixes have previously appeared on singles, though some are here for the first time. For the most part, these mixes are likely to appeal more to fans of the remixing bands than Laibach. Ben Watkins contributes to three mixes (one as Juno Reactor, another two with Nick Burton), of which two will appeal more to the dance fraternity than the hard core Laibach fanbase, though the 'Diabolig' mix of 'God Is God' retains at least some of the brute force of the original, even if little of the song remains. Other remixes, such as the two Random Logic mixes and Ultraviolence's take on 'War' rip the originals to shreds, turning the militant stomp of the originals into minimal techno and gabba respectively.

Some of the mixes are interesting, though – Daniel Miller’s ‘Kraftbach’ mix (a mix which seems to borrow elements from a number of different songs) goes for an interesting mix of Laibach elements with Trans-Europe Express style programming. Mark Stent’s techno mix of ‘Final Countdown’ is quite enjoyable and easily recognisable for what it is, whilst the ‘Late Night’ mix of ‘Wirtschaft Ist Tot’ gives new life to the ageing original. iTurk’s remix of ‘WAT’ tries very hard, but just misses the mark in terms of capturing the power and grandeur of the original. The rest I can take or leave – remix CD’s are often like that.

It’s questionable whether this is really necessary purchase for Laibach’s existing fanbase, as most of them will have these songs in their collection already – the new ‘Das Spiel Ist Aus’ was released on single just prior to this collection coming out, so you’re only really paying for ‘Mama Leone’, and maybe some of the older material if you haven’t been that meticulous with your collecting. That said, that one bonus track plus a bunch of favourites back to back might just make it worthwhile, and if you haven’t yet checked out Laibach, this collection is actually a fairly good starting point.

## **Laibach – Volk (2006)**

Having made a brief return to writing their own material on ‘WAT’, Laibach are doing what they’re best known for – creating extravagantly reworked versions of other people’s music. And what better ‘people’s music’ to adapt than national anthems? On this occasion, they’ve teamed up with fellow Slovenian act ‘Silence’ to record the bulk of the material, as well as bringing in a number of guest singers musicians where needed. The anthems adapted are not necessarily the current ones – for example, ‘God Save The Queen’ is (just about) recognisable in ‘Anglia’, but the tune used to represent ‘Das Lied der Deutschen’ dates back to the days of the Weimar republic.

The result of all this is an album that combines elements of folk, classical music, minimal techno, the occasional bit of militant bombast (this IS Laibach we’re talking about!). This all underpins the contrasting vocal styles of Milan Fras’ trademark growl (often used to comment on a particular countries foreign policy rather than sing the anthem) and the higher-pitched tones of Boris Benko, often verging on the falsetto, with a third vocalist often brought in to add a hint of the individual countries native tongue. It’s a hugely optimistic combination of different styles and musicology. Unfortunately, it only chmaltz on occasion.

The most successful adaptations are ‘Anglia’ and ‘Espana’, simply due to the way all contributing musicians get fairly close to uniting the disparate musical elements into cohesive compositions that sound in some way related to the band named on the sleeve – the childrens choir on ‘Rossiya’ is also touching in it’s own way. Other adaptations don’t work quite as well, often sounding like two almost-but-not-quite related pieces of music joined to form one track, whilst a few (such as Yisra’el) seem more concerned with social commentary than delivering a cohesive tune, meandering rather than building to any kind of climax. It’s a patchy release, overall, only occasionally achieving what it set out to do.

Oh, and in case your were wondering, the anthem of the NSK is present – though in reality it’s a reprise of ‘The Great Seal’ from the Opus Dei album given the ‘old crackly record’ treatment. So now you know.

## **L’âme Immortelle – Lieder die wie Wunden Blumen (1997)**

The first L’âme Immortelle album is generally indicative of what was to come later, with it’s combination of industrial, darkwave and classical elements, even though their potential was not completely realised at the outset. Their first great song ‘Life Will Never Be The

'Same Again' is the obvious highlight – a sombre piano ballad with Sonja's vocals soaring over everything, a genuine case of the right singer finding the right song.

Elsewhere, they explore more industrial territories with songs like 'Winter of My Soul', the militant beat of 'Crimson Skies' and the anti-war sentiments of 'Brother Against Brother', Thomas Rainer adopting a distorted rasp as his chosen vocal style at this stage of his career, with the two contrasting styles meeting in 'Figure in the Mirror' and in more disconcerting fashion on 'Into Thy Gentle Embrace'. The rest of the album is mixed to say the least, with a few listenable but not exceptionally memorable instrumentals and the over-indulgent spoken-word experimentation of the title track.

## **L'âme Immortelle – In einer Zukunft aus Tränen und Stahl (1998)**

The presence of a Funker Vogt remix gives a pretty good clue as to how this album differs from the first one – the industrial portion of their sound has been upped substantially compared with the predecessor. Even deceptively gentle tracks like 'Will You?' offer merely a fleeting few moments of atmospherics before the crunchy beats and throbbing electronics kick in. It's clear however that this was not the ultimate direction for the project, Thomas and Hannes proving to be reasonably proficient at producing seething electro-industrial without having the ultimate spark of greatness.

The emotional side of the music isn't totally lost, however – Sonja's efforts behind the mic keeping this side of the trio's sound very much alive. Her performance on 'Bitterkeit' is easily the most enduring moment on the album, with her renditions Marston's 'To Everlasting Oblivion' and Housman's 'The Immortal Part' also for the most part successful. The dual-vocal 'Love Is Lost' also works better than its equivalents on the last album. Generally this album is improvement on the last due to its more assured musical direction and a greater proportion of actual songs rather than mere 'pieces of music'. There was just a little more musical development needed.

## **L'âme Immortelle – Wenn der Letzte Schatten Fällt (1999)**

Astounding third album from L'âme Immortelle. Thomas now sings as well as shouts, and whilst his voice isn't as subtle and versatile as Sonja's, it's still a significant development, as this album starts to see L'âme Immortelle move away from the harsh electro-industrial textures of 'In Einer Zukunft' (though they still appear on occasion, their impact enhanced as a result) and introduce some synth-poppier elements to their sound. And the result is a varied, dynamic album which never gets dull.

Following the instrumental opener, the spiralling, dual-vocal 'Gefallen' and the Thomas-sung 'Changes' begin the proof that this outfit can work their songwriting mastery over an entire album rather than a single stand-out song. And it doesn't let up – the piano ballad 'Another Day', the tense melancholy electro-goth of 'Stern' (a personal favourite) and the towering anthem 'At The End' all indicative of the extent this band developed since their debut. Darkwave rarely gets much better than this.

## **L'âme Immortelle – Dann Habe Ich Umsonst Gelebt (2001)**

A concept album built round the story of a terminally ill man awaiting his fast approaching demise, as well as the first L'âme Immortelle output to incorporate live strings and guitars, though the overall feel of the album is otherwise similar to 'Wenn Der Letzte Schatten Fällt', with the two lead singles (a L'âme first), the Sonja-sung 'Judgement' and the harder, faster 'Epitaph' reminiscent of the last album. It's only after these two songs are out of the way that the revised style is apparent – 'Rearranging' reworks 'Changes' into a more grandiose, classically-styled piece, whilst 'Licht und Schatten' sees a more sedate (but not particularly

dynamic) take on the alternating vocal concept they've been working with since they first formed.

'Was Hält mich noch hier?' sees the first power chord action on a L'âme album, even though their still clearly learning how best to incorporate such sounds into the mix. The later tracks on the album are strong individually, but they don't seem to hang together well as the concept album which they were part – 'Forgive Me' is a reasonable Thomas-sung piece of dark-wave-pop, whilst 'Leaving' goes for a simultaneous vocal which fails to really convey the sentiments of a dying man musically even it does so lyrically. It's only on the final string-based 'Dead Actors Requiem' that we feel a genuine sense of loss, with a well-placed 'live band' remake of 'Life Will Never Be The Same Again' (with LAM's Sean Brennan on guest vocals) a fitting coda – a strong conclusion to an album that clearly tries hard and succeeds in places, but doesn't always pull on the heartstrings in the way it clearly wants to.

### **L'âme Immortelle – Als Die Liebe Starb (2003)**

This album is devoted to a clearly traumatic collapse of a relationship, every lyric (be they German or English) laced with a feeling of loss, confusion or anger over how and why things went wrong. Shifts in L'âme Immortelle line-up see Hannes leaving the band (contributing to only two songs before his exit) and guitarist Ashley Dayour join. These staff turnover issues do indeed bring changes to the sound, with the guitars more apparent than ever before, the live strings still in evidence, though despite this, the results are solid rather than spectacular.

'Tiefster Winter' and 'Have I Ever?' are both vintage L'âme Immortelle with the guitars slotting into the mix better than the rather half-hearted attempt on 'Dann Habe Ich...'. After these, however, the songwriting begins to lose direction – there's nothing actually wrong with the songs, but only the guitar-heavy 'Aus den Ruinen' and the bitchy 'Betrayal' do anything other than drift past in a competent but slightly miserable, pedestrian manner. It's still clear here that the band were seeking a new direction post-Hannes, but this still bears all the hallmarks of a 'transition' album, albeit one with just enough good songs to save it from oblivion.

### **L'âme Immortelle – Gezeiten (2004)**

L'âme Immortelle finally embrace the full potential of guitar rock, with the results being one of their most dynamic albums in years. It's not quite as subtle or intricate as earlier works, but it's an engaging listen nonetheless, with Sonja and Thomas still able to work their magic with a full band line-up, particularly with anthems like '5 Jahre', 'Stumme Schreie' and 'Rain', all of which manage to transfer the spirit of L'âme Immortelle project to a rock context without letting either the guitar or synth elements dominate.

They also manage to pull off the new style on slower songs 'Fallen Angel' and 'Ohne Dich', both carried off without any of that unnecessary sentimentality so often heard on such tunes. The only completely electronic track is 'Kingdom, a synth-poppy piece that seems rather insipid compared with the tracks that surround it. That and a few over-I lyrics are the only real flaws in what is otherwise an exciting new direction for what must now be Austria's No.1 musical export.

### **L'âme Immortelle – Auf Deinen Schwingen (2006)**

This album is the second L'âme Immortelle to offer a predominantly rock sound (in fact even more so than last time), but unlike 'Gezeiten', this direction no longer seems to be a promising new avenue of stylistic development. Recorded with a large number of session

musicians, this album indicates that Thomas and Sonja are finally at a loss for fresh ideas. It's very hard for a bona-fide rock band to achieve greatness with vocalists, a keyboard player and a bunch of hired hands, no matter how competent musicians they might be. It's a remarkably frustrating album to listen to (and even more so to review) – recognisable as the band named on the CD, but mysteriously doing nothing to so much approach the heights of previous works.

Take 'Phönix' for example – a creepy music-box and vixen-like vocal from Sonja opens things up, with the song reaching it's climax with some rattling guitar virtuosity. None of this actually makes the song a good one. Other elements, such as the vocal harmonies and symphonics on 'Sometime Love Is Not Enough', are impressive on a technical level but somehow the whole doesn't transcend the some of the parts. Elsewhere, such as 'Nur Du' and (on the premium edition only) 'Bis ans End der Zeit', they offer a more straightforward indie rock sound – reasonable for the genre but no more than that, whilst a large number of other songs (especially those sung by Thomas) tend towards the Germanic school of industrial rock pioneered by their mates over at 'Oomph!', though much of the aggression sounds forced.

One way or another, if this direction is ever going to go anywhere, Thomas really needs to recruit some full-time members who really know how to write rock songs, as what's on offer here, whilst competent musically, lacks the sensitivity of earlier works, and neither are they showing any signs that they could be Austria's answer to Rammstein et al.

## **L'âme Immortelle – Momente (2012)**

For a while, I never thought I'd hear from this project again. Following their misguided move into guitar rock, it had begun to seem as if L'âme Immortelle had descended into terminal decline, with founding members Thomas Rainer and Sonja Kraushofer seemingly more interested in their side-projects than their original band. Their last album, 2008's 'Namenlos' seemed like a self-conscious attempt at recapturing their electronic sound of times past, and for a while, it seemed like the bands 'immortal soul', well, wasn't!

But from out of nowhere, a new album has appeared, and this time it's clear that they've really put some real effort in. The album opens with the spoken-word 'L'Etang Malo', a 19<sup>th</sup> Century text by French poet Theodore de Banville accompanied by melancholy strings, a suitably high-brow precursor to the album itself. Elaborate, poetic compositions such as 'No Goodbye' and 'Wie Tranen Im Regen' in particular show clear influence from Sonja's Persephone work, the structural complexity a clear step up from what has come before.

Yet between them we get the Thomas-sung 'Absolution', a more straightforward darkwave pop track, yet one that showcases a singer finally learning not to belt out the words as loud as possible (save it for Nachtmahr!). The now-I 'woman sings-man shouts' technique does still appear on occasion, and 'Banish' will please fans of the bands' 1990s era when they dished up this kind of tune several times per album. The other L'âme stylistic standby (Sonja singing a piano ballad) crops up a couple of times towards the album's conclusion. 'Why Can't I Make You Feel' is clearly the stronger of the two, the album closer 'Hold Me' taking too long to achieve anything of note.

Guitars do still appear on a few tracks ('Empty', 'Demons Be Gone' and 'Dort Draussen') but only occasionally do they venture from the bottom-end enhancing grind that features so often in this genre (and bludgeoned much of the life out of their 2006 'Auf Deinen Schwingen' album). To be honest, the power chords work better now that they've been demoted to a supporting role, and hence are once again a welcome part of the L'âme sound. It's just that it would have been nice to hear some more virtuosity, given the progression heard in the other elements of their style

And despite finding their musical touch again, there's still something intangible missing from this album. Despite the musicianship at work, the album still lacks something equalling the soaring crescendo of 'Bitterkeit', the instant-appeal synth pulse of 'Changes' or the lullaby simplicity of 'Stern'. It's almost as though having reached the age of consent (L'Âme Immortelle are now 16 years old), their full 'maturity of sound' came at the cost of their youthful innocence. That said, this is still a strong release, not quite the full 'return to glory' that was hoped for, but certainly the best we've heard from Thomas and Sonja for quite some time.

## **L'âme Immortelle – Zweilicht (2002)**

Primarily intended a remix offshoot from 'Dann Habe Ich..', 'Zweilicht' doubles as a record of the tour behind the album, with a CD ROM video featuring both live performances and backstage footage. The remix disc contains a new version of all but one of the original albums tracks, plus the B-side 'The Truth Behind', and is particular interest due to the varied cast of remixer – serial scene rework names Assemblage 23 and Lights of Euphoria appearing alongside less-expected choices Faith and The Muse and The Protagonist as well as power noise acts such as Sonar and MS Gentur.

The results are mixed to say the least – Faith and The Muse (remixing 'Judgement') and ASP (taking on 'Rearranging') both put in strong mixes that essentially capture the song in their own individual styles, whilst Lights of Euphoria's remix is good in a club-friendly sense. The industrial/power noise mixes tend to knock most of the life out of the original songs, with PsychoBitch's version of 'Leaving' the 'least worst' in that sense.

The CD ROM portion of the album takes live footage from two L'âme Immortelle shows in Germany that formed part of the 'Embraced In Twilight' tour in 2001, adding backstage clips to form an hour-long show. Unfortunately, the video quality isn't great with quite a small picture, although it's worth watch to see the band play with a live string section (a practise now discontinued). As a package, the set is probably the least essential item in the bands whole backcatalogue – a better live set has since been released, and only a few of the remixes have any staying power.

## **L'âme Immortelle – Seelensturm (2003)**

A collection of unreleased songs and demo version, mostly from the early years of the band's existence, though a few recent remixes are also included. It will thus be of interest mainly to those people who wished they'd never moved on from the electro-industrial/darkwave crossover prevalent on their earlier albums. Demo versions of 'Winter of my Soul' and 'Ich Gab Dir Alles' generally follow the same path as the final album cuts, whilst the unreleased tracks from 1996 are similar their contemporaries on 'Lieder Die Wie Wunden Blüten'.

The rare tracks 'Silver Rain' & 'Echoes' are welcome inclusions, as is a piano version of 'Bitterkeit', though the lack of the original version of 'In The Heart of Europe' is an unfortunate omission. The remixes of 'Forgive Me' and 'Tiefster Winter' are OK but nothing ground-breaking. As it's not really a completion of anything musical, it's not exactly an essential addition to your L'âme Immortelle collection, though collectors will be interested in the limited edition version, contained within a book containing every lyrics and poem written by Thomas Rainer.

## **Les Anges De La Nuit – Ruins Of Victory (2005)**

Hooray! Another trance/synth-pop inspired danceathon! Hailing from Fort Lauderdale, this newly-signed three piece serve up epic trance sounds coiled round a visionary songwriting



style. Get ready to light those glowsticks and wave your hands in the air, because this thing is going to get those Slimelight dancefloors heaving come Saturday night. Only I won't be joining you. Because, dear reader, I'm really, really sick to death of this kind of thing. The album calls itself 'Ruins of Victory', and I'm sorely tempted to append it with 'Not Vengeance'. Because whilst VNV themselves have moved on, there seems to be no shortage of bands content to pick up the pieces and milk what's left of the future pop scene dry.

Come to think of it, some of them are quite good at it. Just listen to *Pride & Fall* – an exercise in how to write a decent album despite a lack of any truly original ideas. Icon of Coil are holding their own after three albums. *Angels & Agony* and *Assemblage 23* have both been at it for a while, too – admittedly both acts seems to be on the decline, but there's still the occasional anthem of note emerging. Which leads me nicely onto this album, the debut effort from what might be termed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Generation of Future Pop. Reading through the Infacted label write-up, you'd be mistaken in thinking that you were onto *The Next Big Thing*. Yet despite listening to the thing several times over, I really can't see what all the fuss is about.

The album opens up with the moody choirs and storm samples of 'The Apocalypse', before the Access-school lead and hard, stompy four-beat appear almost on cue, followed by the morose lyricisms of a man who seems to be singing about the end of time, but really doesn't seem all that bothered about it. And there's the problem – even if they are putting in stacks of effort and emotion, it's all sounding a bit ordinary. Following this is the uptempo 'Banish' me, nondescript barring the first appearance of the 'breakdown' dynamic, which zooms past so quickly that it fails to serve it's purpose of getting everyone to stop and wave their hands before going nuts when the beat kicks in again.

'Forever and a Day' next – a synth-poppy one, relatively accomplished in a technical sense, but the whole thing sounds too much like something from an Iris album to really strike a chord with me. If you ARE a big-time Iris fan, however, there's a pretty good chance you'll really get into this one, as long as you can stand the overly-sugary lyrics. It's after this that the album really nosedives, however, with the long, tedious 'Translucent Minds', all throbbing synths, flying strings and the dullest, most repetitive set of lyrics I've heard in years. Things don't improve for 'In The Worst Time', vocals unnecessary hidden by perfunctory effects, whilst instrumentally it's a straight run through all the chmalt.

'Promise' starts of like it's going to build into this huge floorfilling anthem, but it never seems to want to fulfil it's early promise, sounding as pedestrian as the five tracks that came before. 'Mystic Places' is a slight improvement, more successful melodically but spoiled by clumsy beat distortion which makes the kick drum sound like it's half-buried in jelly. Then comes 'Lost Forever', slightly techno hint on the drum programming, but otherwise nothing of interest. The penultimate song is 'I Find Myself', one of the strongest songs instrumentally, showing more dynamism than previously, but the song is weak, meandering rather than progressing. The album ends with a listenable but otherwise forgettable trance instrumental 'Reborn'.

I've actually seen this album get a few good preliminary reviews. And in some respects, it does offer many people what they want to hear. But I've heard this style of music carried off so much better by so many other acts. The anthemics of *Pride & Fall*, the underlying anger of Icon of Coil or clever production methodologies of *Seabound* just aren't here, and none of those three bands ever produced truly great albums. Good albums, just not great ones. And this album seems to be inferior to these by quite some ways. The songwriting style doesn't click, the synths are a real heard-it-all-before affair and the hooks just aren't hooky. So as far as I'm concerned, it's a bit of a failure all round.

## Mari Chrome – Georgy #11811

Mari Chrome sees the return of singer Marion Küchenmeister, former singer for the late 80's / early 90's German new wave act Invisible Limits. Teaming up with musician Kai Otte and producer John Fryer (you can Google for his credits, too many to list here), the stage is set for a quality comeback album, billed by Alfa-Matrix as "a fresh mixture of solid EBM, melodic trance synths, dark atmospheres and strong emotional vocals". And yes, I'm a sucker for all the above.

The opening song "Here I Am" does indeed deliver exactly what the label promo says it would – a solid, mid-tempo pop song with a raucous synth melody providing a well-executed contrast to Mari's vocals, layered in places to bring a real richness to the sound. "The Seeker" takes the tempo up a level, bringing the inevitable shuffle rhythm that appears at least once on every album in this genre, but it always welcome in moderation and here is no exception. The real stand-out track of the album is up next – "Toxic". I thought they'd stopped making futurepop, but all the elements are here – punchy beats, synth arps, flying strings and a huge chorus. Definitely the track of choice for club play.

Having won the audience over, they then curve-ball us with a tranced-up cover of The Cure's "A Forest". There's a lot of 80's standards just ripe for a modern-day dancefloor remake, but I've never thought Cure songs should really feature on this list. Surely they're nothing without the claustrophobic production and Robert Smith's anguish? Well, Mari Chrome do indeed drive a tank through the spirit of the original, but they do replace it with a surprisingly entertaining romp, all throbbing synths and poppy vox, thus disproving my theory that Cure songs are impossible to cover well.

They couldn't keep the energy level up for long, and "Without You" shows the first real signs of weakness. There may be a pretty chord progression and a memorable chorus, but the song as a whole struggles to maintain interest throughout, sounding cluttered in places. There then come a diversion to Mari's native German tongue on "Nie Wieder", but the language switch doesn't hide the songs otherwise pedestrian nature. Play some synth, sing some words, move on. Nothing to see (or rather hear) here. "Come Closer" as a more seductive, feel about it, with the breathy chorus working well.

It's certainly more distinctive than "Welcome Home", which just repeats everything we've heard so far, a melodic chorus the only vaguely notable feature in a track that otherwise bears all the hallmarks of an album filler. The album's second cover version follows, this time taking on "Blue Monday". Unlike "A Forest", you'd actually expect an uptempo take on New Order's signature tune to work, and hence it came as something of a surprise to hear a more sedate, piano-driven remake. I'm not complaining – "Blue Monday" is one of the most overplayed songs (in any form) in our scene, second only to "Enjoy The Silence", so it's a welcome change to hear any band attempt to deliver a new twist on a overplayed standard like this.

Penultimate song "Running Wild" throws in a lot of energy, but I don't know what it's trying to achieve. "Come With Me" ends the album, and it's another so-so track, indicative of an album that started strongly but lost some of it's sparkle towards the end. Being Alfa Matrix, there is a limited edition version available with a remix disc (not included with the review copy), though looking up the tracklist reveals plenty of remixes of "Here I Am" and "Toxic" (the better songs), but also of "Running Wild" and "Come With Me" (which is more surprising). It's a pity no-one go a chance to rework "The Seeker", a prime candidate for a full-on, glowstick-waving, Kann-I-Zee-Yor-Handz anthem conversion.

It's still an album with several strong songs, and hence will be of interest to both fans of the genre as well as those of you who remember Invisible Limits in their original form. A

final note about John Fryer's production. He's resisted the temptation to make a polished, airbrushed production, and hence the album has a slightly rougher feel to it, not unlike Ashbury Heights 'Take Cair Paramour'. This is a welcome move – whilst the album is unsubtle in places, it ultimately has more impact.

## **Mari Chrome – Toxic EP (2012)**

I was pleased to find that the latest digi-single release from Mari Chrome's debut album was "Toxic". Of all the tracks I heard on the album, this was the one that shouted "ANTHEM!" to my DJ-attuned ears. Recognising that their biggest potential audience is in their homeland, they've recorded a German version of the vocal, unsurprisingly titled "Toxisch", and also delivered a remix, to which both versions of the lyrics have been applied. Or in other words, from one new vocal take and one remix, they've spun out a 4-track EP. Could have been worse, I guess. They could have dumped a couple of "instrumental" versions to up the track count a couple more.

The German version of the song sounds good enough. There's no impression that the song has been forced into a new language against it's will, despite the syllable count varying at times. But have we been treated to anything special? No. The "Alternate" remix I found to be quite disappointing. Despite the introduction of an EBM style bassline and some rock dynamics, the resulting mix just doesn't have the impact of the original. In particular, the magic of the chorus is simply buried too deeply in amongst all the new sounds introduced. Songs like this can sink or swim on the back of a single decent hook, but this is more "bore us" than "chorus", more "filler" than "killer". They've killed off the best bit of the song.

My final mark for this release does not represent my respect for the original version of the song, which would have scored a 7 or 8 on it's own. In these days of pay-per-track downloads on Bandcamp, there's no need to pay four times (actually, it works out a Euro off if you have to buy the whole thing) for what is ultimately one song. The album version is all you need.

## **Marilyn Manson – Portrait Of An American Family (1994)**

All superstars have to start somewhere, and in the case of Mr.Manson it was here, with this 13-track collection of perverted shock-rock, a combination of rock excess and industrial metal grit, with big, stompy beats, grinding guitars and cartoonish keyboards, with Manson snarling authoritatively as the ringmaster in this most depraved of circuses. The growth of Manson's songwriting maturity since his 'Spooky Kids' era is apparent on songs such as the opening all-American rant of 'Cake and Sodomy' and the Willy Wonka inspired 'Dope Hat', complete with horror-movie style theremin.

Even older tracks like 'Dogma' and the Charles Manson inspired 'My Monkey' gain new levels of vitality from Trent Reznor's production influence, with 'Lunchbox' becoming the anthem for every bullied child who'd harboured dreams of smashing their nemeses brains out. A couple of songs ('Sweet Tooth' & 'Wrapped in Plastic') fall short of the mark despite this, but it's nothing unforgivable by debut album standards.

## **Marilyn Manson – Antichrist Superstar (1996)**

'Antichrist Superstar' is a rarity amongst albums – a cohesive concept album comprised almost entirely of songs that still stand up strongly on their own strengths. It's an autobiographical epic, divided into three 'Cycles', charting Brian Warners rise from obscurity to become Marilyn Manson – Antichrist Superstar. The last Marilyn Manson release to be produced by Trent Reznor, his skills at the mixing desk offering a blend of

heavily processed guitars, distorted electronics and bizarre audio effects whose intricacy only become apparent upon multiple listens. The stylistic range of the album is impressive to say the least – the full-throttle industrial metal in the form of ‘Irresponsible Hate Anthem’ and ‘Little Horn’, the twisted complexity of ‘Deformography’ and ‘Kinderfled’, the mantra-like ‘Cryptochid’, not forgetting the crossover anthem ‘The Beautiful People’.

It’s only when the album reaches its third and final cycle that the true scale of the project becomes apparent – the Nazi-rally dynamics of ‘Antichrist Superstar’, the anti-everything blast ‘1996’ and then the slow descent into oblivion of ‘The Minute of Decay’, halted in dramatic fashion by ‘The Reflecting God’, the all-encompassing Satanic hymn that serves as the album’s climax, with the resigned gloom ‘Man That You Fear’ a fitting coda to an album which takes the listener on a roller-coaster ride through the rise to fame of one of America’s most notorious anti-heroes, finishing with the ultimate cautionary tale for anyone dreaming of stardom – ‘When all of your wishes are granted, many of your dreams will be destroyed’.

## **Marilyn Manson – Mechanical Animals (1998)**

A radical diversion for the third album, dumping Reznor and his industrial dystopias in favour of a cleaner, Bowie-esque ‘androgynous alien’ glam-rock concept, based around the twin characters Alpha and Omega. And oddly enough, they seem able to carry off this new direction with apparent ease. From the schmaltzy beauty of opening track ‘Great Big White World’ to the numbing resignation of coda ‘Coma White’, Manson and co examine the life-sapping realities of drug use, emotional (dis)attachment and our increasingly colourless, uniform society from the point of view of ‘a man who fell to earth’ (there’s Bowie again).

A Mansonesque take on glam-rock can be found as early as track 2 – ‘The Dope Show’, whilst anyone looking for the sleazy alternative metal need look no further than ‘Rock Is Dead’. Other highlights include the acoustic guitar and vocoder on ‘The Speed of Pain’ (easily one of this act’s most beautiful creations), the 70s funk of ‘I Don’t Like The Drugs (But The Drugs Like Me)’ and the foul-mouthed carnal desire of ‘User Friendly’, not to mention the last-hope-for-salvation expanse of ‘The Last Day On Earth’. It seems like even without Reznor’s NINfluence, a second concept piece was not out of the question, even if they had to make substantial changes to their musical direction to achieve it.

## **Marilyn Manson – Holy Wood (2000)**

The fourth full-length album from Marilyn Manson, a return in part to the abrasive industrial metal sound of Antichrist Superstar, particularly on lead singles ‘Disposable Teens’ (which is VERY reminiscent of ‘The Beautiful People’) and ‘The Fight Song’, it still bears the more melodic subtleties of Mechanical Animals in places, most notably on ‘In The Shadow Of The Valley Of Death’ and ‘A Place In The Dirt’, both of which are very reminiscent of the ‘Alpha’ tracks from the last album. The strongest song overall is the unusually melodic ‘The Nobodies’ – allegedly a Columbine tribute (allegedly as the same has been said of ‘Disposable Teens’), though the most profound lyrics can be found in ‘Lamb of God’ – a critical look at the concept of ‘martyrdom’ and the glorification of ‘celebrity’ deaths.

It’s also the most ambitious Manson album to date in terms of scope – nineteen tracks (with some versions adding a bonus track or two). This is also in some respects its weak point – the album just drags on for a little too long, lessening the impact of the later part of the album. Regardless of the strengths of the actual songs, the magic touch that made the last two albums so cohesively brilliant seems to have been lost – the last seven tracks seem confused and directionless in particular, just alternating loud and quiet material until

they run out of CD. That's not to say it's a BAD album as it isn't, it's just with a little more quality control it could have been better still.

## **Marilyn Manson – The Golden Age Of Grotesque (2003)**

Marilyn Manson returns with the customary new image, going for a 30s Vaudeville/Berlin 'Decadent' style, which suits his pseudo-artistic demeanour perfectly. Songwriting and production values remain strong, with Tim Skold replacing Twiggy Ramirez on bass, as well as serving as co-producer (and making a v.good job of both roles). More importantly, Mr.Manson has realised that he's no longer in the critical limelight, and has taken the opportunity to enjoy himself a little bit more than usual- mOBSCENE shamelessly rips off 'Faith No More' and 'This Is The New Shit' is a hilariously over-the-top riposte to the so-called originality of 'artistic expression', but it's hard not to get caught up in the frenzy of it all.

'Doll-Dagga-Buzz-Buzz-Ziggety-Zag' keeps the momentum going, whilst s(AINT) offers some of Manson's finest wordplay to date, a contrast to the unsubtle bludgeon of 'Ka-Boom Ka-Boom' (yes, these songs titles ARE for real!). Once again, however, the album seems to lose direction as it reaches it's conclusion, all of the most memorable songs concentrated into the first half. It's still an improvement over the over-optimistic sprawl of 'Holy Wood', and it's encouraging to see that this band are still able to find ways of sounding fresh and vital. It's just their knack for creating consistent albums rather than individual songs seems to have been lost somewhere.

## **Marilyn Manson – Smells Like Children (1995)**

Partially a remix collection from 'Portrait of an American Family', partially a collection of cover versions (including excellent versions of the Eurythmics 'Sweet Dreams' and Patti Smiths 'Rock and Roll Nigger'), and partially a collection of audio snippets from a variety of sources. As 'miscellany' albums go, it's not all that bad, though it isn't really essential either, unless you can't get hold of the cover versions any other way, as the remixes vary between 'just about' listenable' and 'good but not great' and the soundbites cease being funny after a few run-throughs.

## **Marilyn Manson – The Last Tour On Earth (1999)**

There was clearly demand for a Marilyn Manson live album, if the number of bootlegs floating around was anything to go by, and by 1999 they finally succumbed and released a set from 'The Last Tour On Earth' (promoting 'Mechanical Animals'). It may not have been a substitute for the real thing, but it least offered those unable to make the live shows a flavour of what the band sound like live, with a number of tracks (including 'The Reflecting God' and the extended length 'Lunchbox') taking on an extra level of bite in their live incarnations, whilst the acoustic version of 'The Last Day On Earth' provides an unexpectedly laid-back finale.

## **Marilyn Manson – Lest We Forget: Best Of (2004)**

There are no real surprises on this 'Best Of' comp – just a lot of good songs. Even the token 'new' song is a predictable cover of 'Personal Jesus'. All your favourite sleazy, sub-gothic anthems are much in evidence however, with no really critical omissions. The album thus provides a decent introduction to the world of Marilyn Manson for anyone who's been holded up in a monastery for the last decade – the profile he has in the media does limit the usefulness of the audio portion of this package however, simply due to how well known these songs already are.

I do however strongly recommend existing fans to seek out the limited version with the DVD. It contains 20 of the bands promo videos, including a number of songs that didn't make the audio disc and some clips that were never widely played on the networks. Marilyn Manson makes no secret that his art extends beyond the boundaries of music, and each of these videos shows a different facet of his depraved creativity at work.

## Megahertz – Loblieder (2010)

I don't remember hearing many Megahertz remixes over the years, and having gone to the effort of acquiring their entire backcatalogue, that's actually something of a surprise. For those of you who don't know, Megahertz are one of the open secrets of the NDH scene – If you live outside of Germany, you'd be hard pushed to learn of their existence unless you:

- H) Frequent the file sharing networks, and acquired some mysterious Rammstein track called 'Gott Sein'. Only to realise several years later that it's no da 'Stein after all but actually a band called 'Megahertz'

OR

b) Frequent sites like this one. Because I'm here to discover this kind of thing for you.

Anyway, they've made up for a historic lack of third-party reworks by dishing out a double CD collection of the things. A quick scan of the track list indicates one CD of EBM/electro-industrial remixes and a second predominantly consisting of various Germanic darkwave/industrial rock projects. The songs had for the most part never previously seen remix treatment, thus offering a blank slate for all participants. All the ingredients are there. Which makes it harder to cope with the fact that This Really Didn't Work Out As Planned.

Let's take a look at the first disc. Die Krupps and Gerrit Thomas (Funker Vogt) take on 'Ebenbild' and 'Heuchler' respectively, and both make a pretty good job of giving the parent track some real electronic backbone. But the reality is that they simply could not have failed – despite their instrumental differences, the two project share aesthetic chmaltzy with Megahertz in that they're all chmaltz, masculine, mid-tempo Germanic industrial bands. Compare this with the perfunctory efforts of Suicide Commando, Agonoize and Grendel, who simply apply their harsh aggrotech sound palettes to songs that were never designed for them. It's not that the remixes are BAD, it's just there's no real value-added. It's all so workmanlike.

Rotersand are all at sea with 'L'adventure', sounding for all the world like one of those mainstream dance DJs who remix rock tracks for CD single B-sides in exchange for bit of pocket money. It doesn't matter if the mix is any good, the name will sell it! Oh, and I have no idea what Covenant were thinking when then took on 'Fauler Zauber' but the mix provided here seems to indicate a complete lack of any real feel for how to remix songs like this. Heimataerde get three mixes, but only one of them ('Heuchler') really captures the electro-medieval feel of project and applies it to the original song. Sara Noxx at least puts in a decent mix of 'Beiss Mich' – I never cared much for the original but at least here the combination of a simple-but-effective chord progression and added backing vocals works well and doesn't outstay it's welcome.

Things get more interesting when we move away from the EBM remixes, though it's perhaps notable that the most notable track on the whole album is not a remix but actually a full-on cover version. Mono Inc. produce a melodic take on 'Herzblut' – what it loses in intensity it gains in accessibility and tunefulness. It's certainly better than Apron's mix of the same song, which kills off everything that was good about the original and makes it sound like an album filler from a Korn-wannabe nu-metal band. There are also passable

remixes of 'Heuchler' (by Steinkind), Allees Nur Lüge (by Letzte Instanz) and Teufel (by Seelenzorn), all of whom just shift the original slightly towards a different brand of Germanic metal. Listenable, but I didn't find myself aching for a second listen.

Somebody obviously thought it was a good idea to get Qntal to do a mix. Their harp-driven take on 'Augenblick' is surprisingly easy on the ear, layering the vocals carefully and underpinning the track with a gently pulsating electronic backbone, even if the mix as a whole simply indicates Qntal played a difficult hand quite well. 'Staubkind' includes two minimal recreations of 5. März – a solo piano version and another featuring minimal orchestration, a radical move that actually seems to add new purpose to the original song. There is also a 8 minute 39 second version of 'Die Tier' by one Christian Prommer which seems to be rooted in Detroit techno, but I think we can skip that one as a bad joke.

I think what gets me is that not only have the wrong songs been picked, but the wrong remixes were chosen for those that were. Why didn't we get a rework of 'Tanz Auf Dem Vulkan'? The shredded guitar and descending synth line were just aching for one of the Out Of Line brigade to take and give the full-on Oontz treatment. Why weren't any more of the old-school-EBM revival brigade brought on board, given that NDHs innovator (Oomph!) started out in the style? The collection is not a disaster as it does have some ingenious takes on the original versions, but having gone to the effort of ordering this release from Germany with the £-€ rate still under 1.2 (the threshold it needs to pass before I go back to the country), I was hoping for so much more.

## **Mesh – We Colide (2006)**

Mesh return with their first studio album in almost four years. There's been a few developments to their sound, but essentially it's still the same three-piece synth-pop combo who do the angsty, post-Mode electro-mope better than anyone else. Mark Hockings remains one of the genre's best vocalists, and the degree of professionalism in terms of production and execution is refreshing considering the generally poor quality of synthpop emerging from both sides of the Atlantic lately (analogue revival is no excuse for substandard quality control!). Lead single 'Crash' is the obvious floor-filler, the synth lead and relatively forceful rhythm allowing the song to sit nicely along the EBM and future pop hits of the moment.

Other likely stand-out tracks included opener 'Open Up The Ground' and 'Step By Step', although it's likely that each individual listener may well fall for whichever of the songs bears a lyrics which best sums up a sentiment they share. A key change is the inclusion of guitar on the majority of the songs, though they manage to combine the usual power-chord rhythm-enhancement ('This Is What You Wanted' the most obvious example) with some more melodic elements (Can You Mend Hearts?). Generally, the album feels 'harder', more aggressive than previous works, a stylistic shift that works well for them. The real appeal of the album, however is in the quality of the source material – songs of betrayal, break-ups and other facets of life in the real world rarely come any better than this.

Note: There is a limited edition version of this album with a bonus DVD, containing such things as a 'making of' documentary, some promo video, live clips from 2003/4 and five demo versions. A nice bonus – worth paying the mark-up for if you can lay your hands on it.

## **mind.in.a.box – Retro (2010)**

I write this review feeling like some kind of traitor. During the 1980s, I was an Atari XL/XE man, through and through. The Crappydore 64 just didn't feature. One things both machines did have were highly capable soundchips. I have fond memories of taping my

favourite computer themes to listen to away from the machine, and to this day I have a Winamp plugin allowing me to listen to them on any of my machines. There seems to be a lack of any producers willing to use a POKEY chip in the modern era and I don't know why – the cold, harsh square waves it produces would be a great building block for the cold, harsh music I love to write about. It seems as though the C-64's SID is the best I'm going to get.

Necessity is the mother of invention, though, and one of the limitations of chip music was the lack of notes that could be played simultaneously. Chords were thus played as arpeggios and various tremolos and twiddly solos were programmed to compensate, giving chip music it's very 'lively' sound. Many have adapted it for the dancefloor in the past, with varying degrees of success, and now it's time for Mind.in.a.box to have a go. It's the kind of concept you'd expect from a project who have made something of a career out of dreaming up concepts and then developing them across albums that ostensibly contain electronic dance music.

And they can get the concept to work. 'Last Ninja 3' gets a hint of the grandiose orchestration it would have had if the game had been released several generations later. 'Lightforce', which was not one of Rob Hubbard's better tunes in its original form, gets transformed into a near-8 minute extravaganza, with the main theme giving way to an extended length synth lead, an indulgence few electronic musicians dare attempt these days (did Rick Wakeman make the whole concept unfashionable?).

Another Hubbard classic, 'The Last V8', is turned on its head, retaining the original phrases of the original (as well as the 'Return To Base Immediately' sample), but adding vocals and a completely new rhythm. There are some original compositions here – two electropop style tributes to old-school technology entitled '8 Bits' and 'I Love 64', both equally as charming, both equally as reminiscent of Fairlight Children (the Apop offshoot that released a whole album of songs in this approximate style some years ago).

But there is a problem here, and it's something that's affected every Mind.in.a.box album I've heard. Their tendency to take risks in terms of structure and concept might be admirable from a creative point of view. Here the opposite occurs – on both Jeroen Tel's 'Supremacy' and their own 'Mindkiller' they don't get adventurous enough, capturing little of the chiptune favour – neither tune is all that memorable in its own right, which ultimately leaves us with a couple of generic four-beat set fillers.

Still, mixed results are better than no results, and at least Mind.in.a.box have attempted to combine the primitive chip sounds with more contemporary electronic textures and production styles, thus setting themselves aside from the pure-retro approach taken by the likes of Welle:Erdball et al. This album will thus be of interest to the band's regular fan base as well as a decent proportion of the chip music revival movement (must make it into a genre one day), but I still think they could have picked some better core material to work with. I reckon Rob Hubbard's 'Warhawk' or 'Sanxion' themes are ripe for a modern-day remake. Who's up for a go at those ones, then?

## **Mindless Faith – Just Defy (2012)**

This is the fifth album by the Baltimore-based project Mindless Faith. Their style combines various hard electronic influences with jagged guitar riffs, a combination that presents them with a wide potential audience in the industrial scene, but also plenty of competition. After all, the concept of reinforcing synthetic rhythms with some heavily-processed six-string action is a concept that dates back to the birth of industrial music's Golden Age in the mid-to-late-80s. Anyone practising the style now needs to have some original ideas to get any real attention. Fortunately, Mindless Faith have exactly that.



Their stylistic trump card is best exemplified on the tracks “Next To Last”, “Over The Fence” and “You Don’t Know”, where they build on the concept first crystallised on their 2004 ‘Momentum’ album, a combination of uptempo kick drums, heavy psytrance influences, driven forward by ceaseless guitar riffs. The vocals mostly consist of standard industrial-scene gravel (there’s some occasional fem-vox backing), but there’s some neat turns of phrase in their dismissive social commentary. Equal parts Chemlab and Infected Mushroom, these tracks are a must for anyone who enjoys a hard, angry stomp on the world’s darker dancefloors.

Another highlight is the “Let Us Prey” remix of Vultures, tightening up the rather cluttered original song and giving it the full-on psy-industrial treatment described above. “Corporati\$m” takes the intensity level yet further, resembling a full-on industrial metallar at times, though the calmer middle section provides a welcome relief from the ceaseless axegrinding and vitriolic outbursts against rich people that dominate the majority of the song.

I do feel that this project does seem to lose something whenever they let the tempos drop. “No Saints Allowed” could be have a been a great slow, reflective track, but despite the presence of multiple guitar lines (not all of them overdriven to speaker-splitting intensity this time), the song is confused structurally, unable to transition cleanly between it’s loud and quiet parts and often sounding overly swamped whenever the power chords kick in. “Undone” is a slight improvement, but it still seems to drag when compared to the albums undisputed floor fillers.

The remainder of the album sits between these extremes. “The Thirst” is a reasonable attempt at a straight-forward industrial rocker, describing the perils of drug abuse, but the throbbing basslines of “Love Is A Dirty Word” and “Mutually Assured Destruction” sound somewhat workmanlike in comparison with the stronger material on offer here. There is also an instrumental interlude “Indiscriminate Force”, but it achieves little in it’s two-minute duration and is hence the least necessary track on the whole album.

This album still has a decent selection of strong tracks, but having listened back to my Mindless Faith favourites from previously releases, I can’t help but notice that all of my playlist selections (‘Singular’, ‘Momentum’, ‘I’m Pretty Much Fucked’) follow similar musical lines to my stand-out tracks here. And speaking as someone who usually enjoys the downtempo tracks on albums such as this, it possibly indicates a weakness in this project’s overall stylistic spread. But what they do well, they do very well, and largely without precedent.

## **Ministry – With Sympathy/Work For Love (1983)**

It’s hard to believe than Ministry started out as a synth-heavy new wave band. Listening to ‘Alien’ Jourgensen taking on the Brits at their own game may seem laughable these days, but the really interesting thing is that this isn’t exactly bad! Al wasn’t a bad signer prior to fucking up his voice with tobacco, drugs and the like, and the production is quite polished by early 80s standards. It’s just all rather camp and certainly not in the slightest way indicative of what was to come.

‘I Wanted To Tell Her’ is classic 80s new romantic, with it’s cheesy synth leads, bass groove and jangling guitar. ‘Say You’re Sorry’ sees the first appearance of a sax in Ministry’s music (this instrument would be one of the few musical elements on this album to find its way into later recordings), though the strongest song overall is probably ‘Revenge’, cynical, dismissive synth-pop and a forgotten classic. A couple of songs (such as ‘Do The Etawa’) are a little aimless structure-wise and irritating musically, but it’s still surprisingly strong for an album long since disowned by the band.

## Ministry – Twitch (1985)

The electronics have hardened, the tone has darkened. This is Ministry's abortive foray into electronic body music. The vocals are snarled rather than sung (but they're still relatively mild compared with the hoarse rasp heard from the next album onwards). It's a reasonable attempt at the style, the rhythms punchy and the electronics throbbing, though the synth leads now sound quite dated, whilst the quality of production is quite varied.

Most of the songs follow similar lines, echoing the Nitzer Ebb and Cabaret Voltaire sound of the era, though 'All Day' is interesting – the instrumentation sounds like something from 'Work For Love', whilst the vocal style is more typical of the one used during the 'Rape and Honey' period. Generally, the album is more of an interesting curio than a must-hear part of the Ministry back catalogue. It's an interim between the original Ministry and the one they eventually became, but those with a taste for this particular era of industrial music and a tolerance for the varied quality control that came with it will find a lot to like here.

## Ministry – The Land Of Rape And Honey (1988)

The Ministry that we know and love (?) today starts here. The hammering rhythms and scathing power chords join the Ministry musical palette, though only on occasion do they really make the best of the component parts, a number of the tracks merely producing a noiser, more-sample laden version of the EBM heard on 'Twitch'. It's the starting point of what would become a major new sound – the potential would just take an album or two more to be realised. 'Stigmata' opens the album, its fuzzy guitar line and relentless pace kicking off the industrial metal revolution in style, carrying its momentum through the opening tracks, with both 'The Missing' and 'Deity' delivering no-compromise guitar-reinforced rhythmic fury.

The album begins to move back in a more electronic direction as it reaches its middle phase – whilst there are some effective compositions (such as the title track), the muddy production is more apparent during this phase. It's only when we get to the likes of 'I Prefer' and the exceptionally savage 'Flashback' that the pace of the early tracks once again resumes. The significance of this album's stronger tracks cannot be doubted, yet the collection as a whole doesn't quite match that promise. Classic albums are rarely as heavy-going as this one.

## Ministry – The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste (1989)

The potential that was demonstrated on a number of the 'Rape and Honey' tracks gets fully realised here. The sound of this album is cleaner, harder and more deeply cutting than its predecessor, and it shows. 'Thieves' advances on 'Stigmata' with a guitar line that seems to want to drill its way into your skull, whilst 'Burning Inside' is built round a rhythm so suicidally fast that it's capable of inflicting neck injuries on anyone brave enough to slam dance to it.

There's still plenty of variety though – the dirty bassline on the Chris Connelly sung 'So What' opens a new sleazy avenue of creativity for the band, a direction also apparent on 'Cannibal Song' and 'Faith Collapsing'. Whilst they (probably unintentionally) invent nu-metal on 'Test', having invited a rapper along for the ride. The doom-laden gothic finale of 'Dream Song' rounds off the most varied and most consistent Ministry album to date.

## Ministry – Psalm 69 (1992)

The central reference point for industrial metal? Possibly. Whatever the album's status in musical history, it nevertheless showcases Ministry at the very height of their powers.

Some of the most deeply cutting riffs known to man can be found in songs like the anti-Republican anthem 'I' and the William Burroughs inspired 'Just One Fix', whilst 'Jesus Built My Hotrod' offers us a hilariously over-the-top industrial interpretation of old-fashioned country rock. Ding-a-ling-lang-my-dang-a-long-ling-long, indeed.....

'Scarecrow' is slower and more drawn-out, but no less powerful as a result, whilst the title track adds massed choirs to the mix in spectacular fashion. This album is also benefited from stronger production than previously, every riff, drum and vocal rasp tuned to cause maximum damage to one's speaker cones, ear drums and reputation amongst neighbours. It only ever went downhill from here.

## **Ministry – Filth Pig (1995)**

It had to happen eventually, and it's on this album that the bubble finally bursts. Al Jourgensen clearly attempted to make each album heavier than the last, and now he's finally overdone it. Most of the songs on this album sit on just the wrong side of unlistenability. The dynamics of previous albums have gone, there are just walls of guitar noise, percussion and barely understandable vocals.

That said, 'Filth Pig' is at least dynamic enough to be passable, whilst the Bob Dylan cover 'Lay Lady Lay' is performed shamelessly with the band's trademark humour. The rest is little more than a grinding, aimless noise. Yet buried within this is one of Ministry's finest songs of all – the huge expanse that is 'The Fall'. It's not nearly enough to rescue the album as a whole, though.

## **Ministry – Dark Side Of The Spoon (1999)**

This album was three years in the making, and is at least a slight improvement on its predecessor. It's still nothing special compared with Ministry's early work, but at least the big riffs sound purposeful once more, most notably on the track 'Bad Blood', well known for its appearance on the Matrix soundtrack. 'Supermaniac Soul' also shows some teeth, though suffers from thin production, making it a song best enjoyed live.

The slow tracks also manage to carry a little bit of atmosphere this time, though they don't leave any lasting impression, with 'Whip And Chain' in particular sounding confused and directionless. It's almost as if they realise the mistakes they made on 'Filth Pig', but are being too self-conscious in terms of solving the problem.

## **Ministry – Animosity (2003)**

A partial return to form for Ministry. The energy is back in there, and the album hits harder and cuts deeper as a result. Particularly impressive is the opening trio of 'Animosity', 'Unsung' and 'Piss', the three of them delivered with the intensity of a band clearly desperate to convey the message 'We're Back!'

What it doesn't have is any real stand-out tracks in the style of 'Stigmata' or 'Jesus Built My Hot Rod', though the Magazine cover version 'The Light Pours Out of Me' comes close. The later tracks see Ministry indulging themselves more and more with extended song length and odd structures, with varied results. It's still good to have them back, though.

## **Ministry – Houses Of the Mole (2004)**

A viscous, seething incendiary of an album, laden with anti-'W' sentiment, and exactly what any hot-blooded Ministry fanatic might have hoped for. 'No W' turns 'O Fortuna' into a breakneck-pace rework of 'Psalm 69', 'Waiting' is reminiscent of 'I', whilst 'WTV' offers us ANOTHER 'TV' song. 'Wrong' revisits the old sludgy bassline concept with a degree of

proficiency, and concluding song 'Worm' offers a hint of RevCo to round things off. Admittedly, some of the songs are little TOO close to old favourites for comfort, though if they had do a thinly-veiled remake of old songs, they at least picked the right ones.

## **Ministry – Rio Grande Blood (2006)**

With two highly able new recruits – Tommy Victor (from Prong) and Paul Raven (of Killing Joke fame), Al Jourgensen unleashes his latest Anti-American bile-fest. Despite the revised back-up team, it's still the same Ministry who found their touch again on 'Animositsomina' and kept the flag burning on 'Houses of the Mole'. Even by Ministry's standards, this is a highly political album, incorporating plenty of twisted George W. Bush samples, whilst song titles like 'Fear (Is Big Business)' 'Palestina' summing up the vibe here without any need to actually spend time interpreting (or at least making out) the lyrics.

Unlike the last album, this disc isn't an obvious attempt to recapture past glories (even if that attempt was in fact at least partially successful). It's a proper, self-contained Ministry album, with all the industrial-strength riffology, raspy vocals and jackhammering rhythms you'd expect. There's relatively few attempts at being 'clever' – some drill-sergeant contributions feature in 'Gangreen', 'Lieslieslies' is surprising tuneful in it's own way, whilst closing 'Khyber Pass' featuring some Middle Eastern flavoured wailing from Liz Constantine. Generally, Al and co stick to what they do best, dishing up one of the most consistent Ministry albums in years. Nothing really new, but let's just say after a couple of listens I was itching for a mosh pit. In Ministry terms, that's a success.

## **Ministry – Twelve Inch Singles (1987)**

A further sample of early Ministry, an American new-wave band that no-one could have imagined would become one of the centrepieces of the still-emerging industrial scene. An interesting listen, but somewhat patchy, with some dull remixes padding out an potential EP to album length. Later superseded by the 'Early Trax' compilation.

## **Ministry – In Case You Didn't Feel Like Showing Up (1990)**

This live album from Ministry contains only six tracks, and only really qualifies for 'album' status due to the lengthy renditions of Stigmata (nine-and-a-half minutes) and So What (eleven-and-a-half-minutes). Such indulgence can work well in the live arena, where there is a crowd to be worked and the pits can keep moshing for as long as there is angry music to fuel them. In recorded form, it's much harder to keep the listeners attention, with 'So What' in particular sounding particularly dirge-like. 'Stigmata', with it's 'Fuck Everything!' outro, is fractionally more understandable. Decent renditions of 'Thieves' and 'Burning Inside' help redeem the collection, but you still get the impression that this is no substitute for actually going to see the band.

## **Ministry – Greatest Fits (2001)**

An almost-needed compilation of the best-known Ministry tracks to date (ignoring the first two, long-since disowned albums). The only glaring omissions are 'Burning Inside' and 'The Fall' (and there would have been space for both on the CD), though the inclusion of 'So What' (in a live version admittedly) injects a little variety into proceedings, as the rest of the CD is generally non-stop industrial strength riffology. Getting side-project 1000 Homo DJs hit 'Supernaut' is also a bonus.

## Ministry – Sphinctour (2002)

The second Ministry live album, covering the Filth Pig tour from 1996, six years prior to the release of this CD. For this reason, it's not really of interest to anyone except the completist – sound quality isn't great and the setlist (dating from a tour promoting their weakest album) could have been better, too. Generally, this seems to have been issued by Ministry's new label as a filler until Al and co could get the next album out. If you must know what Ministry are like live, there really is no substitute for going to see them.

## Ministry – Side Trax (2004)

A useful collection of Al Jourgensen's one-off side projects (as opposed to Lard and RevCo, both of whom produced a number of albums). The Fugazi collaboration 'Pailhead' sounds a bit like a six-track garage jam, though Paul Barker's bass is a highlight – more audible here than on most Ministry studio tracks. The highlight of the four 1000 Homo DJ tracks is of course the illicit Trent Reznor collaboration, covering Black Sabbath's 'Supernaut', the other three sounding like Al Jourgensen studio outtakes.

The PTP tracks are distantly reminiscent of the 'Twitch' sound, more electronic than anything produced by Ministry at the time, though they don't amount to much more than fairly typical Wax Trax-school industrial. The Cabaret Voltaire colab 'Acid Horse' is also predominantly electronic, though the two versions (one produced by each component band) make for an interesting comparison. The compilation as a whole is still more of a curio than a collection of great undiscovered tracks, but it's still interesting to hear Al and Paul's work outside the confines of Ministry, and some of the tracks do have at least minor classic status in the right industrial circles.

## Ministry – Rantology (2005)

This is a curious Ministry release. It's made up from a number of 'alternate versions', a couple of non-album rarities, plus some previously-released album and live tracks. It's labelled 'The Definitive Collection', which is a little wide of the mark to say the least. The alternate versions are mainly of trivial interest, changing some of the key samples and tweaking some of the mixes (not necessarily for the best), but leaving the songs largely intact. The only notable changes are the addition of more choral parts to 'No W' and bagpipes to 'Unsung'.

The album version 'waiting' and 'Animosity' serve as no more than padding – both tracks are already likely to be in any Ministry fans collection, whilst the three live tracks are all generally weaker than their recorded counterparts. Of the two new songs, 'The Great Satan' is a fairly straightforward industrial metal blast, whilst 'Bloodlines' is at least distinctive – a 'So What' variant recorded for the Activision 'Vampire: The Masquerade' game, it tends further towards a post-punk/gothic rock sound than anything heard from the Ministry camp to date.

## Modulate – Dystopia (2006)

Modulate is the project of the Manchester-based DJ Echo. Having previously produced a few privately-circulated demos, this CD-R EP is their first publicly-available release (even though it is limited to 100 copies). The name is a little cryptic (it's rather like calling a rock band 'Overdrive'), but once you insert the disc, the project's intent is fairly clear from the outset – 'Skullfuck' is a mix of hard four-beats, supersaw synths and foul-mouthed drill-sargeant samples. They want to be the UK's answer to Combichrist. And they don't make a bad job of it. Or maybe not? The next couple of tracks avoid such blatant obscenity and

instead trade in harsh, discordant synth lines and blasts of noise, underpinned by the omnipresent kick drum stomp. Maybe they're more of a Xotox or Soman?

Then comes track 5 – 'Das Bunker', with some martial snare hits giving their sound more of a Feindflug feel. The EP continues along these lines, notching up the intensity level track by track before concluding on the crushing assault of 'Biomorph', which borders on bona-fide power noise. Considering that this project hasn't yet reach 'first album' stage, this EP does show promise, though it must be said that at this stage, their influences are a little 'obvious'. However, in terms of creating harsh elektro aimed squarely at the dancefloor, Modulate certainly know what they're doing.

## **Mortiis – The Grudge (2005)**

He might have risen to (in)fame in Emperor, and might well have earned a cult following during his early solo career writing 'dark dungeon music'. And then of course was the hard-edged synth-pop of 'The Smell of Rain' back in 2001, which earned our Norwegian friend a following from the more conventional rock, goth and industrial audiences. But let's face it, it's that giant prosthetic hooter that he's best known for. But were here to discuss music, not theatrics, so lets take a look at Mortii's long-awaited follow-up to 'The Smell of Rain'.

Packaged in an exquisite case with a transparent PVC artwork, the first impressions were good. Clearly a lot of effort has gone into this somewhere. It's clear from both reading the liner notes and listening to the album that the Mortii's has taken his 'live' band concept from the stage and into the studio. There's clearly lots of technological trickery at play here, though the album is clearly more guitar based than the last. Lyrically, the obsession with witches, hexes and parasites has been all but dropped – it's good, old-fashioned 'I hate you and I'm going to teach you a lesson' all the way.

The opening track 'Broken Skin' sets the scene nicely – pulsating electronic and jagged NIN-style riffs, with Mortii's anguished cries occasionally audible over the stop. Mix in a few quiet bits, with Stephan Schmal from Apop (?!?!?) on backing vocals, and the picture is complete. Then straight into 'Way Too Wicked', and more industrial fury, the grinding, squealing guitars, punishing drum loops all gelling to generate a right royal racket that firmly puts the Depeche Modeisms of the previous album well under the carpet.

Onto 'The Grudge' then, title track and lead single all rolled into one. It's certainly the hookiest track so far, opening in a synth-poppy vein before bringing the guitars in for a huge anthemic chorus. It is here, however, than one of the album's key weaknesses shine through – the vocals are over-processed, unable to cut through the complex mix as well as they might. He does carry off the trick better on 'Decadent & Desperate', full-throttle electro-metal, laden with raging guitars and furious drumming – the chorus sounds suspiciously like an old NIN track I once knew (can you guess which one?), but I guess Mr.Reznor is a good an influence as any.

Things finally slow down for 'The Worst In Me', a downtempo crawl laden with half-whispered, half-bawled vocals, sludgy electronics and some well-placed guitar taking the big, ballsy choruses up to the level at which they belong. It's a long, fairly repetitive track, but it seems to justify it's slight bloatedness. 'Gibber' sees us return to the uptempo electro-metal, with all the riffs and synthetic ear candy you could want, but, alas, not a great deal of originality. It's not a BAD track as such, but it does sort of zoom past without leaving a mark. 'Twist The Knife' is next, and falls into the trap of trying too hard – it sort of meanders around, never really building up any energy.

'The Loneliest Thing' is the nearest thing we have to a ballad here, a brief break from all the seething aggression, starting off slowly before the inevitable arrival of the heavy guitars, building up to a noisy climax before cutting to a delicate little synth outro. The last actual song on the album is 'Le Petit Cochon Sordide', another complex little beast that stabs, claws and lashes at the listener with ever-increasing intensity for the duration. This just leaves 'Asthma' – a textured dark ambient piece that offers a surprising nod towards Mortii's largely disowned 'era 1'.

It's a complex album, quite interesting in places, but I'm not completely convinced that Mortii has truly mastered the art of industrial metal in the same way as NIN, KMFDM, Ministry and the like. The sound is often too cluttered, the vocals often having no hope of being heard without 'active' listening, which is something I'm pretty sure could have been solved. This is a pity, as the style itself still has plenty of mileage in it – few prominent artists have tried this level of industrially-fired guitar-electronic crossbreed since the days of 'The Downward Spiral', so Mortii has to be applauded for his efforts. It just didn't quite come over as well as it might have done.

## **The Mumbles – The Dust Left Behind (2010)**

It would be so easy to lump this UK band in with all the other Joy Division and Sisters Of Mercy wannabes. After all, lead singer Robert Cowlin has a vocal style two parts Ian Curtis to one part Andrew Eldrich, whilst those mechanical drum loops certainly give Dr.Avalanche a run for his money. But this ain't your average post-punk/gothic rock wannabe – the UK has produced quite enough of them as it is.

Firstly, that quasi-atmospheric washing machine guitar sound that's so frequently found in nth generation gothic rock, ain't here, or where it is, it's usually far enough down the mix not to matter all that much. This band is keyboard-based, and I mean in terms of the good old piano (or at least a synthesised version of it) rather than the obviously synthesised bleep you'd expect from a post-Pitchfork/Lakaien darkwave band (you don't get bands like that outside of Germany, anyway).

So, what we've essentially got here is a band which is aesthetically gothic rock, but instrumentally set apart by having a keyboard player who plays rather than mimes to a preset program. They've got just enough chmalt to make you feel at home, but not so many that you feel like you've heard it all before.

But none of this would matter if the songs weren't up to scratch, and here they manage to hit the sweet spot often enough. 'Night Train' is particularly strong, featuring plenty of staccato chords, a contrasting vocal style from Emily Cox and a neat turn of phrase in the lyrics (I love transport metaphor). Also of note is 'Movement', where piano lines from either ends of the scale interplay and develop in impressive style.

Oddly enough, it's one track where guitars a prominent role ('Twenty Two') that serves as the album weakest point, with the drums getting aggressively punchy and the rest of the song not keeping up. It's not a mistake they make too often, though. Indeed, for a project which is run on a student budget, this is really quite impressive. It'll be interesting to see exactly how they develop from here – will they try to build a full rock-line up round the keys and vocalist once they have the budget to drag a backline round with 'em, or will they try to develop their rather minimal existing sound further? Over to you, guys.

## **Neon Zoo – Heaven Sin (2005)**

This is the debut album from scene newcomers Neon Zoo. They formed as recently as 2004, yet have already managed to record their debut album and manage a respectable

number of live performances in the process, including a slot at the Whitby Gothic Weekend in November 2004. The album was produced by Mike Uwins, better known for his work with Manuskipt, the UK's top (and probably only) gothic boy-band, so much so that virtually everyone I know ignores his surname and refers to him almost exclusively as 'Mike from Manuskipt'. All of this thus begs the question – are Neon Zoo a goth band? For that matter, what exactly IS a goth band? And does it matter?

Maybe we should bypass the temptation to pigeon-hole for a short moment and deal with the task at hand, namely trying to describe succinctly as possible exactly what Neon Zoo sound like. There's an interesting mix of styles at play – guitars vary from ear-wrenching virtuosity to jagged riffs, whilst the vocals alternate between a resentful snarl and a seductive drawl. The beats are programmed, but don't actually sound overtly 'synthetic', although a liberal quantity of keyboards fill out the remainder of the available frequencies. It's an industrial rock variant of sorts, sitting somewhere between Zeromancer and recent Girls Under Glass, though it does have a character all of its own, which is critically important in these days of soundalike terror-EBM and 'trapped in a time warp' post-punk 'revivalists'.

The album kicks off with its two most prominent songs, with the title track 'Heaven-Sin' a decent shot at penning a self-defining anthem, a dynamic rock number with huge riffs, a decent 'I Don't Care For Anywhere' sing-a-long chorus and a bubbling electronic undercurrent. Better still is the following track 'Get You', which features a catchy lead guitar and a hefty dose of Hammond Organ, giving the whole song the feel of a 70s rock anthem from a parallel universe where instrumental masturbation was replaced with seething, industrial-age fury.

There's a few other guitar-heavy tracks scattered across the CD, though these songs aren't exactly indicative of the album as a whole, however. There are a few predominantly electronic songs on offer, for example. The throbbing bassline and effected vocalist of 'Darkest Dance' allow the guitars to play the role of fine detail rather than brute force for once. 'Insanity' is the other obvious 'dance' tracks, with a bubbly loop and synth pad giving the song an unexpected psytrance feel. It's not quite up to Goa standards, but it was an interesting experiment. Or accident. I'm not sure quite what they were thinking of at the time.

The remaining songs hover somewhere between these two extremes. The dirty electro-stomp of 'Monster' features some interesting texture and effects (including at least one Reznor-esque 'is that a guitar or a synth?' moment), as does the minimalistic melancholy of 'Within'. The melodic guitar pop of 'Unspoken' is probably the closest they get to sounding like Manuskipt (given the link between the two bands, I guess it was inevitable at one point!). This isn't to say the song is a bad one, of course, even if it isn't a personal favourite.

They don't hit the sweet spot all the time, however. A few of their songs come over as being slightly turgid, largely thanks to a tendency to over-repeat the song title in the lyrics. 'I Am The Sea' is an unnecessary three-minute addition to the track listing, whilst 'Love Me' strikes me as an awfully I lyrics in a song that could have achieved so much more, never really getting out of second gear. 'Alive' is slightly strong, but the lyrics 'I Feel Alive Now You're Inside' comes across as being a little bit forced for a line that gets repeated so many times.

It's still a generally successful debut from Neon Zoo. Electronic rock has enjoyed favourable times in the UK of late, with the likes of Faetal, the much-missed Earth Loop Recall and a host of other promising acts caring more for their quality of output than arbitrary genre boundaries. Neon Zoo have approached the sound from a slightly different



angle, and have for the most part managed to avoid the usual traps. There's still a bit of sorting out to do with some of the lyrics, and I reckon they could have spaced the harder-hitting tracks across the album more, but aside from that, 'Heaven-Sin' is for the most part recommended.

## **New Order – Movement (1981)**

New Order's first album – and often thought to be the first notable thing they achieved since Ian Curtis' untimely death. That said, when this album was originally released, there was a general feeling that it would be a substandard effort from a group trying to hold on to the old Joy Division fanbase. The early singles hadn't gone down all that well amongst the critics, Sumner's attempts to follow in Ian Curtis' footsteps just blatantly not working. The release of only-recorded-live Joy Division track 'Ceremony' gave the impression they were trying to flog a dead horse, despite the clear musical qualities of the song.

It is therefore notable that they chose not to include this track (nor the next single, Procession) on this album, instead offering us eight completely new tracks. And do they sound like a Joy Division Mk II? Well, maybe just a little bit. Three-quarters of the original group are in presence, and whilst Bernard Sumner isn't anything like the late voxmeister Ian Curtis in terms of delivery, the band's music is otherwise very reminiscent of their former band in places, though the addition of a full time keyboardist gives their sound the extra dimension that they needed to finally pull away from their past and become a band in their own right.

The opening track 'Dreams Never End' opens the album on a relatively positive feel, the track dictated by Peter Hook's distinctive 'isn't that another guitar' bass guitar style and lots of effected six-string. The track is let down slightly by the indifferent vocals (sung by Hook on this occasion) – a problem not so apparent on the darker, stripped-down 'Truth'. Chilling stabs of synthesiser and occasional bursts of heavily processed guitar noise come closer to creating the desolate feel of Joy Division's darkest works than any other New Order track on this album or indeed on anything they've released since then.

'Senses' is another treat, a bass-heavy track featuring some strong, metallic percussion plus a really cool 'echoed' drum sound that I'm lost for words to describe. The vocals once again take a background role, Sumner happy for the band's instrumental dexterity to hide his still-developing singing voice. Following on from this is 'Chosen Time', an up-tempo piece that makes all the usual noise without doing anything remarkable. More notable is 'ICB' – a chmalt martial drum beat driving the track along, and lots of whoosy UFO noises fighting for attention over the wall of sound that builds up as the track progresses.

'The Him' is another atmospheric track, loaded full of bleak gothic keyboard tones, interspersed by the odd guitar break that makes for a disconcerting listen. 'Doubts Even Here' is also heavy on the synth backing, a beautifully expansive track that keeps the harsh guitar tones in check, with Hook making his second vocal appearance on the album, this time only getting drowned out when the song reaches its absolute climax. The album ends with 'Denial', one final hell-for-leather assault on the senses, every instrument fighting for attention (and Sumner's voice losing out yet again).

This album doesn't bear any of New Order's biggest hits, but ultimately it proves to be one of their more notable full-length efforts, simply due to the tumultuous nature of many of the songs. Each successive New Order album from here through to 'Republic' would prove to be more commercial and more polished than the last. Those who you who think of New Order as an alt-rock/electropop act may just be a little disturbed by the content of this disc. But if early 80s new-wave dissonance is your kind of thing, this disc might just convince you that Sumner was right to keep the band together in the shadow of Curtis' ghost.

## Nightwish – Angels Fall First (1997)

The first Nightwish album was originally released in two different versions, including a limited edition of 500 with a slightly different tracklisting, although most editions available now contain 'A Return To The Sea' from that version, with 'Once Upon A Troubadour' available elsewhere. No matter what version you hear, it's still clear that whilst Nightwish's innate talent is apparent in places, they simply haven't yet quite got to grips with getting the best out of their instruments and voices at this stage. The only track which truly gets the best out of all contributing members is the opening number 'Elvenpath', where Tuomas and Emppu's virtuosity is contained neatly within the confines of a rock song, with Tarja's operatic tones singing of some Tolkeinesque fantasy over the top.

The majority of the album's other songs deliver a workmanlike but hardly jaw-dropping form of symphonic power metal, with some relatively weak vocals from Tuomas highlighting the need for a male vocalist who could at least match Tarja in the majesty stakes. There are a few songs which indicate Nightwish's innate versatility, including the largely acoustic 'Angels Fall First' and the predominantly keyboard-driven 'Nymphomaniac Fantasia', as well as the four-part 'Lappi' suite, although none of them qualify as true examples of this band's ultimate capability.

## Nightwish – Oceanborn (1998)

The second Nightwish album really exploits the potential they only hinted at on their debut. The core elements of their 'female-vocal symphonic power metal' concept remain, but the songwriting is tighter and their delivery more dynamic. The improved structure really allow the individual band members to 'let rip', pushing their virtuosity to it's limits. Keyboard player (and main songwriter) Tuomas puts on a particularly impressive performance, his synth and piano work (as well as his flute and string arrangements) as elaborate as anything produced by the likes of Emerson and Wakeman back in the golden days of prog-rock. His keyboard wizardry never comes over as being over-played or self-indulgent, however – in fact, it's fully in keeping with the albums extravagant, fantasy-like semblance.

The album is enjoyable as a complete work, although 'Stargazers' and 'Sacrament of Wilderness' have a fractional edge over the rest. Also of interest is the rollicking, folkly instrumental 'Moondance', which I just happen to find irritatingly catchy, and the truly heavenly closing track 'Sleeping Sun' (which is technically a bonus track, so make sure you get a version with it on). There are still a few rough edges to smooth – guest vocals from Finntroll vocalist Wilska on two songs sound too growly and 'raw' compared with the remainder of the music. I'll leave it up to you as to whether the cover of 'Walking In The Air' is either the naffest choice for a rock cover in history or the most inspired, but there's no doubting the proficiency of their rendition.

## Nightwish – Wishmaster (2000)

If 'Oceanborn' marked the point where Nightwish realised their true capabilities, 'Wishmaster' is where they well and truly indulge themselves, and for that matter, their fanbase. Their mix of power metal, virtuoso keyboards and a lead soprano takes a step into the realms of pure fantasy, to the extent a couple of the songs are based on the Dragonlance novel series. One such song is the title track, which explodes with a magical energy every time Tarja chants 'Master! Apprentice!' and suchlike. The only track to place itself fully in a real-world context is 'The Kinslayer', a stirring account of the Columbine murders.

Nightwish's trademark extravagance is of course much in evidence, especially when it comes to Tuomas's keyboards. His adventures up and down the scales on 'She Is My Sin' and 'Wanderlust' are ostentatious enough – by the time he gets to 'Crownless', he's doing the kind of full-on prog-rock synth solo that hasn't been heard since the days of Moog-powered excess. The band also show their compositional prowess with a couple of extended compositions at the end of the album – 'Dead Boy's Poem' and 'FatasMic' both breaking from traditional rock song structure with impressive proficiency.

Despite all their abilities, for some this album might just prove to be too much to handle – the soothing ballad 'Two For Tragedy' is the only real break from all the power/prog/symphonic/operatic rock showmanship going on. If overblown metal fantasies ARE your kind of thing however, sit back and enjoy the ride.

## **Nightwish – Over The Hill and Far Away (2001)**

This was originally released as a 4-track single in Finland, though both Spinefarm and Drakkar would later reissue it as a 10-track CD (the remaining six songs being live tracks). The key song on all versions is of course the title track, a cover of Gary Moore's 'Over The Hills And Far Away', carried off in the band's explosive style, complete with the usual big chorus, synth solos and the like. There are a couple of new Nightwish compositions on here, '10<sup>th</sup> Man Down' the stronger of the two, with Tapio Wilska's vocals integrating more effectively with the whole than on the 'Oceanborn' tracks to which he contributed.

There's also a remake of 'Astral Romance' from the first album, which largely brings the song up to the band's current standards, mainly thanks to stronger male vocals (this time from Sonata Arctica's Tony Kakko) and a more extravagant guitar solo at the song's conclusion. The live tracks feature three songs from both 'Oceanborn' and 'Wishmaster'. These recordings are basically strong, although they don't really deviate all that much from their studio equivalents (although a couple of pyro blasts can be heard at key moments). Since the original single only ever came out in Finland, you'll probably get and pay for these tracks whether you want them or not. This CD is far from a one-song wonder, of course, but it's still one of the less essential discs in a comprehensive Nightwish collection.

## **Nightwish – Century Child (2002)**

The fourth Nightwish studio album sees two significant changes. Firstly, an actual orchestra is utilised for the first time. Previously, symphonic elements were largely derived from Tuomas's keyboard stack. Secondly, Sami Vänskä has been replaced on bass by Marco Hietala, who also becomes Nightwish's first official male vocalist. His rock-god tones are a good contrast against Tarja's classically-trained style (particularly in 'Dead To The World'), though it must be said that our leading lady puts in a more 'measured' performance throughout this album – there's less of the explosive bombast of previous recordings. It's a matter of taste which style any one listener may prefer. All of this makes for an album that sounds more mature, but often darker and more introspective than previous works.

Early tracks such as 'Bless The Child' and 'End Of All Hope' may echo of the Nightwish of the last two albums (though 'Bless The Child' certainly benefits from the orchestral backing), but many of the songs steer clear from the more obviously power/symphonic hooks. They try a little hard on 'Slaying the Dreamer' to go for a full-on power-metal sound and end up with something structurally confused and lacking any real impact, but they return to form come the album's conclusion with a surprisingly effective cover of Andrew Lloyd-Webber's 'The Phantom of the Opera' followed by their biggest extended-length 'suite' to date in the form of 'Beauty Of The Beast'. Compositions such as these generally

don't have impact of other songs but nonetheless showcase Nightwish's ability to move beyond the structural confines of a rock song. All of this makes for one of the more interesting Nightwish records – it might not be to the tastes of all their fans, but nonetheless is indicative of progression.

## **Nightwish – Once (2004)**

Following a near-hiatus during 2003, Nightwish return with their fifth studio album. The use of live orchestra, first heard on 'Century's Child' is a concept expanded on here, with the London Session Orchestra appearing on all but two of the albums songs. Marco Hietala also makes more contributions as male vocalist and a number of the individual songs do explore their own musical avenues, though the underlying concept of the band remains the same. This is still symphonic metal set on a grand, fantastic scale. Right from the moment 'Dark Chest Of Wonders' explodes from your speaker cones with it's hard rock dynamics and symphonic excesses, it's clear that the listener is in for a wild ride.

Some of the techniques used on this album may sound unconventional, but they never actually sound 'misplaced'. 'Wish I Had An Angel' may use a drum machine chorus and an industrial-metal style riff, but an outstanding duet from Tarja and Marco guarantees the songs status as an instant Nightwish classic. 'The Siren' features insubstantial, glossolalia vocals from Tarja (leaving most of the identifiable lyrics to Marco), sounding very Dead Can Dance like in places. They get even more adventurous on the two 'extended' suites, 'Creek Mary's Blood' and 'Ghost Love Score'. The first sees the inclusion of Native American chanting and flute, whilst the latter attempts a mini-symphony for band, orchestra and choir. It's probably a little too extravagant for some, but Nightwish now have the kind of reputation that allow them to get away with such excess.

'Planet Hell' takes a while to build up steam, but eventually builds up to an apocalyptic finale. The heaviest song of all is 'Romanticide', the riffolgy reaching Pantera levels by the songs conclusion. They do tone things down on occasion – 'Nemo's piano melody and more 'controlled' performance make for a radio-friendly version of the 'Wish sound (the song hasn't got anything to do with the Disney film, but I still think of cartoon goldfish whenever I hear it. The token ballad 'Kuoleme Tekee Taiteilijan' is noteworthy for being one of the band's very few songs in the Finnish language. There are occasions where I feel the band let their quality levels slip – 'Dead Gardens' sounds a little unfocused in comparison with the songs surrounding it, but this is otherwise another strong showing for Nightwish – acting as ever as if there is no Finnish word for 'compromise'.

## **The Nine – Native Anger (1999)**

This is the debut album from the then-two piece synth-pop act 'The Nine'. Quintessentially English, this duo spent performed much of this albums promotion hovering around the bottom of industrial/electro-goth bills, supporting the likes of Attrition, Mesh and the reformed Sigue Sigue Sputnik. It's the sort of place you usually find two-piece Depeche Mode wannabes. Except these two soon transcended the empty-floored opening slots and any accusations of blatantly copying 80s new wave chart-toppers. And how did they manage this feat? Fancy stage show? Guest appearance from David Gahan?

Nope. They climbed up the billings simply 'cause they're a damn fine synth pop act. Adopting a harder electronic tone than many, not completely dissimilar to NIN's famed 'Pretty Hate Machine', but minus the scathing dissonance, they soon established themselves as a more dynamic answer to Mesh, assembling the kind of bouncy synth-pop tracks that most continental European bands would kill to imitate. It's the sort of thing Depeche Mode might have come up had they not grown old and turned themselves into a

rock band. Whilst the Basildon boys are a clear influence here, they're by no means being copied here – The Nine have taken the concepts and given them a new lease of life.

So what actually sets this album apart from the army of 80s-pop-with-a-beat revivalists that are rapidly overthrowing the gloomy, guitar-wielding sulk machines that have traditionally dominated the goth scene since it first emerged from the ashes of punk a couple of decades back? Firstly, the two know how to throw together a decent backing track. The electronics are bright and forceful, the rhythms solid and the drum loops proficient and well-tempered. The mix is very good by low-budget debut album standards and the album makes for a good overall listening experience.

They can also write a cracking song when they put their minds to it. The five-minute opener 'Haunted' is a bold, biting piece of electro-pop, combining the bouncy textures of 80s chart toppers with the slightly chilling feel that took the likes of Depeche Mode and their ilk to cult status in the goth scene. 'Burn You Down' is a nicely textured slab of cynicism that still appears in their live sets today, whilst closing track 'Eternal Insane' is the most diverse on the album, altering it's disposition and style in a remarkably adept manner. Obviously the year touring with synthmeister Gary Numan was well spent.

My favourite track of the lot is 'Our Tomorrow'. Confidently striding the middle ground between the Pet Shop Boys and Nine Inch Nails, this stormer of a track incorporates bursts of guitar-like sound into the verses, but countering any harshness with an awesome chorus – 'She Said – everybody's heading for a breakdown', with some wonderfully cheesy melody bleeping away over top. It might be a bit late for this album now, but this is the kinda thing the UK charts could have done with over the last few years. It's catchy enough to attract the attention of Joe Public, but rocks hard enough not to be dismissed with all the rest of the limp over-produced material clogging up the Top 10 these days.

The album isn't perfect, though. Sometimes the pace lulls just a little bit, and in places the songwriting sounds a bit forced. My major gripe is the verses of 'Like an Alien'. I'm afraid 'Love me – like an alien' just doesn't quite click. Thankfully the song is pretty good otherwise, with an absolutely fantastic chorus, so I forgive them there. The other notable slip up is in 'Reflect' – I'm afraid "I've seen the light and it's beautiful, yeh" strikes me as being just a little bit cliché. However, the song still has it's strong points, so I can safely conclude that the album doesn't have a duff track on it.

I'm rather disappointed with the reception this album received. OK, those who reviewed it were all favourable towards it (me included), but none of the songs received regular play in London's DJ setlists, and not that many people seemed inclined to buy the thing. Maybe this review will change a few minds. I mean – if I can get hardcore metal-heads into Apoptygma Berzerk, then surely.....

## **The Nine – Dreamland (2001)**

Let's get this straight – I get to listen to a LOT of synth-pop right now. Yes, I like it as a style. Yes, I think pop music gone downhill with all this clinical overproduced junk, not to mention all the lame r'n'b/soul based stuff that seems to pass for diversity these days. But it's also a style of music that's 'easy' to do. Not easy to do well admittedly, but anyone with a basic sequencer and a couple of plug-ins can easily throw together a simple chunk of 80s revival and join the club.

Thankfully, there's still quite a few bands pushing the boundaries. True, most of them are either German or Scandinavian, but the Brits still have their acts of note. The Nine's debut album 'Native Anger' elevated the band to the level of at least minor critical attention. It wasn't quite enough to make them superstars, however, and with the competition growing

from all sides, their second disc was going to have to be something pretty damn special if they were to barge their way further towards the front.

The opening track, 'Dreamland' sets about that mission in earnest. The sweet synths and smooth vocals are still there as always, though the track is dominated huge rock-styled drum loop that mines similar territory to Depeche Mode's 'Never Let Me Down'. Another development is the contributions of new member, guitarist Neil Dansey, the new boy marking his territory with some huge riffs that add real power to an already strong track. The bands progress from album no.1 is already evident – smiley synth-pop they may well be, but there's teeth behind this particular audio grin.

'Control' is up next, taking the tempo up a gear without losing sight of their objective (that being 'make a catchy pop song'). Try to imagine what Nine Inch Nails would sound like if it was produced by Vince Clarke and you're in the right ballpark. It's 'Rage', however, that showcases The Nine at their most abrasive, a cutting riff driving us through a forceful, dismissive brute of a song, the anger pausing only so that the more reflective chorus has the contrasting effect it deserves.

Things calm down a bit for 'Oblivious', a low-key track that wanders into electronica land and settles down quite comfortably. True, there's echoes of Orbital, LFO or any other 90s chill-out specialist you care to name, but with a real song holding it all together rather than the often pretentious 'loop-it-over-and-over-while-changing-it-a-little bit-as-we-go-along' method. Anyone worried that the boys have gone all soft on us need not, however, as indicated by the next track, 'Ripped', a tense, bitchy piece of industrially-tinged synth-pop, complete with some of the most prominent guitar work so far.

'I Won't' takes us back to the safety zone of pure pop pampering. Friends of mine who said this band sounded like Erasure were probably getting into (off on) this at the time. It's the next piece, 'Transmission' that really does it to me. And no, it's not a Joy Division cover. Racing off at high speed from the word go, it builds slowly but surely towards to what has to be one of the catchiest choruses I've heard in any song, anywhere, ever. I fell in love with the sing the very moment I heard them play it live, and it was a right drag waiting for them to release the bloody album so I could enjoy it over and over in the comfort in my own room.

'Poison' returns to the slow, powering stomp last heard in the opening (title) track. Once again, it's a good song enlivened with the kind of all-encompassing mega-chorus which is clearly become a Nine trademark. 'Breeze' is fairly light-hearted in comparison, but still works well. The albums ends on 'Sanctuary', one of their more innovative tracks, alternating between quiet reflection and crushing drum loop excess, though the strong vocals soar above whatever music is playing underneath.

So I'm impressed. Everything that appeared on their first album is here, and the addition of a guitarist and more dynamic production really does bring the very best out of the band. The fact that there's something of a glut in the contemporary synth-pop market right now might mean this album might get passed over by the less rigorous fans. I'm kinda hoping this review managed to convince some of you to give this disc a go. Believe me, it's sheer class from start to finish.

## **Nine Inch Nails – Pretty Hate Machine (1989)**

Possibly the only industrial album from the 1980s that anyone outside of the genre respects (or indeed, knows about). Jagged electronics meet bursts of blistering guitar work and Reznor's scathing vocals. Electro-pop with an evil twist, or industrial with bona-fide

songwriting? You decide, as there's enough variety here to appeal to fans of any band between Depeche Mode and Ministry on the scale of musical abrasion.

'Head Like A Hole' is the obvious standout – it's snarling guitar line and seething vocal tone becoming an industrial rock standard. The rest of the album avoids falling into the trap of repetition, though, with the furious electro-pop surge of 'Sin' and the minimal, desolate break-up song 'Something I Can Never Have' two extremes on an album that finally took industrial music to the masses.

## **Nine Inch Nails – Broken (1992)**

It may be just a mini album or EP (depending on who you ask), but it's got all the power of a full-length effort, concentrated down to six tracks (plus a couple of bonuses). This is full-on, take-no-prisoners industrial metal with a hateful streak running right across it. Whether it's the blink-and-you'll-miss-it blast of 'Wish', the unbelievable dense power chords in 'Last' or the sadistically twisted 'Happiness In Slavery', there is absolutely nothing on this CD that's even remotely positive in tone. It's the most despicable thing a sane person could possibly want to listen to.

## **Nine Inch Nails – The Downward Spiral (1994)**

The only album on EOL-Audio to score the full five stars. Combining the songwriting sensibilities first practised on 'Pretty Hate Machine' with the condensed rage of 'Broken', this album charts the individuals 'Self-Destruction', abandoning religion, society and sexual morality on the road down to oblivion. From the textured guitar blasts of 'Mr Self Destruct', down to the chilling, acoustic finale of 'Hurt', no song fails to leave an impression, each one intricately produced in such a manner that it cuts into your consciousness in a slightly different manner.

The icy electronics of 'Heresy', the stop-start metallic sure of 'March of the Pigs' and the almost synth-poppy 'Closer' take us down the early steps of the spiral, before the overwhelmingly complex trio of 'Ruiner', 'The Becoming' and 'I Do Not Want This' add a new layer of discord to the story, before 'Big Man With a Gun' knock things back into shape. A brief respite is offered with the beautiful desolation of 'A Warm Place', and then the final four songs erase any lingering hope that may remain.

No other album has yet had the same effect on me as this. I doubt one ever will.

## **Nine Inch Nails – The Fragile (1999)**

The long-awaited follow-up to 'The Downward Spiral' took fully five years to appear, though fans were rewarded for their patience with a double album with 23 tracks in total, including several instrumentals. The album starts strongly – the first disc (Left) offers vintage NIN moments in the form of opener 'Somewhat Damaged', the all-dominating power chords of 'The Day The World Went Away', the redemptive fury of 'We're In This Together', the gentle descent of 'Even Deeper' or the desolate beauty of concluding number 'The Great Below'.

It's when we get to the second disc (Right) that things lose their way slightly – the individual songs are generally strong, with 'Into The Void', 'Where Is Everybody' and the 'beating the nu-metallers at their own game' 'Starfuckers Inc.' the best. However, the instrumentals plus a couple of weaker songs lead to the second disc being a less satisfying listen than the first, the messy 'The Big Come Down' knocking the life out of the album three tracks shy of the end. That said, there's still more than enough good material

on here to justify purchase, but you can't help thinking that a little culling would have made one hell of an 80-minute single album.

## **Nine Inch Nails – With Teeth (2005)**

It was more than five years since the last NIN album, time which Trent Reznor used to exorcise some personal demons and get back to writing songs. Yes, songs. Not odd pieces of music. Not esoteric concept albums. And that's where this album differs from 'The Fragile' and 'The Downward Spiral'. Unfortunately, only a few of the thirteen songs on this album really live up to past glories. The rest vary from 'Good but not great' to 'forgettable'.

There are strengths – 'You Know What You Are?' is a fierce burst of Ministry-style industrial metal fury, 'The Hand That Feeds' is a surprisingly accessible industrial rock hit, whilst the closing duo of 'Beside You In Time' and 'Right Where It Belongs' highlight NIN's more delicate touch. The problem lies with the rather aimless, noisy rock heard on 'The Collector' and the title track, with some of the other songs just idling past. The album still bears many of Trent Reznor's trademark production techniques and lyrical devices, but the magic seems to have gone.

## **Nine Inch Nails – Fixed (1992)**

Not so much a remix project as a kamikaze attempt at alienating the NIN fanbase by taking the raw ingredients of 'Broken' and twisting them into something even more fucked-up than the originals. The punchy industrial dance mix of 'Happiness In Slavery' is the most straightforward reworking of the six, 'Wish' gets stretched out to double the original length, whilst the final two remixes ('Fist Fuck' and 'Screaming Slave') are barely recognisable as the original songs (probably explaining why they were renamed). Not the most listenable NIN release, but an interesting diversion for those with adventurous eardrums.

## **Nine Inch Nails – Further Down The Spiral (1995)**

Rather more palatable than 'Fixed', this remix project culls together a selection of remixes from TDS. Naturally, it's hard to improve perfection, but the all-star cast of Thrilwell, Christopherson, Aphex Twin and Clouser have at least done a number of the songs justice. Multiple versions of 'Mr.Self-Destruct' each highlight a different aspect of the original to reasonable effect, whilst the trance remix 'Ruiner' (version) eventually became the most dancefloor-friendly track from the entire TDS era of the band

A live version of 'Hurt', played on piano rather than guitar makes for an interesting contrast to the original, whilst the dank, Hades-like gloomfest of 'The Downward Spiral' (The Bottom) helps clarify the meaning of the original. My key gripe here is the existence of two very different versions of the album, the US version dropping a number of tracks from the European version in place of two alternative versions of 'Eraser', a 'quiet' version of 'Hurt' that's barely altered from the original and an additional Aphex Twin 'sample manipulation party'.

## **Nine Inch Nails – Things Falling Apart (2000)**

A perfunctory 'alternate version' spin-off from 'The Fragile'. The remixes are interesting in some respects, but most of them stink of self-indulgent 'how fucked up can we make this sound?' musicology. Three mixes of 'Starfuckers Inc' all fail to retain the primal fury of the original, whilst the mix of 'Where Is Everybody?' seems to want to shed as much of the original song as possible, though the live string mix of 'The Frail' is at least worthwhile. The



cover of Numan's 'Metal', however, is excellent, Reznor really getting into this well-performed tribute to one of his key influences.

## **Nine Inch Nails – And All That Could Have Been (2002)**

After many years of having to settle for bootleg recordings of dubious quality, NIN fans finally get an official live album, taken from the 'Fragility V2.0' tour. As a band who do more than many in terms of reworking their songs for live performance, the album is at least of interest to those who haven't had much of a chance to see Trent and co. on stage (or just can't wait for them to come out of hiding and go back on tour). Trent Reznor has openly admitted that this tour wasn't his best, however, so those of us too young (or too ignorant) to have made his 'glory days' tours during the early/mid 1990s are still left wondering.

Those of you who were quick enough might have been able to pick up the limited CD 'Still' (only available separately at nin.com). This features a number of minimal 'live in the studio' versions of NIN songs, with a piano version of 'Something I Can Never Have' and a Rhodes-style take on 'The Fragile' the finest. There are also four instrumentals assembled in the same style, and a new song 'And All That Could Have Been'. These are still NIN-like in their own way, best viewed as an interesting diversion from the bands usual sound.

## **Nitzer Ebb – Industrial Complex (2010)**

The name makes them sound like they're from Germany, but they're really from Chelmsford, a mere 15 miles from where I live. And that's why I'm wondering where the hell they've been the last decade. Their last album, 'Big Hit' was a misguided attempt at jumping on the 'play guitars in industrial bands' bandwagon that trundled all the way through the 1990s. I don't blame them for trying – it worked for Die Krupps and (if Tin Omen counts) Skinny Puppy.

The comeback has been drawn out – Douglas McCarthy originally reappeared as 'Fixmer McCarthy' in 2004, working alongside a Frenchman called Terrence. Two years later, the 'Ebb were headlining Wave-Gotik-Treffen. But it was with a 'retro set'. Crowd-pleasing, for sure, but life and retro-tours are like that. Four years on, though, and we're finally getting some new material.

But what are we to expect from them after a 15-year lay-off, at least in terms of producing studio albums? Truth is, there's not actually an awful lot TO the Nitzer Ebb sound. They never went for elaborately intertwined layers of sounds or oddball musicologies. The synths need to throb, the drums need to pound and Doug's just got to yell or seductively croon enough memorable phrases to ensure the whole affair doesn't descend into a mindless beat flurry. And that much they manage. Easily. The moment you hear the opening bars of 'Promises', you can tell that the 15-year layoff from recording has cost them none of their ability in terms of churning out body beat floor-fillers

But there IS development in the Ebb sound here. The use of acoustic drum sounds and some more rock-styled rhythms isn't completely new to them, but they make better use of the technique here than they did in the aforementioned 'let's become a rock band' phase. 'Once You Say', 'Never Known' and 'Hit You Back' all make a pretty good fist of mixing rock beats with grating electronics and keeping it dynamic enough to prevent it from descending into the synthetic dirge that it's all too easy to end up creating when you put these two styles together.

They push the envelope further on 'Payroll', where Doug adopts a rap-like vocal stance which really shouldn't work, but actually does. Even 'Going Away', the highly un-Ebb-like slow, drawn-out synthy number seems to work. They do seem to exhaust their best hooks

as the album draws on – whilst the quality control never dips, in the album's second half, only 'Kiss Kiss Bang Bang' really earworms it's way into your long-term memory. But that would be too much to ask. Nitzer Ebb have still done enough to reclaim the place high up in the industrial scene hierarchy.

VERSION NOTES: There are two versions of this album with bonus discs, one on Major Records and another on Alfa Matrix. Each with their own unique set of remixes. I've never been convinced about remixing Nitzer Ebb, due to the tendency of adding things that the songs don't need, but it has to be said that Alan Wilder makes a pretty good job of filling out the mix on 'I Am Undone' in an attempt to improve on the original song rather than reworking it for its own sake.

## **Noisuf-X – Excessive Exposure (2010)**

It doesn't seem more than a year since the last Noisuf-X album, and I'm probably right. I say this as they're really all starting to blur into one big morass. I've lost count of how many albums they've put out or where they fit into the whole aggro-tech/TBM/power noise/Endzeit Bunkertracks spectrum. And that's a shame. I used to think they were a step ahead of their contemporaries – tracks like 'Toccata Del Terrore' and 'Dance Of The Nights' showed an interesting spin on getting melodic hooks to work with in the confines of the genre. There's none of that here.

What you essentially have now is a selection of head-on sub-Combichrist stompathons (Deutschland Braucht Bewegung, Aggrophil) and borderline power noise tech beat excursions (All Systems Go!, White Noise), with various trancey/technoish synths thrown in for flavour. The C=64 tribute 'Fire' contains disappointingly little chip-tune flavour (they've just used SID as yet-another sample source), leaving the only really memorable track as 'Fucking Invective', not for the fact that it uses sampled obscenities as a cheap and easy hook, but more for the fact that it's refreshingly honest in admitting that this is indeed the technique in use.

And when a blatant I like that is the high point, you're clearly in trouble.

VERSION NOTE: There is a limited edition with 4 tracks, two of which feature established scene vocalists (Johan Van Roy of Suicide Commando and Peter Spilles of Project Pitchfork). I actually found these fractionally more interesting than the majority of the main album, but given what I've written above, that isn't saying much!

## **NON – God & Beast (1997)**

Boyd Rice doesn't exactly stand still. On top of the Abraxas foundation, the Circle of Nine and all his guest appearances on various chmaltzy folk/ chmaltzy industrial type projects, he finds more than a little time to devote to his own musical pursuits, under his own name, but also under the alias of NON. Best known for his experimental noise work, Boyd has also indulged in a myriad of other sounds, adding vocals, drums and pipe organs to the noise template on live album 'In The Shadow of the Sword', whilst his 'Boyd Rice' titled works skew off in more directions than I have space to describe here.

This particular NON release, however, is more a return in part to the layered distortion of 'Blood & Flame', but this time with the vocals which he's worked into his more recent creations – a sort of compromise of all NON eras. The inlay reveals some clues as to the album's overall concept, that of the God/beast paradox which defines mankind as we know it, and also the presence of the usual 'guest' players Rose McDowell and Douglas P. The album is technically nine tracks long, but they are mixed in such a way that the whole thing

has to be taken as one self-contained piece, some of the subtler tracks serving as bridges between the big hitters.

'God & Beast' starts us off slowly, ceaseless droning and groaning, morphing ever-so-slowly, eventually building up into the morass of synthesised cries of agony which provide the basis for 'Between Venus and Mars', the first of the 'major tracks', with Boyd forced to shout his vocals over his dense, pain-ridden soundscape. His musings, comparing the extremes of love & rape, pleasure & pain, and so on, occasionally sound a little forced ('Love is Lovely, Hate is Great' particularly cringeworthy), but generally get their point across.

'Millstones' brings Douglas Pierce to the party, lots of distant rumbling backing his demented chimes and authoritative repetition of 'Your Eyes Drop Millstones'. This gives way to the looped whispering and distant bass drum of 'The Coming Forth', a bridge between this and 'The Law', the second key track on the disc, and the first one with any kind of solid structure. A painfully sharp martial loop scratches across your eardrums, though not so grating that it detracts from Boyd's repetitive spoken word vocalisation. It's pain – but pain with a purpose.

Once again, this track fades out gently, with Rose McDowall next up on vocal duties as we get on to 'Lucifer, The Morning Star'. She doesn't actually sing anything in particular, but her sweet tones instead provide juxtaposition to what is effectively one synthesiser tone played without pause for three-and-a-half-minutes (something of a favourite in the NON library of musical technique), beaten into submission only when the jerky, glitchy loop of 'Out, Out, Out' scythes it's way into earshot.

Now, I can see this particular track annoying lots of people. It sounds like a musical experiment gone badly wrong. But Boyd Rice seems to have this ability to make such ridiculous indulgences pay off for him. Shouting loudly over what sounds like a sampler with at least three stuck keys, it somehow keeps your attention right through until penultimate track 'Phoenix' wanders along. A title well-placed, as what we have here another stew of droning noise, from which a succession of ascending sirens emerge, climbing higher and higher, until, at their very peak, they are forcibly slammed into submission. And by what, you may well ask?

The track is 'Total War'. It's not a new NON piece, having originally appeared as opener on live set 'In The Shadow of the Sword'. But this version improves on the original in almost every sense. The drum loop is about ten times stronger than the original, the sirens left over from 'Phoenix' conjure images of air raids, enemy attacks and all-out alarm, whilst Rice's vocal has transformed from mere spoken-word into something more forceful than anything he's offered to date. If the original version was questioning the idea of 'total war', this one is practically demanding it, in much the same vein as the Goebbels speech that inspired the song in the first place. Utterly compelling yet truly terrifying, few albums go out with bang quite like this one.

There is a 'hidden track' or two – a deathly scream at the fifteen minute mark, a whispered poem five minutes later and then one final 'noise track', a mix of drones, scrapes and chimes offering one final chance to give yourself some earache. But you've probably got that already. This is, after all, a truly painful album to listen to, but painful in all the right ways. It's what industrial music was meant to be about all along. And as an example of NON's work, it certainly offers the full spectrum of Boyd's various artistic techniques, while remaining cohesive and consistent throughout. It'll hurt, but if you've read this far that's probably what you want anyway.

## Gary Numan – Exile (1998)

The general opinion was that Numan's career took a dive around the release of his latter-day Beggars Banquet albums and remained at a low until the release of 1994's 'Sacrifice'. Gary's discovery of the 'dark' electronic music scene finally gave his music the push in the direction it needed, the resulting electro-gothic trip-hop suiting our 'friend' electric to a tee. Exile is an attempt to develop on this new sound.

The songs on 'Exile' are all pretty foreboding in nature – Numan's own explanation is that it's a radical re-interpretation of Christianity and the Bible. The sound of the album is generally in the same vein as 'Sacrifice', packed full of sullen keyboard tones, slowed-down drum loops and intelligent, esoteric lyrics, into which you can read almost any meaning you wish. New for this album is a slightly greater emphasis on NIN-style guitar riffs in a few songs, though at this stage they're kept quite far down the mix, a tentative but welcome addition to the music.

The strongest track on the album is probably 'Dead Heaven', alternating spoken-word verse with a desolate chorus, Gary's attempts at re-interpreting the tenets of Christianity proving to be more than a little thought-provoking. Opening number 'Dominion Day' is also particularly good, featuring the most prominent guitar on the album, appropriate for such an apocalyptically-themed track. 'The Angel Wars' also features some angry six-string work, although I'm not so keen on this one – somehow it doesn't seem as inspired as some as the others.

Most of the other songs on the album tend to be less confrontational in musical terms, giving more emphasis to Gary's increasingly heartfelt vocals, the man sounding more 'human' than at any time previously. 'Prophecy' deals with the concept of divine betrayal, whilst 'Dark' re-invents the concept of a 'messiah'. The best of the slow tracks is probably 'Absolution', a starkly minimal warning of the dangers of blind faith. The man is clearly trying to get a message or two across here, and by the sounds of this, he's got a pretty good chance of doing so

As for the other three songs, 'Innocence', 'An Alien Cure' and the title track – well, I'm not giving it all away. I have to leave some things to the interpretation of the end listener. The damnation of established religious values is without doubt, but the words are just ambiguous enough to keep you thinking. That said, in musical terms, there's little I can say about these three songs without repeating what I've said about the others. So if I do have a complaint about this album, it's that it does sound a little 'samey' in places.

However, as an exercise in creating moody, menacing electronic textures with matching lyrics, all held together with just the right level of rhythm, it does the job and does it well. It's not as enduring as the very cream of Numan's work, but it's still a relief to hear an 80s synth-popper actually bother to update his sound as time goes on, and it's also a brave and intelligent collection of songs; I doubt God was too impressed with it, but it must have made him think a bit at the same time.

## Gary Numan – Pure (2000)

By the release of 'Pure' in 2000, Gary Numan was well on the way to his artistic recovery. His two previous albums, 'Exile' and 'Sacrifice' had gone down well amongst his own fan base (even though neither album did that well commercially), and the man himself had admitted that he'd rediscovered his true creativity, having left behind his PPG funk noodlings of the 80s in favour of a darker, less pop-oriented outlook. What he really needed to do now was create the album that would cement in all the changes he'd made, and prove to the world that he wasn't dead yet.

The result – ‘Pure’. Following the industrial/electro-gothic path of his previous two albums, but now incorporating a greater proportion of angry metallic guitar work, with Britain’s foremost NINpersonators Sulpher along to help. Despite his improved commercial profile, it’s no secret that this album’s gestation period wasn’t exactly a bed of roses for Gary in personal terms, and much of his anger is borne out on the songs found here. Songs sing of collapsed relationships, various forms of betrayal, the evils of ‘false’ religion and that most ultimate of show-stoppers – death.

The opening (title) track gives us a pretty good idea of what this disc has to offer. The song opens slowly with an ever-growing morass of airy piano and sombre strings (similar to the kind of thing heard on ‘Exile’), this a deceptively gentle introduction bludgeoned into submission by what has to be the biggest guitar riff heard on any Numan album to date. It’s that kind of jaw-dropping ‘fuck me’ riff that makes even the most average of songs come alive, and this song is much better than ‘average’, with the punchy ‘Hey, bitch!’ chorus driving the track to even greater extremes.

There’s three other riff-o-ramas of note here. ‘Rip’ in particular proved to be particularly popular in the mainstream metal scene with its blasphemous theme and its bold, aggressive wall-of-sound chorus. It even crept into the UK singles charts when released a full 18 months after the parent album. ‘My Jesus’ is more introspective in its lyrical tone, but musically rocks as hard as any other once it kicks in. Album closer ‘I Can’t Breathe’, meanwhile, features a jerky industrial loop and caustic vocals in between the various guitar breaks.

The other tracks tend to be slightly less belligerent, though they’re hardly the kind of thing to play to your parents (even if they do have an ancient copy of ‘The Pleasure Principle’ lurking in their record collection). ‘Walking With Shadows’ and ‘One Perfect Lie’ both highlight the songwriter in Numan, two portentously reflective ballads that blend the all gothic gloom with just the right amount of industrial brute force to keep them afloat. ‘A Prayer For The Unborn’ runs along similar lines, but keeps the guitars further down the mix.

The real masterpiece of restraint, however, is the tragic ‘Little Invitro’. It opens in the same sombre fashion as most of the album’s other songs, though this time it doesn’t explode into another rocked-up headbanging session within a minute of the start. Instead, the album’s trademark ‘ethereal’ piano tones tinkle away gently beneath one of Gary’s more personal lyrical efforts, an epitaph to a person or persons unknown. It’s not until the very end that we get six-string action at all, though the all-embracing fuzzbox finale we do get couldn’t really have been better placed.

Of the remaining three tracks, ‘Listen To My Voice’ is probably the best, utilising a more complex drum loop than most, plus plenty of NIN-style guitar work and lots of anti-church sentiment to boot. ‘Torn’, meanwhile, is chmalt reminiscent of ‘Rip’, but doesn’t quite climb to the same level in terms of sheer musical potency. This leaves ‘Fallen’, a menacing instrumental track that sits nicely amongst the songs, but doesn’t really offer us anything new.

And in conclusion? It’s a great album. It’s proof if any were needed that it is possible for ageing pop stars to re-invent themselves, and it’s also refreshing to see a former synth-popper move further in a gothic/industrial direction, rather than the other way (which seems to be the trend right now). OK, there are flaws – a little more variety in the electronic texture department wouldn’t have hurt (given how reminiscent many of the synth patches are to those used on Numan’s last album), and there’s still a feeling that Numan is treading ground previously trodden by Reznor et al. But what he does, he does with style and conviction, and that’s reason enough to buy this..

## Gary Numan – Jagged (2006)

Despite a gap of five-and-a-half-years, which included two record label splits and the birth of two children, Gary Numan returns with an album which is very much in the same musical area as the likes of 'Exile' and 'Pure'. The use of producer Ade Fenton (in place of Pure co-producers Sulpher) has resulted in an album which is fractionally less explosive than its predecessor, more reliant on the haunting textural atmospherics, although there's enough big choruses to save the album from becoming the relentless gloomfest that certain 'dark' musicians seem to spend their entire lives producing, wondering exactly why they never became rockstars. Trent Reznor mastered that years ago, of course, and for the fourth consecutive album, Gary seems to be wearing his NINfluence proudly on his sleeve, although that alien-like voice is all he really needs to make the music sound like his own.

Picking out a highlight is tricky however – most of the album's songs follow the same basic line, which might also be said to be the album's weakness, although mid-album tracks 'In A Dark Place' and 'Haunted' crawl out from the shadows to climb to sonic heights some artists could only dream of. Those murky, downtempo drum beats might now be live, with NIN's live drummer Jerome Dillion contributing to a couple of songs, and the change in producer may emphasise different elements of the sound (not always for the best – some of the guitar processing takes the 'bite' off the instrument that made songs like 'Pure' and 'Rip' so effective) but such changes are only incremental – the fundamental ingredients, including that overused piano pad so typical of recent Numan, remain much the same. Good as this album is, it's also the last album Gary's going to be able to make in this style if he wants to keep his creativity credentials intact. The comeback honeymoon is over – where to now remains to be seen.

## Oomph! – Truth Or Dare (2010)

I'm starting to wonder what inspired this particular compilation. Oomph! Are pretty big in the German speaking world, and thus a compilation containing their best songs with English lyrics might at first seem like an attempt to break them further afield. But Rammstein never needed to do that to become worldwide superstars, so why do Oomph! Feel the need? I might also add that despite releasing versions in various European countries, they didn't bother with one for the UK, a country which sells out arenas for da 'Stein but is almost totally ignorant of this band, who hit upon the whole NDH style first. Major label imports with the weak pound and strong Euro ain't cheap, so those not already up to speed with the band just ain't gonna bother!

Then there's the issue of actually translating lyrics from their original language without losing all of the meaning – anyone who's heard the English version of 'Du Hast' and 'Engel' will understand how forced the process can get. And if you think that's bad, try translating some Das Ich lyrics – it did my bloody head in! The Germans might have a few words similar to us, but their word order is all different, as every schoolkid made to study the language will know. Or not, if my Year 8 German class was anything to go by. Perhaps they should have concentrated more.

So – Oomph! In English – does it work? It's not like they've never used the language before – Supernova was a top tune! Oddly enough, they actually seem to be able to pull it off, most notably on 'God Is A Popstar'. It helps that it's not a major linguistic leap to translate, but using the Lord Prayer as a hook is something that'll work right across Christendom. Also impressive is 'Burning Desire', which is a remake of 'Brennende Liebe'. I'm not sure whether they got Sonja Kraushofer back in to re-sing the song in English or

whether she did her lines pre-emptively when the song was first recorded, but somehow the original 'feel' of the song has not been lost.

There's a few occasions where the translation seems a little bit forced – Take for instance 'Augen Auf!', which has become 'Ready Or Not (I'm Coming)'. They've kept all that 'Eckstein' nonsense and also the 'Child Counting to Ten' parts in German, but they've had to stuff an extra syllable into the chorus, and it sounds a little bit 'crushed in' as a result. Later on in the album, you can also find instances where they've got a little bit 'literal' – whilst I'm sure 'Land Ahead' is technically correct English, I'm sure 'Land Ahoy!' would have created a bit more nautical flavour. Still, it's an accomplished enough attempt at Anglisising the bands output for the international market, but if you're serious about listening to this band in the way they were originally intended, I'd seek out the 'Delikatessen' compilation from a few years further back, which is sung in the original German and is twice the length.

## **Orange Sector – Krieg & Freiden (2010)**

I may have a soft spot for old-style electronic body music in the vein of early Nitzer Ebb, Front 242 and co, but there's a limit to what you can do with the style. I've always been willing to tolerate Orange Sector's limitations as they've always been able to come up with tracks that are, by the standards of the genre, catchy and easy to swallow. But they've exhausted their credit now. Their 1990s output might have been varied in quality, but their synthpop and industrial influences they briefly wove into their sound at least kept it varied. Ever since they returned to their purist EBM sound in 2005, they've sank further and further into their comfort zones. And they're too far gone now.

Firstly, those hard analogue basslines and toughened mid-tempo drum loops aren't exactly rocket science in the school of electronic music. Orange Sector execute them well enough, but so do many other bands in this genre. Admittedly, that's only half the story. You also need some catchy phrases to yell out over the top – you know, something along the lines of 'JOIN IN THE CHANT!' or 'BODY To BODY!'. Here's Orange Sector's idea of a catchy hookline – 'I Hate You. I Fuck You. I Fucking Hate You'. Erm, OK.....

Yes, OK, I've picked one of the few tracks on the album not in their native German. Perhaps they'd do better in their own language? Nope. I played this album to my girlfriend, who is not only German but also likes the 'That Total Age' album (the yardstick from which all albums in this style will be measured) and she was no more impressed that I was, and we quickly switched back to some good old British synthpop. The album seldom deviates from it's established style – a few DAF-like moments on 'Das Gute ist das Böse daran' and especially 'Ein neues Kleid' are the only slight deviations from the Nitzer Ebb-wannabe sound that dominates the rest of the album.

And if Ebb-wannabes are your thing, you might even like this album. But if you're new to Orange Sector, I'd recommend you'd start with the 'Here We Are (Back Again)' compilation from 2005, which delivers their more impressive tracks one after the other. And unless you what to venture into their late 90s 'not-quite-EBM-any-more' territory, that really is all the Orange Sector you'll ever need.

## **Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio – Apocalips (2006)**

The long-running project of Tomas Pettersson reaches it's seventh album. It's a production that oozes quality from the moment you lay eyes on the foil-embossed digipak, before you open it for the first time and get a whiff of that scented CD. The project itself hasn't seen any real direction change – the songs still have titles the size of small cities and their lyrical content still portray the view of mankind as a brutal, carnal being. The obsession with

stockings seems to have been toned down, but the essential elements of the ORE sound otherwise remain. Yet there is still a slightly different feel to this recording – the dancing pianos and half-sung vox of album opener ‘Seduced By The Kisses Of Cinnabar Sweet’ sees this project get as close to actual ‘songwriting’ as they ever have.

The album closer ‘Who Stole The Sun From Its Place In My Heart?’ is if anything even more accessible to the unsuspecting outsider, keyboard melodies and benign acoustic strumming providing the accompaniment to one of the most obviously ‘personal’ songs Tomas has delivered to date. Elements of the ‘old’ sound still remains – ‘Lost Forever, In The Blitzkrieg Of Roses’ combines military snare rolls and orchestral pomp, whilst the lyrical content of ‘Do Murder & Lust Make Me A Man’ uncompromisingly questions the vital aspects of humanity. Other points of interest include the minimally apocalyptic ‘Hell Is My Refuge’, the folkier instrumental ‘Can You See The Forest For The Trees’ and the tribal percussion on ‘Hear The Sound Of A Black Flame Rising’.

The penultimate tracks is perhaps the most surprising of all, providing an adaptation of the old Velvet Underground song ‘Venus In Furs’ – it’s a lyric eminently suited to a band so associated with fetish metaphor. As an album, however, this disc might serve as a useful entry point to newcomers to this group (or even the whole CMI label) – no Ordo album is easy listening, but the heavy-going nature of their early recordings indicates this disc as a more obvious introduction to Tomas’ land of Order, Roses and Equilibrium. Long-time followers of the project may find it a step too far in the direction of (dare I say it) commercial appeal, but since CMI bands seem to occupy a highly elitist industrial subgenre by default, quite frankly I’m glad one of their band released an album that may break the boundaries and win the attention of a wider audience!

## **P.A.L. – Modus (2006)**

It’s been a long time since we’ve actually heard anything new from Christian Pallentin (aka ‘P.A.L.’) – the last studio album was six years ago, with only a live CD and a rarities comp keeping the name alive. PAL’s trademark minimalism is still much in evidence, of course. The mechanical blasts of noise that form ‘Agentenfister’ might form the basis of the album’s most instantly striking track, whilst the blunted bassline and straightforward four-beat of ‘Jobs’ might just squeeze itself into an early-hours DJ set, but they’re very much the exception rather than the rule. Delicate, abstract beats are the order of the day – some tracks do without percussion entirely.

This approach can often lead to interesting music directions. For example, ‘Overlap’ and ‘Gone’ bear a low-key jazz feel, the mixture of e-piano, drums and bass producing a surprisingly ‘live’ sound for a project traditionally associated purely with sampling and electronics. ‘Artist’ is for the most part seven minutes of whirring ambience, but is punctuated by occasional disembodied power chords, whilst ‘Platime’ twists a cleaner guitar sample into a rather delirious four minutes. There are occasional moments of self-indulgence – ‘Delusion’ stretches out an unexciting two-chord repetition to 8 minutes and 39 seconds, and there are also a few aimless tracks that sound like demos of unutilised drones and samples than fully-realised compositions. Nonetheless, this is an interesting return for PAL – just as long as you accept that the true successor to ‘Gelöbnis’ is not here, and by the sounds of things will probably never be made.

## **Panzer AG – This Is My Battlefield (2004)**

This is the second Andy LaPlegua-led Icon of Coil offshoot project, and in fact the third album in a year (following on from ‘The Joy of Gunz’ and ‘Machines Are Us’) on which he has either assembled on his own or at least played a major role on. Despite this, neither is



their any feeling that he's stretching himself thinly, as this war-infused electro-industrial project (yes, another one!) is actually rather impressive. The tracks are generally song-oriented, and whilst the vocals are a good degree harsher than your average Icon of Coil song, neither does Andy indulge in the brand of excessive vocals distortion that's starting to turn the entire terror EBM genre into a contest to become the least intelligible.

Preceded by the 'Introduction of the Damned', the album proper starts with 'Filth God', a tumultuous mix of scything rhythms, swirling strings and blasphemous lyrics – everything your 21<sup>st</sup> Century industrial stomp-head could want from a song. Other early highlights include 'Battlefield', which sounds like any other EBM track of the time – until that chorus kicks in, and the almost-loC like 'When Death Embrace Me'. 'Totale Luftherschaft' is practically power noise, whilst the computer-voiced 'In Is All In Your Head' and the breakbeat frenzy of 'Behind A Gas Mask' both use guitar to reach very different ends. As with most albums of this type, there are still a few tracks that thump and grind away without achieving much, and the overall concept isn't exactly original, but despite all this it's still worthwhile.

## **Panzer AG – Your World Is Burning (2006)**

This second album from the Panzer AG project doesn't only indicate Andy LaPlegua's rate of work (his fourth album from a solo project in as many years) but also a willingness to experiment. Stepping back from the war-inspired EBM, we instead witness sound closer to the more electronic works of NIN and Marilyn Manson – the most accessible face of industrial rock finally attempted by a predominantly electronic musician. Guitars DO feature, but are no means the dominant instrument. Violins feature on four tracks (including the otherwise Combichrist-esque album closer 'When I Am You'), and there's also an operatic moment on 'Mother', which was probably unexpected by most.

It's therefore a valid attempt at the style, but if it has a flaw, is that some of the songs sound rather 'gimmicky' – 'Aenimal' features an overly-cheesy cheerleader-style spelling of 'F-U-C-K-H-E-A-D', whilst 'Tip The Dancer' is a catchy but shallow tribute to strip clubs. The album is still very enjoyable to actually listen to, though – 'Machinegun GoGo' and 'Crash N Burn' prove to be the most successful attempts at the sub-gothic electro-rock forming this album's core, 'Among The Few' and 'Not Too Late' are reasonable enough slow tracks, and the album as a whole proves to be an enjoyable listen, even if it's clear that Andy LaPlegua still often takes the 'easy route' when it comes to coming up with hooks.

## **Parallel Project – Fusion (2004)**

Whilst Ronan Harris is very strict as to what bands he applies his self-invented 'future pop' tag to, many critics, including myself, have seen it fit to expand the definition a little bit. After all, most of the so-called EBM material coming out of Europe now isn't really EBM at all, but a form of trance with a song structure of sorts. And whilst it's occasionally moody, it's still technically pop. As in you can play it safely to 'normal' people. And yes, normal people really do exist...

But enough moralising (must carry that line of discussion on somewhere, though), what has Parallel Project got to do with all this? It's probably got something to do with the way that fourteen industrial/wave/dark electro scene vocalists have been collected together, each recorded one song (with the exception of the ubiquitous Daniel Myer, who offers his sample manipulation expertise instead), with Alex Matheu of Negative Format providing the musical accompaniment. Now whilst Alex's regular project uses enough vocal effects

to just about class as 'industrial', the focus here is on a more commercial trance sound. And all that put together gives us future pop.

And the result? Well, let's start with the male vocalists, not because it's sexist, just because there's more of 'em. Tom Shear's appearance on lead single 'Explicit' is a fairly routine affair (very Assemblage 23, in fact), but lightened by a tuneful series of epic-style keyboard stabs in the chorus. Salva Maine from Culture Kultür does much the same, whilst Mark Jackson (of VNV, no less) makes a rare vocal appearance on 'Deleted Scenes'. It's reasonable enough, but lacks the sense of conviction so typical of his band's frontman. It was better than his sore-throat cover of 'Getting Closer' at InFest 2003, but I'm afraid that ain't saying much.

Darrin Huss of Psyche features on opening track 'Space and Fiction', but his words are heavily obscured by the mix, so I can't really appreciate his efforts, which is a pity as his voice usually carries quite well. There are also a couple of downtempo numbers, features. Clint Carney (System Syn) and Ned Kirby (Stromkern) respectively. Clint's synth-pop offering 'Drowning' is unspectacular, though Ned's track 'Contrast' is more notable, a trip-hoppy thing that is only spoiled by a slightly blunt vocal that sounds a little 'brutish' for the low-key accompaniment.

Daniel Myer's contribution to 'Recognition' appears to be rather minimal, as the track is essentially an uptempo trance instrumental with lots of acid squelches (I though those things had died out), with only a few barely-audible vocal samples buried in there. The only really 'industrial' vocal comes from G.Wygonik of Cut.Rate.Box. He features on the final, technoish, track of the CD, and fails to really do anything special with his hoarse whisper.

But enough about the men – what about the ladies? With a selection of six different female vocalists, you may expect a variation of styles, but it seems Mr.Matheu has gone for a few too many obvious choices. Sandrine from Seize puts in a good performance on 'Failure', providing some nice backing for herself, even if the music isn't as creative rhythmically as her regular band. Fellow Alfa Matrix diva Jennifer Parkin (of Ayria) goes for the full Ibiza Euphoria treatment, however. Doubtlessly it'll get club play, but does it really belong here? Kirsty Venrick from The Azoic puts in a more forceful performance on the energetic 'Consequence', even if it is ultimately a club-friendly dance track with voices playing second fiddle to all the trance dynamics.

God Module's Courtney Bangert's features in 'Memory', her voice receiving a touch of sonic trickery to make it sound more mechanical than the other lady singers. But only slightly. This leaves Scene DJ Rashree Devi Matson and Victoria Lloyd of Clair Voyant, who both get to exercise their vocal cords over a couple more of the downtempo numbers ('Motive' and 'Trigger'). Neither song ventures beyond 'quite nice electro pop' territory, with Victoria's offering the fractionally stronger of the two, keeping some of the dreamy otherworldliness of her usual project.

I have to say that I was little disappointed with this CD. The potential to produce a scene-wide 'super album' was there. Given that the guest players regularly sing dream-pop, drum n'bass and high-speed electro-industrial, it seems a shame that we've ended up with a future pop album. Only 'Trigger' and 'Contrast' really deviate from the formula successfully, and they're buried away on the later stages of the CD where the casual listener may never find them. The rest – well, it'll slot into next to Icon of Coil or VNV in your next DJ set, but it breaks no new ground, which is a pity considering the number of people involved and the inevitable hype that comes with a venture like this.

## Portion Control – Violently Alive (2010)

I might have waxed lyrical about the new Nitzer Ebb album, but so did everyone else, and thanks to the launch date of this site, they did so several months before me. But whilst they've spent a full 15 years getting new material together, there's another project from the South-East corner of England that have been at the hard, rhythmic electronics for just as long, and with an equally long "creative break" in the middle of their career. Wikipedia calls them "one of the most famous obscure electronic music acts in the world", which is contradiction in terms if ever I've heard one. But Portion Control are still dishing out substantial portions of rhythmic goodness, and that's the important thing.

They call themselves 'electropunk', which is certainly applicable to their lo-fi output from the 80s, but the cleaner, more purposeful sound delivered here no longer warrants a punk association. Call it EBM, electro-industrial or some other genre, the album is simply a collection of pounding beats, throbbing synths and shouted vocals. Only one of the tracks tops five minutes, a positive step for a band I've found can often deviate into extended-length concepts that don't always work. This is a controlled, focused, yet forceful assault on the senses and the dancefloor.

In terms of intensity, this album sits somewhere between the self-enforced minimalism of the 'Ebb and all who copy them and the 'everything and the kitchen sink' onslaught of the Combichrist Collective, with different tracks veering between one extreme and the other. It's not the kind of album where each track needs it's own individual review, though if I were to pick highlights, I'd say 'Relapse' and 'Amnesia' (the latter previewed on last years 'Crop' compilation) bear the catchiest turn of phrase, the most solid rhythms and just have more of everything.

If you're one of those aggrotech loving middle-floor-of-Slimelight types that don't care for lyrical artistry, you need look no further than album opener 'Icon', an impressively dense production that'll rival anything you're likely to hear on the latest Endzeit Bunkertracks (hey, it might already be on there, the last one all sounded the same to me!). If you're more the kind who likes your beat moulded from blasts of pure noise, just skip to 'You Hold Me Down' at the albums end. The collection only slips up when they get all experimental on us – the directionless 'Blood Loss' and too-drawn-out 'Guided By My Fear' trying to self-consciously to sound different and 'clever' and not replacing what made all the other songs sound so solid with anything that quite equals it. Some may enjoy Portion Control's experimental side, but I'd go for their straight-ahead dance stuff over that any day.

I suppose I could also complain that all the really good tracks are good for the same reason, but that would be unfair – at a time when industrial beat artists are all heading for one extreme of the other, these South London boys have crash landed right in the middle. It may not appeal to you after all, but if you like any genre of industrial dance music, you'd do well to give this album a go.

Oh, and the band sell their backcatalogue themselves at reasonable prices, so go their site to buy the album in CD or download form.

## Potentia Animi – Psalm II (2006)

This 'Bruderschaft' of singing monks has grown since 'Das Erste Gebet', but the concept remains the same – a light-hearted mix of religious chant, medieval instrumentation and occasional pop/rock influences (is that a guitar or a just cittern plugged into the overdrive channel?). They borrow many lyrics from Carmina Burana (something of a mittelalter standard) as well one piece by Bruder Nachtfrass and a 4-track stretch consisting of poems by the likes of Nikolas Lenau, Victor Klemperer and Schiller.

The final results are certainly entertaining, as if the band are very aware of their limitations. A decent take on 'Ave Maria' to start, a hard rockin' 'Eifersucht' and then enjoyable enough renditions of the oft-utilised 'Tempus est iocundum' and 'Anima Animus' texts. They carry on along these lines right up until the very last track 'Viva La More', the point at which the brothers finally get their hands on some synthesisers and have a go at trance (not even Enigma made it to this level of brash cheese). It's a refreshing aside from the more austere mittelalter practitioners – purists may regard it as an aberration, but it's far more enjoyable if you don't take it too seriously.

## **Presto Fervant – Banzai (2013)**

The history of this project's creative force will take longer to describe than it will to review the two tracks on this single, so for reader of this sites, I'll simply say that it's the vocalist more recently known for Container 90 (Ronny Larsson, aka Ron2-D2) alongside Fredrik Lundvall (from all sorts of bands). And even that's longer than the shortest possible review I can manage, which is 'typical Swedish EBM'. They've just dug up a couple of unused tunes from 1992 and pressed them onto yellow vinyl.

That's not an insult – Sweden has produced more than a few EBM bands of note and this single is a worthy contribution to the canon, no matter how long ago it was recorded. The lead track "Banzai" includes the usual body beat essentials, including vocal staples such as "Lock The Target!" and "Crash and Burn!", but captures at least some Japanese cultural influence with a recurring oriental melodic motif, with some spoken-word history lesson material worked into the mix. It's a strong showing from a project that outputs music only intermittently.

The B-side (which really is a B-side, being a 7" single) is "Zymotic", and apart from some Pong-style plink-plonk retro noises, this once really is a standard-issue old-school EBM track that defies any further description. It's still worth picking up if old EBM and old formats are your thing. For those of you now purely in the digital world, you can still listen to it over on Soundcloud.

## **Pride and Fall – Nephesh (2003)**

The fact that their debut album appears on the Dependent and the observation that the band name looks a bit like 'Praise The Fallen' from a distance might indicate that this Norwegian trio were all set to be the next VNV Nation (wasn't that Icon of Coil's job once?). There's certainly a clear influence, but if anything, Pride and Fall take VNV's trance influence that much further, combining morose vocals (which, in true future-pop vary from the resigned to the almost uplifting) with uptempo four-beats, dense electronic textures and melodic synth leads with surprising proficiency for such a young band.

Pride and Fall are at their best when they embrace their influences full-on, namely with the full-on trance breakdown of 'December', whose 'We are in Heaven as Brothers' chorus is either the most inspiring or most naff chorus this scene has ever produced. The mid-tempo schaffel of 'Construct' is the other real anthem on offer, though none of the tracks (perhaps barring the pointless chmal EBM outtake 'Delusion') are exactly poor. It isn't a very long album either – there's only six full-length songs, plus various instrumental breaks which are on the border as to whether they're classed as filler or not. The album can still be regarded as a respectable debut, however, though they'll need to find a new direction quickly if they're going to survive the inevitable future pop crash (due any year now!).

## **Pride and Fall – Elements of Silence (2006)**

The first thing that struck me about the second Pride and Fall album was that despite comments made when they first formed, they don't really sound all that much like VNV Nation after all. The second thing was that they don't sound like anything new or exciting either. The whole thing really sound like a re-run of the trancey future-pop sound of their debut, complete with the chmal-poetic lyrics, 'atmospheric' instrumental bridges and all the usual 'wieberelectro' trappings. It's just as well for them that there are still plenty of people listening to this sort of thing.

And let's be fair – Pride and Fall are better than many at what they do – their production is relatively rich and atmospheric, and some decent melodies and leads help make up for some rather indifferent lyrics. There are a number of potential DJ-friendly club tracks here, though no real stand-out anthems equalling the likes of 'December' and 'Construct' from the debut. They also make a couple of unnecessary slip-ups, like mispronouncing the title of 'Pathogen' and making a complete mess of getting all creative rhythmically on 'Border'. There's still enough quality future-pop here to keep the glowstick-wavers amongst you happy, but that's about the limit of this albums appeal.

## **The Prodigy – Music For The Jilted Generation (1994)**

It's only really possible to see the significance of this particular album if you understood the goings-on in the music scene circa 1994. The Criminal Justice Bill had turned the ravers into criminals overnight, with controls on the 'legal' dance scene now so tight it scarcely seemed worth the bother. Meanwhile, over in the USA, Kurt Cobain had put a bullet through his head and suddenly the rock community had lost it's icon of the moment. The entire alternative music scene, dance, rock, rave, grunge, the lot, had to move on.

The Prodigy used to be ravers. Dancers, MC, and a bloke making breakbeat techno with a bunch of ragga-samples. They were pretty good at it, too – their debut album 'The Prodigy Experience' proving to be one of the few 'rave albums' that wasn't a compilation to get even the remotest critical attention. Hey, I liked it and I've never popped an E in my life. But as that album was ultimately designed for a scene that was now illegal, it was clearly necessary to progress onto something altogether more relevant.

And 'Music For The Jilted Generation' was the answer. Liam Howlett, the music maestro behind the Prodigy had somehow taken an underground concept and thrown it straight into the public eye, without losing even the slightest bit of musical integrity. The album opens with a voice stating 'So I've decided to take my work back underground, to stop it falling into the wrong hands'. It's a mission statement for the Prodigy – with rave descended into crass commercialism, it was time to toughen things up.

One can chart the bands move from the 'Experience' sound to this by listening to the two tracks released on single prior to the album proper. 'One Love' was of course the track released by Liam secretly on white label ahead of time to see if he could still cut it on the underground. It's a wailing, Arabic-toned piece – actually an extreme remix of a track by a band called 'Emanation'. It shows a slight move away from the breakbeat/ragga/Ecstasy inspired early material, but still certainly more rave-ready than most of the other tracks here.

The exception of course being 'No Good (Start The Dance)'. Featuring as it does that decidedly commercial synth riff and the sped-up Kelly Charles vocal sample, it somehow all came together and worked. Trouble is, of course, was that sped-up vocal samples were a staple of the last album. Once Flinty got behind the mic two years later, there was no

way the Prodigy were ever going to do something as blatantly chart-friendly as this again. But it still became something of an anthem for them.....

The rest of the album is more indicative of what Liam Howlett really wanted the Prodigy to be. The album opener 'Break and Enter', for example, is an ominous 8-minute tour de force, full of broken-glass beats and brooding synthetic creativity. It may feature another sample-of-feminine-origin, but the Baby D sample chosen acts as more of a juxtaposition to the music rather than using it, 'No Good'-style, to add a hook line.

As for the other 'dance' tracks, there's 'Full Throttle' – up-tempo techno that progresses from a retro-style piano break to a more vicious burst of acidic squelching. There's also 'Speedway' – staccato strings, wailing sirens and a selection of basslines all thrown into the mix. 'The Heat' (The Energy) follows a similar line, but it does seem a little bit indifferent to me – it has all the right ingredients, but move from idea to idea without letting anything develop.

But the real successes of the album come when the guitars come into play. 'Voodoo People', for instance, features a old Nirvana guitar line (actually played live rather than sampled), funky flute, hard blasts of acid synth and that loopy 'Voodoo, Hoodoo....' sample nonsense that gives the track the essential 'hook' that would make it a crossover floorfiller for many years to come. And then of course is the PWEI-collaboration 'Their Law' – chugging guitars and big rock beats throwing the Prodigy hat into the techno-metal arena. Not forgetting, of course, the 'Fuck 'Em – And Their Law' – the Prodigy here with their most (indeed only) political statement to date.

One of the things these songs have in common is the use of sampled vocals. Adherents of the Prodigy's live show, however, might have wondered why the bands own MC, Maxim, wasn't making more of a contribution to the album tracks. On 'Poison', however, he finally gets a go at doing a bespoke vocal. Liam's slowed down electro-funk terrorism might have been quite far removed from the musical base of Maxim's reggae roots, but he really gets behind the track, the cries of 'I Got The Poison, I Got The Remedy' finally managing to capture his Mcing skills onto CD.

This just leaves 'The Narcotic Suite' – three tracks at the end of the album which show Liam stretching his wings further still. Most notable of these is '3 Kilos', a murky 60s-inspired piece, loungey piano and a chmalt (but very well-placed) flute solo combined with more downtempo Prodigy soundtrack. 'Skylined', meanwhile, is a soaring string-led slice of euphoria – quite unlike anything else here (the only parallel it has being 'Weather Experience' from the last album). This just leaves the evil 'Claustrophobic Sting', a looped sample of cackling, evil laughter tamed only by some biting electronic grooves, making sure the album fades with a bitter aftertaste.

So, in retrospect, how does this album stand up? The rest of the 90s would see a number of other bands try their hand at the Prodigy style, with the whole concept of combining elements of previously incompatible styles ending up with a notably chequered history. The recent rise of 'simple' rock music a la The White Stripes, coupled with six zillion niche DJ-led dance music styles might indicate that elaborate style mixes like this are going out of fashion. But what it does prove is that combining styles can and does work if you go about it the right way.

## **The Prodigy – The Fat Of The Land (1997)**

Liam Howlett kept us waiting for this album. We'd already had two singles. There was the infamous 'Firestarter', giving the band all the bad press they needed to send them from stardom to super-stardom, and the dark, abrasive 'Breathe', which savagely squeezed the

very last of the rave-oriented 'feel-good' factor out of the Prodigy sound. Now contemplate a whole album of tracks like that, and it's small wonder that anticipation was reaching fever pitch. Finally, almost a year and a half after 'Firestarter' blasted it's way onto the scene, the accompanying album hit the shelves and flew off them at an unprecedented rate of knots.

And was it worth the wait? For the most part, it was. But it wasn't worth quite the amount of attention that it ultimately got. Polished to the point of near perfection, the album hit hard and it hit fast, a frenzied rush of breakbeat dance-rock fused with high-octane vocals and a genuine attempt to diversify the bands sound. But peel away the layers and you'll see that the whole thing is somewhat contrived, a self-conscious attempt to make a 'great' album. The line-up of guest stars (either sampled or recorded for the purpose) is unprecedented. But does the album really need them?

The first track indicates that Liam might indeed have had a point when he chose to get other people to do some of the hard work for him. I'm referring of course to the old family sing-along favourite, 'Smack My Bitch Up', the controversial sample in question lifted from an old Ultramagnetic MCs track. The accompanying breakbeat loop (sampled from the Beastie Boys) makes for a strong dance track that really comes into it's own when we hit the Indian chant the forms the bridge, an inspired move on Liams part, our diva's feminine tones perfectly counteracting the sampled Kool Keith vocal that forms the bulk of the song.

'Breathe' is up next, the strongest track on the album, though unlikely to be a new track to anyone reading this now. The combination of a Joy Division styled guitar line and the adrenaline-fuelled vocal interplay between Keith and Maxim makes for what is probably the hardest, most threatening dance track ever to hit the UK No.1 spot. Yes, I've heard more aggressive dance tracks, I've heard tracks that are a lot easier to dance to in my chosen style (4-to-the-floor-slam dancing – not exactly Prodigy friendly I grant you). But when it comes to requesting songs at tacky discos or picking a song to do on the karaoke machine, this one is a personal favourite. It's either than or Sham 69!

It's rap time again, Kool Keith now offering us a bespoke performance for 'Diesel Power'. Pretty good if rap is your kind of thing. It isn't my kind of thing at all, but KK's performance is more than competent, serving as an earnest tribute to the Prodigy live show. Next on the menu is 'Funky Shit', a techno pulse that stands up well despite the lack of any vocals of consequence beyond the core sample. Exactly why Liam chose that sample when virtually any other would have done (and saved having to cut a radio edit in the process) is beyond me, but I guess rockstars require controversy like oxygen.

And now to 'Serial Thrilla' – starring a full vocal from Essex's own resident nutcase, Keith Flint. While it sometimes sounds like it wants to be 'Firestarter II', it's a good track on it's own merits, Keith putting in a committed performance and Liam's incendiary backing track matching his compatriots malevolent mouthing note for note. Maxim gets a go on lead vocals for 'Mindfields', accompanied by a demented sitar riff. It was good enough for the 'Matrix' soundtrack, and it's certainly as good as anything else here.

But now we get maybe the most controversial collaboration on the whole album – as it's time for Crispian Mills, lead singer of dreary psychedelic revivalists Kula Shaker, about as far distant from the sound of The Prodigy as you could have got in 1997, to get a go behind the mic for Narayan. But let's ignore media hysteria and actually look at the music. The track has a Middle Eastern feel about it, with Liam's dreamy piano refrain and Mills' trademark mantra forming the backbone. And against all odds, it really works!

A two minute drum solo provides some degree of continuity between this track and the next – 'Firestarter'. Opening with a huge guitar sample (nicked from The Breeders 'SOS'),

the fierce breakbeat that follows serves as the accompaniment to what was to be Keith Flint's debut vocal performance. You must have heard this one by now – it's one of the few really successful songs that incorporates yobbish Essex-boy vocals and still manages to find it's way into mainstream DJ play. And no – it doesn't turn you into an arsonist. I don't think Flinty really knows what the fuck he's on about – most singers of his calibre don't.

Probably the most adventurous track on the album is 'Climbatise', the only full instrumental track on the whole disc. It's success is mainly thanks to the deeply funky bassline that underpins the whole song, over which a delirious horn sample wails away for pretty much the duration of the track. This just leaves the L7 cover 'Fuel My Fire'. An appearance from Republica's Saffron doesn't help this song climb above the level of a strictly ordinary cover version, Keith Flint's vocals weaker than at any point on the album so far. A bit of an anti-climax, really.

And so to my final verdict – was the album really worth all the hysteria? Well, anyone who can remember back to 1997 might also remember some pop band called 'Oasis' issuing an album called 'Be Here Now' a few months after this, smashing all the 'fastest sales' records the Prodigy had previously set with this (at least in the UK it did). And if I remember rightly, 'Be Here Now' was a tedious pile of crap. This album isn't. Hey, compared with most of the junk that's clogging up the No.1 spot these days, this album is really quite good. Good enough reason to buy it, then.

## **Project Pitchfork – Dhyani (1991)**

The first Project Pitchfork album was rush-recorded, and it shows. The track order seems rather jumbled and the mix quality makes the whole album sound rather one-dimensional, with the drum and sequencer programming noticeably unsubtle. It's to the bands credit, therefore, that this CD is listenable nonetheless, a relic of the early days of a band who would later become highly influential in the field of darkwave EBM (or EBM darkwave, if you like).

Lyricaly, Pitchfork have always shown an acute socially awareness, and here we see them at their most preachy. Their early hit 'K.N.K.A.' (Killing Nature, Killing Animals) is heard here in it's rarely-heard album version, with other highlights being 'Box of Steel' (a graphic account of a rat in an animal testing lab) and the anti-war 'Vietnam'. A passable cover of the Zager and Evans chestnut 'In The Year 2525' sets another precedent – apocalyptic visions of the future would soon become a Pitchy trademark.

## **Project Pitchfork – Entities (1992)**

Having got to grips with their base sound, Project Pitchfork decide to push the envelope as far as they can with 'Entities', an album consisting of nine actual songs linked together by a series of instrumental snippets. The 'ambient filler' became something of a scene bugbear as a decade wore on, though the 'Mirror' tracks (Parts I through to VII) aren't exactly bad, varying from Jarre/Vangelis style new age to a horror-movie style soundscape (oh, how I hate that term!).

The songs themselves are varied to say the least. The 'signature' track of Project Pitchfork's early sound appears in the form of 'Souls', but even this song doesn't appear in it's definitive form (the extended version from the subsequent EP took that accolade). The savage 'The Abeyance' is the other obvious standout, though a muddy production minimises it's impact. The remaining songs are all interesting in their own way, as are some of the lyrics (as ever), but none are truly impressive, making it's seem like an album of attractive musical moments but of few really good songs.



## **Project Pitchfork – Lam’Bras (1992)**

The second Project Pitchfork album builds slightly on the promise of the first, thanks in part to a more detailed quality of production, with the early 90s EBM rhythms, darkwave textures and Peter Spilles vocal actually managing to mesh into a cohesive whole on this occasion. The majority of the album's songs deal with a 'back to nature' subject matter, with the suggestion that mankind is fighting against its true nature.

The strongest tracks appear early on, with 'Go Further' most successful in building from its EBM roots to a truly 'transcendent' finale, although 'Conjure' is probably the most club-friendly (and hence most enduring) track here. There are a number of other tracks of interest (including an early Patricia Nigiani appearance on 'Floating Dolphins'), but the album does begin to run out of steam in the later stages, with the sloppy 'Storm World' and overly-static finale 'Brain Dead' the worst offenders in terms of breaking the flow.

## **Project Pitchfork – Io (1994)**

If 'Souls' was the most important song from Pitchfork's initial creative phase, then 'Io' was probably the most important album. This endorsement comes, however, with a heavy caveat, as this is NOT an easy album to listen to. Peter Spilles' lyrics become even more cerebral than before, whilst the darkwave EBM sound in which the band specialise becomes increasingly complex, with a bizarre range of textures and plenty of structural trickery at work.

The nearest the album has to a stand-out track is 'Renaissance', an inspiring tale of sacrifice for one's true love that earned this song 'fan favourite' status. 'Carrion' offers a more down-to-earth track for those expecting 'classic' Pitchfork, though the remaining tracks require more conscious listening effort. Everything from the soaring heights of the opener 'Io' through the Patricia Nigiani spoken-word on 'The Silverthread', not forgetting the schizophrenic tempo shifts of 'Antidote' and 'The Seeker' and the virtuoso pipe organ on 'Equilibrium'. Every song here has something to draw you in, and something to put you off. It's just LIKE that!

## **Project Pitchfork – The Early Years (89-93) (1996)**

This compilation makes a relatively good job of compiling the choice cuts from Project Pitchfork's first creative phase. The tracks chosen for inclusion here are generally the more club-friendly cuts, including a number of tracks from Eps and singles, the most notable of these being the reworked versions of 'K.N.K.A.' and 'Souls', both substantially improvements compared with the original versions on the albums. There's nothing here from the original version of 'Dhyani', but otherwise all the major Pitchfork releases up to 1993 are represented (plus three tracks from the more recent 'Corps d'Amour' EP). Meticulous collectors won't find anything here they haven't already got, but this compilation is still useful for the casual fan who doesn't want to track down every Pitchy release just to get all their best-known tracks.

## **Project Pitchfork – Alpha Omega (1996)**

This is the first Project Pitchfork album that really consolidates rather than develops their overall sound, coming over as being more direct and more accessible than the elaborate (some would say over-elaborate) 'Io'. The opening, title track makes some of their most profound social commentary to date, with an extended remix 'Omega Alpha' bringing the album to a close. Other highlights include 'Silent Scream', which deals with the dangers of utilising religion as a political tool, as well as the album's centrepiece 'Requiem', a

metronomic darkwave standard that would stand as the best-remembered track from Pitchfork's mid-90s phase.

The other tracks, whilst not particularly enduring, are usually at least worthy of a few listens – the 'get up and do something' incitement of 'Revolution Now' is admirable if not quite the anthem it clearly wants to be, whilst the band explored their harsher electro-industrial side on 'Endzeit' (a rare usage of their native German tongue) and 'The Animal', contrasted by the more organic textures of 'Green World' and 'The Longing'. The album isn't uniformly brilliant (a number of the harder tracks fail to really develop and maximise their potential), although this is still a successful album on the whole.

## **Project Pitchfork – Chakra:Red! (1997)**

They're experimenting again, but this time Pitchfork get it all right. This is a diverse and colourful album, still recognisable as the band named on the cover, but substantially more adventurous than anything they've produced to date. They open with 'Human Crossing', an anti-vivisection track featuring the return of 'Rat 41' from 'Dhyani'. The vocal effects (surprisingly rare for PP) and ultra-catchy chorus get the album to a strong start, leading neatly into '2069AD', featuring chugging guitar riffs and a drum'n'bass rhythm which nonetheless doesn't seem the slightest bit out of place. And the surprises don't stop there – every track has something unique to offer.

'Time' is a lush instrumental, one of the few such tracks to really develop and progress from its base chord sequence, whilst 'God Wrote' does the obligatory 'apocalyptic' number (it wouldn't be a Pitchy album without one!) without repeating previous efforts, thanks to the careful inclusion of a breakbeat, which doesn't stick out as much as you might expect. The latter half of the album includes the grinding guitars and schizophrenic tempo shifts of 'Rush', the dark serenity of 'December Sadness' and the openly 'sexual' trio of 'Temptation', 'Tower of Lust' and 'Celeste', before closing on a remarkably effective cover of the old Jon and Vangelis chestnut 'I'll Find My Way Home'. This isn't the most 'typical' Project Pitchfork album out there, but it is certainly their most versatile, and my personal favourite.

## **Project Pitchfork – Eon:Eon (1998)**

Like Chakra:Red, Eon:Eon shows Project Pitchfork really pushing themselves – only this time the ride is a lot less comfortable. Despite this, the album still offers three of their finest tracks to date, sandwiching the bulk of the album. They open with the jarring electronic throb of 'Carnival', a vintage Pitchfork 'unstoppable force of destruction' metaphor, and end on 'Steelrose', a visceral, gravel-throated industrial surge. It's the penultimate track, 'I Live Your Dream', that really stands out, however. Stripping down the Pitchfork sound to its most essential elements, this transcendent, piano-led meisterwerk stands out as their most perfect actual 'song' to date.

The ten tracks these songs sandwich are varied in both quality and style, however. Their experiments in terms of incorporating jagged guitar riffs are sometimes successful ('Wish') but miss the sweet spot elsewhere ('Rescue'). Other tracks just come over as being somewhat directionless, 'Our Destiny' sounding especially muddy, whilst 'Dreamer' and 'Resist' are just plain dull. There are highlights – the slow, quirky 'Karma Monster' and the chmaltz 'Eon' work well, whilst 'Orange Moon' is a surprisingly clever track that takes several listens to truly appreciate. It's still a patchy album in terms of enjoyment, but it isn't for the want of trying.

## Project Pitchfork – Daimonion (2001)

They may have bitten off more than they could chew on 'Eon:Eon', but for the most part, Project Pitchfork are bang on form for 'Daimonion'. It was this album that dished up their dead-cert, no-prisoners-taken floorfilling EBM anthem 'Timekiller', featuring one of the most instantly recognisable leads in the scene's history. The intensely catchy 'We Are One' and the military-snare driven 'Drone State' provide more down-to-earth examples of this band's distinctive sound, two tracks that'll keep all the long-time Pitchies happy. Guitars are once again apparent in places – fuzzy power chords support the synth throbs of 'The Clone', whilst the sudden arrival of clattering riff in 'Mine (Beast Of Prey)' represents the inevitable explosion and resultant bloodshed that results from the unintended detonation of hidden munitions.

The heaviest track of all is 'Existence v4.1.' which borders on industrial metal in its intensity, whilst still offering a notably intelligent analysis of exactly why religion dominates the lives of modern people. Acoustic guitars also appear on a couple of tracks, with some heavily effected tones working well on 'Fear'. There are a few weak tracks, 'Sand-Glass' sounding rather turgid, whilst the spoken-word verses of closing track 'The View' tend to reek a little of a band trying to be a little too clever. Nonetheless, 'Daimonion' remains one of the strongest and most consistent albums by this band to date.

## Project Pitchfork – Inferno (2002)

Whilst Project Pitchfork's past works have often revolved around themes, this is their first bona-fide 'concept album', forming the first part of the 'Nun' trilogy (with the subsequent EP's 'Trialog' and 'View From A Throne' forming the remaining parts). Musically, their key advancements include more usage of guitars than at any point before, as well as three songs in German (having only offered us two such tracks on their eight previous albums). Alas, 'Inferno' falls into the trap encountered by many other 'concept' albums, namely that the overriding concept seems to take priority over the quality of the individual songs. This album isn't so much inaccessible as damn near impenetrable.

There are highlights, but even then it's hard to work out WHY you like the songs you do. 'Souls In Ice' is a personal favourite, but I can't explain in words why I like it. There's also a decent sequence of songs in the later stage of the CD, including 'Lightwave', 'I Am (A Thought In Slowmotion)' (the most guitar-heavy track on the CD, and one of the few that doesn't over-complicate itself), as well as the heartfelt paean to the female sex that forms the basis of 'Your Cut Feather'. Elsewhere, however, the album comes across as just being too 'technical' and overly contrived. Spille's philosophical ramblings are becoming too esoteric for their own good, whilst the music simply throbs and pulses in the usual Pitchfork style, occasionally including some ingenious turn of phrase or synthetic device, but except where mentioned above, never really coheres. Maybe there's something I'm missing here, but for the most part, this album just does my head in!

## Project Pitchfork – Collector: Lost and Found (2002)

This is a real 'bits'n'pieces' compilation of Project Pitchfork rarities, drawn from side-projects, unreleased archive material, compilation tracks and bonus discs included with limited-edition versions of their studio albums, all long since deleted. A number of tracks actually date back to the band's early demos, with a sound similar in style and execution to the songs which eventually made it onto 'Dhyani', although 'Nuclear Attack', dating back to 1986, is an interesting relic from the Cold War era, which came to a close just as the whole darkwave movement took off.

There are a number of tracks featuring a hypnotic synth repetition, much akin to Virgin-era Tangerine Dream, including some the out-takes from the Aurora Sutra project and the 15-minutes long 'Journey Through The Psychonoetic Dimension', There's also a couple of trancey dance tracks from Peter Spilles 'Children of Chi' project and a series of 10 out-takes from an unused movie soundtrack. All in all, it's a fairly interesting listen as 'miscellany' compilations go, perhaps lacking any kind of long-term appeal, but thankfully it's better than your usual cash-in 'collection filler'.

## **Project Pitchfork – Collector: Fireworks and Colourchange (2003)**

This is a useful (but not quite complete) collection of tracks from Project Pitchfork's WEA-era singles. The first disc contains non-album tracks and the second a series of remixes. The non-album tracks vary from interesting to nondescript, with a couple of half-decent EBMish numbers (such as The Liar '98 and Life Command) that'll keep Pitchfork's core fanbase happy, as well as a few more 'textured' tracks in the form of 'Temper of Poseidon' and 'Odyssey'. The needless inclusion of two Daimonion tracks ('The Clone' and 'Fear') and the inclusion of live version of 'En Garde!' in place of the original does hurt the 'completeness' factor of the disc unnecessarily, in my opinion.

The remix disc is likely to be of more interest to the casual fans, however, given some of the big name remixers present on this disc. Apoptygma Berzerk put in an excellent take on 'Steelrose', VNV Nation do their usual 'thing' on 'Existence', whilst And One's rework of 'Timekiller' (more of a cover version than a remix, I might add) is good for comedy value at least. Gary Numan incorporates some of his 'Exile' era sounds into 'I Live Your Dream', whilst Phillip Boa puts does a no-holds-barred NINpersonation on 'Timekiller'. A couple of the other mixes are disappointing in comparison, with both Front 242 and Covenant both seemingly at a loss as to how to work their magic on 'Steelrose' and 'Carnival' respectively.

## **Project Pitchfork – Kaskade (2005)**

Project Pitchfork's first new material since the 'Nun' trilogy in 2002 continues their move away from their purely synthetic origins, including even more guitars and now live drums as well, making it their most 'rock' album so far, although Spilles distinctive vocal style ensures the band at least remain recognisable for who they are. This includes their now-notorious taste for esoteric lyrical concepts, which seem to becoming increasingly twisted with each passing album. Many valid comments are made about the state of modern existence in the fifteen songs on offer, but the body of the text is heavy-going to say the least, with active effort required to get any idea as to what it is they're singing about.

Like 'Inferno', the album spawned no singles, a fair indication of an album that again lacks a real stand-out anthem to match 'Timekiller' or 'Requiem'. A number of tracks come close – they get the 'dirty electro-rock' sound more or less right on 'The Future Is Now' and (to a lesser extent) on 'The Touch' and 'Merry-go-round to Hell'. Also notable are 'Your Tempting Fantasy' (probably the prettiest song on the album) and the straight-ahead stomp through 'Abyss' and 'Fleischverstärker' (the two tracks most likely to please fans of the 'classic' Pitchfork sound). As with 'Inferno', however, they slip-up when they get too 'clever' – the mindless drivel of 'Beautiful-logic-strings' and structurally confused 'A.Dream' two examples of a band trying just a little too hard.

It's a hard album to rate, as it's a challenging listen, but one embedded with just enough audio gems to justify the effort. I just wish I knew what it was all supposed to mean! It's albums like this that have led to the near-death of EOL-Audio's 'in depth' reviews, you know.....

## Project-X – Modus Operandi (2003)

Project-X commit all the sins. Calling your band 'Project' anything isn't exactly original, unless you've got a thing for Parsons or Pitchforks. And as for sticking '-X' at the end? It's all completely predictable really. It's just as well they're pretty good at what they do musically, then. But predictable nonetheless. Face it, you've only just started reading and you've probably already started guessing what this bunch sound like.

For the record, this particular Project-X (for there is more than one band laying claim to the moniker) play mid-tempo electronic industrial cum EBM. Torny's gravel voice prevents the need for over-the-top distortion a la Hocico, but this is otherwise big, stompy music for big, stompy crowds, presumably wearing their big, stompy boots. It's the brute force school of industrial.

So the kick drum's pounding away in the background, the synths are pulsing and bleeping merrily along, and some Swedish blokes shouting loudly over the top. What more could you want? Some original lyrics might help – opening track 'Last Notes' featuring a big, proud 'I Can't Run, I Can't Hide' chorus. Sorry, Torny, 'Running and Hiding' is just SO last century. That said, it's still a solid chunk of technology-driven stress-relief, the sort of rhythmic nastiness that probably soundtracks aerobics classes in Hell.

And pretty much the whole album continues in this vein – lead single 'Infected' is stronger lyrically but musically much the same as the track that came before (the aforementioned 'Last Notes' and the track that comes after, namely 'Stay Awake'. The first sign of any variation comes with 'Blindfold', going for a slower tempo and a bit of synth-piano.

The next point of interest is 'Lies 2K2', a new version of an old demo track from 1995. Suffice to say that they've improved on the original, thickening out the rather hollow and rigid sound of the original into a track equal or better than anything else here – a worthwhile re-recording. Next up is 'No Regrets', the fastest track so far, making good use of driving synth lines in a way that invokes distant memories of the 'Push' cover from the 'All Systems Dead' EP.

'Humiliate' now, one of the more interesting tracks in terms of subject matter, discussing the links between love and homicide. Sample-laden, the whole thing is essentially reminiscent of Suicide Commando. Then comes 'Reminder', featuring some screeching acid indulgence and a line I suspect might have been stolen off Nine Inch Nails. Which one? 'Just a fading fucking reminder of who I used to be' (C'mon folks, name that song!). I'm letting them off here only 'cause it's the last really successful track on the album

Title track 'Modus Operandi' is probably the most atypical track on the album (ironically), though it's all a little disjointed, too much of the old stop-start, nice-bit/nasty-bit technique. The album closes on 'Unreal', which features ascending synths and a vague martial tone, which should have worked but it didn't. There's a hidden track somewhere around the eight-minute mark, a quick burst of the 'unplugged' Project-X, which sounded like three drunken Scandinavians who couldn't be bothered to boot up the synths.

There's 1000 'limited' versions of the album out there, featuring a bonus disc with two mixes each of 'Lies 2K2' and 'Last Notes'. Of the 'Lies' mixes, The Fair Sex tries to sandwich the song with grinding industrialness on the bottom and commercial trance on top, a mix that is more interesting than out-and-out successful, whilst Punto Omega offer a so-so linear EBM recreation. As for the 'Last Notes' mixes, the 8kHz Mono Remix is unspectacular, whilst the Children Within technofied version, whilst not exactly easy listening, might actually be the most distinctive sounding thing across the two discs.

All in all, what we have here then, is a meat'n'spuds no-nonsense industrial dance album. There's not really anything here that breaks new ground, and even the stuff that does try to push the boundaries a little doesn't really work. Whether you buy the version with the remix disc or not, you can be pretty sure his one's a safe bet if you want to fill your head, room or dancefloor with big, pounding four-beats and suchlike. Just don't expect anything more than that.

## **Psychophile – Transition (2003)**

Psychophile have been going for quite a few years now. The Brighton based project have released a couple of CD-R demos and have tweaked their line-up to the extent that main musician and backbone Mat Hook no longer appears on stage, drafting in Smogo to do live guitars and backing vox. Unfortunately, the recording and release of a full studio album would elude them until Wasp Factory finally signed them up and gave 'em a chance to lay down some tracks and press said recordings onto silver disc.

Now despite all of Mat's efforts in the studio, anyone who's seen Psychophile live (and they do keep up quite a schedule) will know that their most distinctive player is vocalist Lucy Pointycat. Her style might well be something of an acquired taste, but there's no doubting that she's not exactly short of octaves. In a world dominated by female vocalists of the 'soft, wispy, high-pitched' variety, it is at least refreshing to hear a lady with a decent pair of lungs on her. Not quite up to Diamanda Galas standards, but still a relief to hear someone pushing the envelope.

Musically, meanwhile, Psychophile offers a fairly uncomplicated atmospheric synth-pop sound, with snarling guitars thrown into the mix. I say 'thrown in' as a not-overly-subtle way of saying that in many cases the six-string element just doesn't sit in with the rest of the music, often sounding more like an unnecessary noise than a genuine musical element. This is a pity – guitars do have a place in such music, but promising early tracks like 'Visions Images and Dream' and 'Mirrors' are spoiled somewhat by the blurry production whenever they throw some energy in.

They do diversify a bit as the album progresses, though. The downtempo 'Never Had A Face' sound a bit like a parallel universe variant of Yazoo where both members wore black eyeliner, and the guitars here are played in moderation, sitting in better with the music as a result. The best of the 'slow' tracks, however, is 'Illumination', assembled in an orchestral fashion, and making good use of Lucy's vocal range. Lyrically, it's a little bit on the sentimental side, but it's textured nicely enough for that not to matter.

As for what happens when they attempt to up the tempo and go for a floorfilling dance number, well, the results are variable to say the least. 'Darklight' works relatively well, as long as you like the idea of a chorus going 'Bounce, Bounce, Bounce' Bounce'. There's also 'Intense', a real everything-but-the-kitchen-sink effort, pulsating synths, backing vocals from Smogo and a broken-beat bridge that sounds like it came off 'The Prodigy Experience'. With a more controlled production, this track might have come out a classic, but as it stands it's a little too unfocused to earn that accolade.

There are a few tracks where Lucy and Smogo get a go at writing their own music rather than letting Mat do it. Lucy's contributions include 'For Her', which just doesn't really do anything for me at all, and the fierce 'Invocation' (co-written by Mat), which at least conveys a little bit more energy, even if it's nothing really exceptional. Smogo's offering the album is 'Horrorshow', two minutes of ambient weirdness that builds to a noisy but unspectacular conclusion.

We also get two tracks with bass contributions from former Chaos Engine member Vere Kervorkian on the tracks 'Surplus' and 'Mercy Seat' (an Ultra Vivid Scene cover). The four-string contribution is more effective on the second of these, with the mix on 'Surplus' failing to bring the best out of the instrument. The cover version at least allows the band to experiment with a tried and tested song, and whilst I'm not familiar with the original, this version comes over relatively well to the unknowing listener.

I do admit to being left feeling rather indifferent about this album. The elements are all valid, they throw so much energy in, but it just doesn't seem to have come together. But I know they can do it. How do I know? Because of 'Vice Girl'. Featuring Lucy's effortless intro, where her trademark voice soars and dips effortlessly, this track soon unfolds into a truly spectacular piece of goth-pop, with all the dynamics and musical integrity such songs require.

Which leaves me with a very tough conclusion to write. If this was a major-label album, I'd have ripped it to shreds. But we aren't talking about a major label band here. We're talking about a low-budget Wasp Factory band, full of energy and ideas, but lacking the facilities required to produce the songs the way they deserve to be. There is potential here, but there's quite a lot to sort out first, mainly in terms of getting some better production and a better guitar sound. I only hope they and other acts in similar circumstance find the means to do that, as this scene deserves better.

## **Psychophile – Vodka Milk (2005)**

Psychophile have spent most of the last few years provoking some rather extreme opinions in the UK scene. The critical response to their 2003 album 'Transition' was generally positive, and I seem to be in a minority in thinking that it could have been significantly better than it actually was. They've got a fairly sizeable fanbase, too, and make regular live appearances around the country. At the same time however, I've heard a number of not-so-appreciative comments about them, usually sprinkled liberally around LiveJournal or mouthed during drunken conversations between sets at shows. Maybe they don't like Lucy's vocal style? Maybe they don't care for Smogo's economy-grade guitar? Maybe they don't like The Mog? (I can't see what's dislikeable about a papier-mache cat, but you know what some people are like).

Anyway, the second Psychophile album is here (not counting some demos that go back a lot longer than you think). They've moved from Wasp Factory to the new label NovaDiem, with a quick glance at the credits suggesting that founding member Mat Hook is playing an even more low-key role than ever. He seems to be happy to let Psychophile become the Lucy and Smogo show now (having retired from live performance in 2002). The question is, have they sufficiently advanced from their debut effort 'Transition', an album I really wanted to like, but never did, no matter how many times I listened to it?

Well, it at least seems that the Psychophile collective have at least advanced in a technical sense – the production is clearer, the guitar is (with a few exceptions) better placed in the mix and the overall sound is more professional. They've also made an effort to link the songs together in places, in an attempt to create a cohesive experience. An experience which begins with 'All In The Mind', a techno beat bludgeoned by huge synth stabs, vaguely reminiscent of the very early works of the Human League in a schmaltz universe where Alison Moyet was lead singer in place of Phil Oakey.

The tense, ominous 'Naked' follows, Lucy's voice floating eerily over thick layers of synth and guitar, with a drum loop distilled down to mere blasts of noise. It's tracks like this that really show their musical progression since the first album, but also that they're still capable of slipping up, repeating 'I'm Naked' just a few too many times for my liking.

'Cracked' is another highlight, featuring some of their best guitar work to date, whilst Lucy's vocals (and the multiple octaves that come with it) sway confidently through the full length of this particularly dark tale.

The slow but slightly over-shortened 'Isolation' bridges us to 'Is This Real?', the first really uptempo track, with the synth lead dancing delicately over the thick, growling power chords, and one of the few areas where their interpretation of electro-rock (if that's what you call it) emphasises the 'rock' elements without overplaying it's hand – they've tried several times before to write songs like this, but this one works better than any of their previous attempts. The rich, lush expanses of 'Waves' offer more of a new wave feel, taking us neatly up to the 'intermission' of 'Sussurus'.

Intermission? Well, that's how I normally diplomatically rate instrumentals plonked in the middle of otherwise vocal albums. Thankfully, this bunch have at least had the good sense to bring in Jo Quail and cello, which compensates for the rather tinny piano synth that's also employed in this delicate little bridge between the two halves of the album, a composition which eventually builds up enough atmosphere to justify it's inclusion. It's then straight on with the filthy industrial rock of 'The Other Side', which kicks, bites, screams and scratches all the way through it's four-and-a-half minute duration, though they do seem to fall into the old trap of letting the guitar swamp the mix in places, while elsewhere the structure feels a little bit 'fragmented'. The song dates back to before their 'Transition' days (I still have the mp3.com demo), and I'm not sure why they've dragged it back out of the archives.

Next up is 'Circles', a light electronic piece, little more than two minutes in length, a pleasant enough way of taking us through to 'Gentle', a dark, funereal song, laden with sinister electronics bleeps and burbles, with Lucy's vocals more ethereal than at any time previously (I had to check the inlay to see if they'd got a different singer in, but no, it's still Ms.Pointycat at work!). Accelerating toward the end now, we get 'Not Listening', more furious electro-rock, schizophrenically switching between simplistic analogue sections and scathing blasts of overdrive from Smogo's axe (thankfully not burying the mix in the same manner as on 'The Other Side' and, indeed, substantial portions of their last album).

With the throttle now very much engaged, they launch right into 'Dreams In Vain', melodic in places, but otherwise fairly straightforward Psychophile fayre. The last track on the album is the obscurely titled 'Pigs, Pots and Pans', an odd instrumental, eerie pads, quirky loops and a noisy middle sections that appears out of nowhere, before fading back to nothingness once more. There is a little postscript – a video for 'Darklight' – aka the song from the last album that should have been called 'Bounce Bounce Bounce'. It's a colourful but otherwise unadventurous assembly of Lucy and Smogo in their finery performing said song – mind you, having invested so much money in all that fake hair and PVC, you could hardly expect them to shell out for a classy video too.

It's a suitably strange finale to an album which is varied in both style and quality. Despite the criticisms, I still feel they're starting to reach their potential. They're still slipping up in places on the production front, and I'm still waiting for that truly 'great' song that'll win me over for good. But there's still plenty of reason why you might want to pick this thing up. It sounds like a band doing what they want to do rather than taking the easy option and running through the chmalt. As I've always said, varied results are still results, and if you're feeling adventurous, you could do a lot worse than investing in a copy.

## **Punto Omega – Punto Omega (2003)**

You wouldn't normally think of the Spanish-speaking nations as industrial/electro strongholds, but the reality is that they've done a better job than many are willing to give



them credit for. I mean Esplendor Geométrico, one of the innovators of the power noise sub-genre, were Spanish. Mexico has offered us such big hitters as Hocico and Cenobita. And now Argentina has joined the party, thanks to this rather impressive debut album from Punto Omega, a duo discovered by Thomas Rainer of L'âme Immortelle, a man who seemingly knows a good thing when he sees one.

The sound of Punto Omega, referring to both the band and this, their sole, self-titled CD, is essentially one that follows a well-trodden path before seeking their own deviation some way along. They are essentially working in the modern harsh EBM, the pulsating synths and vocal distortion reminding one of Hocico first and foremost. I'm not necessarily against this approach – all bands need to start somewhere, and you need to know the rules before you start breaking them. Thankfully, Punto Omega do at least have a few fresh ideas up their sleeve.

The first is that almost every word on the album is in Spanish. Not English. Not German. Not in any language commonly understood by the bulk of their potential fanbase. This is no problem, however, for three reasons. One, it indicates a band respectful of their own culture. Secondly, translations are provided in the inlay for those of us not au fait with the Spanish tongue. Finally, most of the vocals are so heavily distorted that even if you did know the language, you'd be hard pushed to work out what they're on about. There is one track where they briefly break from both the distortion and the Spanish-only trend, but I'll get to that one later.

Anyway, they get off to a flying start with intro 'Marcha Hacia el Punto Omega' (March Towards The Omega Point), a huge, proud orchestral number with martial timpani, choirs and a burst of Galician bagpipes resulting in one of the most spectacular introductions a band could hope for. This leads seamlessly into 'Punto Omega' itself. An eponymous track on an eponymous album had better be pretty anthemic, and sure enough the mix of synth pulses, jagged power chords, bursts of choirs and strings, topped off by the aforementioned Spanish lyrics, which, it has to be said, translate to something not a million miles away from VNV Nation. Looks like we've got some more visionaries on our hands, readers!

Next up is 'Guerra en los Cielos' (War In Heavens), a more down-to-earth body beat sort of thing, with some clanging metal sounds keeping the duo at least partially within the broader definitions of industrial, if the scathing, unintelligible vocals weren't already enough. We then arrive at another track pairing, with 'La Caida' (The Downfall) effectively serving as an instrumental intro to 'Mundo De Robots' (Robot's World), which generally keeps the album going in a similar vein to what has come before, though their synth lead here has a hint of God Module about it. The track features a guest appearance from Claus Bita of Cenobitia, but he sounds so much like regular vocalist Pilgrim that it scarcely seemed worth the effort.

'El Laberinto' slows down the pace a tad, going for a more reflective chord progression, a much-needed shift in pace which prevents the album from sounding like multiple copies of the title track. The really distinctive one, 'La Fusion', is next however. Co-written by Thomas Rainer, and actually featuring the man himself on lead vocals, it comes as little surprise that this piano-led track sounds almost exactly like L'âme Immortelle, and therefore quite unlike anything else heard here. It has to be said that Thomas' voice comes over quite well in Spanish, his drawn-out spoken word build up leading up to a climax, featuring the most prominent guitar on the album, as well as the only English vocals heard here at all.

From here on in it's full throttle to the end of the album, kicking off with the punchy, yet slightly melodic 'Tempestades de Cambio' (Storms of Change), whose best feature is the

drum and choir interplay in the middle eight. This followed by the reintroduction of metallic percussion on 'Peregrino de los Tiempos' (Pilgrim of Times), and then we close on 'Realidad Virtual' (Virtual Reality), a real up-tempo white knuckle ride of a song, the caustic rhythm loop supporting a three-way fight between the vocals, pads and guitars, the trio tightly threaded together to ensure the album can't go out on anything other than a bang.

Early purchasers of this CD might find themselves with a bonus remix disc. Let me assure all of you who bought this album long after this version sold out that you aren't missing anything critical. The line-up of remixers certainly looks impressive, with the likes of L'âme Immortelle (no surprise), Run Level Zero and even the Lights of Euphoria getting a go.

chmaltzy e, most of the bands featured go for fairly straightforward re-creations, not really capturing the 'grandeur' of the originals. If I had to pick a favourite, I'd probably go for Angels and Agony's take on 'Guerra en los Cielos', if only because they seem more willing to let the track develop into something tuneful. The rest are competent mixes and nothing more.

Not that I'm really here to comment on bonus discs. You don't have to listen to it. It's the main album the concerns me, and I have to admit that I'm quite impressed with what Punto Omega have come up with here. Comparisons with Hocico are inevitable, but the two bands are by no means 100% alike. Perhaps a better comparison might be made with Flesh Field, whose 'Belief Control' album bears many similarities with this one, both incorporating symphonic elements into what is traditionally a primarily rhythmic style. On that count, Punto Omega's debut doesn't therefore really stand up as a truly original album, but it does succeed on its own merits, and it's certainly not as derivative as some. Let's hope they don't fall into a cycle of repetition, as there's something worthy of development here.

## **Qntal – V (Silver Swan) (2006)**

Qntal's fifth album (and their third post-Ernst one) sees a move further away from the electro-medieval sounds of their early works, as well as removing the electric guitar that characterised 'Ozymandias'. It's their most 'authentic' sounding album so far, synths relegated to atmospheric (rather than rhythmic) roles, with acoustic string instruments of European/Middle Eastern origin playing a frontal role on most of the songs, with the remainder adopting a more symphonic approach. And the strange thing is, it's for exactly these reasons that this album really trips up. Qntal have removed everything that made themselves sound distinctive, replacing it with a style that Dead Can Dance had tied up more than a decade ago.

Of course, Syrah's vocals are as strong as ever, as they've dug out an interesting collection of traditional texts in a variety of languages (only borrowing ONE Carmina Burana text this time!). But despite this, I tended to find the music blended into the background too easily – the only exceptions being the orchestrated climax of 'Von Den Elben', which could have been the soundtrack to a fantasy epic, followed by the entertaining jig 'Lingua Mendax'. The remainder struck me as pleasant listening but no more. Interestingly, this CD may be of interest to those people who like Estampie (Syrah and Michael's other project) but never cared too much for the Lakaien-offshoot electronics of early Qntal. I however, miss that stylistic fusion and find what has replaced it to be well executed but ultimately lacking in character.

NOTE: The limited edition version of this album contains a five-track bonus CD. There's a single edit of 'Von Den Elben' but also three remixes, with the versions of '292' and 'Veni' seeing a move back towards the more rhythmic electronic style of times gone past. So they haven't given the style up COMPLETELY, then.....

## Rammstein – Herzeleid (1995)

Whilst not often spoken about these days, the first Rammstein album at least gets the Berlin sextet off on the right foot. Their Teutonic brand of industrial metal comprises of deep, growling German vocals, throbbing keyboards, forceful riffs and drumming militant in it's precision and intensity. Despite their obvious explosive nature (and that's clear even BEFORE you see the live show), most of the songs are constructed with a deep meaning, something often missed by those not au fait with the German language.

The album is sandwiched by two self-referential tracks ('Wollt Ihr Das Bett...' and 'Rammstein') which are generally typical of the bands early sound, although 'Weisses Fleisch', 'Asche Zu Asche' and 'Du Riechst So Gut' are probably most indicative of the direction the band later took. Perhaps the most notable song, however, is 'Seeman', a slow-paced epic floating on an ocean of tremolo. There are a few weak tracks (the jerky, indecisive 'Herzeleid' the worst), but the album is generally consistent throughout.

## Rammstein – Sehnsucht (1997)

If 'Herzeleid' was where Rammstein developed their 'sound' then Sehnsucht was where they exploited it to it's fullest potential. Whilst it's not dissimilar to it's predecessor, the general feeling is that each song is that much stronger and more musically advance, with each band member playing more competently than before. The 'sexual' nature of Rammstein's music is also more obvious – songs such as 'Bestrafte Mich' ('Punish Me') and 'Bück Dich' ('Bend Over') mean exactly what you think they mean, whilst 'Spiel Mit Mir' and 'Küss mich (Fellfrosch)' refer to incest and oral sex respectively.

The real hit to emerge from this album was 'Du Hast' – by Rammstein standards it's a relatively simple song (though even this number has a cleverly-disguised dual meaning), but the catchy refrain and razor-sharp execution ensured it would become an industrial metal standard. Despite the success of this song, however, the favourite amongst many fans (including myself) was 'Engel' – the heavenly chorus (sung by female singer Bobolina) and angelic subject matter thrown into sharp contrast by the song's fierce tanzmetal base. It's the crowning moment one of the most consistently strong industrial/metal albums I've been fortunate enough to acquire.

## Rammstein – Live Aus Berlin (1999)

A live recording of a show from Rammstein's 'Sehnsucht' era. As the album only covers two albums, it isn't much use as a compilation of any kind, though it does demonstrate that the 'Stein works in the raw, live arena. Extended versions of 'Bück Dich' and 'Engel' and the non-album rarity 'Wilder Wein' are the key chmaltz attractions here, though one cannot truly appreciate a Rammstein show without the visuals. Luckily, it's also out on DVD.....

## Rammstein – Mutter (2001)

Could they possibly out-do 'Sehnsucht'? Yes, they could. It was apparent from the very first bars of album opener 'Mein Herz Brennt', the orchestration slowly uncurling to eventually unleash one of the most jaw-dropping album intros I've ever experienced. The military march of 'Links 2 3 4' takes things up a gear, leading neatly into the huge, all-encompassing anthemics of 'Sonne'. The more straightforward (indeed almost radio-friendly!) 'Ich Will' then takes us through to the fiery, no-holds-barred tanzmetal blast of 'Feuer Frei!'. And we're not even halfway through yet!

The album's centrepiece is the more personal 'Mutter', before the enchanting (yet highly disturbing) nursery rhyme-esque 'Spieluhr'. Track 8, 'Zwitter' refers to hermaphrodites, and remains one of the few German songs to make me laugh out loud BEFORE looking up the translation. The obligatory 'sexual' track follows in the form of 'Rein Raus' before one final surge across the eardrums with 'Adios' and the delicate lead-out of 'Nebel'. Simply put, this album delivers everything Rammstein promised back when they first formed in the mid-1990s, and remains one of the most highly rated albums in the history of this site.

## **Rammstein – Reise Reise (2004)**

There was a substantial gap between 'Mutter' and 'Reise Reise', approximately three and a half years. It didn't come as a surprise, therefore, to find a number of changes to Rammstein's sound in the process. The lead single 'Mein Teil' was ironically the most 'typical' of the songs on offer, a thinly-veiled reference to the Armin Meiwes 'cannibal' affair. This and the slightly weaker 'Keine Lust' are probably as close as this album gets to 'classic' Rammstein – the remainder offer a number of interesting variations on the traditional tanzmetal template.

'Amerika', featuring the band's first English vocals outside of cover versions, is a tell-it-like-it-is statement on modern coca-culture, whilst 'Moskau' is an ingenious combination of Rammstein and Russian girlie pop (you have to hear it to believe it). 'Los' is a bluesy, acoustic track, which really shouldn't work, but it does. Also noteworthy are 'Dalai Lama' (a modernised take on an old Goethe poem) and 'Morgenstern', two of the more musically advanced 'Stein tracks (though they aren't as anthemic as some). This plus the slightly turgid 'Stein Um Stein' and the overly mellow lead out track 'Amour' (which would have worked better if it didn't take so long to get going) mean this album doesn't quite rank alongside 'Sehnsucht' and 'Mutter' in the EOL-Rankings, but the reality was that the band still had to move on, and did so.

## **Rammstein – Rosenrot (2005)**

A slightly curious Rammstein release – appearing little more than a year after 'Reise Reise', it comprises of six tracks that didn't make it onto their 2004 album, plus five new songs. As a complete album, it thus comes over as being rather 'bitty', perhaps their least consistent release to date. There are few moments where we hear a 'classic' Rammstein sound, most notably of the pyromaniacal lead single 'Benzin' ('Mann Gegen Mann' and 'Zerst?ren' are the other dead-cert rockers), but a great proportion of the album is given over to more atypical variants of the band's signature sound.

The most obvious standout track is the track 'Te Quiero Puta!' (I Love You, Whore), featuring heavy use of trumpet and vocals in Spanish (no, barring the title, I have no idea what they mean), yet the song is oddly catchy in its own way. The English/German 'pop ballad' 'Stirb Nicht Vor Mir' (Don't Die Before I Do) and the percussion-free closing track 'Ein Lied' will annoy many but I personally found they ranked amongst the album's highlights. I did find the remainder of the album's tracks somewhat so-so, however. The likes of 'Feuer Und Wasser' and 'Hilf Mir' come over as fairly common-or-garden tanzmetal bluster, whilst the other songs, whilst not exactly 'bad', really didn't equal what had come before. This album will therefore remain an oddity in Rammstein's discography, but there's just enough material of interest here for me to recommend purchase regardless.

## **Red Mecca – You Were Never Here (2013)**

Naming your project after a cult Cabaret Voltaire album is a pretty daring move, as it sets expectations high for something genuinely creative. The band themselves made their first

move towards enigmatic obscurity by providing their press pack in the Swedish language only. I guess I could have asked Patrik to translate it, but as he's busy with the site rework I turned to Google Translate, which gave me enough knowledge to properly review their work.

The bands imagery focuses on singer Frida Madeleine (with musical maestro Jan Strandqvist very much in the background) standing in desolate locations, an image highly befitting the opening track "Overlord" – nine minutes of echoed drum hits and intense synth growls set to a disconcerting chord progressing. Listened to on iPod, it doesn't amount to much, but played through a decent soundsystem (yes, some of us still value such things) and it's intended purpose is clear.

The first actual song (and hence first significant appearance from Frida) is on "I Will Disappear", and as a kind of uptempo darkwave pop, it works well. Imagine Cocteau Twins remixes by middle-era Project Pitchfork and you'll get the approximate idea about what this one's trying to do. The song does lack a real hook, and the vocals are a little deep in the mix for what is the lead single of the collection, but the atmosphere is certainly there.

"Pictures" is slow and (possibly as a result) this time gets the vocal mix spot on. The slow, grinding rhythm is a valid counterpoint to Frida's airy, ethereal tones. I did start to fear for my continued interest a few minutes in, but there a proggy synth solo arises out of nowhere to provide the necessary earworm needed to keep my attention. This is something "Waiting" never achieves, noisy drumming and over-repetitive musical devices consigning this one to filler status.

"Love And Hate" is probably the most club-friendly track on here, with the usual up-tempo beat and throbbing synth combo heard in this overall genre reinforced by vocal contributions that really cut through the mix. The production style isn't far off the favoured style of fellow Swedish act Covenant, and yes, all concerned should take that as a compliment.

Ending the sextet is "I C", which is for the most part a shimmering constant in the high frequencies, ominous bass rumbling at the lower end, before breaking into a tune of sorts for the final minute and a half. Valid experiment, but not one rewarding of repeat listens. The EP as a whole is a decent effort though, and it does serve a purpose in terms of devised something original in the whole 'heavenly voice with dark synths' genre which had previously thought to be exhausted of any further development potential.

## **Lou Reed – Metal Machine Music (1975)**

People that know me are unlikely to be surprised that I bought this – everyone else will wonder why I bothered. Album listings regularly list this as one of the 'Worst 5 of All Time'. When it was originally released, record shops were inundated with furious customers, half of them complaining that they had a dodgy copy, the other half just admitting they wanted their money back 'cos it was a pile of shite. It was a commercial disaster for Reed and his record label. And did he care?

I don't think so. This is the man who brought fetish play and drug abuse to rock music – anyone remember the timeless 'Venus In Furs' and the positively on-edge 'Heroin'? Reed's style did compromise a bit once the first two VU albums were out of the way, even if the lyrics were still a little 'riske'. But no-one was prepared for this monstrosity. It was the biggest two-fingered salute anyone could have offered the somewhat worthy but stale music industry of the early 1970s.

What we actually have here is a four-part symphony of pure noise – well, it claims to be four parts, but I think it's just one long work split up so you could fit it on a couple of records (this is 25 years ago, remember). The instrument list is somewhat misleading with its tongue-in-cheek sense of humour, but the work is basically made up of all the white noise, guitar feedback and other forms of cacophony Reed could come up with.

And unlike most long instrumentals, there is very little variation in mood or style across the length of the album. There are no choruses, no vocals, no epic solos, no melodies, no hooks of any kind. The pulsating nature of some of Reed's effects boxes gives semblance to a little rhythm on occasion, but don't get your hopes up, there's nothing even vaguely musical about this.

Or maybe there is....two year prior to this, Tangerine Dream released 'Zeit', an infinitely more minimalistic concept, but every bit as far removed from the catchy four-minute rock anthem as this piece. The critics were better disposed toward this piece. Maybe it was because Edgar Froese's soft synths and organs sat much nicer in the background than Reed's endless feedback, or maybe it was because that was exactly the kind of thing people expected from a group of freaky Germans, whilst all people wanted from Lou is another 'Transformer'.

And the piece is actually somehow listenable in its own way. There is an awful lot going on here – feedback patterns resembling sound effect of sorts fade in and out and there's little 'surprises' all the way through. You'll have to sit through it to find out. I'm also reliably told that Sonic Youth – themselves greatly influenced by the likes of the Velvet Underground, actually sampled from this work on one of their albums. Oh, and I need hardly add that this was probably the first album of its kind in the 'noise' genre (White Light/White Heat merely being a rough run).

So, do you buy this album or not? If you're a fan of Lou Reed's other work, best not bother. However, if feedback loops and non-stop droning mechanical noise is your kinda thing, you might actually enjoy this. The ultimate accolade I can offer is that it's the biggest headfuck I've ever heard. I downloaded a six-minute excerpt from the Internet, and after a few listens, I was dying for the full-on experience. Does it say something about my state of mind, or indeed the state of the music industry, as it's no better now as it was then? Alternatively you could just annoy the neighbours with it.

## **The Retrosic – God Of Hell (2004)**

Hands up who didn't like 'Bone Peeler'. Thought so. Yeah, OK, there's bound to be a few people who automatically like anything :Wumpscut: puts out, but I ain't writing for them. I'm writing for you lot, the rational fan of goth n'industrial tuneage. People who like music because they like how it sounds. Not because they liked their previous album. And certainly not because they're mates with the band. And this album might well do for you what Rudy's last opus failed to do. It's electro-industrial with purpose. It actually has some teeth. Sharp ones.

Of course, there's a good reason why I'm comparing this album with :W:, as the two acts do generally plow the same furrow – the scathing, raucous vocals are very similar, whilst the electronic styles aren't dissimilar – mid-tempo electronic industrial laden with an aura of depression, with a combination of classical and more exotic musical influences adding some flavour (a technique the Retrosic really began to make a go of on 'Messa da Requiem'). The key difference here is that whilst 'Bone Peeler' sounded like a straightforward run through the clichés, this disc actually seems to get up and do something.

'The Storm' opens the album, a brief burst of Indian flute prefacing the introduction of the main loop, and then introducing a distorted kick drum that sounds like it was brutally kidnapped from 'One World One Sky'. It is from this base that lead man Cyrus does as the title suggests and conjures up a spiralling storm of electronic fury, climaxing on the line 'This World Will Burn Like Me'. The sentiments of 'Ground Zero' are now set on the global stage, and already the seeds of this particularly ominous album are sewn.

'Maneater' follows, a big, punchy EBM monster, a song which voices some cannibalistic desires that might shock some, but nonetheless fit in perfectly with the general mood of the album. Then comes 'New World Order' – a slightly dated quotation, admittedly, but it still rages in all the right ways, using a more future-poppy lead, but twisting war-related metaphor to completely opposite ends to that of Herr Ronan Harris. It thus keeps the momentum going as we enter the albums more, erm, 'experimental' phase.

Starting with 'Tale of Woe'. The tempo has been taken right down, the piece crawling along at funereal pace, a tale of total loss of all will to live. With the rhythmic elements stripped down to their minima, the strings finally get a chance to shine, with primitive little bleepy motif, resembling some last-gasp Morse code message, completing the aural picture. After this follows 'Dragonfire', the first of two instrumentals, fairly straightforward rhythm n'samples fayre, but making clever use of a brass section in addition to all the strings – something rarely heard in this genre dominated by keyboards loaded with thin, lifeless synth-horn sounds.

The real moment of originality, however, is next – 'Elysium'. Relying more on world music methodologies than anything synthetic, it features female diva Zaide on lead vocals, who mouths her deep, resonant Eastern vocals, whilst some oriental instrumentation plays in the background, with a militaristic snare drum providing the rhythmic base. Some might think it's a little bit misplaced, but it does fit in nicely with the feel of the whole album, providing a welcome break from all the oppressive electronic nastiness.

Oh, you wanted oppressive electronic nastiness, eh? Well listen to 'Total War' then. Of all the tracks on the CD, this is probably the most straightforward – pounding beats, seething electronics and searing vox with a war-related theme. If that sounds like your sort of thing, it probably is, but I still think it sounds a little ordinary compared with the rest of the album. 'Antichrist' follows along similar lines, but with a more prominent lead synth giving it more of a trance feel, even if the blasphemous subject matter will keep it off the major label dance compilations pretty much forever. If anything, it's almost bordering on the 'Mexican sound' practised by the likes of Hocico and Cenobita, which is no bad thing.

'Sphere' is our second instrumental, an odd combo of big beat, bubbling electronic and rich, resonant strings. My only complaint is that the drum loop can sound a little thin compared with the other elements of the song, though this may have been intentional. Can't have the beatbox ruling everything, can we? We end with 'Tears In Rain', a verbatim reading of the legendary 'Time to Die' speech from Bladerunner. It's a brave attempt, but it doesn't quite equal Roy's speaking his words over the Vangelis soundtrack. There is a bonus track (No.12), but it's just a short collection of miscellaneous samples, nothing worth writing about.

Multiple versions of this album are available – depending on which one you bought, you may have one or two bonus discs to check out. I'll deal with 'Servant of Hell' first, found on both the 2CD and 3CD editions. The most notable tracks here are Zaide-sung versions of 'Tale of Woe' and 'The Storm', the latter proving to be the most successful, her classically-trained voice showing impressive range, really swooping and soaring round the unforgiving electronics. Zaide also gets to sing in a full classical context on 'Passion (First Sign)', a brief coda to this short but intriguing bonus curiosity.

If you bagged the ultra-limited 3CD version, you'll also get the 'Rarities collection'. The title isn't that accurate – The Retrosic is still a fairly young acts and most of these tracks can still be found on other CDs. There are two versions of their hit 'Ground Zero'. The 'Valley of Death' adding post 9/11 George 'Dubya' samples to the original, whilst Punto Omega's mix builds Cyrus' vocals into an entirely new backing track, incorporating echoed church organ and choir along with all the obligatory nasty electronic bits. It's not the tidiest remix I've ever heard, but it's still impressive in terms of scope.

The other five tracks are given over to remixes The Retrosic has done for other bands. There's a good (if somewhat linear) version of [:SITD:]'s 'Laughingstock', which is more of a cover version, Cyrus electing to re-sing the vocals instead of utilising the originals. There's a mix of Aslan Faction's 'Hell on Earth', though the two acts are too similar in style for anything more than a reasonable rework to emerge. The other three mixes, including a version of Clan of Xymox's 'There's No Tomorrow' are Okish but nothing exciting.

These are mere bonuses (bonii?) however – I'll let you decide what version to seek out from what I've just written. It's the album itself that counts, and it is successful in progressing the sound of The Retrosic on from 'Prophecy' and 'Messa Da Requiem', two releases that combined a fair bit of promise with signs of inexperience. The world music and classical influences do enough to pull this album away from the sea of electronic industrial that I find myself immersed in these days, and it also does enough to make it's mark and show up at least one of the scene's 'big names', which is achievement enough for an act only on its second album.

## **Revolution By Night – Faithless (2003)**

Revolution By Night have been around for a while, now. Those of you who did the 'gothic thing' in London circa 1994 might have remembered a band of that name. They sounded a bit like the Fields of the Nephilim. Used to be called 'Restoration II'. They had a guitarist, and bassist, too. There was also an album by the name of 'Breathe'. And they were surrounded by lots of other bands, all going for the same sound. And what relevance does all this bear to this EP, release nine years (!) after their debut album.

Not much at all really. The guitarists have gone. Bassist Bryon Adamson-Woods has switched to playing keyboards, whilst Steve Weeks remains as vocalist and lyricist (though both of them partake in the merry art of programming and sequencing). There may be a hint of the old goth-rocker left in Steve's vocals, but everything else has changed. Their sound is now clearly influenced by the current European electronic sound, with clear echoes of VNV Nation, Apoptyma Berzerk and Mesh, to name but three.

More significant, however, is the element of their sound that stretches right back to Ultravox. Not the most frequently-quoted influence in the scene (the 'Mode win that accolade) but legends in their heyday, and the means by which RBN manage to separate themselves from much of their immediate competition. The 'Vox influence is particularly apparent on the title track, swathes of lush synthesizer mated to a solid rhythm and an inspired vocal performance from Steve, who seems here to have found his songwriting niche.

There's a fair selection of versions of the song on offer. The 'Radio Edit' cuts out a few lines and some of the instrumental parts to pack the song into the requisite four-minutes demanded of such versions. There's also a couple of big-name remixers. Tom Shear (Assemblage 23) goes for a piano-based intro, leading into his fairly straightforward EBM dance-mix, an accomplished example of the current sound dominating the 'gothic' dancefloors of the world.



The other remixer is none other than Ronan Harris of VNV Nation. The EP offers two different length versions of his particular take on the song. The general feel of this mix isn't so much of a VNV track par se, but more of Ronan's work as producer for other acts, Angels and Agony in particular. The murmuring synths and four-to-the-floor beat form a solid base, to which trance-oriented synth lines, and snatches of the original vocal (heavily effected) are added. Production is up to the usual VNV standards, the only complaint being exactly how relevant this mix is to the original song.

There's also four other songs on this disc. 'Schadenfreude' is RBN's attempt at a big, pounding EBM anthem (in contrast to the synth-pop styling of the title track). Instrumentally, it's intricately detailed and ultimately very effective, a surging rhythm carving through a mass of swirling synths, though it's not as strong a track vocally as 'Faithless'. We also get the 'voxless' version of 'Higher Ground'. I prefer the full version they play live, but as it stands, it's still an accomplished piece of music, sort of treading the middle ground between contemporary EBM and hard trance.

There's also a couple of re-jigged tracks from the bands past. 'Selling Heaven' appeared on a compilation many moons ago. This version (subtitled 'HRH135 mix') opens up in a bright Erasure-like fashion before toughening up once the beat kicks in. It's better than the original, but the producing quality is poorer than the other tracks, sounding a bit muddled in places. 'Condition One' (v2.0) is stronger and more anthemic, particularly in the chorus, though again production is not as clear as it was on 'Faithless'.

Revolution By Night have made no secret of the fact that they've left their past, 'Breathe' CD and everything else, well and truly behind. This disc therefore serves as their new mission statement. Their live shows have indicated that there certainly is 'more to come' from this duo, tracks such as 'Empires and Dance' and 'Two Lines Deep' offering a good indication of what the forthcoming album might sound like. But 'Faithless', original, remixes and B-sides all included, will do very nicely for now.

## **Revoluting Cocks – Got Cock? (2010)**

With Ministry now permanently consigned to history (or so we are told), it's probably no surprise that Al Jourgensen's best-known side-project sees an increase in it's productivity, as this is their second album in as many years. It's also no surprise that the sound of the project bears more influence from it's parent since it's been allowed out into the world on it's own. But this is most definitely NOT a Ministry album with a stupid name. There's not nearly enough barely-disguised socio-political invective for that.

'Trojan Horse' is a case in point – the sludgy bassline, hard-rock riffs (with a solo three minutes in) and that fact that the song drags on for more than a minute more than it should (quality control was never a RevCo strong point). It'd have been a lot funnier had the closely related 'Lard' project had not released '70s Rock Must Die' a decade previously. The album then settles in to a more predicable pattern of silliness, RevCo's sleazy Stateside industrial rock, driving us through 'Filthy Senoritas', 'Dykes', 'Piss Army' and....well, you're getting the idea now aren't you?

And the odd thing is, it's good for a few laughs on the way. They trip up often enough – 'Fuck Money' is a too-obvious assault on the financial realities of the music industry ('Buy Our Fucking Album' is bad enough when said on stage, it's twice as bad on Cd). 'Poke-A-Hot-Ass' stretches one piece of clever wordplay out far too long. At least we get to end on the irritatingly catchy 'Me So Horny' and then lets you enjoy it all again with a remix.

None of this avoids the fact that this project is still incredibly silly, but is that necessarily a bad thing? If you're looking for 'deep and meaningful', you definitely are going to have to

look elsewhere, but as a All-American romp though the sex, drugs and rock'n'roll chmalt, this is enjoyable enough as it stands.

## **Schandmaul – Mit Leib Und Seele (2006)**

Following the diversion of the 'Kunststück' project, it's back to business as usual for Schandmaul on their fifth studio album. It's fairly clear from this recording that the band see reason to deviate from what they do best, German-language folk rock, combining electric and acoustic guitars with the usual mix of flutes, shawms, bagpipes, violins and other traditional instruments. To be honest, there's isn't much evidence of progression from 'Narrenkönig' two albums previously. Maybe it doesn't matter?

The opening song 'Vor Der Schlacht' is an anthem of sorts, a triumphant piped chorus allowing this track to stick in the memory. It's the first of seventeen (!) tracks, the usual mix of guitar-heavy rollicking folk rock and more subtle acoustic moments. It's everything their fans want to hear, but somehow I get the impression that they're never really going to break out of Germany, something that more extravagant acts such as Corvus Corax and In Extremo are starting to do. Of course, folk rock bands are historically famed for longevity, so as long as they keep the quality of their output high enough, they may have no cause for concern. At the end of the day, though, this is just another Schandmaul album.

## **Seabound – Beyond Flatline (2004)**

One might think Dependent Records was in trouble, losing their two biggest acts (Covenant and VNV Nation). A replacement for VNV was soon found in the form of Pride and Fall, but what about Covenant? Who could really fill the shoes of Clas, Joachim and Eskil? The first album by German duo Seabound might have suggested that they had claim to this particular crown. I mean, besides from any musical similarity, the band name spells out a love of water-based metaphor shared only by the bleepy Swedish trio themselves.

However, whilst comparisons to Covenant are certainly valid to an extent, particularly with the mix of distorted beats with clean vox, it's not a card one must overplay. Despite bearing an Eskil production credit on one song, the 'No Sleep Demon' album was significantly more laid-back than 'United States of Mind'. The two were essentially different animals. This disc, meanwhile, builds on the Seabound variant on the future pop sound by adding a variety of techno/electro influences.

Or to put it another way, they avoid sounding like Covenant by putting some Haujobb influence in as well. And that effectively sums up the sound of 'Beyond Flatline'. The distorted beats are still very much in place, as are the lush watery synths and soft vocals style. The major change is an increased use of techno/electronic style rhythmic structures, a direction suggested but not really explored on 'No Sleep Demon'. Even then, the technique doesn't so much dominate the album as merely add a sense of variety.

No album in this genre is complete with it's anthems, and thankfully we get a fair selection here to get our teeth into. The best amongst these is 'Contact', the most 'industrial' sounding song on the CD, but the restrained vocals counterpoint this nicely, reminding one of you-know-who. Another potential hit is the socially observant 'Go International', a tense, cynical, twisted piece of electro-pop, with a bit of sadistic whispering thrown in.

Not that a full-on synth-popper is beyond them. Album opener 'Transformer' makes a fairly good job of mating a firm rhythmic pulse with airy synths and nonchalant vocals, though I do feel that the line 'You are no scientist, You're not an amorist' comes over as a little forced. More successful is 'Poisonous Friend', deceptively bright and refreshing, but with a

bitter twist that only became particularly clear once I opened the booklet and took a look at the lyrics.

There's also a couple of long, drawn out ones for those of you into the slow, ballad-style tracks. 'Torch' is more notable, however, for how vocalist Frank Spinath adopts a Dave Gahan style vocal almost on cue. I did check the inlay to see if Basildon's finest had done a cameo, but this is definitely not the case. 'Watching Over You' is more typically Seabound, a really nice, textured slow-builder that isn't particularly original lyrically but scores highly on atmosphere if nothing else.

The remaining four tracks are the ones that need to be placed, for one reason or another, in the 'erm...interesting' category. There's a couple of harsh-vocal tracks for starters. The sparse 'Digital' makes a fairly good fist of the technique, though it's no classic, whilst in album closer 'Icarus' the scratch-vox serve as mere garnish to what would otherwise have been a reasonably accomplished synth-instrumental. This just leaves the comparatively weak 'Soul Diver' and 'Separation', two tracks that hover round an indecisive tech-beat territory, neither one ever really getting off the ground.

I'm going to conclude this review by returning to my comparison between this act and Dependent's other 'band of focus' right now, Pride and Fall. I do this because both are riding their label's hopes that they may one day rise to the same heights as their predecessors. Pride and Fall, whilst ultimately producing a more musically consistent album, seem firmly stuck in the shadow of their influences. Seabound, however, have managed at least to draw ideas from a greater variety of sources, and whilst the ingredients don't always combine perfectly, it's a brave effort and a promising start to 2004's release schedule.

## **Seize – The Other Side Of Your Mind (2003)**

This is the second album from Anglo-French act Seize. Their self-released debut, 'Lunacy', dating back to 2000 was certainly an interesting affair, a sort of ethereal trip-hop/electronica journey, with occasional salutes to world music, drum'n'bass and myriad other styles along the way. A competent debut it certainly was, but it did nonetheless bear the hallmarks of a debut album, occasionally losing direction and not carrying off every song as they might have done.

This, album, however, sees the group take a substantial step forward. Or at least a substantial step in some sort of direction. It depends on what you wanted to hear. They've joined up with upcoming label Alfa Matrix, who have recently developed something of a speciality for goth-friendly dance music. And given the scene in which someone (them or their promoter – it is not clear) has been trying to break them, it seems the perfect choice. Because, unlike its predecessor, this is very much a dance album.

However, if there's any of you now dragging your mouse pointer up to the 'Back' arrow in fear of reading a review of yet another VNVinpersoNation, you can stop right there, as this most definitely isn't future pop. Well, mostly. Having hinted at it on their debut, Seize are now fully embracing the broken beat in all its glory. They occasionally make use of simpler rhythmic devices, but such is the detailed level of production here that even those tracks sound rich and multidimensional, something that was lacking somewhat on some of the tracks on their earlier album.

The opening track, 'The Other Side' is probably the best example of this, dominated by a ludicrously detailed drum'n'bass loop, over which French diva Sandrine delivers her sweet airy vox, all of this leading up to a highly unexpected trance drum-roll build-up to the finale, a structural device that technically shouldn't have worked, but still does. Backed onto this

is 'Don't Let Me', a more laid-back synth-poppier number which still sounds the business despite a slightly iffy chorus ('I don't wanna fall in love because it hurts' – understandable, but a bit forced, IMHO).

But then we get 'Unbreakable', the first of the four-beat numbers, and a bloody good one at that, a perfect example of vocal trance at it's very best, complete with the obligatory filter sweep breakdown and huge, hand-in-the-air synth lead. Even then, they break from convention by building some breakbeat into the middle eight, a clever way of avoiding accusations of cliché, whilst still sounding like something a big name uber-DJ might put his name too. Except this bunch would actually play it live....

'Eyes Water' is obviously going to be a bit of a comedown after this. It's another synth-pop styled track, and possibly one that's a little bit sugary-sweet for my liking, me overdosing slightly on all the ear candy. Rather more palatable is 'Lost In Space', a quirky little thing that starts off sounding like another drum'n'bass cut, a false intro that eventually fades into a delicate piece of post-rock electronica which bleeps and bloops in all the right places.

'Because of Me' follows a similar musical line, Sandrine's breathy vocal singing a story of a failed relationship whilst the instruments skip along nicely underneath, lush pads and understated leaving plenty of room for a particularly cheesy (in all the right ways) lead synth, before progressing to a richer, string-based accompaniment in the latter half of the song. '100 Years' then picks up the pace a bit once more, but not before a very Jarre-esque intro that reminds me of getting Chronologie on tape as a Xmas present back in 1994.

Onto 'Insanity', then – a tense, urgent piece that seems to want to tear itself in several different directions at once. I'm not especially keen on the 'Answer me, Deliver me' chorus, but you have to admire their daring in threading together such an odd-beat track. And then backing it onto the most straight-ahead four-four euphoria dance-athon on the album – the 'Yuri vs Jus mix' of 'Don't Let Me'. It's a version far removed from the original, but still works well in this form – it's got a hint of a '3am' feeling about it – all you need now is a smoke machine, laser lights and a couple of glowsticks.

'Too Good To Be True' keeps up the pounding beat'n'hand clap ante, though this is clearly an intentional move to prevent cluttering up the multiple layers of synth and vocals which build up, layer by layer as this song progresses. 'Weird Dreams' takes us back into breakbeat country, Sandrine's smooth, unbroken vocal lines not in the slightest bit disturbed by the polyrhythmic audio soup simmering away underneath. We end on 'Who Am I', an uptempo run for home that simultaneously proves to be both reflectively lush as well as jarringly rhythmic.

If you were quick, rich and/or lucky, you might yet have a bonus remix disc to enjoy (it's the version in the DVD case). Against the normal run of form, this might actually be worth searching out and shelling out a premium for, as there are some interesting mixes on here. The first part of the CD features some hard-edged electro reworks from the likes of Implant and Neikka RPM, as well as a punchy take on 'Lost in Space' by E.R.R.A. and an unaccredited 'broken' mix on 'Unbreakable' which really does tear the original to shreds and rebuilds into a drum'n'bass monster.

It's the second half of this disc that really stands out, and this is where the potential audience of the album are going to be split right down the middle. Firstly, there's Diskonnekted's mix of 'Don't Let Me', which makes Seize sound like a European EBMwave act, which they are not, but it's still a hugely enjoyable experience for those into this kind of thing. French electronic oddity 'Oil 10' then throws in a positively bizarre take

on 'The Other Side' that supports itself on one fuzzy four-note analog arpeggio and about six million different sound effects.

Then we get two highly polished dance/trance mixes from Colony 5 (who take on 'Unbreakable') and a return visit of Yuti vs Jus (who this time do the honours on 'Because of Me'). The penultimate track, Sero Overdose's 'Dream Pad Remix' of 'The Other Side' features some nice synth washes, which brings us nicely to the grand finale, Delobbo's 'Chromatic Mix' of 'Don't Let Me', an eight-minute epic that should slot nicely into DJ sets in any number of clubs.

It's maybe not the direction Seize's early fans wanted them to take, but it is a direction that'll get them a LOT more attention. The more extreme critics might accuse them of selling out, but I personally don't think writing songs that other people might actually want to listen to is a crime in it's own right. Hey, if it was a crime, melody would surely have also been declared illegal by now!

## **The Sisters Of Mercy – Some Girls Wander By Mistake (1992)**

This isn't a 'real' Sisters album, but it might as well be one. Back in the early 80s, Eldritch and co didn't have the means to record a whole album in one fell swoop, so they instead threw out 7" and 12" singles whenever they got the chance to. This compilation assembles all those early singles onto one incredibly long CD (79:30 mins). While it doesn't sum up the entire Sisters non-album output, it does serve as a useful collective of all those hard-to-find vinyl gems that would otherwise only be available on scratched-up discs lurking in the darkest depths of seedier 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand record shops.

The sound of the Sisters in those days was pretty distinctive. Andrew Eldrich's deep, Cohen-on-a-bad-day voice and dark, morose lyrics pretty much defined the band's appeal back then. He was accompanied by the trademark 'twangy' guitar sound (often totally drowned in effect pedals – an element they refined for later recording) that's evident in so much 80s new-wave music that it'll almost certainly remind you of something familiar when you first hear it. Add an ultra-tinny drum machine by the name of Doctor Avalanche and you have the sound of the Sisters in their formative years. The album doesn't deal with the releases in strict order, though the tracks that made up each one are at least kept together.

We thus open with the 'Alice' 12", the title track having since become something of a staple in the gothic scene the world over, it's female-oriented subject matter and effects-swamped guitar all elements of a textbook trad-goth song. This disc also held the mechanical drum-machine driven clubbing tribute 'Floorshow', and it's longer, more atmospheric sister track 'Phantom', utilising the same key loop, but with a more minimalist, instrumental accompaniment. The noisy, scathing post-punk blast of '1959' rounds off this release.

Next up is 'The Reptile House' – a five-track EP. The songs here are generally slower and less confrontational than those on the 'Alice' 12", utilising less obtrusive drum loops and more emphasis on the guitars and Eldrich's mournful vocals. Of these, 'Valentine' is my favourite with it's hypnotic, repetitious feel. 'Burn' has a similar feel to it, whilst the other three ('Fix', 'Lights' and 'Kiss The Carpet') practically crawl along, sounding gothic even to those who'd never previously heard any music recorded before 1994. Believe me, this is the EP that got me into the Sisters in the first place.

And so we come to 'Temple of Love' – the one track on this disc you've probably heard at least once before. This isn't the version that the DJs are spinning these days – they much prefer the 1992 remake, with Ofra Hazra's backing vox and a richer overall sound. This version is still very much a classic. Longer, more anthemic and more elaborate than

anything they'd come up with previously, this is the track that brought the long-haired 80s rockers to the Sisters fan-base (something many 'gothic' bands never even got close to achieving). OK, it sounds a bit tinny in places, but when you consider that the band was still playing clubs and student unions at this time, it's hardly surprising production values are a little suspect.

The B-side offered 'Heartland', a moody piece more akin to the two previous Eps. More memorable is the cover of the Rolling Stone's 'Gimme Shelter'. Utilising a drum loop that sounds like a rough run for what would eventually become 'Dominion', the Sisters version of the Stone's classic is a respectful cover which turns the song into one of their own. In many respects, the songs resigned, funereal tone seems more suited to an black-clad 80s new-wave outfit than anything from the 60s pop-rock scene.

It's at this point that we move to the really old tracks, with 'The Damage Done', 'Watch' and 'Home of the Hit-Men' – the very first Sisters of Mercy 7" release back in 1980. These songs have a harsher, less focused tone about them, a sign of the band's lack of studio experience at the time. Despite this, 'The Damage Done' still crystallises the SoM guitar sound from this day on, whilst 'Watch' has a distinct proto-goth Joy Division dissonance about it. 'Home of the Hit-Men' is a 30-section snippet, practically inaudible and best ignored.

Next is the 1982 'Body Electric' 7", a fast, nervous snatch of new-wave pop, dominated by the grating guitar excesses (mastery of the studio still a few years away). The B-side 'Adrenochrome', though, has a distinct rock'n'roll feel about it, the boys feeling obliged to pay at least some tribute to the big rock stars that inspired them in the first place. This just leaves 'Anaconda' – originally released with 'Phantom' on 12". It has a 'cleaner' feel about it that most, thanks mainly to the strong bass guitar keeping the guitar feedback in check on this occasion.

And so ends this lengthy trawl through the days of the Sisters of Mercy as a lo-fi post-punk outfit. The chart success and superstar status would soon follow their WEA signing in 1984. This retrospective is however, pretty much essential for any Sisters of Mercy aficionado, barring those who kept their record players after the CD revolution and still like the sound of needle on vinyl. It'd take quite a bit of searching to get all the original singles, though (I've got half of them), so you might as well buy this and see exactly how Andrew Eldrich began his journey to cult stardom.

## **[:SITD:] – Stronghold (2003)**

[:SITD:]'s debut album is an enjoyable enough romp across a collection of big stompy beats, throbbing electronics, synth strings, and snarling vocals. Carsten and Tom don't really break any new ground here, but what is done is generally done well. The two obvious highlights are 'Snuff Machinery' and 'Laughingstock', two accomplished examples of contemporary mid-tempo EBM, each making a valid social statement in amongst all the drum programming. The other notable track is 'Rose-Coloured Skies', a more redemptive, up-tempo track that almost (but not quite) develops into a real 'hands-in-the-air' anthem.

'Hurt' and 'Lebensborn' are reasonable enough accompaniments, although 'Locked In Syndrom' proves to be a touch static for my liking. Tom takes the mic for a passable 'future pop' number 'Venom' ('future pop' in that the vocals are sung rather than growled), although it's clear that this isn't the right direction for them. The remainder of the album is made up of instrumentals of varying quality, but ultimately prove to be filler on an album with only seven actual 'songs'. This and some over repetitive-lyrics indicate the bands inexperience, but 'Stronghold' still proves to be a respectable debut effort.

## **[:SITD:] – Coded Message: 12 (2006)**

[:SITD:] return with a second album, although in many respects, it's hard to tell it apart from their debut. Sure, there's a mixture of slow (Upstairs), medium (Brand of Cain) and fast (Richtfest) current-era EBM variants, as well as the token 'sung' track by Tom (Relief) and the obligatory VNV-esque synth-string instrumental (Yield of Despair), but there's nothing here that we haven't heard before – it's the same old combo of snarled vox, heavy-handed drum loops and common-or-garden EuroEBM electronics.

It's also becoming more apparent that [:SITD:] are seriously struggling when it comes to writing decent English-language lyrics. Most of their phraseology either reads like quasi-philosophical futurepop-reject or a collection of isolated statements that may or may not qualify as a 'song'. All in all, it just seems like Tom and Carsten at a loss for ideas as to how to take their project forward – maybe they should just stick to the remixing, where the source material is generally stronger and more innovative than anything present on this CD. They can still assemble a decent dance tracks, and some of these songs do work in the club context, but they serious need to find themselves a few new ideas and a better lyricist if they're going to survive to album no.3.

## **Skinny Puppy – The Greater Wrong Of Right (2004)**

Skinny Puppy may have split in 1995, with some-time member Dwayne R.Goettel succumbing to a heroin overdose a year later, but few people seriously believed that the surviving members would never share a stage or studio again for as the pair of them could keep breathing. Sure enough, Cevin and Ogre did indeed reunite for the Doomsday festival in Dresden in 2000. And to prove that it was no one-off, they've now gone and recorded a new album. But is this a sell-out or a triumphant comeback? Let's take a listen....

The first question that needs to be answered is who is filling the shoes of the sadly departed Dwayne? The answer is Mark Walk, the 'other half' of Ogre's 'OhGr' project. Cynical critics now be expecting a follow-up to 'SunnySyOp' won't be totally surprised to find elements of the OhGr on this album, most notably Ogre's more 'melodic' vocal style, though I'm a bit cautious about actually calling it 'singing' – the guy isn't actually a natural in that department. But then again, he was doing that back on 'The Process', the 'posthumous' Puppy swansong.

And then we have the rhythmic element. Those of you who have recently discovered the wondrous world of electronic industrial music might be forgiven for thinking that all you needed was 120 distorted kick drums every minute and an arpeggio preset for the bassline. In actual fact, industrial music never had an 'official' rhythmic style (though I bet someone's going to e-mail me with a disagreement on this one). As long as it cut through the air viciously enough to scare off the uninitiated listener, it'd probably pass. For the record (sic), the Puppy crew spend most of their time in broken beat territory here, but true to form, they don't stick with it for the whole album.

Anyway, we kick off with 'I'mmortal', a filthy electronic rocker that seems to have been tailor made to scream 'WE'RE BACK!'. The punishing drum loop and highly processes guitar stabs (anyone remember 'Dig It?') provide the basis, the combination of innocuous and caustic electronics the detail, whilst Ogre delivers his vocals in his typically (by recent standards) scowling tone. It's doesn't actually strike me as anything truly revolutionary, but neither does it sound like a bunch of industrial dinosaurs gathering together to knock out another album for moneys sake alone.

'Pro-test' continues along a similar line, though this time Ogre come dangerously close to sounding like a rapper in places. Once this track is over, however, the guitar is put away and for a while we get to enjoy some pure electronics, starting with 'EmpTe', a kind of mutant drum'n'bass concept alternating with some very climatic drum rolls, which juxtaposes nicely with the song's nihilistic lyrical tone. It's one of the albums two real highlights, linking two unrelated concepts to form a cohesive song.

'Neuwerld' follows, one of the more, erm, 'difficult' pieces on offer here. There's an ominous throbbing bassline of the 'one-fingered' variety and some suitably evil kick drum programming, but Ogre's vocal is weak, pointing up rather than making use of his melodic limitations, whilst the song is a mess structurally, fizzling out rather than reaching any kind of meaningful climax. Oh, and references to a 'New World Order' belong back in the days of George Bush Sr, not ole' 'Dubya'.

'Ghostman' fairly straightforward (by the standards of this CD anyway) – a rush of fucked-up beats, bursts of electronics at random intervals, whilst Ogre groans and moans about the dystopian nature of modern existence. It's when we enter the albums second half with 'dOwnsizer' that we start to see some stylistic various – doom-laded strings prefacing a slow, depressive crawl, with a few well placed guitar stabs and military snares adding some extra 'oomph' to Ogre's sneering vox.

A further surprises now – 'Past Present', which is more of a hard-edged synth-popper than anything dark and twisted. Sure, with Ogre behind the mic they're never exactly going to be Top 10 material, but this almost sounds like the old masters taking the long pretenders on at their own game, producing a rich, expansive industrial pop track that'd probably go down well with the Djing contingent of Skinny Puppy's fanbase, who have traditionally been too worried to spin anything other than 'Assimilate' for fear of clearing the floors.

It's track 8, 'Use Less' that takes home first prize however – hardly surprising considering it features both Wayne Static (of Static-X) on backing vocals and Danny Carey (of Tool) on drums. It's Carey that really brings this song to life – the calms of the verses interspersing the storms of the chorus, Danny throwing some truly thunderous tub-thumping, over which the cries of 'Are we all completely useless?' soar, pushed to further heights when Mr.Static comes into play in the later stages.

Two more to go – starting with 'Goneja'. This one's very close to the OhGr project, a very mechanical slab of industrial sleaze, blending jerky rhythms with a bunch of little hooks, synth washes and other bits of ear candy. 'DaddyWarbash' brings the albums to close, a sort of study into the possibilities of applying multiple vocal styles and effects within the confines of the same song, sounding child-like, Numan-like, vocoder-like and (dare I say it) Ogre-like at various points, yet it does in it's own way manage to sound climatic, at least by the standards of a couple of warped electro-industrial pioneers about to get away with pulling off their attempted 'come back'.

I'm pretty sure that there's going to be a fair few Skinny Puppy old-time fans that'll pan this album unreservedly. They're elitist like that, you see – and this isn't nearly revolutionary enough to pass their critical expectations. But neither is it bad. It's actually one of the most listenable Skinny Puppy albums to date, yet it still managed to keep that aura of 'weird' that makes it distinctively 'them'. There's a certain feeling that they're 'avoiding the obvious' where possible.

That said, it really was too much to ask from the outfit that revolutionised industrial music to do it all over again, so don't expect anything beyond what I've laid out here. It's even odds if SP fanatics will like this or not. OhGr fans almost certainly will like it, though – the band is now two-thirds OhGr anyway, so it sort of goes without saying really. So it's your



call – but I for one won't be giving 'superior' looks to people shelling out for this if they think it's worth a go.

## Skon – Nic Realnego (2012)

It's been a long time since I've heard an album like this. Most electronic industrial these days seems to draw from a strictly limited pool of influences (find one that DOESN'T quote Skinny Puppy as an influence), just as most old-school EBM seems to copy Nitzer Ebb's first album over and over. There are other sub-genres that simply haven't seen so much interest in terms of revival, and for the first time in ages I'm hearing a new album that harks back to the long-forgotten and largely-deleted dark electro sound of the late 80s and early 90s. Bands such as yelworC, Placebo Effect and Calva Y Nada all produced works of note that simply haven't found a contemporary audience.

But in some small way I hear the sound being revived here. The lo-fi production, the crashing, reverb-heavy drums, the vocal gravel and the layers of darkwave synth. It genuinely is a true gothic/industrial hybrid, and whilst it's all very ominous stuff, well, you're not here looking for easy listenin' music, are you? Possibly indicating this sub-genres now very niche appeal is the fact that this project is not from Germany (from where practically all music in this style emerges) but from over the border in Poland. And all the songs are in Polish.

Luckily the accompanying image file collection provides translations, and it's not like anyone listens to songs like this to obtain deep lyrical insights. Be assured that it's all very bleak stuff. It's on a musical level where albums like this score, and Skon have no less than 14 tracks with which to make a mark here. We open with the quasi-symphonic "Wstep", which leads us into the album's title track.

And if you're looking for an example for how to 'do' this style, this is one of the best examples available, all jackhammering drums, throbbing synth arps, arcing strings flying over the top of the mix, and not one hint of the overused supersaw synth presets used by every Hocico and Suicide Commando wannabe out there. The following track "Odlegla Wolnosc" continues along similar lines, possibly lacking a little of the grandeur of the title track but still more than capable of filling your ears with swathes of pulsating electronic gloom.

"Rdzawe Lzy", a slow instrumental stomp takes us into "Nie Ten Wymiar", and we hear the project's first sign of weakness, the track too reliant on a two-chord repetition to hold interest for the six-minute duration. "Umieram" is a minute longer, but luckily has the energy and impetus to last the duration, in the process bringing back welcome memories of Slaughtering Tribe-era :Wumpscut:. Which, contrary to popular opinion, produced more good songs than just "Soylent Green".

"Grajek" is almost light relief in comparison, a brief run of octave basslines and catchy martial melody taking us through to "Wieczna Piesn". This is the strongest of the album's slow, reflective tracks, the synth creating a cathedral-sized atmosphere at times. "Droga" is another hard, stompy one, but without any embellishments of note, and hence comes across as filler. "Mruczanka Dia Smierci" is what I'd diplomatically call a "flavour track", a quirky, almost folksy instrumental that again serves as counterpoint change in tone, or rather would have done had it not tried to drag out too few ideas a minute too long.

A brief reprise of "Nic Realnego" chmal follows, not unwelcome but not necessary either, which leaves the album to close with two older Skon recordings. Well, that's what I'm guessing they are, given the song titles have dates it. "How You Die For Pain" from 2002 was definitely worth reviving, lacking the intense drum programming of the newer songs

but every bit as successful in an atmospheric sense. The 2006 track “Zwiastun” works less well, coming across as a mid-00s EBM throwaway. There is a final blast of noise in the form of “Zakonczenie” to see us out on, but if I wanted to listen to this kind of thing I would have dug out my Whitehouse CDs. Oops, sorry, I sold ‘em.....

But for the balance of this duration, this album does indeed achieve the role of reminding the few of us that remember it of an era of dark electronic music that has largely been forgotten. And for those of you who have no idea what the bands I’ve been referring to during this review sound like, well, I’m afraid virtually all of their backcatalogues have been deleted. So you’ll have to settle for this. And if you wanted more incentive, Halotan have it available as a free download!

## **Snake Skin – Canta’Tronic (2006)**

The second Snake Skin album sees Tilo Wolff make two key changes to the projects sound – cut down on the vocal effects and introduce a female vocalist. Not just any female vocalist, of course, but opera singer Kerstin Doelle, a classically-trained soprano more commonly associated with chamber music. This combination of vocal styles set alongside the pulsating dark electronic backbone has few precedents – the Argentine act Lamia and the more rhythmic creations of Qntal and Helium Vola are as close as you’ll come. This particular style works most effectively on the album’s odd-numbered tracks when they throw caution of the wind and let loose an uptempo elektro rhythm laden with quasi-classical synth melodies and one or both of the distinctive vocal styles on offer.

Opening song ‘Eterna’ is particularly outstanding – an operatic stomp that concludes with Kirsten’s voice soaring to heights never previously heard in this entire genre. ‘Bite Me’ sees the two vocalists share the singing, working in morse-code style bleepology and a well-concieved chord progression to form the song that is most illustrative of the album’s sound as a whole (both of these songs also feature as edited club mixes at the albums conclusion, along with an FAQ remix of ‘Eterna’). Some of the beat-heavy tracks feature Tilo solo, thus bearing the closest resemblance to the previous album (‘Tourniquet’ and the slower ‘The Eternal’ are the best examples).

Interspersing these songs are five tracks that offer a more stripped-down sound. Three of these (‘La Force’, ‘Manora’ and Recall II’) are centred on Kirsten’s singing whilst the other two feature Tilo’s voice (with varying degrees of digital manipulation applied). These tracks are technically sound, but alongside some of the more ‘explosive’ tracks, they can seem to drag a little (especially ‘Still Not Home’, which takes ages to really get going). A soprano-fronted electronic gothic project probably isn’t to everyone’s taste, especially with Tilo’s own outlandish tones in the mix as well, but if you’re starting to find the current sound of dark electronics somewhat homogeneous, this is the nearest thing you’re going to get to originality all year.

## **Suicidal Romance – Shattered Heart Reflections (2010)**

I remember watching Top Gear back in the mid-90s, when they actually made an effort to review cars real people might buy. Jeremy Clarkson was tasked with reviewing the Vauxhall Vectra, a middle-of-the-road car for middle-managers. Typical corporate fleet material. He spent the majority of the review shrugging his shoulders, at a loss as to what to say about a car which had nothing really wrong with it, but nothing remarkable either. And I’m in a similar situation here. I have no idea as to what to say about this album.

I do have one interesting thing to say about the band – they’re from Estonia, which hardly a hotbed of dark-scene-activity, but you’d be hard pushed to tell the fact by listening to the music. They seem to be going for a Blutengel kind of sound, mid-tempo, synth-driven

goth-friendly dance tracks with a female vocalist that mimics the style of Constance, Gina, Kati and all the other women that have passed through Chris Pohl's vampiric embrace, whilst the male singer goes for the quasi-industrial gravel that you've probably heard a hundred times over if you've been listening to the same things I have for the past few years.

And let's not discredit them – they make a pretty good job of what they do – the songwriting is tight and purposeful, the lyrics avoid the blood-sucking I heard all too often in that-German-band-I-won't-mention-again, and there's refreshingly few signs of the experimental self-indulgence commonly used for album filler in this genre. But neither is there any synthetic texture, lyrical device, sonic dynamic or any other feature that demands that I listen to any particular song time and time again. Suicidal Romance have avoided the pitfalls of their chosen genre, but neither have they found their distinctive voice yet. Two albums and one EP into their career, it's about time they started doing so.

### **Suicide Commando – Critical Stage (1994)**

After a succession of demo tapes, 'Critical Stage' finally sees the first actual Suicide Commando studio album, though many of the tracks here originated from the aforementioned demos. Johan Van Roy's take on industrial features EBM rhythms (put through varying degrees of distortion), ominous throbs of synthesiser and heavily distorted vocals (often beyond the point of legibility). The project is clearly influenced by fellow Belgians Dive and Klinik, both of whom practice a similarly strident brand of electronic industrial – indeed Dirk Ivens even provides a guest vocal on 'Where Do We Go From Here?'.

Whilst the overall concept is sound, there is still the feeling that many of the tracks still feel slightly 'demoish' in terms of production quality and structure. Whilst some compositions seem to develop, other seem little more than glorified rhythm loops with over-repetitive vocals. Nonetheless, if you like your industrial raw, rhythmic, electronic and unremittingly harsh, you may be willing to forgive its weaknesses. This is electronic body music taken in the direction Front 242, erm, didn't.

### **Suicide Commando – Stored Images (1995)**

The Suicide Commando sound advances further, although the changes are for the most part incremental. The quality of production allows the rhythms to cut deeper than before, the development of each individual track seems more thought out, and this time we do get some genuinely memorable anthems. The album opener 'Murder' is among the album's more confrontational compositions, a rhythm loop so abrasive it almost degenerates into pure noise, interspersed by screeching blasts of high-frequency synth and Johan's scathing claims 'Violence breeds Murder – Murder I Win'. No compromises here. This is EVIL!

The subtler, more melodic face of the Suicide Commando sound becomes more apparent as we move onto tracks such as 'The Exit' and 'Save Me', the rather basic lyrics tolerable in amongst creepy electronic refrains and hammering drum loops. Whilst your interest may begin to flag in the middle-to-late stages (as this style can become heavy going after a few songs), Johan did have the good sense to save the best track to last – namely 'See You In Hell!'. Despite a vocal that's only one variation short of the title repeated over and over, this particular composition sets horror movie atmospherics to a crushing stomp, a death march for the industrial generation. Maybe the middle part of the album doesn't quite live up to its standards, but Johan is, in places, really starting to achieve his true potential here.

## **Suicide Commando – Construct/Destruct (+ Re-Construction)**

On his third studio album, Johan Van Roy begins to show signs of moving towards a more polished, 'cleaner' sound. That isn't to say that Suicide Commando is going all soft on us, just that the melodic and rhythmic elements of the projects seem more balanced than before. A large number of this album's songs open with a delicate synth chime, before the jarring beat and chmalt-vox cut in. It's a trick Van Roy has clearly mastered. The only disruption to the pattern is on 'The Mirror' (a 're-MASTERED' version of an old demo track). Remaster or otherwise, it's an abstract, power-noise style track which clearly originated from an earlier session, sounding lo-fi alongside the remainder of the track list.

Of course, one may argue that he doesn't actually do much else here. The only real difference between many of the tracks is exactly how distorted the rhythm is – tracks such as 'Acid Bath' and 'Desire' utilise a fairly straightforward EBMish stomp, whilst 'Better Off Dead' tears across the speaker cones like it was the last song on earth – it's testament to the quality of Johan's output that the melodic elements are still able to pick their way over the mix regardless.

## **Suicide Commando – Mindstrip (2000)**

Whatever Suicide Commando were hinting at on 'Construct Destruct', they well and truly deliver here. The seething layered of 'Jesus Wept' sets the scene, only for the listener to be utterly blown away by 'Hellraiser'. Taking the concept of a crushing rhythm (with a kick drum resembling a bomb going off every beat), scathing vocal and a horror movie melody to its absolute limit, this track exemplifies everything Johan Van Roy has been trying to achieve since he programmed his first drum loop. If that was not enough, he pulls off the trick a second time in the form of 'Love Breeds Suicide', an intricate chime motif buried under an all-conquering synth lead.

As well offering more effectively structured songs than any of its predecessors, there is also more variation in mood (at least as far as such an act CAN vary its sound), the klaxon-like 'Raise Your God' sandwiched by two slow, heaving compositions in the form of 'Body Count Proceed' and 'Mind Stripper'. Conversely, 'Comatose Delusion', one of the more melodic songs here, appears between two tracks ('Run' and 'Blood In Face') where the blistering mechanised rhythms dominate all, though in the context of the album, these two tracks ultimately rank amongst the album's less memorable.

## **Suicide Commando – Anthology (2002)**

With four studio albums, a number of singles and Eps plus a large number of compilation contributions, it was seen fit to assemble a 2CD Suicide Commando anthology. The first CD covers the 'hits', taking what are believed to be the finest tracks from this project's releases to date. The fifteen tracks chosen are not listed chronologically, so early, rather primitive sounds tracks such as 'Never Get Out' and 'Necrophilia' sit alongside aching well-produced industrial floorfillers from the 'Mindstrip' era. This makes it harder to judge the musical progression of the project, but at the same time a CD containing 'Hellraiser', 'Love Breeds Suicide', 'Better Off Dead' and 'See You In Hell' might still be a very useful acquisition for those relatively new to the brutally harsh, chilling variant of EBM developed by Johan Van Roy.

The second CD contains just seven tracks, the strongest of these being 'See You In Hell 2002'. The ominous spoken-word sample 'Welcome To Hell' prefaces a remake of the 1995 hit, now consistent with the more refined brutality heard on more recent Van Roy recordings, but losing none of the original fury. We also get four tracks from now-deleted

compilations – whilst both the menacing ‘The Ultimate Machine’ and the grinding stomp ‘Come To Me’ in particular initially sound as though they may be interesting, neither do they really equal Johan’s finest.

Finally, there are remixes of ‘Better Off Dead’ and ‘Desire’ – generally reliant on slight tweaks to production than any major restructuring. It would have been nice if this CD had been filled to capacity, possibly drawing a remix or two from the deleted ‘Reconstruction’ CD or even a couple more tracks from the ‘Chromdioxyde’ demo compilation. As it stands, it’s a decent summation of a decade of industrially-fuelled creativity for Johan Van Roy, though avid collectors may not feel it’s worth it just for the new version of ‘See You In Hell 2002’, fine remake that it is.

## **Suicide Commando – Axis of Evil (2003)**

Having taken EBM to new levels of intensity on ‘Mindstrip’, Johan Van Roy now takes a side-step and delivers the nearest thing he’s ever done to a ‘concept’ album – as in it’s the first Suicide Commando album where the lyrics seem to matter as much as the crushing distorted rhythms, heavily-effected vocals, searing synth leads and sinister little melodies. The key focus of the album is the USA under G.W.Bush, with ‘One Nation Under God’ perverting the Pledge of Allegiance to Van Roy’s own ends, whilst ‘Evildoer’ can be seen as more of a personal attack against ‘Dubya’ himself.

Other songs such as ‘Consume Your Vengeance’ and ‘Face of Death’ take a more general look at our self-destructive society, whilst the eight-minute album opener ‘Cause Of Death: Suicide’ takes a close look at self-termination. With the remaining tracks dealing with such relevant issues as false idols (The Reformation, Plastikchrist), homicide (Mordfabrik) and euthanasia (Sterbehilfe), it’s certainly the most meaningful Suicide Commando album. What it lacks is an out-and-out floorfilling anthem that equals ‘Hellraiser’ or ‘Love Breeds Suicide’. Try as they might, ‘Evildoer’ and ‘Axis of Evil’ fall fractionally short of making the impact that some of the key songs from the last album made.

NOTE: If you find the limited edition boxed version of the album, you get a bonus DVD, with a few live clips, a remix of ‘Cause of Death’ and an interesting interview with Johan Van Roy. Nothing worth an Ebay bidding war, but may be of interest to the more hardcore fans.

## **Suicide Commando – Bind, Torture and Kill (2006)**

Johan Van Roy might have made a huge impact with ‘Mindstrip’, and he might also have kept the project’s head above water with the accomplished ‘concept’ album ‘Axis of Evil’, released at a time when highly-distorted-vocal anti-American EBM was all the rage. Three years further down the line, however, with an army of imitators following closely behind, there simply isn’t anything else for the project to do. Out of fresh ideas, or even truly fresh sounds, Terror EBM’s kingpin has fallen.

The album opens with the title track, featuring a rather tired usage of a spoken-word female vocal (so 1990s :Wumpscut....). We then get a run of tracks so typical of Suicide Commando that they scarcely warrant description – subject matters such as religious chmaltz, cannibalism, torture and murder are all much in evidence (much of the album is said to be inspired by serial killer Dennis Rader, admittedly a suitably sadistic subject matter for a project such as this). The distorted beats, distorted vocals and synth leads sound much the same as ever. Some of the uptempo tracks are reminiscent of Hocico (‘Conspiracy For The Devil’ and the pathetically-titled ‘F\*\*\* You Bitch’), whilst some of the mid-tempo stomps (particularly ‘Dead March’) remind me of a kind of vocal-effected [:SITD:]. Hardly the most surprising pair of bands to be compared with.

Fans of this particular school of music may yet derive entertainment from this collection (as I've heard this style of music done a lot worse) but I still think it's indicative of a dying genre. Johan van Roy may have been credited with a key pioneer of the distorted-vocal industrial beats, but it looks like he's going to be both it's founding father and the final nail in it's coffin.

Note: There is a limited edition of this album featuring a 5-track EP for 'Conspiracy For The Devil' – aside from a stripped-down mix of 'Meschenfresser' by Diskonnekted, it's nothing worth writing home about. Or writing on here about, for that matter.

## **Suicide Commando – Implements Of Hell (2010)**

A few years ago, I was of the opinion that this project had lost it. The mid-00s industrial scene was packed to the gills with projects that did the whole hard beats and extreme vocal distortion thing, and Johan Van Roy had been caught and passed by a bunch of kids that he himself had influenced. It happens everywhere, and this just one more example.

But in the whole aggrotech/terror EBM/whatever-it's-called-scene, things are now different. There's been few notable practitioners of the style appear in recent years, and those that have are more likely to have aped the shouted slogan and sample hooks of Combichrist. The way is thus clear, therefore, for the master of harsh-vocal-EBM to reclaim his crown. And he's gonna try to do it with his 'Implements From Hell'.

Initial signs aren't all that good – 'The Pleasures Of Sin' and 'The Dying Breed' both thump and throb away in a workmanlike manner, as if Van Roy was producing this stuff on auto-pilot. Things don't wake up until we get to 'Die Motherfucker Die'. It sounds like it's gonna be an ultra-predictable obscenity laden EBM romp, and that it certainly is. But after a couple of indifferent openers, blatant obscenity is pretty much what was needed to wake the whole album up.

Whilst the album offers up a second no-nonsense act of kickdrum-fuelled audio terrorism (it's called 'Hate Me'), the album's more interesting moments come when the tempo gets toned down a few notches. 'God In The Rain' is surprisingly melodic by this project's standard (can you remember another Suicide Commando tune from the last decade that could be whistled?) whilst 'Come Down With Me' weaves choral samples into the overall mix (can you remember another Suicide Commando track that did that, ever?).

Penultimate number 'The Perils Of Indifference' threatens to answer it's own question – it's perilously close to leaving me indifferent, but at least the album provides one final attempt at grabbing your attention. 'Until We Die' mixes sombre strings with a slow, irregular beat, over which Van Roy muses about the injustices of the world and the futility of existence. It's rare for a Suicide Commando track to be even remotely touching, which makes for a strong ending to what was ultimately a mixed bag in terms of approach and quality. It's hardly an equal to Mindstrip, but it's a lot more interesting than the highly generic 'Bind, Torture, Kill', and for that at least we can be thankful.

VERSION NOTE: There's a 2CD version of this album with an 11-track bonus disc. Most of the tracks are remixes by bands that sound too similar to Suicide Commando to be able to do anything drastic with the songs, though Leæther Strip manages to make 'Hate Me' sound like, erm, Leæther Strip (thank you Claus). There's a pretty sound remake of 'Cause Of Death:Suicide' from two albums ago, and a stripped-down 'Winter Version' of 'Until We Die', a song ideally suited to such a treatment.

There's also a 3CD boxset with various bits of memorabilia in it, the additional CD containing 4 additional versions of 'God In The Rain' (including a :Wumpscut: remix) plus a

couple of rarities – reasonable enough, but unless you're a fanatic, I'd save your money and get the tracks off eMusic or Amazon. Notice how I don't recommend that other online music store. Jonny doesn't do fruit.

## **Sulpher – Spray (2002)**

Industrial metal hasn't had a good press in recent years, not helped by the current status of the scene's leading lights. NIN seem to be on another long hiatus, Ministry have spent the last decade trying to regain their lost brilliance, Gravity Kills and Orgy have failed to live up to their early promise and the rest just aren't industrial any more or aren't any good. The way is thus clear for a new band to step into the breach and seize the glory. Are Sulpher the band to do it?

This album had quite a run-up, the band releasing two singles and performing countless live dates before finally releasing this, their first full-length, in early 2002. This means that many of the tracks won't be new to Sulpher's hard-core fanbase, as five of these (yes, half the tracklisting!) have been released previously, and most of the others have been played at their many shows so far. But let's assume you're totally new to Sulpher. What exactly is on offer here?

'Scarred' opens the album, and gives the uninitiated a pretty good idea of the Sulpher sound. A brooding, deceptively quiet intro sets the atmosphere, lead man Rob whispering the vocals in a sadistic Reznor-esque tone, when from out of nowhere comes an almighty riff, a jagged six-string explosion of the kind that sets of mosh-pits in the places that still allow them. The track shifts between these two extremes, giving us both faces of Sulpher in one song.

Next is 'Misery', a more straightforward rock-oriented track, making all the right noises in all the right places, with enough creativity to keep it well out of the dirge-like bluster trap so many songs of this type fall into. The first stand-out track, however, is 'You Ruined Everything', a all-enveloping fuzz-guitar riff making for one of the catchiest metal choruses I've heard in a long time. Rob Holliday has a remarkably strong voice, and his 'YOU RUINED EVERY-THING!!!!' is more believable that you'd imagine from such an angst-I line like that.

'Unknown' is a slower, often quite delirious number that occasionally breaks away into another wall-of-sound industrial riff-o-rama, with plenty of good keyboard work filling out the sound during all the quiet bits. The most sedated track on the album, though, follows straight after. The first half 'You Don't Mean That Much' contains more undistorted guitar than the rest of the album put together, a brief respite before the song eventually builds into the overdriven noise frenzy that most of Sulpher's songs eventually become.

And now, we get the full, uncut, seven-and-a-half-minute version of 'One of Us'. Opening up with swathes of ominous synthesizer, leading us oh-so-carefully into the song itself, the terrifyingly brooding verses matched to THE chorus of the album – another huge riff and Rob yelling out like he really was Mr.Reznor, rather than the poor imitation many (unfairly) make him out to be. This is about as good as industrial metal gets – even if this band fade like all their predecessors, they will always have this track as reminder of their potential.

'Blasphemy' is up next, with an up-front anti-god subject matter that's more Marilyn Manson than anything truly industrial. It's fairly typical of the album, not one of the better tracks, though I'll leave you to decide whether you think 'I don't believe in God – He Don't believe in me' is a throwaway lyric or the song's saving grace. Next is 'Fear Me', a track that's been knocking around for quite a while, and while the vocals are weaker than

elsewhere on the album (the chorus just a half-heated repetition of the song title), the testosterone-fuelled instrumentation works well, making it a good one for dancefloor play.

Title track 'Spray' is notable for its brevity – it being little over a minute in length. A thrashy, highly processed riff and lots of Ministry-esque shouting make for a pretty exhilarating minute, though a little more development wouldn't have hurt. This leaves 'Problem' – more adventurous in terms of structure than some of the others, though occasionally it loses its way a little. Rob almost gets away with a chorus consisting of 'DIE!' shouted loudly several times, but he misses the sweet spot by a small margin.

And so 'Spray' comes to a close, a short-but-sweet collection of classy industrial metal tracks that do at least something to renew hope in the genre. They haven't broken THAT much new ground here, given the clear influence of NIN, Ministry and other bands of that ilk. But it is very good at doing what it does. They still need to build on this when they come to work on their next set of material, but this at least gives them a solid base to work from.

## **Swarf – Art Science Exploitation (2004)**

It's been a long time coming, this album. The Swarf trio split from their former label Wasp Factory in 2002, fully intending to record their debut album with Marc Heal of Cubanate, who was in the process of setting up his own imprint. It didn't work out, and it eventually fell to London's Cryonica label to pick up the pieces and see the first Swarf album completion, finally appearing in 2004, three years and two label changes after their 'Fall' EP.

As it happens, the three songs from that EP appear here as well. As does 'Drown' from the last Wasp Factory sampler, as well as the threesome from 2003's Cryotank label sampler. This means that 70% of the songs will be already known to Swarf aficionados. That doesn't mean that 70% of the CD will be already known, as all of the songs have undergone some kind of modification in attempt to produce the 'definitive' versions.

The final result is certainly impressive in a technical sense – the sound of this album is generally richer, tidier and cleaner than anything they've produced in the past. A fine example of this evolution process is in fact the opener 'Vision', which makes a better fist of the central broken beat, which now sounds like it's driving the song onwards rather than trampling all over it. Liz Green's delicate little voice is thus able to shine in a way it wasn't able to on previous Swarf recording.

As an introduction to the album, the song is thus relatively effective, even if it doesn't symbolise the sound of the album as a whole. The Swarf crew seem pretty keen on having a go at a fair number of contemporary dance styles – with track two, 'Supine', taking us into commercially-viable trance territory, the lush waves of arpeggiated synth signifying the kind of 'instant glowstick material' that led to many a sulky goth sitting in the corner of Slimelight waiting in vain for some Bauhaus over the past few years.

'Shadows' next, the inevitable 'slow' track, a form of intricately-textured electronic dream pop, a style well suited to Liz's voice, particularly when she starts laying down the harmonies, though it's not really a favourite of mine. Then we get 'Grey', a downtempo synth-popper with a really cheesy lead synth which you're either going to love or hate. This of all tracks make an interesting comparison to the version on 'Cryotank' – the rhythm loop is played down here, but the overall sound is more detailed, possibly as a result.

The centrepiece of the album is of course 'Fall', the trio's first real hit and certainly the song likely to appeal to the biggest cross-section of their audience, a sweet yet confident



piece of dance-pop, heard here in a version which follows it's older Wasp Factory sibling in terms of structure, but with a more 'detailed' sound. The raw impact of the song has been lessened slightly in the process, but the 'subtle-ization' (if that's a word) is a sign of maturity if nothing else.

Taking the tempo down again is 'Sorrow', a song heard both on the 'Fall EP' and the Wasp Factory sampler, this version effectively a revised version of the former. The deep piano and crawling beat work better here than they did previously, another track benefiting from the 'tiding' process, but somehow this version sounds a little bit 'safe' compared with the original, the layers of strings pushed further down the mix and not cutting the air the way they did last time – it's a question of taste, really.

Now on to 'Drown', one of the group's own favourites for a set closer, their paean to, erm, getting drunk. The original version of this song had a very Cryonica sound to it, similar to the Alexys-sung Inertia songs, but spoilt with an overdose of vocal reverb. This version tones down the hard-edged acid synths without removing them completely, transforming the song into the big, proud drinking anthem it always should have been.

The adrenaline really gets pumping now, first with 'Subtext', an uptempo vocal dance-athon, which some wish to call 'future pop', with a prominent lead synth and a gloriously uplifting coda, firing us straight into the path of 'Motion', the fastest and most intense track on the album, combining elements of hard house, trance and industrial, with Liz having to put in her most robust vocal showing so far to have any hope of making herself heard. The album is led out with 'Reflect', an insubstantial electronica piece, which is easy enough on the ear but doesn't really cause any excitement.

So in the final run, I have to give this album my qualified recommendation. Qualified in the sense that you thought Swarf were an 'industrial' band (or dare I suggest, a 'gothic' band, as they've traditionally been billed as one or the other), you'll probably dislike this CD with a passion. It's a dance album, first and foremost, in the respect that it is for the most part comprised of dance music, but at the same time it's a dance album with proper, actual songs on it. Not just some diva getting looped ad infinitum.

Sometimes they play a little bit too safe, creating self-consciously 'nice' music that doesn't seem to want to make an impact, but they generally do what they do well, and for the most part, it's still got an 'edge' of sorts. Which is just as well really as the competition is getting fierce. There's countless numbers of female-fronted 'dance' bands out there, both inside and outside 'the scene', so anyone wishing to join the club had better had some good ideas. Swarf HAVE had some ideas, though such is the nature of the industry I've just described that they might need a few more in the near future to progress beyond this debut album, good that it is.

## **Synthetic – Control (2003)**

I've got a lot of admiration for the Synthetic trio. There's something undeniably shameless about what they do. They don't even try to side-step cliché, but rather run headlong into it, hoping to find new uses for overused musical techniques. Camp vocals, bloopy electronics and cock-rock guitars are all much in evidence on their hook-laden albums. They feed off the bleedin' obvious, and are so much better for it.

'Control' is their third album, coming two years after their 'A.D.S.R.' opus. The two albums don't sound dissimilar, though that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Certainly in the electronic department things are much the same, whilst Timothy's vocals are as good and as silly as ever. Paul Five is starting to find more way to incorporate his guitar into the Synthetic sound palette, but there's still an ample supply of his big, chunky riffology.

And each album also has one ludicrously over-the-top anthem proudly standing above the rest. Last time out it was the 8-minute cheese-fest 'Country' and this time it's 'The Body Farm'. Incorporating more pitch-bend than it's safe to ingest in one sitting, this song is just one rollicking ride though everything Synthetic do so well, with one change – the drum programming, which has been tweaked so it sounds like a live performance than straightforward dance loops. The technique is heard on other tracks, but here's where it works best.

There are other highlights too – the rigid rhythmic and yearning lead of '25 Years' reminds me of something from the 80s, though I can't quite put my finger on what. Another hit is the album opener 'Show Me The Way', where Paul Five guitar-solos the intro, before thumping through the verses and somehow managing to fit in a New Order-style bridge to boot! Gawdammit, this is catchy stuff.....

There's places where they trying to play with your expectations – 'Going Down' opens up sounding like it's gonna turn into Ultravox's 'Vienna', before a second layer of synth gurgles into earshot and throws you into the midst of the actual song. Elsewhere they just go for big blunt hooks – 'Embrace' sounding like something from the 'A.D.S.R.' sessions with it's 'proud but primitive' lead synth that sounds like it was knocked up using a kids electronics set.

Regardless of any doubts you might have, none of what's mentioned above really hurts the album. I do however have a few bones of contention. Their use of rather dull and overused piano-synth patch spoils a few tracks. They might get away with it in 'Submission', which alternates the tinkly ear candy with some dense, snarling verses, but in 'Taboo' they just end up sounding like Synthetic-by-numbers. Anthemic it may be, but it's a trick they've pulled one too many times now.

However, if there's one track I've really got a problem with then it's 'Spooky Kabuki'. I mean, what kind of title is that? And sure enough, the song's dominated by the cliché piano synth. But the point where they really, really screw up is in the lyrics department. I mean, what is 'Find me a Scape-Goat, Buy Me a New Coat' meant to mean, other than 'I need a better rhyming dictionary'. And the same thing can be said about that title....

There are three other tracks, all of which sit somewhere in the centre of this albums spectrum of quality. There's a couple of slower tracks, including 'Hollow', which features some interesting guitar delay, making four notes out of every one played, leading up to the big, redemptive chorus. The slowest track of all is 'Tongue Twister', which features some excellent guitar work even if it's quite basic lyrically. This just leaves 'Rescue', which sort of hovers in the middle in every respect.

This album is undoubtedly 'fun'. Synthetic clearly enjoy what they do. And it's also fun to listen to. For a bit. It's hard to say where this disc stands compared to 'A.D.S.R.', since both are built on similar concepts and have the same basic appeal. But they also need to take note of where cliché is good and cliché is bad, as both are in evidence here.

## **Tactical Sekt – Genetocide (2002)**

Having released his first album as one-half of Aslan Faction the previous year, Anthony Mather switches to his solo project for his next full-length release. Of course, it takes some careful listening to really tell between the two, perhaps with the exception of a mean BPM increase of between 10 and 20 (depending on which songs you are comparing), which generally results in the project sounding slightly less like Suicide Commando and slightly more like Hocico – a dancefloor friendly Aslan? Less stomp, more pulse!

With pounding kick drums, relentless throbs of synth, the occasional sample or melody, topped off with vocals distorted to the limits of intelligibility. And often beyond. With no lyrics provided in the booklet, you're hard pressed to work out what Anthony's on about. Johan Van Roy of the aforementioned Suicide Commando makes a cameo appearance on 'Damage Limitation', though his influence seems more apparent on the lead synth than the vocal. All in all, it's a fairly average album for the genre. The sheer ferocity may impress some, but measured alongside other albums from similar artists, it seems to lack character.

## **Tactical Sekt – Syncope (2006)**

Those of you who have noticed the reduced coverage of so-called 'terror EBM' on this site might be wondering why. Albums like this. That's why! The relative inactivity of Aslan Faction has led to Tactical Sekt becoming Anthony Mather's primary project in recent times, but at times it gets very hard to tell the difference between all these NoiTekk bands, never mind individual releases by each one. Here the beats thump and the synths pulse as hard as ever, only for Anthony to over-do the vocal distortion, leave the bulk of the lyrics unintelligible (they're not even in the inlay) and homogenise the album even more. Competent as they are, none of the tracks actually has much of a hook to make it memorable, which doesn't help matter.

The listener is thus left with only a few clues to the subject the different songs concern. 'American Me' makes clear references to 9/11, whilst 'Not Entertained' makes reference to various TV channels, but what is Tactical Sekt's stance on either issue? Bugged if I can work it out. '4 Steps To Dysfunction' – I can spot the part of the song where the 4 said steps are laid out, but can I make out what they are? Nope. Club-wise, most of these songs would slot quite nicely into a late night EBM set. And there's plenty of people who might dance. But would they remember what songs they were dancing to the morning after? I seriously doubt it. I do occasionally hear songs that keep my interest in this genre alive. This album doesn't contain any of them.

NOTE: A limited edition version of this album was released with an eight-track bonus disc, containing exclusive tracks rather than the remixes and token cover versions you'd hear on such CDs. There's a few songs here that lower the tempo, creating songs more reminiscent of the Aslan Faction project, as well as one (Siege Engine) that does away with most of the chmalt-vox. It wouldn't have hurt to place a couple of these on the main album. It might have helped bring a bit more variety to proceedings. As things stand, this limited edition is already sold out virtually everywhere. So you'll either have to Ebay or go without.

## **Tactical Sekt – Burn Process (2003)**

Technically an EP, but at 12 tracks (7 new, 5 remixes) it's an album's worth of music. It's also a more interesting listen than the 'Geneticide' album from the previous year, mainly due to the remixers adding a certain 'colour' that an all-Sekt album lacked. The seven songs on offer here follow similar lines to those on the album, a straight-ahead, distorted-vocal terror-EBM stomp, clearly influenced by (but not up to the standards of) Hocico and the more uptempo Suicide Commando songs. I still he needs to ease of the distortion on the voice a bit. There reaches a point where it stops sounding scary and starts sounding silly.

It's the remixes that prove to be the more interesting portion of this EP – the relatively straightforward EBM base of the songs giving each remixer more creative latitude than usual. Haujobb and Solitary Experiments rework the rhythms of 'Xfixiation' and 'Devils Work', whilst Reality inserts a punchier drum loop into 'Burn Process'. The real stand-out,

however, is [:SITD:]'s 'Hellfire' remix of 'Xfixiation', restructuring the track with a middle break leading into a new refrain that turns a rather anonymous stomp into a real anthem. It's rare that I recommend an EP over its preceding album, but for once I feel I'm genuinely justified in doing so.

## **Tarmvred – Viva 6581 (2003)**

Tarmvred's first album, 'SubFusc' was a relatively successful study into the techniques of the distorted beat techniques. Whilst some of the pieces presented there were certainly elaborate and nicely developed, they didn't exactly do enough to set this Swedish project aside from the rest of the geeky knob-twiddlers that seem set on showing all the future-pop kiddies how 'industrial' is really done. How fucking '1337' of them.....

Nah, good as it was, was it really just Mr.Johansson getting his act into gear for this thing? A 4-track EP? Yep. Tarmvred proudly presents 'Viva 6581'. Anyone here g33k enough to know what a '6581' might be? Yes, you at the back in the unkempt hair and South Park T-shirt!! Correct, the sound chip to the Commodore C-64, probably the most popular 8-bit computer of all time! And just so you know I'm not biased, I was one of those odd-one out Atari users.

Of course, Welle:Erdball have been doing the soundchip nostalgia thing for some years now. The difference here is that Tarmvred had elected to keep his distorted beat agenda intact and combine the two concept into something which doesn't really have a parallel anywhere else. Those with good memories might remember a brief 'taster' of this sound on the 'SubFusc' album (somewhere in the middle of track 1, if I remember correctly), but it was only a fleeting hint of what was to come.

So then, in theory it's a bizarre but intriguing concept. In terms of execution, it's something of a mixed bag. The four tracks presented here ('6', '5', '8' and '1') rolls themselves off in increasingly frantic style. There is an inherent difficulty that the all-encompassing nature of noisebeat is such that often there's scarcely any EQ space left for the 6581 parts to breathe, let alone blend in with the percussive elements of the mix. Every now and again a plinky-plonk melody or a lush blast of primitive sawtooth shines though, only to get beaten down submission with one-too-many-drumbeats, an issue particularly prevalent on closing track '1', which overplays itself in every respect.

It's still fun to listen too, though, and still interesting how Tarmvred plays with fucked-up drum loops and retro-chip melodics and still occasionally gets away with it. But one wonders, and indeed hopes, that this is just a bridge to a full-length album of such material, with more attention paid to the interplay between the two radically different schools of music, as whilst we have a potentially exciting new derivative of the increasingly saturated power noise sound here, work now needs to be done on how the final product is assembled.

## **Terminal Choice – New Born Enemies (2006)**

Chris Pohl is nothing if not prolific, but with Blutengel proving to be the more lucrative project in this day and age, this is actually first new Terminal Choice material for three years. The shift from Germanic electro-goth to US-school industrial rock nonetheless continues unabated, with English now the sole language in use and the guitars take a more frontal role than ever before. Of course, none of this means that the album is a particularly good one. Two glaring spelling mistakes on the packaging get things off to a dodgy start, and the oh-so-naff spoken word 'listener warning' album intro doesn't improve things.

Then comes the songs – four of the sixteen tracks are self indulgent ‘experimental filler’, leaving eleven new songs and one cover. Pohl never really mastered the English language, and whilst he has occasionally hit upon a catchy turn of phrase, he fails to do so here, the lyrics varying from the merely simplistic to just plain trite. Musically, the Terminal Choice boys combine strictly ordinary riffs and power chords with melodic synths, a listenable combination but also one that lacks character – this could be any guitar-wielding industrial band from any non-English speaking country in the world (their lyrics are too lame to pass as Yanks and they’re certainly not introspective enough to pass as Brits). A couple of songs (‘Devil Daddy’ and ‘Crack Up’) hint at a mid-90s White Zombie sound, but it’s a decade too late.

The predictable murdering of Yazoo’s ‘Don’t Go’ thus remains the only attention-grabber, but it’s still one of those covers where you know exactly what it sounds like before you’ve even heard it (Remember Mazza’s take on ‘Personal Jesus’?). Coupled with the last Blutengel full length, it really seems like the Pohl camp is in crisis. Terminal Choice? Terminal Decline, more like.....

NOTE: The limited edition of the album comes with an extra CD, offering four extra audio tracks and a multimedia part. The only really interesting part is a cover of ‘I Ran’ – it’s as predicable as the Yazoo cover on the main album, but it captures fractionally more of the ‘spirit’ of the original.

## **Terminal Choice – Übermacht (2010)**

Sometimes, intricacy goes unnoticed. Other times, it isn’t even there in the first place. This album falls soundly into the second category. Terminal Choice might have started out as Chris Pohl’s dark electro-industrial outlet, but they’ve long since moved towards a hook-laden industrial rock outlet. They’d actually penned some decent tunes along the way, but in 2006 they dished up ‘New Born Enemies’ and it was clear that the goodwill had been exhausted. Over-the-top Yazoo covers were no longer funny.

They’ve not changed the formula much in the past few years either. The guitar grind that had characterised every industrial rock release since the golden days of Wax Trax!, synth drums, big, blunt, testosterone-fuelled synth leads and Chris Pohl belting out the vocals with as much subtlety as a sledgehammer. Obviously, all the years pandering to the gruffti girls with Blutengel has suppressed some of Chris masculinity. He’s here to take it back.

And what better way to announce it than with ‘We Are Back!’, complete with plenty of KMFDM style self-referencing and a ‘put your hands in the air’ chorus (why is it always German bands who ask you to stick your hands in the air – I thought it was something the French did!). There absolutely nothing going on here that’ll surprise anyone familiar with this project’s past, but it’s got a catchiness about it that was absent from pretty much every song on the last album. They’ve found their touch again.

They continue along their not-so-merry way in the same style, with plenty of viper-tongued commentary on the state of society, interpersonal relationships and just about anything else that takes their fancy. They take a dig at social networking on ‘MySpace Hero’, though someone should tell them (and cc in Rupert Murdoch) that MySpace was a 2006 thing, and the kidz are all into Facebook now. Or was it Bebo? Or maybe Twitter?

They take a brief diversion to their native German tongue in the middle part of the album, with ‘Kommerz’ stealing adapting a bassline from Die Krupps and a hookline from And One. The later stages of the album deliver ‘Get Away’, probably the weakest track on the album thanks to some incredibly ‘meh’ lyrics that sound like they were scribbled down for the sole purpose of getting one extra song on the disc.

The album ends with 'Free Again', an unusually heartfelt track for a project that's usually all about ballsy industrial rhythms. It concludes an album which sees Terminal Choice find at least some of their form again. It ain't clever and it doesn't need to be. The limitations of the project are plain to all to see – I'm just glad they've rediscovered the art of writing a half-decent tune.

VERSION NOTE: The early versions of this album come in a 2CD digipak. This features a couple of extra songs, the bi-lingual 'To America' the stronger of the two. There's also the usual crop of remixes, with the 'Electronic Body Version' of 'We Are Back!' proving the original song was strong enough to stand up when all the guitars were taken away.

## **Theatre Of Tragedy – Storm (2006)**

Theatre of Tragedy may have a new female singer in Nell (replacing Liv Kristine), but in terms of sound they seem to have purposely taken a step back. The industrial/electronic influences have largely been dropped, with the keyboards back to providing the strings and piano synth traditionally associated with dual-vocal gothic metal acts. Raymond's vocals still have a slightly 'robotic' feel, though this disc is still more reminiscent of the heavier 'Aegis' tracks than anything on 'Musique' or 'Assembly', although they haven't brought back the Early Modern English lyrics.

Whilst all this is well and good, the downside of this approach is that Theatre of Tragedy seem to be losing elements of their sound that made them distinctive. 'Storm' was a relatively sound choice for an album opener lead single, but the nine tracks that follow (apart from a brief hint of their electronic era in 'Exile') proceed to repeat the same formula over and over. Given that female-vocal metal bands are popular in these times, they may yet draw support from fans of Lacuna Coil and the like and possibly win back a few people that didn't care much for their electronic era. But neither is this a great album – proficient enough but quite dull after a few songs.

## **This Is Radio Silence – EP (2006)**

This is the first release by this Ben McLees (SonVer, D.U.S.T., ex-ELR) solo project, a six-song (but only one track) EP. Whilst solo project like this often let self-indulgence get in the way, this particular release proves to be surprisingly listenable for a low-budget self-produced CD-R. The EP is sandwiched by two visceral industrial rock tracks, with opener 'Traumatique' providing a caustic mix of electronic squelches, grating guitars and middle-fingered vocals. The closing number 'Elevator' music, meanwhile, is a short, sharp, no-nonsense rhythmic head-rush.

In between these, we get 'Unbeautiful', a slow, grinding riff and lethargic drum loop juxtaposed with melodic keyboards and a surprisingly restrained vocal – it's like listening to every era of Swans at once! The stripped-down 'Mute', meanwhile, features a forlorn guitar not similar to the one used in SonVer's version on 'Remember Me'. With the ELR-like 'We Fall Apart' also impressing, it falls to 'Purged' to serve as the one disappointing track, a rhythmically schizophrenic muddle that fall some way short of pulling off the 'alternating-loud-and-quiet-bits' dynamic. It's otherwise an interesting listen, clearly influenced by the darker post-punk and alternative rock bands of the last 25 years but able to stand up as a project in it's own right.

## **This Is Radio Silence – Now There's Nothing (2010)**

Back in the days of EOL-Audio, there was a band called Earth Loop Recall. They got more that a little coverage from yours truly, only to split a year after I discovered them. Ben went off to concentrate on SonVer, as well as various jobbing stints in other UK bands,

and also found time to produce a CD-R EP called 'This Is Radio Silence' The songs on this EP were later recycled in the 2k7 incarnation of ELR (which existed whilst I was on reviewer hiatus), only for that version of the band to last a year before collapsing again.

So now he's back with a free-to-download solo EP. OK, he gets Tim Clark and Joanna Quail (both involved in the whole messy ELR saga) to help out on a few tracks, and Scott Lamb (the 'Deathboy' himself) provides vocals for one track, but this is still very much a solo effort. And I say solo in the 'lonely' sense – listen to these 8 tracks a few times and the desolate, resigned atmosphere created will demonstrate to you that the choice to become a one-man band wasn't a conscious creative decision. There really was no other way.

What's been delivered here is a drum machine driven 8-track mope-fest, laden with effects-drenched guitars, synth textures and Ben's plaintive cries spiralling out from the middle of it all. You'd think from this description that this was some kind of goth band, and you'd be wrong. This isn't so much gothic as it is a means of showing those hordes of whining indie bands how misery is supposed to be conveyed on record. Or at least the virtual digital equivalent.

The digi-gloom comes in several forms. The blunt synth that cuts through the opening song '0000000' provides a decent foundation for the most ELR-like song here, with a stripped-down version appearing later on under the guise of 'Now There's Nothing'. 'Forever Ends Today' delivers up a more straightforward brand of guitar-heavy post-punk revival, so much so that I recently managed to use it to bridge from a 'dark indie' DJ set seamlessly into a trad-goth one.

'Living A Broken Dream' is a minimal acoustic ballad, indeed it's a little too minimal for my liking, not offering enough feeling of progression to garner much attention. The Scott Lamb colab 'The Truth In Your Trigger Finger' it's suitably schizophrenic, with Scott Lamb snarling over a seething electronic chmaltzy before Ben and his guitars come in for a verse of their own.

The Eps final track, 'We Fall Apart' provides one final point of interest, as it's a song that dates back to the oft-forgotten 2006 TIRS EP, a collection of songs that were later absorbed into the Earth Loop Recall canon – an interesting move as we'd all been led to believe that ELR is a project that is very much a thing of the past. The original version was 8 minutes and 47 seconds in length, and here it grows by a further two minutes thanks to an extended outro. The plodding beat and grinding guitar interludes, the ever-repeating one-fingered melody – none of this amounts to a track that is in any way anthemic. But if you must listen to a drawn-out electro-rock dirge, this is probably a good one to go for.

It's pretty clear that this EP isn't actually trying to impress anyone. Whilst it occasionally flirts with tried-and-tested songwriting techniques, it isn't bound by them either. Except for a few songs (I'm thinking of '000000' and 'Forever Ends Today'), it really isn't all that easy to listen to. But it does have a degree of musical integrity, a kind of 'like me or delete me' degree of self-confidence. Given the increasingly tedious state of post-punk revival these days, with only a few projects both pushing the boundaries and getting much attention for these days, this EP at least reaffirms that Ben McLees won't play anyone's game other than his own.

## **This Morn'Omina – Les Passages Jumeaux (2006)**

Following the diversion of 'The Drake Equation' EP and other projects, Mika Goedriek returns with the middle part of his 'Nyan' Trilogy. As with the first part, the album is comprised of two CDs, here designated 'Le 25ième Degré' (CD1) and 'Le 33ième Degré'

(CD2). The most significant advancement the project has made is the recruitment of percussionist 'Sal-Ocin' as a full member (he had previously played in live shows and guested on a track on the previous album). This thus sees the final true integration of chma beats with programmed industrial rhythms – the key appeal of the TMO sound.

As with last time, the first CD focuses on the uptempo dancefloor tracks, opening with the nine-minute epic 'Tenet(s) Of On' before taking us into harsh distorted-beat territory with 'Mai(i)nomai' – either track could be regarded as equal to 'Epoch' and 'One eYed Man' respectively. The next three songs are less intense, but bridge the gap nicely to '(The) World Tree', the most powerful chma/noise fusion track on the album, structured in a manner that guarantees maximum impact. The remaining two tracks ('Tsidii' and 'Aemae(ea)th') seem a little anti-climatic in comparison, but neither do they really upset the flow of CD as it moves to its conclusion.

The second CD is a more minimal, ambient affair, this time concentrating on fewer, longer compositions than on its predecessor (Le Serpent Rouge from the last album). This is a wise decision as it allows each individual piece to develop – Le Serpent Rouge, whilst an interesting listen, seems like a filing cabinet of not-completely-realised ideas in comparison. Whilst the tribal rhythms and textured electronics make for intriguing listening, it lacks the outright power of the first CD, and thus best treated as a separate album in its own right – treated as one, there is simply too much to take in! This Morn' Omina is and always will be an acquired taste, but followers of this project will most likely be very pleased with this latest instalment.

NOTE: The limited edition of the album comes with a third CD, containing 5 'ccf' versions of tracks from the 'Le 25ième Degré' CD. These are essentially cut-down versions of the originals – possibly of interest to DJs wanting rid of the drawn-out intros, but as a listening experience they don't really match the originals.

## **Tool – 10,000 Days**

A five year gap since 'Lateralus' and America's most esoteric of rockers return in typically idiosyncratic style. The custom packaging (complete with enclosed lenses for viewing the trippy inlay) is the first reminder that Tool are not your ordinary rock band. Then you actually listen to the thing. 'Vicarious' is the opener, Maynard James Keenan's attack on the American tendency to derive entertainment from atrocities beamed to TV sets from afar, a song that rocks surprisingly hard for a composition that can't really decide on a time signature. Tool are back, and don't we know it!

As it happens, that's one of the albums more accessible moments. 'Jambi' scatter-guns its way through its seven-and-a-half minute length, the spluttering guitar line eventually giving way to a bizarre talk-box guitar solo, but even that's nothing compared to the 17-minutes of the 'Wings For Marie/10,000 Days' pairing. Said to be a paean to the long-term illness of Maynard's mother, it's a surprisingly restrained piece, the shimmering, spiralling guitars and barely-audible vocals (plus some background textures provided by Lustmord), often building to false climaxes, leaving the listener wondering when they'll finally crack and throw in few big riffs – in reality, they seep into the song at such an unhurried pace that you'd be hard pushed to spot them.

And the surprises keep coming. Or at least they would if Tool didn't have the reputation they have for being just a little unpredictable all the time anyway. 'The Pot' gets as close as any to band's Undertow/Ænima era, whilst 'Rosetta Stoned' is the obligatory 11-minute 'everything-and-the-kitchen-sink' progressive epic, a track that always leaves you wondering if it's about to finish. Towards the end of the album, we get 'Intension', a subtle,



low-key track that never quite gets off the ground, and the slow-building 'Right In Two', offering a chima-style solo from Danny Carey on the way to it's seething climax.

But is the album any good? Somehow, I feel it's not quite the equal of 'Lateralus'. It's in many respects too technical for it's own good. The switching time signatures, ludicrously elaborate basslines and drumming (they're too creative to warrant the mere title of 'rhythm section'), the range of guitar sound and Maynard James Keenan's philosophical ramblings are all impressive in their own right. But held alongside the likes of 'Schism', they fall fractionally short of uniting to the extent that they truly hold the songs together. Great musicianship, certainly. Great innovation, too. But a great album? Not quite.

## **T.O.Y. – White Lights (2003)**

The group formerly known as Evil's Toy became T.O.Y. in 2001. Hardly surprising, as they hadn't sounded 'Evil' since the 'Illusion Album' back in the mid-1990s. Their debut album under the new name 'Space Radio' nevertheless proved to continue their recent trend for producing polished EBM/synth-pop in the style of just about every other band that seems to appear on these pages.

The album 'White Lights' therefore might be only their second album under this name, but it's their fourth synth-pop album in a row. They're clearly getting to grips with the style, technically at least. It's bright, shimmering and incredibly easy on the ears. And that is in part the root of the whole problem. The band that once seemed capable of biting heads clean off with 'Organics' has lost most, maybe all, it's teeth.

It's actually quite hard to put my finger on the root of the problem here. It's not like that they've done anything wrong here. It's just it sounds like every other album like this, never seeming willing to deviate or take any risks. The opening track 'Fly Away', for instance, is perfectly OK on it's own. But listen closer and you'll notice that it's musically reminiscent of 'We Are Electric' from the last album. And that's about as good as it gets.

The succession of songs that follow flow past without ever really leaving any impact. Lyrically, they deal with all the usual future-pop issues – dreams, nightmares, souls, heartbreak. You name it – they're all here! There's a mention of a 'promised land' in 'Beyond Sleep', whilst the title track features our scene's most overused word 'Forever'. And I'm sure I've heard a song about white lights before, too. Maybe they're already aware of this – the album's last track is called 'Another Lovesong'. Too true....

Instrumentally, too, the band keep to the usual sound-palette typical of the European wave sound. Firm, mid-tempo drums (not too distorted, mind), trancey sequences, rich strings, tons of synth-piano, the odd little hook and stacks of ear candy. Production levels are at least generally strong, so the album stands up well as a technical exercise. But admirable as this is, it's not enough. I want to be blown away, knocked down – Impress me! They even have the gall to put in an instrumental 'The Liquid Circle' which, whilst sounding OK on it's own, is really crying out for some vocals.

There are a couple of places where they try to push the boat out a bit. 'The Sky Is The Limit' features a De/Vision guest vocal, which might interest some, but IMHO, De/Vision fell into the 'bland synth-pop' trap long before T.O.Y., so it sounds like all the others. The only successful track is the danced-up 'Fairytale', which sounds suspiciously like Icon of Coil, nebulous lyrics included ('she's my coloured secret light – a mystic flavoured guide' – utterly pointless but at least spares us from all the maudlin pop fodder found elsewhere).

Early versions of this album come with a 4-track remix CD, which goes against convention by offers T.O.Y. remixes other artists (rather, as you might expect, other artists remixing

T.O.Y.). This does mean that the sound dominating the album is also in presence here. They manage to make 18 Summers sound like, erm, T.O.Y., and even tame the harsh tones of Dennis from *In Strict Confidence*. There is another mix of their own 'Fairytale' here, even money says whether this or the album version is better.

I really hate to criticise albums like this, but unfortunately I don't really have a choice here. In terms of overall sound, it's OK. In terms of songwriting, bearable. But it's just SO unadventurous. The fact that I omitted descriptions of every individual song isn't down to my own laziness. It's down to how similar they all sound. This is of course just a personal opinion. But it's one I'm going to state regardless.

## **Trauma Pet – You Cannot Feel This (2006)**

'You Cannot Feel This', they say. And they're right. I can't. Despite a valid underlying concept and a line-up boasting at least some musical talent, Trauma Pet fall some way short of the mark with this debut effort. Attempting a combination of ethereal female vocals, low-key electronics and, on some tracks, textured guitars, the resulting music amounts to less than the sum of it's parts. It's hard to truly put one's finger on the root of the problem, but some rather flat-sounding basslines and drum loops don't help – in fact, the whole production sounds rather thin and demo-ish.

They do succeed at times – 'Puppet' progresses nicely and could have been a great song had it been given a more 'fullsome' treatment. There are also a few moments (especially in the middle part of the album) that remind me of certain *Diary of Dreams* recordings (even if the actual songs don't). Elie's vocals are perfectly listenable, but I really don't think the songs really allow us to hear her at her best. Pete Boyd's guitar is often a welcome addition (especially on 'Affinity' and 'Rain'), but doesn't always feel like it's 100% integrated to every song in which it features. Taken as a whole, this album seems to resemble a cake taken out of the oven too early – a mix that could have become something truly delicious proves only to be something that is only just palatable.

## **Tubeway Army – Tubeway Army (1978)**

This is where it all started for Gary Numan – a three-piece punk outfit attempting to build some kind of order into the discordant morass of six-string, three-chord excess that was apparently supposed to be the great white hope of the music industry. Those familiar with Gary's later work might be very slightly surprised by the content of this debut work – it's not dominated by synthesiser as you might expect, and the whole album sounds more like a robotic punk album than anything electro-pop.

Despite this, the album does lay down some of the foundations for Gary's more noted works. Firstly, the whole album has a very mechanical feel, thanks mainly to Paul Gardiner's rich, persistent bass, a guitar style considerably more rhythm-focused than discordant contemporaries and Jess Lidyards (Numan's uncle) drumming. With a strong backing group in place, Gary is thus able to develop his distinctive vocal style, a mutant cross-breed of David Bowie and the Daleks, a vocal stance so distinctive that it defied all attempts at indifference – you loved it or you loathed it.

The groups controlled, uncomplicated nature seemed at the time to be making a statement, both against the unfocused fury of the punk movement and also the long-established prog-rock scene, by now getting so lost up it's own arse that it was rapidly losing the massive fanbase it'd painstakingly built up over the 70s. Songs like 'My Shadow In Vain' and opening track 'Listen To The Sirens' were punk in the respect that they made short, succinct statements about the world around them. But somehow Numan's vision was more

distorted and more disconnected than most. A critic once said it dealt with people 'Trapped in their own mind' – which sums it up better than any words of my own.

Some songs do make a definite statement. 'The Life Machine' is a euthanasia statement, defying the obvious by adopting a relatively cheerful tone, whilst broadcasting his sentiments from the viewpoint of a terminally ill patient that just wants to die, but clearly can't summon up enough emotion to offer one final 'fuck you' – instead nonchalantly muttering a resigned 'I know – You've got your principles' – which in it's own way has more impact than some kind of swansong obscenity. Interesting to see that out of all the 'right to die' songs that rock has thrown out over the years, this one stand alone in it's approach.

There's some other tracks with a slightly riske feel to them. Take 'Everyday I Die', the central character being a lonely singleton with nothing better to do with his life than masturbate over dirty pictures (c'mon – what else can 'I unstick pages and read' mean). 'Jo The Waiter', meanwhile, is a strange acoustic number that hints towards trans/homosexuality. The use of an asexual name gets one wondering, though the lyrical content of the song is so nonsensically esoteric that it's true meaning is only clear if you read the album's liner notes.

There are some tracks that preserve the rough, guitar-driven sound of Gary's punk days. The high-speed babbling vox of 'Friends' is accompanied by some fiery riffs of the kind that wouldn't star again in his music for at least a couple of decades. The other notable 'rock' tracks include 'Are You Real?' and 'Steel And You', the latter's fierce, dehumanising blast prefaced by some demented Moog experimentation, thus defining the two instrumental extremes of the album in one fell swoop.

It's probably true to say that many of the albums songs aren't particularly reliant on the electronics. Often they are used to 'flesh' out the songs rather than drive them, though in that respect they certainly do their job, reinforcing the icy tone of most the music. Some tracks (notably 'My Love Is Liquid') try to do something a little more creative with the primitive technologies available to them, and thus have become fan favourites, a treasured relic of Numan's embryonic synth-pop sound.

The reissued version of the album not only adds the aforementioned liner note, but also an audience recording of an old Roxy show in 1978. The sound quality isn't up to much, but it is surprisingly listenable nonetheless, offering a number of tracks from 'The Plan' (an old record company demo, later released by Beggar's Banquet), an early version of 'My Shadow In Vain' and a few songs not heard anywhere else. They also pull off a reasonable version of The Velvet Underground's 'White Light/White Heat'. It's not essential listening, but will be of great interest to those who need convincing of punk's connections with electro-pop.

It's a better album than some might imagine, this. It may essentially be a primitive electro-pop prototype, but the appeal lies in it's simplicity. Numan's lyrics have always been notoriously arty, often making vague, purposefully intelligent references to controversial subject matters that'll go way over the heads of many casual listeners, and here is no different – there's always going to be at least one song where you'll miss the point and just go 'WHAT!?!?'. Not down-to-earth enough to be punk, but without the shimmering sheen of electro-pop, this album has failed to find it's place in music history, which is a pity, as it's surprisingly adept demonstration of how some jaded punks found a more dystopian route to stardom.

## Type O Negative – Life Is Killing Me (2003)

The New York quartet Type O Negative have a nickname. The Drab Four. They're not exactly the wrist slashers guaranteed No.1 choice, but their blend of resignation, anger and cynicism isn't really conducive to happiness either. And that last album put the lid on that. Songs the size of big green cities, it seemed intent on doing nothing except dragging out the experience until everyone got bored and went home. I liked it, being me and all that, but many others didn't, thus making this disc something of a 'make or break'.

A four-year break they might have taken, but no-one can doubt that Type O have at least picked a tactically astute time to return. Everyone's getting bored of nu-metal, whilst bands as diverse as The Darkness and Evanescence are defying convention and topping the charts, whilst even former niche interest bands such as Nightwish are starting to find their way into UK CD stores. Type O, with big, chugging rock songs saturated with angsty gloom oughta get along just fine, shouldn't they?

Well, true to form, New York's finest have a shock or two in store. The intro 'Thir13Teen' might be an almost-respectful Black Sabbath impersonation, but that's only a preface to 'I Don't Wanna Be Me', which contrary to the established Type O practise, is notably uptempo and disposes of itself within four minutes (not counting the ambient outro stuff). It's not exactly a disaster, but the quartet don't sound entirely at ease either. Hardly encouraging for the album ahead. (Additional note: Everyone else seems to like this one – so maybe you will as well).

Fortunately, they only do the 'fast' thing a couple more times, and these attempts are more successful. 'I Like Goils' is Pete Steele's counter claim to the thousands of fans who think he's gay – 'cos he isn't. Possibly homophobic, but obviously he felt the point had to be made. There's also 'Angry Itch' (a cover from a Broadway music 'Hedwig and the Angry Itch, but it's very Type O in tone), dealing with the topic of being left sexless following a botched sex-change op. No punches pulled here – "six inches forward and five inches back – I've got an angry itch".

The rest of the album is closer to the Type O Negative sound we know and love – grinding atmospheric gloom-metal with a dark undercurrent that half humour of the most evil kind and half an opinionated form of social awareness. Tempos vary from controlled to downright slow and sloth-like. Steele's vocals (with the rest of the group on backing) are generally sung quite softly, saving the lung-wrenching cries for the bits where it really matters. The guitars and bass are rich, expansive and cutting all at the same time, to which the keyboards and percussion dovetail nicely. It's everything a TON aficionado could hope for.

What's more, the songwriting level is strong and consistent across the whole album. True, there's nothing here to quite equal the everlasting damnation of 'Black No.1' or the catchy twisted 'My Girlfriends Girlfriend', but the albums still notable due to the number of tracks that merely come close to that standard. Subject matters stretch from women (both real and fictitious), through parenthood right through to the sheer lack of desire to live. In Type O's songbook, nothing is taboo.

The title track 'Life Is Killing Me' is certainly a highlight, a gruesomely slow account of the 'Right to Die' arguments, and the doctors salary packets that keep people on life support for the sake of a few extra bucks (UK readers note – this is the American medical system at work here. We have quite enough medical care problems of our own, anyway). The moving 'Anesthesia' is more abstract lyrically, but the supreme feeling of nihilism it creates is still vintage Steele, whilst the Josh Silver's keyboards contributions just take the track to another level, particularly his prog-styled organ flourish towards the track's close.

As for the 'significant other' songs, 'A Dish Best Served Coldly' is an 'It's over and I don't give a fuck' sort of thing, featuring some acoustic guitar in addition to all the usual sounds. There's also 'How Could She?', a tribute to all the fictional female icons American culture has produced for us, and the heartbreak experience by anyone sad enough to mistake them for real people. But better still is '(We Were) Electrocute', an almost-sentimental story of a past relationship, with it's delicate, insubstantial chorus, brass fanfares and cheesy fuzz-guitar outro. Clearly these boys know the benefits of a decent hook or two.

Pete Steele also devotes one song to each of his parents – 'Todd's Ship Gods (Above All Things)' deal with the expectations of his father, whilst 'Nettie' handles the mortality of his mother. To be honest, I'm not so keen on these two – maybe the intensely personal nature of the lyrics has something to do with it, as I've never been great at sharing the sentiments of others. Neither songs is exactly bad, however, so I don't think I have any right to complain. Come to think of it, the statement 'Above all things boy, be a man' reminds me of my own father many years ago, so maybe there is a link....

And as for the rest of the tracks, well, why should I ruin the surprise? Watch out for the sitar in 'Less Than Zero (<0)' and the murderous passion of 'IYDKMIGTHTKY (Gimme That)', the meaning of that acronym becoming clear after a few listens. There is one instrumental track other than the intro, 'Drunk In Paris', a grinding guitar and accordion job that has at least a little Gallic flavour. It prefaces album closer 'The Dream Is Dead', and it's at this point that I admit I've run out of ways of saying "This is Good".

Those of you who pounced early (or otherwise struck lucky) aren't quite through yet, however. Bonus disc time! There's a cover of 'Out Of The Fire (Kane's Theme)', dominated by a wrenching guitar solo, interspersed by a bit of male choir and martial drumming. There's also Type O's oft-mentioned cover of 'Black Sabbath', this song, and indeed the band of the same name proving to be a pretty major Type O Negative influence. This version strips down the verses (Steele going for a spoken word approach), but is generally quite a faithful version.

The other cover here is the notorious 'Cinnamon Girl' single, here in it's 'Extended Depression Mix', so if you must have a longer version but never picked up the single, here it is. Another old favourite is 'Christian Woman' here in 'Butt-Kissing, Sell-Out Mix', which does the reverse by making a long song short. Of the rest, 'Suspended In Dusk' is a growly dirge-like crawl, while 'Blood & Fire (Out of the Ashes Mix)' and 'Haunted (Per Version)' are just reasonably alternate versions of old album tracks.

But what about the album proper? Worth a four year wait? For the most part, yes. It might take a few run throughs for all the clever little details to emerge, but there's a hell of a lot of depth on this CD, the songwriting occasionally esoteric, but never in a bad way. The Type O humour is still very much there, not always as obvious as it once was, but always waiting to pounce on the unexpected. It grinds, crawls, groans and spits you out the other end. It's a gloom-fest that's worth shelling out for.

## **Ultraviolence – Blown Away (2004)**

I've never quite worked out how to describe Ultraviolence, with or without genre definitions. Industrial gabba is the best I can come up with, though I also think they're hardcore something-or-other, but I'm not entirely sure. Suffice to say that their fanbase has generally hovered around the industrial/hard dance/x-over scene rather than any of the elitist 'we're harder than you are' scene pigeon holes. This is probably something to do with the fact that Johnny Violent (the man behind it all) actually writes real songs on occasion, isn't afraid to give his songs a hook and also has a personality of sorts (clue: he

swears quite a bit at the live shows. OK, that's not exactly original, but it's better than twiddling knobs for an hour and saying diddly-squat). Now where was I?

Ah, 'Blown Away', a 2CD retrospective of the finest moments of Ultraviolence, the first CD given over to hits and a second to remixes and a couple of oddities. Each track is given its own explanation in the liner notes, describing its origins and the story behind its creation and purpose (Johnny Violent has never been one to hold his cards close to his chest). A quick scan over the tracklisting reveals that all the old favourites find their way onto the collection in some form. Earache wisely chose to release this compilation at the 'five studio album' mark, the 'sweet spot' for releasing compilations such as this, since you'll have enough material to fill the album without having to resort to 'filler' material, whilst at the same time not having to make difficult decisions about what to drop.

For instance, 'Life Of Destructor', is represented by 'Hardcore Motherfucker' (how COULDN'T it have made it on?), 'Joan' (the 2<sup>nd</sup> best known song off that album) and 'We Will Break' (the brutally fast beat flurry that's over and done with inside a minute). Notably, they chose to put the full 9-minute album version of 'Hardcore Motherfucker' on the album, the three rhythm variations following by that awesome, jaw-dropping outro. Despite taking up over a tenth of the available space, it's still a wise decision, as it's a song that really sums up the true scope of the Ultraviolence project. It's also one of the most over-played songs in history – fortunately, the rest of this album gives the uninitiated some indication as to what ELSE this project has produced over the years.

'Psychodrama' was the second album, a concept piece of sorts, telling the story of Jessica and Hitman, a disturbed pop star and a cold-blooded killer. The song 'Psycho Drama' sees the start of Ultraviolence's obsession with using blatantly silly female vocals, while 'Murder Academy' provides a contrast with its militant rhythm and drill-seargent vocal samples. 'Heaven Is Oblivion', meanwhile, was the closing track on the original album, with all its euphoric strings and cheesy vocals – it's shameless fun, the right choice for a compilation such as this. Then come a couple of tracks from the Johnny Violent 'Shocker' album – his weakest effort by far, though even here the two 'least worst efforts were chosen', the incredibly silly 'E Heads Must Die' and the oppressive 'North Korea Goes Bang' (the only song on this CD I've ever really gone back to).

'Killing God' gets four tracks – 'Adultery' is a good choice, one of the more 'balanced' songs in the Ultraviolence backcatalogue, and one of his strongest actual songs. 'Still' is more high-tempo silliness (and I mean that in a good way), even if it veers dangerously close to happy hardcore (urgh!). There's also a remix of 'Masochist' called 'Masochist Breakdown', which it's a fast, furious and intense contrast to the 'instant appeal' factor of 'Adultery' and 'Still'. But ultimately, the highlight of this album was always going to be 'Paranoid', the most outrageous cover of a Black Sabbath song I've ever heard (and I've heard quite a few, trust me), jagged guitar samples and sped-up vocals taking us through this hilarious act of tribute/sacrilege (delete as preference requires).

The most recent Ultraviolence album was 'Superpower' back in 2001 (hey, Johnny, we're still waiting for a follow-up!). This time, 'Sex' is the gratuitously shameless opener, more sweet synths and female vocals with surprisingly tolerable MC-style spoken word loops. The centre of the album is represented by 'Elektra' (one of the more lyrically creative Ultraviolence tracks), and 'Separation', one of the few really 'slow' Ultraviolence tracks, with sung female and shouted male vocals and some huge power chords thrown in for good measure. The album ends with 'Team UVR' – the most autobiographical song in the act's backcatalogue, which contains one of the few raps I find even vaguely tolerable (probably due to the use of motor racing metaphor), and plenty of references to Johnny's own past works, included an extended reprise of 'Hardcore Motherfucker'.

The second album is largely given over to remixes – starting with eight Ultraviolence remixes of songs by other artists. With an act as extreme as this, it's inevitable that some of these songs would suffer from losing much of their original 'spirit', buried under a rail-gun blast of kick drums. For example, Laibach's version of 'War' is barely recognizable for what it is, even if it stands up as a good Ultraviolence song. In the majority of cases, I'm not familiar with the originals, so can't comment on what Mr. Violent has done to them, though the Leechwoman remix (TK421) works well, thanks to Johnny managing to find a song that is as fast and furious as he is. Most of these mixes are best regarded as good but not great Ultraviolence songs, no more, no less.

Then come four mixes of existing Ultraviolence songs. The Lenny Dee mix of 'I, Destructor' suffers from being mastered from vinyl with it's rather muffled sound kicking the life out of it a bit. We then get two outrageous mixes of 'Psycho Drama' tracks, with both the title track and 'Heaven Is Oblivion' turned into big, happy party anthems – more amusing than anything else. Then comes the Hellsau mix of 'Strangled' – the fastest track of all, but not a favourite of mine. We end with a new version of 'Electric Chair', sounding fresher and more deeply cutting now it's been given a more professional-sounding makeover, and 'Theme From Guts v1', a few excerpts from a movie soundtrack Johnny Violent is currently working on, dealing more with textures and sound effects than anything rhythmic.

If you've already got all the Ultraviolence albums, it's still debatable whether there's any point in actually buying this compilation – you'll already have the bulk of CD1 (a few tracks on it are versions from singles, otherwise they're all album tracks), and the remixes on CD2 are reasonable but not absolutely essential (though they are worth a listen). They'll still be of appeal to Ultraviolence die-hards, of course, and if you're one of those that have just heard 'Hardcore Motherfucker' in a club and want to know what all the fuss is about, well, here's your chance. Personally, there's only a finite amount of Ultraviolence I want to listen to (Mr. Violent's production style has often left me wanting), but this thing will certainly save you having to trawl through all the albums.

## **Underworld – Dubnobasswithmyheadman (1993)**

I suppose I should understand this band better than most. It was recorded in Romford, my home town, and seemingly inspired by the urban environments of Greater London (from Chelsea to Essex they say), plus just about every other city in the world. Of course, out of the three band members, only Darren is a local, and the band was actually formed in Cardiff. But the album is unquestionably a London one, far more so than the 'Reverence' album from Faithless, who claim London is their key inspiration. Let's just say that this is my local band, and I feel at duty to draw some sense from their recorded output.

'Dubnobasswithmyheadman' is an album heavily influenced by acid house and techno, with a strong hint of the early sound of trance. Despite this, the songs are not particularly uptempo, with beats that serve as an accompaniment to the lyrics and synths rather than a dominant force. There are a few exceptions, but generally, this is an album for chilling out rather than outright dancing, a good thing when you realise it takes time for all the intricate bits to sink in. It takes long enough to check out the CD inlay, a black-and-white scrapbook of various words, passages and other oddities (like a draft for what would become the lyrics to 'Born Slippy').

The opening track, 'Dark and Long', starts as the album means to go on. A bouncy bassline and dreamy, aimless vocals. Add the various synth noodling in the background and you have the classic hypnotic Underworld effect. The song builds smoothly and neatly, the background groove fused perfectly as Karl Hyde breaks out into song, even throwing in a touch of the Romford accent at one point. The track fades away as it reaches the seven

minute mark, and soon we're into the whistling winds and soothing strings of 'mmm skyscraper I love you'.

The song proper starts a minute in, with just the nonchalant 'mmm skyscraper I love you' supporting the delicate techno beat. Eventually, a bleepy bassline clicks in, with Karl Hyde splitting up the 'mmm skyscraper's with more of his trademark vocal babble. The song bounces along merrily in that light for a few minutes, before a reprise of the intro, this time in a minor key. And still the song carries on. Underworld do a good job in keeping the thing varied enough to be interesting for the thirteen minutes this track goes on for, while keeping the elements all united. Eventually, all we are left with are strings. Even then it carries on, with a mix of electronic percussion, vocal cuts and some other miscellaneous effects fading us out.

The faster but ultimately less successful 'Surfboy' bursts in. Vocals are quite sparse here, the song consisting of a fast beat layered with various synth bleeps and samples. A recognisable bassline and melody doesn't appear until about three minutes into the song. It's still a good track, and develops more and more towards the end, but isn't especially memorable. The next track 'Spoonman', fades in with the usual background effects and a fuzzy 'world' sample, processed beyond comprehensibility. As usual, the lyrics are based round a few repeated phrases that babble on for a few minutes, before dying away to an instrumental. The words come back soon enough, though, this time as a stream-of-consciousness, vaguely audible monologue that has the capability to conjure up any number of images. The final line 'into the blood' carries on with the repetition theme, fighting with 'into the sperm' for audibility.

The more ambient 'Tongue' is simple but effective, sung with vocoder-type lyrics, accompanied by some delicate guitar while subtle synths quietly ooze about behind. Eventually the thing dies a death and the album's central song 'Dirty Epic' comes into play, and what an epic it is, too. It is another dreamy, meditative song, a song that has to be heard post-clubbing at around 3 am to work its magic, Karl Hyde hitting upon a particularly strong turn of phrase at this point of the album. There are many elements to this song, reprised, layered, developed on and on into the epic it claims for be. This is what 'intelligent' dance music should be about – not random experiments with a drum machine.

And when that dies away, the bouncy callsign of 'Cowgirl' comes to the fore, a classic song which combined a techno bass with strong hints of acid house and goa trance. The repetition of key lines works better here than anywhere else on the album, the phrases 'Everything, Everything', 'I'm Invisible', 'An Eraser of Love' and 'Why don't you call me, I feel like flying into' are all layered together piece by piece, fed through a vocoder, occasionally breaking loose into a high-speed acid solo. It wavers around with a number of false conclusions, eventually fizzling out shortly after the eight-minute mark, and what an exhilarating eight minutes it was, too.

'River of Bass', as you might expect, is based round bass. The usual Karl Hyde vocal meandering are laid over the dominant bass line. The odd synth line fades in and out during the song, and the whole thing wanders on without any real surprises. This leaves the almost cheerful sounding 'm.e', sung partly in Japanese, partly by a robot. And partly by Karl Hyde again, who doesn't come in until about two or three minutes in (hard to say when). The song has a brighter feel than the rest of those on the album, and almost seems to carry a meaning. Some nice piano tinkles in after a while, and it carries on for a few more minutes before fading out for good.

Anyway, as dance albums go, this has to rank as one of the strongest out there, recommended even to those who have no real urge to dance. There is no real weak track, all nine songs showing enough creativity to keep the listener interested. Often bands make



the mistake of opening the song with one style, then totally leaving it behind for something else. Other bands just seem unable to develop beyond their one or two club hits, creating a cash-in album of filler material. Underworld never made that mistake, and their music sounds more inventive as a result. Do you need more convincing?

## **Underworld – 2<sup>nd</sup> Toughest In The Infants (1996)**

You can draw many parallels between this album and 'Dubnobasswithmyheadman'. The principle and style is still the same, but the music has deepened and darkened still further. If the first album was rather involved, it had a number of bright spots. This one only offers a vaguely 'poppy' track on the bonus CD, leaving the album for the 'serious music'. The CD inlay offers few clues, the tracklist on the back confusing (as track 1 is made up of three songs). All the more reason to play the bloody thing.

The CD opens with a three-part track, which for the sake of simplicity, I'll treat it as one, called 'Juanita'. Underpinned a fragile, 1996 vintage tech-beat, the opening section offers some typically twisted vocal imagery from Karl Hyde, sung here through a vocoder (going for the same effect as 'Cowgirl'). A descending sequence take into the second phase, a series of looped samples with various crackles and groans in the background. Karl then conjures up one of his epic vocal fantasies into which little if any meaning can be read. The song fades out with some childish nonsense to do with colours (it's the kind of song that's impossible to describe in a review, but at least I tried!).

The mellower 'Banstyle/Sappys Curry' initially seems to be built around two perpetually looped organ chords. A low-key vocal section completes the chill out fell, especially as you can't really make out what he's singing about (usually you get at least some idea, but here I'm totally perplexed). The repetition finally fades away after six minutes, to be replaced with a little idle guitar, with the electronics just rolling past in the background. Eventually we get a beat to go with it, and more understated vocals. The tune seems to play on for just about forever, before eventually fading away after fifteen or so minutes.

Next we get 'Confusion the Waitress'. An opening bass line not so much deep as subterranean, before the almost poetic words 'She said you can do anything you want, She said you can be with anyone....'. This gives the song a real 'hook' and whilst it's too downbeat to become an anthem, it holds it's own very nicely. Next up is a instrumental called 'Rowla'. It sounds pretty 'happy' to start with, but ends up sounding like six and a half minutes of electronic insanity from the mixing desk, as if the Aphex Twin had been invited over for tea and buns. Either that or Underworld saw the special effect functions available to them, and decided it was a shame not to use them all. A most enjoyable sonic head-fuck.

'Pearls Girl', the song that ultimately became the single from this album, now forms the centrepiece. Naturally, it's a bit easier to relate to than previous efforts, though it's certainly the most rhythmically advanced of all their 'anthem' tracks, their only notable use of breakbeat. A long intro leads up to a particularly strong vocal performance, quite literally giving the music real 'colour' and 'texture'. Like all the songs on this album, we are treated to an extended ending, allowing them to shove in a reprise of the main verse and some extra sounds, drawing out the song to a fraction under ten minutes.

Three to go. 'Air Towel' sounds like a compromise between 'Banstyle/Sappys Curry' and 'Confusion the Waitress'. Some of the vocals from the former track are repeated here (this time sung through some sort of voice processor), plus some new phrases, which border between the bizarre and the outright kinky. To be honest, you'd never notice unless you saw the words written down. After this, there's 'Blueski', three minutes of discordant guitars with a bit of backing. Never liked that one, really.

The final track 'Stagger', however, wins first prize. Simple really. Opens with a hi-hat and a bit of piano from way down the bass staff. Then we get a nice haunting melody, playing away under what I believe to be Karl Hyde's finest hour. In a few minutes, he combines a whole mix of contemporary soundbites ranging from Wardour Street to Bethnal Green. Very little gets in the way of the vocals here. A echoed kettle drum bangs away in the background, giving the track a bit of oomph, and there's the ever present flourishes of electronics, with a touch of guitar in the late stages.

My version of this album came with a bonus CD single, containing the non-album track 'Born Slippy' and 'Rez'. I already had both of these, but many people won't (well, not 'Rez' at least) so they're there for a purpose. For those of you that haven't read my other reviews, well, 'Born Slippy' was THE song of THE film of my generation (Trainspotting) and 'Rez' is a less well known track, but still a very good one, more in the style of 'Dubnobasswithmyheadman', complete with elements from 'Cowgirl'. This CD single is a nice bonus to an already superb album. That said, the plain version is still worth the price on it's own. Buy either. Just buy it.

## Underworld – Beaucoup Fish (1999)

Whilst the bulk of this Underworld section has been in place since 1999, it's still taken me an age to get this review down in HTML form. Not buying the album until a full year after it's release may partially explain the delay, but the fact that it took well over another year to listen to the album all the way through, thus allowing me to write about it, is probably the real reason. And why did it take me so long? Because, dear readers, this album is boring.

May sound a bit harsh, as there are actually some good songs. The undoubted highlight is 'Moaner', a pulsating assault of layered rhythms topped off with one of Karl Hyde's weirdest and most wonderful vocal performances to date, an ever-building string of unconnected commentaries driving the whole song onwards and upwards to it's climax. But wait a mo – haven't we heard this before? Wasn't it released as a single back in 1997 to promote 'Batman and Robin'? Yeah – so that means every self-respecting Underworld fan will already have this. It also means this song was almost two years old by the time it made it onto the album. So call it an extra, then. We've still got ten new tracks.

Of these, the vocoder driven 'Cups' at least manages to justify it's 11-minute length, even if it's all rather low-key chill-out material of which there is far too much around these days. The fierce techno of 'Kittens' is more my kind of thing, a surprisingly strong instrumental track whose noisy, chaotic nature appeals to these ears which are mine. On a different tack entirely is 'Skym', which succeeds by doing the exact opposite. No drum machine here, just lots of reverbed vocals and a little bit of synth. But then we get to the singles, and a varied bunch they are, too.

'King of Snake' is OK, because the vocals are funny and the music solid, even if it's nowhere near the level of 'Cowgirl' and 'Born Slippy'. However, 'Push Upstairs' is totally gutless, a stop-start rhythm and half-hearted vocals, with a dreary, clichéd electric piano sound serving no useful purpose whatsoever. 'Bruce Lee' is even worse – the use of an Essex accent doesn't work at all, and the song is just this crappy little thing. 'Jumbo' is better, but it's once again let down by uninspired vocals. I really, really can't put my finger on the problem at the heart of most of these songs, it's as though the magic that took the band from synth-pop days to super-stardom has all been used up, and they're now relying on technical ability alone.

There's three other tracks here. 'Winjer' is nicely textured, but I still found myself fast-forwarding through it looking for the good bit (which I never found, just more vocoder). 'Push Downstairs' is seemingly related to 'Push Upstairs', and it's certainly equal in the

mediocrity stakes. That leaves, 'Something Like A Mama' which is a stupid title, and as for the song, it sounds like that 'electronica' thing people used to go on about. You know, try and sound clever with a keyboard and beat box. Now how about singing me a song? You know, like the way you used to, before you went all crap like this.....

I'm disappointed. I bought the 'Push Upstairs' single with such enthusiasm that I even bought both parts at once. That was enough to lead me to the point of totally ignoring the release of the actual album. Bought 'King of Snake' later on, and it was better, but I only bought the album because I had the others and there might still be some good stuff on it. And there is, in places. But by Underworlds exalted standards, it's poor. Small wonder the band itself soon started to fall apart. Oh, they held together in the end, but down one member. I only hope they can recapture their old form.

## **Unheilig – Moderne Zeiten (2006)**

Der Graf's darkwave rock project returns with it's fourth album, an album which is very similar to its predecessor 'Zelluloid', the artwork conforming to Unheilig's 'house style' and the music more or less following suit. It's the usual mix of gruff German vocals, power chords (with the odd acoustic moment thrown in), electronic rhythms, strings and enchanting melodies. There's a fair mix of Rammstein-esque rock anthems ('Luftschiff' and 'Horizont'), EBMish dance tracks ('Ich Will Alles', 'Helden' and 'Menschenherz') and slower, ballad-style tracks ('Astronaut' and 'Mein Herz'), all done the way only Der Graf can.

Or maybe that should read 'the only way Der Graf knows how'. This project has done very well at developing it's distinctive 'voice' and reasonable fan-base, but neither is it really going anywhere. On the other hand, there's no doubting the quality of the material on here – the 'hits to filler' ratio is very favourable. Simply put, there's nothing here that'll win Unheilig any new fans, but the chmaltz fans will be very happy with this latest offering.

NOTE: The limited edition digi-pak version has two bonus tracks – 'Tag Fur Sieger' and the ballad 'Sonnentag' – they're both as good as the albums core tracks, certainly not the 2<sup>nd</sup> rate rejects often used to sell limited editions. Worth picking up this version if you can find it.

## **Velvet Acid Christ – Lust For Blood (2006)**

That straight-edge vegan Bryan Erickson might be getting just a little self-righteous with his online rantings, but at least this latest release sees something of a return to form musically, following the confused 'Hex Angel'. It also sees the return of 'real' instruments – namely drums, guitars and bass, in addition to all the synths. Whilst there are some uptempo electronic tracks, a return to the openly danceable sounds of 'Fun With Knives' still seems some way off. The album opener 'Wound' (also lead single) may be relatively formulaic by VAC standards, but it sets the tone nicely for 'Parasite'. A drum loop where all barring the kick are blasts of noise, offset against clean vocals (yep, no distorted savagery for once) and sombre, classically-inspired melodies.

Undistorted vocals also feature deep in the mix of 'Machine', sung by collaborator Todd Loomis. Perhaps the most extreme example of VAC's current sound is 'Crushed'. Despite the nearly-intelligible vox (not that I've ever cared much for this project's blantly graphic and unremitting hateful lyrical content), the murky bassline and guitar shimmer is more reminiscent of the gothier side of post-punk. VAC meets The Cure – who would ever have thought it? Bryan doesn't hit the sweet spot every time. 'Disconnected Nightmare' pulses, throbs and heaves it's ways through five minutes of meandering fury, whilst 'Discolored Eyes' is the kind of track you'll either love and hate – an synthetically-enhanced abyss of

guitar noise it may be, but is it the all-compassing wall of sound it clearly wants to be or just a formless blur?

Still, there's plenty of interest elsewhere – 'Ghost In The Circuit' is a beautifully subtle instrumental that delivers sufficient musical complexity to avoid the 'filler tag' such tracks usually receive. The three-track 'Lust For Blood' suite also develops nicely, the opening section dominated by bass guitar before moving onto a riff-heavy finale (with a little bit of piano virtuosity thrown in). Add a couple of 'bonus tracks' based around techno rhythms at the album's conclusion and one three-minute blast of industrial fury in the form of 'Kashmir Crack Krishna', and we may yet have the most diverse and 'complete' VAC album in years. It's certainly one of the strongest in a melodic sense – more importantly, Bryan Erickson seems to have found a musical path through the glut of harsh electro-industrial that dominates the scene at present. He still has his own sound.

## **Velvet Underground and Nico (1967)**

Come on, you must know the album I'm talking about. It's got a big banana on the cover. You can peel it off on the original LP version. It's in every music buff's record collection, and mine as well, yet it never charted when it was originally released. You might never have listened to it, but you must have seen it enough times to wonder what kind of banana-related music is contained within its eleven tracks. Well, let me put you straight right away – there are no songs about bananas here. Frankly, the album is much better for it.

What we have instead are the first eleven tracks of the warped musical dynasty known as 'alternative rock'. Now such an overused tag, used to bolster sales of substandard guitar-based indie into chart region, it is this album which is regarded as many as the first attempt to drag the rock n'roll sound which dominated popular music up to this point kicking and screaming into the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Joy Division, Radiohead, Siouxsie Sioux, Jesus and Mary Chain – they all owe their existence in some part to the Velvets, with this album, produced by cover designer Andy Warhol, taking the forefront.

But enough about history – let's talk music. Of the eleven songs here, I'd class at least six as being very good to excellent, with the rest in the running, too (though I'm not personally a great fan of 'Run Run Run'). They all have something going for them, from the chmaltzy nursery-rhyme sweetness of the opener 'Sunday Morning' (which sort of sums up how I feel coming home from Slimelight most weekends) to the closing duo of 'The Black Angel's Death Song' and 'European Son', a couple of noisy, distorted free-form studio jams, giving some indication of what was to come on the next album – *White Light/White Heat*.

Between these we get the more conventional sounding rockers 'I'm Waiting For The Man' and 'There She Goes Again' – the former still regarded today as one of Lou Reed's greatest works (to the extent that it's often mistaken for one of his solo pieces). There are also three songs sung by German model Nico, the gentle-sounding 'I'll Be Your Mirror', the seductive 'Femme Fatale' and perhaps the most famous VU song of all – the Cinderella imagery of 'All Tomorrow's Parties', driving piano matched with some wild guitar noodling and Nico's infectious chanteuse vocals. A stark social statement or just a great song? You decide – I think it's both.

Whilst all of these songs are some way inspired by the darker side of Western life in the late 1960's, subject matters not dealt with by any other established band at the time, their references to these issues can seem a little vague, meaning careful 'active' listening is required to get the most out of the songs. The same cannot be said about 'Heroin' and 'Venus In Furs'. 'Heroin' attempts to convey the intense highs and lows that result from

drug abuse, a genuinely disturbing song that constantly shifts in tempo, just to keep you on your toes. Forget the Beatles and their LSD, forget all references to marijuana (especially as I can't spell it) – heroin is the unholy grail of the drug addict, and don't they let you know it....

'Venus In Furs', meanwhile, happens to be my personal favourite. Twangy guitars and Cale's squeaky viola sound provide an almost medieval-sounding backing to Reed's S&M fantasy – such songs might be meat and drink to modern rock bands, but 33 years ago, such matters were taboo. I'm not saying the song is explicit in any way (it isn't), it's just not the sort of thing that would have appealed to Joe Public listener. But this site isn't about what Joe Public listener would like. It's about what I like. And I like this song, this album and, at least for the first two albums, this band. And not a single fucking banana in any of the songs.

## **VNV Nation – Advance & Follow (1995)**

The first VNV Nation album may have been largely forgotten in these post-future pop times, but it's still a very interesting document of the bands evolution. The militant drumming of 'Anthem' introduces the concept of war-related metaphor, 'Afterfire' and 'Serial Killer' bring orchestral elements to the EBM base, whilst 'Frika' best showcases the development of Ronan's distinctive songwriting style.

There are oddities – 'Cold' is a lusty tribute to the Nitzer Ebb school of EBM, 'Requiem QCN' incorporates spoken Latin verse, whilst 'Amhran Comhrac' adds a touch of Irish folk to proceedings! The album ends with the victory march 'Fiume'. Collectors are best advised to seek out the v2 edition released in 2001 – it's limited but easier to obtain than the original, reworked to compensate for the initially hurried production and also has five bonus tracks, including two alternate versions of 'Afterfire' and a couple of Front 242 covers – 'Circling Overland' well worth a listen.

## **VNV Nation – Praise The Fallen (1998)**

The second VNV Nation album, but the first one that really garnered widespread respect. The album is centred on four songs ('Joy', 'Solitary', 'Honour' and 'Procession') that laid the ground that laid the bridge between 90s EBM and 00s future pop. Each song offers it's own interpretation of the style – the redemptive 'Solitary' would become the bands official 'anthem', though the doom-laden, self-questioning 'Joy' and the rallying cry of 'Honour' are also both important tracks in the bands backcatalogue, orchestrated EBM with that distinctive VNV lyrical style.

The rest of the album is something of a mixed bag – two forceful instrumentals in the form of 'Ascension' and 'Burnout' and a more traditional shouted-word style of EBM lyricism with 'Voice' all suffer from the lack of an actual song to detract from the slightly muddy production that is apparent on the more percussive parts of the CD. More appealing is the delicate 'Forsaken' – an instrumental that would later spawn a truly inspired vocal version. As it stands, 'Praise The Fallen' is still the first VNV album that resembles the band we know today and it contains a number of their best songs, but it's not exactly their most consistent work overall.

## **VNV Nation – Empires (1999)**

The quality of production has improved, the tone of the songwriting slightly tweaked and the number of actual songs increased. This is the central reference point for both VNV

Nation and the future pop genre. This disc offers such hits as 'Kingdom' (one of their best 'percussive' tracks), 'Standing' (the first truly 'positive' VNV song), the more EBMish 'Legion' and the ladies favourite 'Darkangel' (don't ask me why, OK?).

We also get 'Rubicon', a song shaded with an overbearing inevitability and an interesting contrast to the out-and-out dancefloor hits. The only downsides are the slightly messy 'Fragments' (the only real salute to VNV's industrial roots) and the slightly confused 'orchestrated' song 'Distant' occupying the middle portion of the album. These two tracks (plus the inclusion of the not-quite-finished-yet 'Saviour') keep this album from my own all-time greats list, but it's still the one essential purchase in the ever-growing VNV backcatalogue.

## **VNV Nation – Futureperfect (2002)**

Exploring the concept of 'retro futurism', this CD sees VNV further leave their EBM roots behind as they continue to lead their own self-penned 'future pop' movement. The punchy 'Epicentre' get things off to a strong start, whilst lead single 'Genesis' makes all the right noises (even if you find the biblical theme somewhat off-putting). The real highlights, however, are 'Electronaut', an intensely catchy and remarkably well-developed trance-styled Schaffell number that's easily their best instrumental to date, and also 'Beloved', a slow-building epic that eventually grows to an awesomely uplifting climax.

Other points of interest including the piano ballad 'Holding On' and 'Structure', the only real concession VNV have made to the distorted beats of the power noise scene. The album does slip up in places, though – 'Carbon' is nicely textured but meanders structurally, whilst 'Fearless' is a little too simplistic lyrically. The weakest song of all is the concluding track 'Airships', which hovers aimlessly like the mode of transport indicated in the song title. These three tracks shouldn't deter you from buying the album, however, as the good far outweighs the bad.

## **VNV Nation – Matter + Form (2005)**

With a very large number of European bands focusing their attention on the hugely successful 'Empires' and 'FuturePerfect', VNV Nation throw the entire scene a curveball with their fifth album, switching to a more traditional analogue sound. The new approach is successful in places – 'Chrome' and 'Entropy' providing us with two punchy, hard-edged anthems, which 'Perpetual' and 'Homeward' demonstrate the subtler side of this new sound (though both songs are still easily upbeat enough for club play).

A couple of the songs are a little anonymous, however. 'Endless Skies' seems to want you to like it, but it doesn't quite hit the mark lyrically, whilst 'Arena' is listenable but relatively pedestrian. More importantly, there are five instrumentals, none of which really grab you as much as some of their predecessors. 'Intro' merely prefaces 'Chrome', 'Colours of Rain' the usual classical diversion (and not one of their best), whilst 'Strata', 'Interceptor' and 'Lightwave' are all uptempo hard techno/trance styled instrumentals, with the psytrance-tinged 'Lightwave' the best of the three. It's therefore an interesting rather than wilding exciting release for VNV, which a probably-necessary change in musical direction – it just looks like it'll take time before it's fully realised.

## **Winterkälte – Disturbance (2004)**

The last full-length album from Winterkälte was 'Drum'n'noise' in 1999. Whilst that album might have had praise heaped upon it from all corners of the (and let's face it, it is) highly elitist industrial community, it was a bit of a sprawl in places. There were, after all, only seven tracks on the CD, one of them two parts of the same thing. But what does it matter –

the concept was there, and now it seems Winterkälte have the style down to a fine art. Like all previous albums, their track titles make references to anti-globalisation and environmentally friendly sentiments, though it isn't clear whether they are in any way intended to be representative of the music.

'Solar Peace' kicks off the album with dense blasts of cold electronic noise, building up a synapse-shattering wall of sound, before that most Winterkälte of elements, the distorted kick drum, marches in, bashing it's way across the soundscape in militant style, but at the same time sounding ever so slighting erratic, in the sense that you're never quite sure where it's going to go next. In many respects, it's good to see that a band that promotes live drumming (rare in power noise) bring some it's benefits to a studio album.

The opening is complete, and now we can get down to some real industrial fury on 'Yes2Wind', a polyrhythmic assault on the senses, one of those high-tempo extreme dance tracks that keeps on morphing in front of your ears, but keeping a solid undercurrent that'll keep the 'upstairs at Slimelight' crowd moving. Next up is 'Nuclear Free North America', a track more typical of the 'classic' Winterkälte sound (if such a thing exists), an almost bouncy kick drum with countless layers of seething electronic fury fired over the top.

And still there's no let up 'Ban Depleted Uranium Weapons (Poison Dust)' sees two different drum loops fight for prominence over a background of distorted screams and looped noises, while 'Eco Lateral Damage' sees a stuttering kick fight it's way across a dense landscape of layered electronics, relying more this time on slowly evolving textures, which must have sounded almost 'nice' before they were forced into the mix here.

'Act Global' is the first track on the CD which sounds confused and uncertain to my ears – the usual rhythmic battering is much in evidence, but their attempts to incorporate a slow, funereal two-note melody into the mix isn't always as prominent as it might have been, the concept only really achieving much in the final minute of the track. Then come 'Modulation Four', a track which borders on noisecore, the usual kick drums buried deep in the mix, the key loop distorted to such an extent that it could almost be passed off as pure noise.

And now from the extreme to the almost catchy – 'Genetic Imperialism'. Utilising a more conventional school of beat science than usual, this is an upbeat little dance number which manages to find a more accessible use for Udo's sizeable library of noises. The penultimate track 'Pops' sees a return to the full-throttle power noise sound, characterised by the teeth-clenching grind of metal-on-metal feedback noise over the top.

We finish with the 'Diane Wilson' version of 'Stop Dow', a track which appeared in it's original form on the 'Hands 04' compilation (for those not aware, Diane Wilson held a 29-day hunger strike outside a chemical plant owned by the Dow Chemical Company in 2002). In this form, the track is less intense than most on offer in here, built round a fast but not exceptionally noisy loop, whilst the usual seething electronics are toned down to provide more of a textural role than a rhythmic one.

The album thus concludes, and I'm going to stick my neck out here and say that this is definitely the strongest Winterkälte album to date. They don't overindulge themselves like they did on 'Drum'n'noise', but they're certainly making a better job of ass-kicking power noise than they did on their debut 'Structure of Destruction'. The power noise scene is still relatively young, but Winterkälte are now relative veterans of the style.

## **Wolfsheim – Spectators (1999)**

Wolfsheim had a fair bit of history behind them by the time this album came out. They were already big news on the German alternative circuit, and were making inroads into the

goth subcultures in other countries, their polished synth-pop melancholia very much emerging as the sound *de jour* in the numerous dark corners of Europe's gothic/industrial clubland. This disc was to offer whatever proof was still needed that Wolfsheim were very much here to stay as scene frontrunners.

Strange, therefore, that this album shows very little sign of music pertaining to a stereotypical 'gothic' or 'industrial' sound. Neither gloomy enough to class as gothic, nor cuttngly harsh enough to qualify as industrial, this album instead stands as a landmark example of the contemporary European synth-pop sound. Peter Heppner's distinctive low-key vocals don't exactly carry much energy, but match them to a good song and they do usually come to life in their own way. And the songs themselves, dealing with love that is lost, blighted or just too far away, are for the most part intelligently written and often thought-provoking.

In terms of musical accompaniment, we have the usual Wolfshiem combination of delicate synths, string snippets, little choral passages and plenty of other little details that ensure each song has it's own distinctive 'flavour'. The most successful track, is, however, one of the least adventurous – 'Once In A Lifetime'. Something of a scene standard, this, it consists of a bright synth pop backing to Heppner's usual understated vocal, deceptively hiding a disturbing undertone that reminds one of Depeche Mode's at their finest.

Most of the other tracks have at least one distinctive feature that sets it apart from the rest of the CD. Opener 'It's Hurting For The First Time' features soaring synths and soprano, while 'For You' features a wrenching sound that's sort of halfway between knob-twiddling electronics and a guitar solo. Meanwhile, 'Read The Lines' has a lovely little 'bleep' chorus circa 1981 without losing it's contemporary flavour. The one instrumental track, 'E', is well developed and sits in well as the album closer, retro-synths and some middle-eastern style vocal samples all working nicely in unison.

The use of German lyrics on 'Kunstliche Welten' doesn't detract from the album's 'delicate' feel, though there are a couple of tracks which make a fine attempt at disrupting the composure of this disc as a whole. 'Sleep Somehow' features a searing breakbeat, cranking up the tempo to a point where Heppner is no longer able to equal it in vocal accompaniment. More notable is 'Heroin, She Said', the dubious subject matter appropriately dealt with via a series of calm, elegant verses disrupted by choruses that ascend to levels of chaos never heard on a Wolfsheim CD before.

There are several versions of this album out there, and if you're lucky, you might get one or more bonus CDs, in the form of this albums attendant CD single releases. My version has 'Kunstliche Welten', featuring an interesting orchestral version of the said song, and if you've bought this CD recently, you might get all three singles, including, amongst other things, an extended version of 'Once In A Lifetime'. I don't think it really capture the essence of the original song, but it seems to work well as part of a DJ set, so it's not entirely without purpose.

Whatever form you buy the album in, you can be pretty sure that you've got one of the finer examples of the current European synth-pop/wave sound. In terms of danceability, Wolfsheim isn't exactly in pole position – indeed I hear the live show features Peter Heppner standing still on a little podium for the entire show, but in terms of crafting a nice collection of songs and getting the best out of them, this disc proves the possibility given plenty of time, some good ideas and not a little talent.



## Wolfsheim – Casting Shadows (2003)

We've long since established here that 'Wolfsheim' are 'Big in Germany'. They get into the 'big' charts for big bands, you see, and now they've gone and got a distribution deal with Warners (sure sign of being able to shift a unit or two). And in 2003 we see the long-awaited successor to 'Spectators', the album that has since, like it or not, grown into a something of a modern synth-pop standard by which others can be measured. Including this disc, the duo's own follow-up.

Stylistically, it's what I'd normally refer to as a 'consolidation' effort – that is, take the best elements from all the previous albums and try and get them all to sit together nicely. And sure enough, the album sounds 'just fine'. The problem here is that it works TOO well – so polished is the sound, so easy on the ear is Heppner's soft vocals, so simple are the lyrics, that the 'shock factor' offered by the likes of 'Sleep Sometimes' and 'Heroin She Said' isn't here. OK, the former of those was a track I never liked much, but at least it broke up the album a bit.

I mean, you can stick on the CD (using a CD player – not a PC, thank-you copy protection), launch into track 1 'Everyone Who Casts a Shadow' and then get on with something else without being disturbed. It really is that indifferent. This leads into 'Care For You', saved from my eternal ignorance only by it's Spandau Ballet style chorus (and that's a pretty strange comment for me of all people to make). Then comes 'I Won't Believe', which toughens things up a bit once the drums kick in, but not by much.

Onto 'Kein Zuruck', then, the first of two songs in German, as well as the lead single. It adds some acoustic guitar to the mix, and whilst it's doubtlessly an accomplished song, it's nothing remarkable at all. And still the pattern of indifference continues with the gently swirling synths of 'And I...' and the piano-synth led 'Underneath The Veil', two more low-key synth-pop tracks that sort of shout 'Wolfsheim By Numbers' out loudly. 'Underneath....' does try to pick up pace as it progresses and speed towards it's climax, but it's too little, too late.

We finally get something of note when 'Find You're Gone', which features a number of trancey-future-pop string-synth stabs in amongst all the usual bleeps and burbles. Then comes 'This Is For Love', which features some interesting electronic textures (the whole song is based round what sounds like a land-line ring tone fed through a delay), though I never really felt the urge to revisit it. Then we move onto 'Wundervoll', the second song in German. It's stiff, static rhythmic might have been meat n'drink to the likes of And One, but Heppner needs something a bit more creative to really function at his best.

On the final run for home now, with 'Approaching Lightspeed', which once again goes for some ultra-retro synth patches, the bright, chiming chorus sounding a bit like it was lifted from an Erasure song. The album ends with instrumental 'In Time', which progresses nicely enough, but, well, life and instrumentals are like that. There is a 'Bonus' disc on some versions, with some MAGIX remixing software on it or something, but I didn't bother with that.

So I'm disappointed. Very. This band might well have found their niche, but they're getting way, way too snug it there. Doubtlessly the name will sell a few copies, but in terms of musical merit Wolfsheim seen to be treading water. Lyrically, too, the album is rather nebulous (notice how I didn't try to interpret one song – they hover round the usual lost love/sombre reflection territory). And what's worse? I know they can do better. Unless you're made of money, go and get yourself something by another German synth band, or failing that, just complete your Wolfie backcatalogue. 'Cos this one sucks, pretty much.

## Wolfsheim – Find You're Here (2003)

I've made no secret of the fact that I was severely disappointed with Wolfsheim's 'Casting Shadows' album. The whole thing was just too easy on the ears, too easy to ignore. I do remember liking one track, however. That was 'Find You're Gone'. Having established that they were issuing a reworked version on CD single, I decided it was at least worth a go. Hey, it's limited edition status meant that even if it was crap, I could probably get a good price for it on E-Bay some time. Even though I'd probably get paid in Euros. German ones.

Anyway, what we have here is a double CD single pack, one for the original 'Find You're Gone' and one for the rework 'Find You're Here'. In a pointless act of symmetry, each one contains the original song, an instrumental version and one live track, plus a CD-ROM video. Or to put it another way, owners of the album are really only getting one new song here. The rest just screams 'filler'.

So how does the new 'Find You're Here' compare with it's parent track? The two songs follow the same basic pattern, though the lyrics have been rewritten. To be honest, each version works as well as the other. The instrumentation has also been tweaked, though in my opinion this is where the new version falls down. The lead synth that made 'Find You're Gone' worthwhile has got lost down in the mix, making the 'Find You're Here' experience identical to just about every other Wolfsheim song.

The rest of the package isn't really up to much. An instrumental version of each song is provided, both as tedious as each other. There's also live versions of 'Kein Zuruck' and 'Kunstliche Welten', which are OK, but whilst they don't sound EXACTLY like the album versions, they aren't that far off and don't really convey much energy. There's also a video for each song, both based round Peter Heppner singing whilst speeded-up film of decorators refurbishing a room plays on behind him.

So it's another disappointment from the Wolfsheim stable, managing here to ruin even the one good track on their last album with what appears to be a cash-in rework. One point of interest is that in the videos, Peter Heppner is starting to look suspiciously like Midge Ure. He's obviously practising for his impending entry into the realm of the synth-pop dinosaurs, as that's what he's starting to sound like.

## :Wumpscut: - Music For A Slaughtering Tribe (1993)

The first :Wumpscut: album has been released in many different versions over the years, although the core content remains the same (even if they keep reshuffling the track order). No matter which version of the album you get, the distinctive tone of Rudy Ratzinger's sonic palette is clear from the outset, and it ain't exactly pleasant. Just over half of the album is given over to unremittingly harsh industrial dance, borrowing heavily from the likes of Leæther Strip, Skinny Puppy and, it's most heavily distorted moments, The Klinik.

The tell-tale keyboard stabs of 'Soylent Green' identify the album's obvious stand-out track, although the spoken-word Aleta Welling vocal on 'Fear In Motion' and the synapse-crushing PAL sample that forms the basis of 'Concrete Rage' prevent the remainder of the album from becoming mere second-rate imitations of the lead song. There are also a number of more subtle, darkambient style tracks, laden with morbid keyboard textures and a slight neo-classical feel. There are a few tracks (of both kinds), that really don't achieve much, either hammering or droning away without any apparent direction, but such indulgences can be forgiven on a debut album such as this.

NOTE: Most current versions of the album feature a remix disc 'Music For A Slaughtering Tribe II'. It includes a couple of remixes each by 'Haujobb' (doing his usual technofication)

and Brain chmalt, plus an interesting take on 'She's Dead' by Kirlian Camera (adding a darkwave beat where none previously existed) and a few other mixes. It's around the usual standard for bonus remix albums – an interesting chmaltzy, but scarcely likely to upstage the main album.

### **:Wumpscut: - Bunkertor 7/Bunker Gate 7 (1995)**

The second full-length :Wumpscut: album is a more 'balanced' affair than anything Rudy has released previously, but it's still every bit as corrupt and vitriolic as 'MFAST'. There are still a number of no-holds-barred EBM stomp-a-thons on offer, including 'Dying Culture' (a new mix of the tracks previously heard on the 'Dried Blood' EP), 'Mortal Highway' and the title track, all of built round hammering percussion loops and Rudy's savage vocals, with 'Mortal Highway' the strongest of these due to the clever inclusion of a sampled guitar riff. There's still a tendency for some of the songs to bash away without any real direction, but most of the songs are at least listenable if not eternally memorable.

The real appeal of 'Bunkertor 7' lies in the slower tracks, however, all of which are stronger conceptually than the somewhat abstract keyboard experiments heard on previous works. 'Capital Punishment' is slow-building epic whose ominous whispers eventually build into a towering climax, a truly moving account of state-sponsored termination. 'Die In Winter' is as morbid and resigned as you'd expect from a song with a title like that, although the real highlight is the instrumental 'Thorns', a medieval-sounding plucked-string intro giving way to vast keyboard textures and a solid but still restrained techno beat. It's tracks like this that reflect the project advancement, and are the primary reason for purchase.

NOTE: The US version of this album are entitled 'Bunker Gate 7' (different title, but the songs are in the same language). These version feature an extended version of 'Die In Winter' and remixes of 'Bunkertor 7' and 'Die In Winter' (the latter by Haujobb) which are both Okish but don't really advance the originals in any real sense.

### **:Wumpscut: - Embryodead (1997)**

An album dedicated to "stillborn foetus wise enough to die in their mothers womb", no less. Despite any recommendations I may give, this album nonetheless needs to be accompanied by a health warning, as this is the most depressing, most harrowing, god-awful slice of misery from the Ratzinger camp to date. The gloom starts steadily with 'Golgotha', the story of the Crucifixion told with the oppressive beats and funereal keyboard combo that Rudy does so well, before things step up a gear for 'Embryodead', one of the most violent, inhumane industrial tracks ever recorded, a direct attack against the futility of human life itself.

As the album draws on, we get the usual mix of harsh industrial dance and dark electronics, with the highlights being the eardrum-splitting 'War' (possibly the most intense :W: track to date?) and the creeping doom of 'Is It You?', conjuring horror-movie style imagery to chilling effect. Other tracks of note include 'Womb', a sickening 'voice from the womb' bringing a whole new viewpoint to the abortion debate, and of course 'Angel', a delicate number, the soaring strings and subtle motif offering the albums one moment of redemption. The rest is unremittingly dissonant – yet it still dovetails together well, moreso than any previous :Wumpscut: album, and the few weak tracks ('Pest' is the only really pointless one) don't interrupt the flow. Recommending to anyone who, having read this, think they can still stomach it. Expectant mothers need not apply.....

## **:Wumpscut: - Boeses Junges Fleisch/Evil Young Flesh (1999)**

The fourth full-length :Wumpscut: album (ignoring, for a moment, all the miscellanies) sees some changes in the overall sound of the project. The majority of the songs are in German this time, with only the occasional section in English. There also seems to be more willingness to experiment in terms of structure. Either that or Rudy got completely lost whilst putting this thing together – it's hard to say. The mix of hard industrial rhythms and equally hard electronics (with slightly less of the funereal gloom heard on some earlier tracks) seems good in theory, but in reality the whole album sounds like a complete mess. There are highlights – 'Ich Will Dich' may sample from a porn movie (and it's a pretty, erm, 'graphic' sample – double-fucking, anyone?) but it's one of the few tracks that manages to grab your attention and then proceed to progress anywhere.

The only other successful tracks are the industrial headrush 'Flucht', the instrumental 'Draussen' (incorporating a violin solo to great effect.) and 'Sag Es Jetzt', the duet with Lilli Stankowski cleverly balanced. The remainder of the CD seems to thrash about, making a lot of noise, but never really achieving anything of worth. The jerky, confused opener 'Wolf' leads straight into lead single 'Totmacher', whose plucked string sample initially make it sound like it might develop special, but the unimaginative chorus ('Tot! Tot! Ich Macht Dich Tot!') kills off any hope the listener may harbour. The instrumental 'Hexentanz' is unremittingly dull, whilst 'Vergib Mir' is all stop-start and no real punch. The remaining songs, whilst fractionally more listenable than these two, are nothing really special, resulting in a patchy album overall, something which can only be described as a disappointment.

## **:Wumpscut: - Wreath Of Barbs (2001)**

Following the disappointment of 'Boeses Junges Flesich', 'Wreath of Barbs' seems a return to form of sorts for :Wumpscut:. Some of the portentous gloom of early works has returned to the sound, yet a new degree of musical maturity is apparent. The album's songs are for the most part more 'controlled' than previous albums, though there's still plenty of evvill EBM for those who want it, particularly with the caustic synth stabs and blasphemous lyrics of centrepiece track 'Christfuck'. The opening duo of 'Opening The Gates of Hell' and 'Deliverance' also do a fine job in combining hard beats and layered synths.

The most notable track of all, however, is the title track, combining vocodered lyrics, a Led Zep-style beat and a mechanised plucked-string sample, a dark, delirious meisterwerk – hardly related to previous :W: works, but ironically so much better for it. The album isn't perfect – 'Dr Thodt' is a meandering Aleta Welling spoken word track that tries to sound more shocking than it really is, whilst the final run of slower tracks at the end of the album ('Line of Corpses', 'Hate Is Mine' and 'Bleed In Silence') prove to be interesting rather than wilding exciting, although an understated remix of Kirlian Camera's 'Eclipse' proves to be an interesting finale to say the least.

## **:Wumpscut: - The Mesner Tracks (1996)**

This is a collection of early :Wumpscut: tracks that had appeared on 'Various Artists' compilations. It's most notable for the eight-minute long 'Mother', a brooding-drawn out piece built from ominous layers of keyboard, with more 'heartfelt' vocal performance than heard previously from Rudy. There's also a decent chunk of war-infused hard EBM in 'War Combattery', a good version of 'In The Night' and the 'muted concept' (aka 'instrumental') version of 'Black Death' (good, but I personally prefer it with the vocals intact).

The rest of the album is somewhat bitty, with semi-decent excerpts (the cathedral-like 'Ceremony' and the bubbling textures of 'Lindbergh', for instance), interspersed with a number of overly-indulgent audio experiments, such as 11 minutes of 'Jesus Gone', thankfully consigned to the end of the album, plus a few beat-heavy tracks that don't quite come off – 'UK Decay', for instance, zooms past at such speed that it never has much chance to make a mark. 'The Mesner Tracks' are thus best treated for what they are – a diverse collection of early :Wumpscut: creations that don't necessarily cohere well on CD, but still a collection that die-hards will snap up once given a chance.

### **:Wumpscut: - Born Again (1997)**

This is in many respects a remix collection for 'Embryodead', collecting a number of alternate versions of the albums tracks from various sources, adding a couple of previously unreleased tracks and a few other oddities for good measure. It's worth noting that most of the mixes present are done in-house by Rudy, with usual suspects like B-Ton-K and Haujobb proving the rest. Despite the relatively strong source material, the results are somewhat disappointing – 'Embryodead' was a relatively cohesive album by :W: standards and it loses much of this power when shuffled around like this. The bulk of the remixes seem to sit in the 'OK but not as good as the original' camp, many of them sounding rather 'forced'.

Some mixes are interesting, such as the attempts to add dance beats to 'Womb' and 'Angel', although these songs lose some of their 'spirit' in the process, whilst some mixes (such as the 'Embryodead' reworks) seems intent on removing everything that was good about the original. The two new tracks are good enough, 'Wumpsex' a straightforward noisebeat romp, whilst 'Man's Complete Idiot' does the 'slow and ominous' thing Rudy's done umpteen times before. All considered, the album's only real selling point is the 'distant' vocals version of 'Thorns' (not an 'Embryodead' track, but never mind that now), Rudy's duet with Fabienne D. meshing perfectly with the original tune, a rare opportunity to hear the voice of :Wumpscut: undistorted. It's just a pity it couldn't be accompanied by some stronger tracks than what's on offer here.

### **:Wumpscut: - Dried Blood Of Gommorah (1997)**

This is a compilation of the EP's 'Dried Blood' and 'Gommorah'. Both are long since deleted, so if you hear any of these tracks these days, it's likely to be on here. The songs on this collection all date back to the mid-90s and for the most part showcase the hardest, harshest sides of the :Wumpscut: sound. The undoubted highlight is the 'French texture' version of 'Black Death', the definitive version of one of the great early Ratzinger creations, delicate spoken-word sections, each of them building slowly up to an almightly climax, with an hellish guitar sample and relentless drumming combining to form one of the most intense sections of any industrial track I have heard.

The albums continues to spit bile and hatred through the no-nonsense beat-blasts of 'In The Night' and an early version of 'Dying Culture'. The album does eventually ease off to provide at least a hint of Rudy's more 'subtle' side, such as the funereal 'Crucified Division' and the ever-so-slightly melodic 'Turns Off Pain'. There are still signs of songwriting immaturity, however – some the lyrics are often quite simplistic, especially 'Funeral Diner' and 'Body Parts, whilst some of the other tracks lack the dynamic mastery of 'Black Death', hammering away relentlessly without colour or variation. It's still an important :Wumpscut:, a collection of two rare Eps that cover what many long-time fans consider to be :Wumpscut:'s definitive era, even if it's patchier in terms of quality than his studio albums of the time.

## **:Wumpscut: - Blutkind (2000)**

Blutkind is a 2CD compilation of :Wumpscut: archive material, reviving tracks from the demo tapes 'Small Chambermusicians' and 'Defcon' along with previously unreleased material, as well as two new tracks to sweeten the package. It is one of these new tracks ('Hang Him Higher') that proves to be the collection's highlight, the delicate strings and synth chimes giving way to a robust industrial stomp, the resultant combination proving more successful than anything off his previous album 'Boeses Junges Fleisch'. As for the archive material, whilst there are a few early versions of well-known :Wumpscut: tracks (including a pointless instrumental of 'Soylent Green' but also an interesting take on 'Default'), the bulk of the collection is made up of tracks that never made it onto any of the actual albums.

There's a sizeable number of arp-heavy EBM tracks (some more melodic than others), some slower ambient/ethereal pieces ('Frozen Images', 'March of the Crying' and 'Lamandier' all working particularly well) plus a number of what could politely be described as 'sonic experiments', the best of these being the virtuoso guitar sample on 'The Hellion'. Whilst these recordings will be of interest to those devotees who lap up everything with the big :W: on it, the reality is that this collection still feels more like a filing cabinet of ideas and a tribute to Rudy's influences than a collection of fully developed songs – these demos seem to be showcasing musical concepts, not fully realised productions. The production quality is thin compared with the studio albums. That's excusable considering these are technically demos, but still obvious to the listener.

NOTE: This collection was later reissued as a single CD – this is the version you'll find for sale now. This version omits those songs that also appear on the 'Preferential Legacy', though this unfortunately includes some of the stronger tracks such as 'Pornography' and 'The Hellion'. Since both collections appeal to more or less the same type of fan, you'll probably end up buying both or neither, but if you're stuck, I'd go for the other one, myself.

## **:Wumpscut: - Liquid Soylent (2002)**

This is simply a compilation of the CD's 'Deliverance', 'Ich Will Dich', 'Totmacher' and 'The Remix Wars'. The first CD is the more interesting of the two, containing everything except the 'Totmacher' mixes. There's some reasonable versions of 'Deliverance' (including a slow, symphonic-style cut) and the 'Slut Remix' of 'Ich Will Dich', that cuts out many (but not all) of the porn-movie styles that many found off-putting, although the other remixes are noticeably weaker. The 'Remix Wars' features three :W: songs remixed by Haujobb and three Haujobb songs given the Rudy treatment, which will be of interest to those into both acts, as the remixes are reasonable enough, but as we all know, Haujobb remixes are ten-a-penny in this scene.

The second disc contains 10 mixes of 'Totmacher' from the now-deleted double EP (including contributions from Suicide Commando, VNV Nation and Covenant) plus the 'Grave Digger Party Mega Mix' from the 'Boeses Junges Fleisch' limited box. It's a pity they couldn't have picked a better song to remix. Some of the remixing artists have some interesting ideas on how to rework the guitar sample of the original, but few seem to have any desire to keep the original song intact, which is just as well. Perhaps the biggest surprise is a power-noise style remix from VNV Nation, which was probably assembled by Ronan to prove he has versatility, safe in the knowledge that he couldn't be accused of spoiling a great song.

## **:Wumpscut: - Preferential Legacy/Music For A German Tribe (2003)**

This release (typically referred to as 'Preferential Tribe') consists of the 'Preferential Legacy' and 'Music For A German Tribe' 12" (formerly part of limited box sets) plus a number of new and unreleased tracks. Or in simpler terms, it's another :Wumpscut: miscellany. The kind of compilation only devoted fans will buy. Just as well there's plenty of them. The 'Music For A German Tribe' tracks are essentially versions of well-known :Wumpscut: tracks with German vocals. Some of these work well (The teutonic tongue gives 'Soylent Grün' a little extra 'bite'), others less so (thanks to the slightly higher syllable count, 'Schwarzer Tod' is fractionally less powerful than its English equivalent 'Black Death').

The 'Preferential Tribe' section, meanwhile, features a number of early demo tracks from the project, many of which were issued on the original version of 'Blutkind' (subsequent version remove tracks that also appear here). The liner notes are at least honest in that these tracks are intended as a 'aural biography', symptoms of Rudy's early musical development. The relatively underdeveloped nature of these tracks mean this section is at most worthy of curiosity interest, although some of the slower tracks ('Batavion' and 'Lamandier') at least generate a suitably mournful atmosphere that would characterise the quieter moments on the early studio albums, whilst 'Total War' is the best of the 'hard EBM' tracks. Also worth a listen is 'The Hellion', possibly the only :Wumpscut: track to incorporate a guitar solo.

As for the unreleased material, there's the usual collection of eardrum-crushing drums machines and sonic experimentation that's really a polite way of referring to filler (instrumental of 'Hang Him Higher', anyone?). There are a few gems worth digging out – a decent remix of Das Ich's 'Aura' and a cover of Alison Moyet's 'All Cried Out' spring to mind. The latter is actually the first :Wumpscut: cover version to see the light of day and Rudy's interpretation is at least faithful even if its appeal relies partially on the novelty factor. I guess the disc just needed a selling point for those that already had the rare vinyl Cdified here, and a chmaltzy e 80s cover was the obvious answer.

## **:Wumpscut: - Bone Peeler (2004)**

The first 'proper' :Wumpscut: album in four years was eagerly awaited but in many respects is something of a disappointment. It's better than 'Boeses Junges Fleisch' in some respects, as it offers a more detailed production and less of a 'sprawling' feel. Unfortunately, it's also rather boring to listen to. Having overplayed his hand several times in the past, the balance has now been thrown too far the other way. The songs on this album simply don't have any impact. Take, for instance, the opening track 'Crown of Thorns' – the delicate synth chime giving way to the distorted beat and visceral vocals would traditionally make a fine :Wumpscut: track, but somehow it never really takes off.

And the album really just continues along those lines. Whilst Rudy steers clear of those pointless experimental indulgences of past, neither can he assemble a industrial-grade anthem along the lines of 'Soylent Green', 'Christfuck' or 'Black Death'. A couple of tracks offer vaguely memorable moments – 'Rise Again' and 'Our Fatal Longing' (with its German child's voice and counting motif) are personal favourites, but I could easily have picked any of the others. It's a pity, really – the sonic texture and morbid atmosphere are all here, something many preset-laden copists struggle with. But the end of the day, this album is gutless.

Note: The European first editions of this album are laden with a heavy form of copy protection – even if you only use CD players, you are advised to steer clear of these discs. The ‘Limited Second Edition’ is the one to go for if you can get hold of it – not only is it copy-protection free (a minor victory there!) but it’s also got a ‘Bonus Disciple’ remix disc. It’s no more exciting than the album, but you know you’ll want it regardless (I know what :Wumpscut: fans are like with limited editions). The mixes are good enough, but fail to bring any additional spark to the source material. The Suicide Commando version of ‘Crown of Thorns’ is OK, the Das Ich version of ‘Your Last Salute’ surprisingly restrained, but only a version of ‘Rise Again’ by Haus Arafna really takes any song into unknown and unexpected territory.

### **:Wumpscut: - Evoke (2005)**

‘Evoke’ sees :Wumpscut: move even further towards a softer, slower sound, something previously hinted at on ‘Bone Peeler’. This may disappoint those wishing a return to the hard industrial days of old, but luckily this is also an improvement on the previous album. This time, Rudy actually seems comfortable with the stripped-down, less confrontational style he has seemingly adopted (the clean artwork, featuring only a mysterious creature known as ‘Blondi’, reflects the musical differences as well as anything else). A number of the songs, including Maiden, Hold and Don’t Go, feature lead or joint-lead female vocals – sung rather than the more traditional spoken-word approach, which is heard once on the closing tracks ‘Obsessi?’. ‘Don’t Go’ also sees Rudy ease of the vocal distortion a bit – a welcome diversion from his usual electronically-hardened gravel.

There are a couple of relatively forceful dance tracks, with ‘Churist Churist’ the best, sung in a synthetic language bearing some resemblance to Hewbrew/Eastern European tongues, with a few ‘Protect and Survive Samples’ thrown in for good measure. As the other uptempo tracks are noticeable weaker (‘Rush’ is just OK, the instrumental ‘Breathe’ unnecessary), it’s left to the slower songs to truly define this album – the exquisite ‘Hold’ might well be the most un-Wumpscut thing on any album with the :W: to actually be worth a listen, whilst album opener ‘Maiden’ is one of the few tracks I’ve ever reviewed set in waltz time (it works, too – if you ignore the slightly naff lyrics).

NOTE:: The 2CD version of this album comes with an additional remix disc, which for once is well worth having. Most of the mixes are at least reasonable, with a female-vocal version of ‘Churist Churist’ by Recently Deceased (which is also included on the Metropolis Records version as a bonus track). Another mix to use an alternate vocal take is Kirlian Camera’s version of ‘Hold’, which feels more like a cover version than a remix – combining heartfelt vocals, pulsating electronics and orchestral bombast at the very close, it’s probably the best KC remix of anything I’ve heard to date.

### **:Wumpscut: - Cannibal Anthem (2006)**

Three studio albums in as many years seems to indicate a little desperation on Rudy’s part – he’s looking for a direction that suits him and doesn’t seem to be hitting the mark (I may have enjoyed ‘Evoke’, but many others did not). This disc sees a slight move back from the ‘clean’ textures of the last album, though neither is it really a return to the apocalyptic industrial behemoth of earlier works. One other thing worth noting is that the album’s vocals are predominantly in German – even more so than on ‘Boeses Junges Fleisch’ (the only other album to be based around Rudy’s native tongue). It simply isn’t clear whereabouts in the :Wumpscut: sonic spectrum this thing is intended to lie.

For example, ‘Wir Warten’ is reminiscent of the :Wumpscut: of days past, pummelling kick drums and scything electronic the most intense thing Rudy’s produced this side of the



chmaltzy , even if the actual song is not a great one. Lead single 'Jesus Antichristus' is a reasonable dark dance number, despite the horribly cliched title, whilst the title track (sung in another mysterious language) features primitive synth bleeps and some delicate guitar parts. The latter half of the album is slightly weaker, though the penultimate track 'Hunger' works well in a similar fashion to the female-vocal tracks from 'Evoke'. At the end of the day, 'Cannibal Anthem' is just another :W: album – not the best one by any stretch of the imagination, but certainly enough to keep the fans happy. It's just a pity that the 'Wow' factor is somewhat absent.

## **:Wumpscut: - Siamese (2010)**

A new Wumpscut album every year is no longer a surprise – indeed, it's something we've come to expect around March or April time. And it should also come as no surprise that Rudy has dreamt up another gruesome concept to hang the songs around – this time offering us two-headed skeletons. So yes, the title does refer to the antiquated term for conjoined twins. And as for the music – yep, you've guessed it, no surprises here.

This isn't necessarily a bad thing – after all, Rudy has dished out plenty of influential electronic-industrial recording during his 1990s heyday – is it too much to ask that he carries on pushing the boundaries as yet another decade dawns? Seemingly so. Those of you who lap up everything Rudy dishes out will be satisfied enough with what on offer here. We open with the crushing rhythm and horror-movie melodics of 'Falling From Lucifer's Grace', and for :W:-aficionado's, nothing seems amiss.

The scathing synth lead and repetitive phraseology of 'Boneshaker Baybee' instantly marks it out as the album's token club track (you can already see the Kombichrist Kiddies bouncing around to this one), whilst 'Zirbit' does the shuffle rhythm thing heard once on all such albums, weaving a hefty chunk of bass staff piano into the mix. Most of the rest of the album is fairly standard Wumpscut fodder, with only the pretty synth chimes of 'Loyal To My Hate' really sticking out as the album heaves through to its conclusion.

It's still a relief that Rudy has not resorted to producing entire albums of pounding distortobeats laden with 'instant-hit' earworming samples. But at the same time he's stuck in a creative rut. With the possible exception of 'Evoke', I can't think of single :Wumpscut: 'annual' that stands out from the rest since he started his yearly pattern back in 2004. Buy if you've got all the others, but if you're new to this project, start with one of his 1990s recordings, and listen to :Wumpscut: from an era when it really bore some relevance.

VERSION NOTE: As ever, There is a box set available with plenty of :W:-oriented goodies, including a remix CD. I haven't heard it, and I don't intend to.

## **X Marks The Pedwalk – Inner Zone Journey (2010)**

I've spent a substantial amount of time the last decade listening to various 'reformed' projects from industrial music's golden age, having got into the style around the time most of the key bands either split or went on long hiatus. XMTP (as they'll be called from now on) was no exception, splitting in 1998 and apparently selling off all their kit in the process. And guess what? They've carried on almost exactly where they left off.

Most of you reading this, of course, won't know where they left off. If you've heard any XMTP at all, it'd probably be something like 'Abattoir' or 'Paranoid Illusions', largely typical of early 90s electro-industrial, all jackhammering kick drums, hard emotionless synth throbs and Ogre-esque vocal snarl. They were fractionally more melodic than a number of their contemporaries, though, which led to the cleaner, techno-styled output of their later days.

This isn't exactly what they became best known for, but it's the style they've continued here, so we had better get to like it!

Of course, during the hiatus, the likes of Rotersand and Mind.in.a.box have built careers out of post-industrial, post-futurepop electronic dance music. It was these two bands that I first thought of when I first played this album, and several listens later, I still feel exactly the same. But then again, XMTP were playing this kind of thing back in the mid-90s, before either of the aforementioned bands even existed. I haven't time for 'chicken vs egg' arguments about who got there first, so let's get on and listen to the music.

The lead single, 'Seventeen' is a good a place as any to start. It's done in the style scene newbies now call EBM, which isn't really EBM, but rather some techno/trance/synthpop hybrid with some vague industrial influence somewhere. And oddly enough, despite the lengthy lay off, this is a good an example of the style as any. The repeated phraseology in the half-sung, half-spoken lyrics, the driving rhythm, the abundance of synth washes and ear candy, the pixel-perfect production. It's a bleep master-class.

But it's an album of 11 songs, not just one. The closest they get to 'Seventeen' in terms of being an out-and-out anthem is 'Runaway', which uses all the same techniques to pretty much the same ends. Also of interest are 'Obscure Reason', a slower track who's key point of interest is a duet between Sevren Ni-Arb and Estefania, whose styles mesh nicely without any need to resort to the ultra-cliched 'beauty and the beast' alternation.

The album does seem to lose some momentum in the second half – 'Winter Comes Tomorrow' is a reasonable attempt at the 'schaffel' school of modern-day bleep, but the duets of 'Clean Hearts' and 'Stripped By Tears' fail to reach the levels of 'Obscure Reason'. It's hard to define exactly WHY they don't work, there's nothing strictly wrong with either song, it's just that having got this far into the album, they both come across as nicely textured but ultimately rather ordinary songs that won't get remembered once this review goes live.

By the time we get to 'Shapshots In A Dark Room', it's clear that the album has jumped the shark. Some delicate piano melodies might hark back to Robert Miles style dream-trance, whilst the use of swirling, Jarre-esque synths harks in this context brings up memories of Angels & Agony, but the song as a whole lacks any real apparent direction. Someone's going to tell me that there's some really elaborate structural concept at play here that I totally failed to get. Well, all I can say to that is 'I don't get it!'

It's thus very hard to rate this album because it's practically impossible to know what yardstick to compare it against. I mentioned Rotersand earlier on, but this is a band who, at their best, can produce entire albums packed to the gills with 'anthems', and that isn't what XMTP is about. Comparing it with their mid-90s work isn't much easier – except to say that 'Seventeen' is definitely the most memorable track they've devised since they dropped the angry vocal stance. And yet having heard 'Seventeen', I wanted all the other songs to be that good, and was disappointed to find that a fair number fell quite a way short.

## **XPQ-21 – Alive (2006)**

XPQ-21 return after a lengthy break with a revised line-up and new label. The success of 'White and Alive' and 'Beautiful' in club earned the band a following amongst the 'future pop' contingent, a genre definition which cannot in any way contain the scope of Jeyênne's creativity. Interestingly, the two aforementioned hits actually feature on this album in only very slightly reworked form, which presumably is more down to a desire to save them from the black hole of deletion than as an attempt to cling onto past works. The increased use

of guitars and live drums (without, I might add, becoming a full blown rock band) sees a new lease of life for the XPQ-21 project.

The real standout tracks are those like 'Rockin' Silver Knight' and 'Jesus Was Gay', breakbeat-driven tracks fleshed out with thick, squealing synthesisers and a heavily processed guitar sound, which, whilst not dominant in the mix, adds a layer of discordance to the whole mix. 'Dead Body', meanwhile, is an electro-fuelled punk rocker with a Nitzer Ebb style vocal, a bizarre combination that I'm otherwise at a loss to truly describe. There are a few EBM-style tracks, like 'Everything' and the Spanish-language 'Barcelona', though on this occasion they don't stand out as the album's best offering. The best 'pure electronic' tracks are the psy-trancey 'Sonne' and the album's outro 'Changes', one of this project's better 'ambient' tracks.

NOTE: The limited edition 2CD version of this album comes in a sizable A5 digipak. The second CD is the obligatory remix collection, though the conceptually diverse source material at least makes this collection more interesting than your average bonus remix CD. For instance, 'Dead Body' is taken in radically different directions by Dope Stars Inc. and Alice In Videoland, highlighting the songs' punk rock and old-school EBM credentials respectively. Skinjob's take on 'Rockin' Silver Knight' might take the song back in an electronic direction, but it'll fill floors in clubs that just can't hack the original, so it's still a worthwhile take. Obviously there's the usual 'forced insertion of elitist form of obscure electronica' style of mix to contend with, but on this occasion, it's thankfully not the dominant style.

## **Yanni – Live! The Concert Event (2006)**

This is Yanni's third live album, featuring a concert recorded in Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas in 2003. The man who effectively started out as a solo keyboardist plays live with a sizable entourage, a multi-cultural band and orchestral section accompanying the man and his keyboard rack. Recording such a massive show is no easy task, but with the aid of digital technology, the resulting album ranks as one of the most polished, professional sounding live albums I've ever heard. The individual character of each instrument is captured, which in a mix this complex is some achievement.

Whilst the show was intended as a promotion for the 'Ethnicity' album, the setlist offers a sample from right across Yanni's career, with early material such as 'Keys To Imagination' reworked to best utilise the many and varied musicians on stages. A decent variety of styles are present within the set – everything from the orchestrally-enhanced arpeggio of 'Standing In Motion', through romantic piano on 'Enchantment' and 'Until The Last Moment', right up to cultural crossover extravaganzas like 'Rainmaker' and showy virtuosity on 'Playtime'. Particularly impressive is 'The Storm', a conversion of 'Summer' from Vivaldi's Four Seasons, the 18<sup>th</sup> Century standard made fit for the 'contemporary instrumental' genre which, when all is said and done, best describes the genre to which Yanni's music belongs (the term 'new age' is indicative of something he left behind years ago). The quality of the recording and the range of styles on offer would certainly make this a fine introduction to his work, though as a document of the tour, doubtlessly his existing fanbase will snap it up too.

## **Zeromancer – ZZYZX (2003)**

This is the third Zeromancer album, following on from 'Clone Your Lover' and 'Eurotrash', the quintet have gained themselves a fair bit of recognition for their line in electro-industrial rock. Certainly few could ignore the observational cynicism of 'Doctor Online' or the

bouncy don't-care-what-their-singing-about dynamics of 'Clone Your Lover'. So more of the same this time then?

Not quite. Let's start with the inlay. The white cyberish look of the previous album has gone, replaced with a series of photos that make Zeromancer look more like an American indie band than something from the industrial cutting edge. It's a look that carries through to the music, too – whilst not that radical an overhaul of the band's sound, the Zeromancer boys have tweaked various aspects of their musical palette to achieve, well, that's open to debate. Maturity of sound or just commercial exploitation?

First let me say that anyone expecting full-throttle floorkillers like 'Doctor Online' are going to be sorely disappointed. There are SOME songs in a similar vein, but they aren't really the focus of the disc. The metal guitar stabs have been replaced by a more textured power chord style, whilst the bawled vocals have developed into something altogether more melodic. They HAVE written songs like this before, it's just now they seem to take centre stage instead of hiding away on the bits of albums that some CD players never seem to find. If anything, it's a throwback to their days as Seigmen, a arty, atmospheric rock act that was big in their native Norway if nowhere else.

The most extreme example of the bands new sound would have to be lead single 'Famous Last Words', which sounds like it was tailor-made for the radio, full of string flourishes and achy-angsty vocals. It's doubtless going to have appeal to the right audience, as the musical integrity here is not in doubt, but that audience might well not be the same one that Zeromancer has had to date. Maybe they'll go for it, maybe they won't. We'll see.

The track 'Erotic Saints' is even more low-key, a moody, Placebo-like number that might just make a second single, if the band really are set on pressing this musical direction. Truth be said, there might well be some merit this direction – album opener 'Teenage Recoil' makes a good fist of driving guitar rock with an angsty, girl-oriented subject matter and some surprisingly effective C-64 style electronics. Of all the tracks on the album, this one is the best at 'mixing' all of Zeromancer styles into one.

Of the other 'compromise' tracks, we have 'Hollywood', which is a touch on the sentimental side, but is redeemed by a big, soaring chorus, the line 'When All This is Over, Heaven Knows I'm Going Nowhere' sticking in the mind. Meanwhile, the crackly electronics and processed guitar of 'Feed You With A Kiss' gives one a brief reminder of Adore-era Smashing Pumpkins, though the song itself feels a little flat, the chorus sounding a bit repetitive and the whole song never really gelling.

The same comment might also apply, with some variation, to much of the second half of the album. 'Lamp Halo' is good enough, ranking about middle in the album's pecking order, whilst 'Mosquito Coil' tries to stand out with some scratchy synthetic miscellany, but suffers from similar structural flaws to 'Feed You With A Kiss', in that the song never really takes off. The album closer 'Blood Music' is more accessible, one of the albums angrier songs, even if the line 'Do you feel Love?' is just SO Depeche Mode. (Bonus track 'Fractured' might be found after this – not bad by 'bonus track' standards.)

This just leaves the two songs that form the middle part of the album – 'Idiot Music' and 'Stop The Noise!'. Anyone looking for the 'loud' version of Zeromancer should skip through to this bit. 'Idiot Music' is a in-your-face assault of fierce guitars and vitriolic voices, with some nice fluid bass work that sticks out particularly well during the middle eight. 'Stop The Noise!', meanwhile, is the jagged guitar-stab laden fest that we all knew would crop up eventually.

It's a tricky album to review this, mainly because your viewpoint will depend on your expectations. As stated previously, it's not THAT far removed from the first two albums, but with a great proportion of radio-friendly guitar-rocker, and less of the electro-metal fury. It makes an interesting comparison with the recent album by The Galan Pixs, as both seem to be generating (on purpose or by accident), increasingly alt-radio anthems with an industrial influence. It's my opinion, however, that the Pixs' made a better job of this, making this album something of a disappointment in comparison.

## **Zeromancer – The Death Of Romance (2010)**

Indeed. It is possible to have a love affair with Norwegian industrial rock bands, and if it hasn't died here, it's certainly gone into that phase that Facebook calls a 'complicated relationship'. I was willing to forgive them for 'ZZYZX' in 2003 as the band was clearly undergoing some kind of crisis at the time and duly went on hiatus to let time do its usual healing job. And sure enough, when 'Sinners International' made its appearance last year, the old magic had, at least in places, returned. And now, with renewed enthusiasm, they've followed it up with another album only a year later, and KER-PLUNK! Just when it looked like they'd found their touch again, they've only gone and forgotten how to write the bloody songs!

The essence of a Zeromancer hit is to build up to a big, sing-along chorus – who can forget the cries of 'K-LONE, K-LONE, K-LONE YOUR LOVER!' or '1-800 SUICIDE!'? Even 'DOPPELGANGER I LOVE YOU!' worked at the time. But despite listening to this album several times over, all I'm thing is 'Hello? Anthems? Where Are You?'. The closest they've got is 'The Hate Alphabet', but even here use far too many tried-and-test techniques – the shuffle rhythm, the cheerleader-style spelling bee, the close company of the words 'love' and 'hate' in the lyrics. It's not a bad song, but when this is the best they can manage, you start to doubt whether it's worth continuing.

It's not like Zeromancer has betrayed their own sound – the essential elements (throbbing synths, scything guitar riffs, snarly, antagonised vocals) are all still present. It just sounds so workmanlike, so much like they're going through the motions. 'Murder Sound' would have worked had they come up with a decent chorus, whilst 'Revengefuck' is a song that really seems to have all the right elements but lacks that killer edge. As for the album's title track, it's little more than a plaintive attempt at sounding deep and meaningful – effected guitars and lyrical heartbreak might, in the right circumstances form part of a tragic love ballad, but not when the song is as weak as this. I know 'repeating the title a lot' has worked as a Zeromancer chorus in the past, but only when they've yelled it straight on your face. The pathetic whine we've got here is FAR too emo.

The other point of interest is 'The Pygmalion Effect' – as a song, it's lacking in direction and lacking in any real hook, but the elaborately crafted guitar line and offbeat bass/drum interplay is reminiscent of Seigmen – the band three of Zeromancer five members had been members of back in the 1990s, and who had reunited on stage during this band's mid-00s lay-off. Now, if they can get the musicianship of Seigmen to work with the catchy hooks of Zeromancer, they might actually have a way out of this mess. But first things first, boys – let's try and remember how to write a half-decent choon!

## **Rob Zombie – Educated Horses (2006)**

Rob took a few years out after 'The Sinister Urge' to work on horror movies, but the arrival of 'Educated Horses' marks his return, and with it comes a significant switch in style. The industrial groove metal of recent years has been stripped down – for the first time in over a decade, Rob Zombie fronts an album that actually sounds like a band playing rather than

an extravagantly-dressed studio production. I'm not saying one approach is better than the other, but it is something the more recent converts to Rob Zombie's wicked world need should be aware of. The trashy horror aesthetic is still there, of course, providing enough continuity between albums to leave the music recognisable for what it is.

There are a couple of riff-heavy songs that echo of the more recent Zombie sound, such as 'American Witch' and 'Let It All Bleed Out', almost, but not quite as good as the Dragula's of the world. Elsewhere we get tracks like 'Foxy Foxy', a slightly silly but vaguely catchy attempt at producing a Zombie-style pop single. There's also slower, more vehement rock with '17 Year Locust' (which incorporates a sitar solo, of all things) and 'The Lords of Salem', a more acoustic moment in 'Death As It All' and a rather confused song called 'Ride'. As the whole, the album is an enjoyable enough romp, nothing really deep or meaningful going on and quite short with only nine full songs, but best enjoyed in it's own rights, a B-movie rock album, scarcely likely to attract a headline billing but nonetheless with it's own charms.

## Various – DISCover (2012)

The title of this compilation indicates that this is a label sampler, and the label in question is Conzoom Records, a German electropop label. In assembling the tracklist, the label has taken a risk in including a number of rare and remixed tracks, rather than taking the more obvious 'biggest hit by each band' route. Whilst this does mean the album is not fully effective at providing a truly accurate overview of the definitive sound of the label's roster, it does at least mean there's plenty here for those devoted fans who already have the essential tracks by the bands on offer here.

But enough debate about the target audience – how are the songs? The good news is, remix, rarity or otherwise, there's plenty of quality music on offer here. Carved Souls offer a pair of contrasting tracks – 'Box' is an uptempo floorfiller, combining morose vocals with a hint of dream-trance inspired piano in a manner that'll give the futurepop establishment (what little is left of it?) a run for their money, whilst 'It's Not The End' showcases the slower, more menacing side of their sound.

Those of you looking for something closer to the original spirit of synthpop need look no further than the two Vision Talk tracks, each capturing the bright, joyous and melodic spirit of whichever Vince Clarke band you happened to like the most. Sitting somewhere between these two extremes are Neuropa's two offerings. 'Fashion War' fires huge quantities of synthetic ear-candy over six minutes of one-fingered basslines. 'Das Beat Industrielle' bears a title that suggests it might be the token 'loud and nasty' track that crops up once on most modern albums in this genre, but it's actually as catchy and innocent as anything else here.

The nearest thing Conzoom have to a 'star act' are the Australian duo Parralox, with a version of 'Ancient Times' remixed by Iris (who aren't signed to Conzoom but would fit right in if they were). As it stands, it's a pixel-perfect combination of the two project's signature styles, the only downside being the lack of a second Parralox track, one in it's original form, just to highlight how good this project sounds without any outside assistance.

I do have to knock a few points off for the occasional slip-up. There's some rather trite lyrics in the two 'Ostrich' tracks, which is pity as they otherwise deliver a nice line in minimal electronic pop. That and the overly-drawn out, unsubtle 'Wildlife' by 'The Sound Of The Crowd' mark the compilations low points. But label compilations are not about wall-to-wall brilliance. They're about discovering something new to listen to. And with three new discoveries in Carved Souls, Neuropa and Vision Talk, I certainly feel better for having listened to this.

## Various – Swedish EBM The Collection

They love their EBM in Sweden. My sole visit to the country took in a Front 242/Nitzer Ebb double-billing as the supposed highlight, only to completely underestimate the scale of the mosh-pit that I would need to survive to have any hope of getting close enough to the band to get a decent camera shot or two. There's plenty of Swedish bands willing to have a crack at the style themselves, and hence the country has proved to be something of a leading light in the current revival of classic body beats, alongside the state of Saxony-Anhalt in Germany, but has always been referred to by me as "new-school old-school EBM". Because I seem to be incapable of using one word when four will do.

A quick look at the track listing yields no surprises. Plenty of personal favourites and a promising spread of new, sufficiently industrial-sounding band names to indulge. And it's Spetsnaz up first! This band sound so much like early Nitzer Ebb that they're practically a tribute band. Yet the offering here, "Satiric Strokes", is a disappointing, ponderous affair, sounding like a rejected B-side from one of the 'Belief' singles. Autodafeh, students of the 242-school of body music throw in "Camp Intel", but this too is a fairly average effort by their standards, notwithstanding the Speak & Spell samples and the And One style detuned synth melody. If this truly was to be a national showcase, they could have least have wheeled out their 10-star mega-anthem "Divided We Fall" (if you haven't heard this track yet, you need to!).

Two major players, two let-downs. The way is free for the smaller bands to make a mark. Sure enough, both Kropp and Turnbull A.C.s deliver raw, no-nonsense, lo-fi, 3-minute body beat floor-fillers, true to the original spirit of 'That Total Age', which was essentially punk rock that replaced traditional rock instruments with a few synths and some metal bashing noises. No Sleep By The Machine veer away from the purist attitude heard so far, "Yellow Mica" featuring a shuffle rhythm and lush melodics, but I'm not complaining. We needed some variety and a hint of poppy accessibility does the trick. Spark! Also try to follow the tuneful path but "Singelolycka" ends up sounding like a confused mish-mash of ideas. This style isn't exactly the most advanced in terms of musicology. How hard can it be to get it right?

Stockholm Wrecking Crew take us to the halfway mark, and the band name is spot on, as the tracks percussive, punky nature genuinely does sound like a bunch of muscular Scandinavians performing a jam session in a scrapyard somewhere around the outskirts of Sweden's capital. Don't think I'll be buying their album (if they have one), but would definitely be up for watching this particular crew live one day (let's face it, WGT loves this kind of thing). Next up is Dupont with "Behave" from their 'Entering The Ice Age' album. I know why they picked this track, it being the most authentic EBM track in a back catalogue rich in synthpop and minimal synth influences, but neither does it showcase the best aspects of their talents.

T.W.A.T. go back even further in their time in search of influences, "The Barricades" sounding like a version of DAF with a second synth and backing vocalists. But when you get a bunch of Swedes developing a German sound whilst singing in the English language, the best you're going to get lyrically is 'We Are The Rude Boys. They Are The IKEA People'. Sorry, but I preferred listening to D.A.F. singing in German and not actually knowing what the bloody words meant. And then as if to prove all was not lost, we get a pair of tracks (one by Batch ID, the other from Sturm Café) that not only tread the line between EBM proper and analogue synthpop, but do it very well. Proper, catchy tunes with a solid rhythmic backbone. I needed that.

That, unfortunately, is as good as this compilation gets. “Not The King Of Body” by Projekt Tanz is all reverb and no substance – a few Monty Python samples isn’t nearly enough to save it from skip-over status. Penultimate track is “The Directors Cut” by Astma works hard but comes across as a nothing more than that an workmanlike EBM cut, lacking any kind of hook to make it memorable. Container 90 take us to the end with the incredibly short “Copycat” (is that title ironic or what?). Again, there’s lots of energy, but the song ends in such an abrupt manner that all that effort just seems like a waste of time.

The thing I object to most about this album is the use of the definite article ‘The’ in it’s title. This IS a collection of EBM, and it IS Swedish. But it isn’t definitive by any means. There are too many bands featured here that are poorly represented by the songs contributed. Maybe the label couldn’t license their better songs? The compilation does have a saving grace in the way some of the less well-known EBM projects manage to steal the show. I had never heard of No Sleep By The Machine, Batch ID or Kropp before listening to this, but I’ll certainly give their recordings a go if I could lay my hands on them.

## **Various – Swedish Old School EBM 2013 (2013)**

This isn’t the first compilation I’ve reviewed for Brutal Resonance with Swedish and EBM in the title (that honour goes to Swedish EBM: The Collection), but as one seeking out the hotspots still practising the ‘true’ form of electronic body music (as London ain’t the place to be for it right now), I’m always willing to give such things a go. It’s a “chmalt edition 7”, but I’ll confess I reviewed the thing in digital form.

As compilations go, this isn’t fully representative of the country’s scene with a mere four bands (about as many as you can fit on a 7”), but they did at least pick a quartet of relatively big names. The Pain Machinery kick off with a “chmaltzy” “e y static “Surface”, a dull bassline and generic vocal snarl proving to be a poor showing from a band who I know can do better. Turnbull AC’s put in a typically unsubtle showings with the thunderous drumming and Doug McCarthy-esque vocalisation on “Boys”, shamelessly playing to their strengths and better for it as a result.

Sturm Café get into the spirit of the compilation, putting in a blunt, bludgeoning EBM mix of “Koka Kola Freiheit”, which was a rather tuneful synthpop tune on the original album, but now resembles the one synth-one drum track-one vocal proto-EBM sound of Virgin-era D.A.F.. The curveball of the album is Container 90s “De-Evolution”, due to a tendency to switch between four-beat and shuffle rhythms, a device best not used unless you have a full command of the music theory required to nail such transitions. Unfortunately, these guys seem not to, and it sounds quite sloppy as a result.

I do admire the ‘exactly what is says on the tin’ spirit of the Eps title. It’s Swedish old-school EBM, pressed onto an old-school format, though Sham Recordings have once again provided a stream for us digital-by-default types. It’s just with huge compilations now being released for free download all over the place, a four-track EP on vinyl still comes across as being as something of a niche product. Indeed, it’s limited to 160 copies, which sounds about right.



## Live Reviews

### Front 242 – London Show 2000 – 5 Nov 2000

This may have been a date tagged onto the end of their American tour, but that didn't bother me. I'd been waiting to see Front 242, and finally my chance had come. My tickets were ordered well in advance, and given the appalling weather, I had even come into town by a more reliable train line. Nothing was going to ruin tonight for me. I'd been let down too many times recently. A last minute change in the support line up meant Zombie Nation had disappeared, but as they'd since become a silly Top 40 techno band, no-one really cared too much. **Void Construct** thus got an unexpected chance to open proceedings. Their show went as well as any band who runs Cubase from a tower PC could hope for, but their FLA-type sounds need more stage presence to work effectively.

Industrial metal newcomers **Sulpher** were much more my kind of thing, with ex-members of the Curve and Creatures amongst their number. The result was one step short of astounding – a British version of Ministry would be one way of describing it, though comparisons with NIN were also pretty close to the mark, with Reznor-esque cries of 'DIS-INT-ER-GRATE', filling the far corners of the London Astoria. Certainly an act I'll be keeping a careful eye on.

**Greenhaus** catered for the more techno-dancey oriented people in the room, and they had some interesting computer graphics on display to make up for their lack of stage presence. They still struck me as a slightly obscure band to be worthy of a Front 242 support slot, but when you realise that the bloke who organised this gig is in their line-up, I don't think I ought to complain, even if they don't strike me as anything particularly awe-inspiring.

There was quite a delay before **Front 242** took to the stage, and I was kinda worried that we'd be getting a heavily curtailed set, looking at the time. But I needn't have worried. They eventually found their way onto the stage and into the hearts of the Astoria's crowd. Richard and Jean-Luc have lost none of their energy in their 20-year lifespan, and they've reworked a number of their songs to prevent any accusations of sounding 'dated' (the Re:Boot album will give you some idea, even if it doesn't always carry through too well off-stage). True, they haven't produced any new material in 7 years, but at least this proves they haven't been totally idle.

Unsurprisingly, 'Headhunter' got the best response of the night. I can't be the only person who believes that in amongst all the versions and remixes of this track, the live version remains the best one available. I'm sure I heard a couple of new tracks in their somewhere, though they might just have been extreme remixes of something else. There was no 'Tragedy For You', but everything I wanted to here was in there. Front 242 might have some severe opposition these days, but even if there's no new material forthcoming from Brussels, they'll still always have their live show to fall back on.

### Suicide Commando at Slimelight – 10 Feb 2001

When I look back upon February 2001, I will always see it as a disturbing, depressing month, where I was both unwilling and unable to do anything of purpose. There was one bright light amongst the gloom, and the **Suicide Commando** show at Slimelight was it. I had no idea what their music sounded like, I'd only seen the name written down, but somehow I felt something special was going to happen. Andy Goodwin's hard EBM warm-up set set the adrenaline pumping round the room, but tonight he was mere side salad to the raw meat offerings of Mssr Johan Van De Roy.

From the first song through to the end of the set, Suicide Commando showed us how industrial dance SHOULD be done. Every time a song's beats kicked in, the massed crowd responded in perfect time, and didn't stop until the music did. 'Hellraiser' was the strongest song on offer, whilst no song was exactly weak. The solid beats, distorted vocals and harsh electronics pleased fans of all schools of Slimelight-friendly industrial at once, and the encore was inevitable, whilst VNV Nation took the opportunity to come onto stage and give away lots of goodies (thanks for the 'Standing' CDS, Ronan!). But that was mere garnish. In one night, Suicide Commando had not only broken into the UK industrial circle, but established themselves as one of the leading acts in the scene.

## **Project Pitchfork – Daimonion Tour 2001 – 8 Apr 2001**

Due to the months of unemployment, I'd only bought two of Pitchfork's eight albums by tonight, and the new one wasn't one of them. Anyway, what I'd heard was already more than enough to entice me out on a Sunday night after Slimelight. With work the next day, I was hardly in the frame of mind for such a gig, but I was working on the principle that if the show was good enough, I'd get drawn in and forget about tomorrow.

The support line-up witnessed a few last minute changes, St.Eve and Zeromancer appearing on the billing but not the stage. **MaxDmyz** thus opened the show, which suited me fine as I'd seen 'em live last year at the Electric Ballroom as the three songs they did there were enough to catch my attention, even before the performance-art aspect of their show is taken into account. What a pity it is, then, that the audience was almost totally unappreciative of their effort. MaxDmyz actually bother to put on a show rather than run through a set of songs, and their industrial-death-metal sound is a good base for their on-stage antics. Lead man Twister may have had a harsh, metallic bark of a vocal style that failed to endear him to the bulk of the crowd (those that made it in on time, of course), but he and the rest of them gave 110% in a vain attempt to get the audience worked up. Sticking an axe into some old monitors probably summed up their feelings at the time.

**Temple-X** also made a last minute appearance, doing a mini-tour of their own before taking to stage as Fad Gadget's backing group the next weekend. That probably explained their belated appearance on the bill, which was possibly understandable as nothing else in their sound suggests them as a good support for one of the leading industrial/darkwave bands of the moment. Good Placebo impression, but why here? **The Chaos Engine** were the main support act of the night, and this time they got some decent crowd response. The intricacies of the music (if there were any) often got a little bit lost in the vast wave of guitar noise, but at least they seemed at home at an event such as this. 'Employee of the Year' was a stark reminder that a Sunday concert means work the next day, but the rest was sheer unadulterated industrial fun.

So to **Project Pitchfork**. Debuting a new album that I hadn't yet heard wasn't the best setting I could have hoped for, but in the end it wasn't a problem, as I kinda sussed out early on that the new songs were exactly like the old ones. Ironically, the only band on the bill not to use a live guitarist was also the only one to get a mosh pit. The push-n-shove started for 'Carnival' and reached a climax during the lesser-known '2069AD'. Between this, the quartet knocked out a mix of old favourites and new tracks. Not too familiar with the Pitchfork backcatalogue at the time, I decided that memorising the setlist was out, so I just stuck around near the front and tried to have as much fun as a man who had to get up at 7am for work the next day could.

Whilst I was slightly disappointed not to hear 'Human Crossing', its absence was understandable given that it was never released as a single from an album that isn't

always regarded as being PP in their purest form. More surprising was that I never heard 'Souls'. I did have to leave before their set ended to catch the last tube, so maybe it snuck in towards the end, but I wasn't too worried as I've heard it enough times in Slimelight, thank you. Still, it was a great way to start my 2001 gigging schedule proper, having not been to a ticketed gig since Front 242 last November.

## **Fear Factory – Digimortal Pre-Release Tour 2001 – 14 Apr 2001**

The start of a long Easter weekend of live music. Plus point were that both support acts had numbers in their names (always a good sign). The downside was that Kill II This weren't playing despite initial rumours that they were. They may commit the sin of replacing a word with a number, but I feel they would have been a perfect foil for Fear Factory's industrial-death-cyber-metal excesses. Still, I was in nice and early, so might as well see what the supports had to offer.

**Apartment 26** was the better of the two. Hardcore isn't usually my kind of thing, but this band at least made it sound sort of industrial (which suits me), in a Pitchshifter-sorta way. They often fell into the trap of overplaying their music, but frontman Biff Butler (yes, son of the Black Sabbath man) knew how to work up an audience, so I wasn't totally displeased. **Earthtone 9** were a disappointment, however. They made a lot of noise, and sounded like they wanted to act clever, but the whole thing didn't appeal to my (admittedly picky) tastes, so I went upstairs looking for some friends instead.

I found some, and then it was time for **Fear Factory** to take to the stage. Debuting songs from a yet-to-be-released album isn't always the best way of working a crowd up, but as the new tracks sounded a lot like the old ones, at least when played live, the audience weren't too perturbed. And since all the old favourites cropped up anyway, it didn't take much for a seething mosh pit to break out, and I finally got a chance to work up a sweat.

Interestingly, there was no encore tonight, the band playing their entire set in one fell swoop before packing up at the unusually early time of 10pm. I took this as a cue to hop on a bus to Slimelight and catch gloomy hour. One question remains – were all those red balloons dumped on us in the later part of the set meant for us or an up n'coming Westlife show at G.A.Y.? Something tells me they don't fit into Fear Factory's 'Digimortal' manifesto anywhere.

## **Slimelight Easter Weekend 2001 – 14 Apr 2001**

Slimelight's Easter special gave us no less than three internationally recognised industrial acts for the price of entry tonight (which was nothing, thanx to free fliers given out at last weeks Pitchfork gig), though events would transpire to mean I only saw the first two. Techno-industrial-EBM specialists **Inertia** came on first – have seen them twice before, nothing in their set particularly surprised me, though Reza and Alexys threw themselves into their live show as ever, so I felt obliged to dance away enthusiastically for the duration of their performance.

I was more excited at the concept of seeing **Project-X** again, though tonight's performance was somewhat low-key, lacking one keyboard player, and Torny not indulging in the crowd interaction that made last October's show all the more memorable. He reeled off all the favourites such as 'The System Is Dead' and their version of 'Push', and I danced down the front for almost the whole duration, though for various reasons, it just wasn't as much

fun as last time. **Icon of Coil** came on last, but by now my ears were bursting and I still had Elektrofest ahead of me. Since loC were playing there too, I retreated to the bar and decided to wait until tomorrow.

## Elektrofest 2001 – Apr 15 2001

Having caught a little sleep after last night's excesses, I arrived at the LA2 a little worse for wear (both mentally and physically), but nothing was going to stop my enjoyment of Flag Promotion's latest all-dayer. Being one of the first through the door meant I was able to get a decent vantage for opening act **Adfinem**. A synth-pop trio from the far northern reaches of England, their short pleasant, pop-oriented set was a nice way to open the afternoon, though it wasn't sufficient to tempt me down from the balcony. I did pop down to watch **Void Construct**, now minus the dreaded Tower-PC case but otherwise much the same as last time. Not a bad take on the post-industrial/EBM sound of the day, but not distinctive enough to make me want to buy their album.

I did want to buy **Mechanical Cabaret**'s album, but it proved impossible as they haven't recorded it yet. Instead I hit the main floor for first time this afternoon to work-up a sweat to Roi's bizarre twisted electro-pop. Gory projection, retro-synth sounds and camp, punky vocals. The closest thing on the menu to headliners Fad Gadget, and the first really distinctive act of the afternoon. Then it was time for **Greenhaus**. They'd reworked their set since last November, adding a live guitarist for the second half of their non-stop set and working in a cover of Joy Division's 'Transmission'. There were no live projections due to a technical problem, but the music was good enough, the ever-growing crowd really getting into it on this occasion.

Having missed most of **Icon of Coil**'s set last night, I was going to make damned sure that I wasn't going to make the same mistake twice. Thirty seconds into the first song, however, and I was already thinking 'oh, no – not ANOTHER EBM band'. One minute and I was onto 'Christ – they sound just like Apoptygma Berzerk'. Then I realised that I really, really LIKE Apoptygma Berzerk, and most other modern bands in this style for that matter, and these guys were no exception, so I found my footing and danced away wildly for the rest of their show, amazed at the number of songs of their I actually knew already (probably heard 'em in Slimelight). A small technical hitch toward the end of their set didn't dampen things too much, and the hyped-up 'Headhunter' cover that ended their set made me a happy man.

The main support slot of the day belonged to **In Strict Confidence**. Not well known to me, but I know a number of people who had come especially to see them, so they had to be worth a try. Musically, they combined hard electro-industrial with some more gothic/darkwave textures,, but the vocals were particularly harsh (bordering on Ministry in places). I quite enjoyed their set, even though none of their song left any real marks on me. The first band to get an encore, In Strict Confidence clearly had a small but devoted following in presence, and hopefully next time I'll be one of them, just as soon as I've had a chance to sample their music in the comfort of my own bedroom.

With 11 live bands and several hours dancing behind me with only a modicum of sleep, I was almost ready to call it a night before **Fad Gadget** came on, but a group of older fans who remembered the original Fad convinced me to stay. I'm glad I did – sleazy synth-pop in a fusion of Soft Cell and early NIN was what I was led to expect, and that's what I got. Temple-X, somewhat transparent as a band in their own right last week, provided a perfect back-up to the ever-youthful Frank Tovey, wandering on stage in a butchers outfit and immediately getting into the swing of things.

Blood (fake, this time) was spurted around the place for 'Ricky's Hand', there was intermittent plucking of pubic hair and the application of plenty of shaving cream for 'Ladyshave'. Whilst the set occasionally lost direction as I sat waiting for the next gimmick to come along, the music was still strong and somewhat catchy. The encore gave us 'Back To Nature', with Frank climbing the speaker stacks and doing a passable tarzan impression once up there. Stage diving when still half-covered in cream rounded off the night, and this most epic of weekends. I went home happy, and finally got some sleep.

## Gotham 2001 – 27 May 2001

Well, another bargain-price Flag 1-day fest, another bank holiday Sunday to kill. Thought I'd better check it out. Arrived to find a surprisingly large queue outside the LA2 (sorry, Mean Fiddler!!). A sign of something good? It seemed so from the start when the **Descendants of Cain** took to the stage. Their slow epic goth sound, much loved by the regulars of Club Tennabre, finally got the full audience it deserved today, the main dancefloor filling up surprisingly quickly. It was a perfect, smoke-filled introduction to the afternoon, so much so that I went and bought their album in the later stages of the day. Second up were **Squid**. Marilyn Manson is the first name that sprang to mind here, the singer almost a dead ringer for America's finest in his white dress and long black hair. The music also resembled the sub-goth sounds of Mazza's early work. It was fun for a while, but their crunchy bass sound was overused and started to grate after a while.

Time for the first key point of interest for the day – **Two Witches**. One of very few Finnish bands I know of, the band proved numerology is not their thing (there's three of them), but the music made up for it. Singer Jyrki Witch is a natural goth-rock frontman, and despite never having heard the groups music before, for the first time this afternoon I felt myself moving in time with the rhythm, rather than observing it from a distance – sign of a good crowd-worker and some top-notch goth rock.

Sadly, any potential adrenaline rush was curtailed by **The House Of Usher**. I'd heard great things said about them previously, including one overoptimistic fan defining them as 'gothic drum n'bass'. What I saw was just some dreary plod-a-long old-school goth, scarcely advanced from The Sisters of Mercy and co, and this despite the three guitarists and oh-so-gothically clad singer who seemed more obsessed with playing with the mic cable than creating any form of enthusiasm amongst the crowd. It had attractive moments, true, but I wanted to dance rather than sway, and was hoping for something a little more energetic. I left the floor during their last song and got some chips before the next act.

So to **Killing Miranda**, the only band on the bill whose works I knew well in advance. They didn't let me or anyone else down. Despite losing a member since this time last year, they were firing on all four cylinders, belting out the songs from their (excellent) new album 'Transgression By Numbers', and in the process creating that most rarest of things – goths with smiles on their faces. Most of their set was devoted to the new album, with a couple of tracks from the older 'Blessed Deviant' and a cover of the Ramone's track 'Somebody Put Something In My Drink' at the end. Notable highlights the classic 'Burn Sinister', the Ramones cover and 'Spit' – dedicated to Dark Star Organisation (who'd given this band a couple of less-than-praiseworthy reviews). I hope I've now restored the balance upset by Mr.Dyer.

It seemed inevitable that the buzz of KM's performance would be dulled at some point before the end of the day, as it was a hot day in a crowded venue. I didn't expect the comedown to come quite as quickly, however, as **This Burning Effigy** took to the stage. They essentially suffered the same problems as House of Usher – how do you motivate a crowd with slow, sombre music, especially after a day packed full of gothy guitar bands

like yourself? They were obviously unable, or unwilling, to address that problem, instead just getting on with the job in workmanlike fashion. A couple of my friends managed to miss the band entirely by simply standing by the upstairs bar – a more inspired performance may well have drawn them away.

**Star Industry** was the only band in the upper half of the bill who hadn't seen any UK live action of late, so I was naturally intrigued to see what they had to offer beyond Slimelight semi-fave 'Nineties'. They seemed to have amped up the guitars for the live show, probably in keeping with the spirit of the rest of the day. Their set was definitely an improvement on some of the slower goth acts we'd seen today, but I still wonder what made them want to emblazon every song with all that guitar when the studio recordings did fine without all the 6-string action swamping the mix. Still a good show however, and it was nice to see them in the UK.

So that left the Paganic **Inkkubus Sukkubus** to end the day's festivities. They don't use a full drum kit live (settling for a standing bodran player plus backing track), so the stage looked very empty during their set. That probably suited this most free-spirited of bands just fine, as it gave them plenty of room to dance about and have a good time. Quite tired by now, I decided to resist the opportunity to mingle with the Inky Sukky fanatikks down the front, and instead enjoy their set from various vantage points around the venue. Thankfully, they kept the songs short and sweet, which was about all my brain could take at this point. I left at the end of their main set, not waiting to see if they'd do an encore, not because I didn't like the music, more because I didn't want to get caught up in the LA2 crush seen (and felt) at the close of many of their events.

The verdict? After last year, it came as something of a disappointment. I've come to rely on Flag's 1-day events to provide a little variety, but today we didn't get it. There was nothing like resembling the warped synth-pop of Mechanical Cabaret, the darkwave gloom of Diary of Dreams or the neo-classic stomp of In The Nursery, all bands seen at last years event. It may have made a change from the generally electronic-dominated goth/cyber scene of the moment, but I think I know where my heart lies. There were still some good bands though, so the day was far from a total loss.

## **Mesh (+ The Borg and Greenhaus) – 8 Jun 2001**

It's hard to believe the level of support Mesh have worked up for themselves, given that their music is sold by only a few shops across the country and they get virtually no press. Yet the gig was a total sell-out. I had to resort to getting a yellow cover slip from Stargreen, and I witnessed the final Resurrection Records ticket get sold the afternoon before. So somehow Mesh have made it through to the masses and filled the Garage to capacity. Supports were pretty predictable tonight. **The Borg** played synth-pop in the style of the ex-Numan cover band that they are, and did it reasonably well, even if there's nothing else I can really say about them. **Greenhaus** did their usual thing, and turned out to be the highlight of the night. The computer imagery was working again after the hiccup at Elektrofest and their whole show provided the usual techno-crossover dance-a-thon, with a couple of their uptempo racks really starting to come alive.

And eventually **Mesh** came on stage. They played a mix of song from their most recent album plus a few new tracks, which distinguished themselves by sounding exactly like the old ones. The throwbacks 'You Didn't Want Me' and 'Trust You' proved to be the highlights in the respect that everyone knew them and they'd been slightly remodelled for the show. But these were small touches – I really feel I gained little by coming here when I could just have easily listened to their music on my chmalt on the way to Slimelight. Don't get me wrong – Mesh know synth-pop like few others, and can always be relied upon to provide

the goods, but I feel they need a little bit more if they are going to keep my attention in amongst the soundwave of similar sounding bands arriving on the scene at this time.

There was a show by Christian Death at Slimelight afterwards, but I don't feel like writing about it.

## **Funker Vogt (+ Man(i)Kin and Revolution By Night) – 30 Jun 2001**

I've always been a bit indifferent to Funker Vogt. True, I love their underlying style, and Funker Vogt do it better than most, but more recently I've found I need something more from the music I listen to, and what I've heard of their recorded material just doesn't quite cut it. Still, their live sets are usually pretty good to dance to, even if there's doubts about how much is being played live. Indeed, I'd heard great things about their live show, so even if it wasn't one of my favourite bands playing, it would still serve as an enjoyable pre-Slimelight meet-up. So I bought my ticket 24 hours before, picked up a copy of 'Machine Zeit' to get a better feel for their music, and joined the queue outside the Underworld nice and early.

**Revolution By Night** opened proceeding, then, with Steve Weeks of Slimelight fame on vocal, Bryon Adamson-Woods on guitar and keyboard, and Gordon (who works in Slimes) on the, erm.....play-button of the sequencer? Despite Steve introducing himself as 'VMP ImpersoNation', the music didn't bear as much resemblance to our scene's current top dogs as one might have expected. Sure, there was a strong EBM/electro-industrial thread travelling through most of their music, but hints of 80s new romantic music (Ultravox in particular) also figured heavily. The songs were generally quite good, but they looked noticeably uncomfortable on stage – maybe a smaller show elsewhere beforehand may have helped calm the nerves a bit. Still, it's a lot better than the RBN of old, with their retro-goth indulgences and silly Ministry impressions, so I have to give them some credit.

I wasn't really overawed with the concept of watching **Man(i)kin** again, having not got especially excited by anything they'd done to date, but thankfully they exceeded my expectations this time. Maybe it was the singer growing his hair back, maybe it was the venue, maybe just their ever-growing on-stage experience, but this was the strongest Man(i)kin show I've seen so far. The two drummers really did come into their own tonight, and the Depeche Mode cover 'A Question of Time' actually sounded purposeful this time. They eventually succeeded in getting much of the growing crowd dancing, thus setting the scene nicely for tonight's headliners.

So one quick stage makeover and we're onto **Funker Vogt**. I was pleased to find a live guitarist amongst the line-up, clad in the ubiquitous orange boiler suit, whilst lead singer Jens Kastel (the only one not dressed fit to repair a central heating system) was the every bit the full-on industrial-strength frontman I was hoping for. The crowd responded with the all the enthusiasm one could hope for, and soon the lower floor of the Camden Underworld was bouncing as one. I stayed down with 'em before pulling back to get a better view of things – just in time to catch the night's highlight, Mark and Ronan of VNV Nation coming on stage to help sing 'Tragic Hero'. There was a certain anarchic spirit about things that made up for the solid but somewhat homogeneous music. And so, having had my fill of bleep for the weekend, I went home happy, not bothering with the Slimelight for once. Can't go EVERY week, can I?

## Sulpher (+ Greenhaus, GNA and N-Dot) – 14 Jul 2001

Having seen Sulpher's remarkable support slot at Front 242 last year, I was more than happy to shell out for a ticket to see them headline. As ever with one of Frank's gigs, however, variety is the name of the game, so this was far from the celebration of industrial metal's new generation as it might have been. N-Dot opened proceedings gently with an almost Delerium-esque electronica sound. I have to admit that they were the most impressive and original of the three support acts on offer today, even if they didn't exactly fit in with the theme of the night.

**Global Noise Attack** were, musically at least, the nearest thing to headliners Sulpher on offer, but taking a more thrashy view of the industrial metal sound. I may have been encouraged by the presence of so many guitars played loudly, but I soon realised that they really weren't anything special, and stood at the edge for their entire set. **Greenhaus** took to the stage, and having seen them twice in three months already, a third show was more than I needed, no matter how good a live act they are. I wanted some decent metal fast, and the wah-wah space riffs of the 'Haus' guitarist wasn't exactly what I was thinking about.

So **Sulpher** finally took to the stage. It was clear from the start that all was not well, as my calculations showed that they were given a shorter set than Greenhaus. 40 minutes just wasn't enough. Everything I remember from Sulpher's last show was present here, but there was something intangible missing from the performance that I couldn't put my finger on. Maybe the vocals were too sparse (because Rob Holliday has a strong voice and should really be making better use of it), maybe it was the lack of the well-know 'Fear Me' from the setlist. 'One of Us' was probably the highlight of the show, even if it did sound like NIN (that's good, isn't it?). There was no encore, so I quickly left for Slimelight.

## Converter at Slimelight – 14 Jul 2001

I'd purchased one of **Converter**'s albums only a few days ago, and that had been enough to convince me to wander upstairs and attend tonight's show (as opposed to hanging around sulking on the goth floor). I even tried dancing to **Zan Lyons** warm-up set, but I couldn't quite get into it. Anyway, after the disappointments of earlier (an indifferent Sulpher set with little of interest in the support acts), I was kinda hoping that a one-man-tapping-a-box-of-electronics might somehow rescue the night for me. Sounds unrealistic, eh?

Well, I'm glad to say that this most respected of power noise artists just about managed to rescue my weekend. Tapping out psychotic rhythms on his kit, I soon realised it was futile trying to pick out tracks from the album, so I just threw myself into the seizure-type frenzy that passes for dancing in my book (and several other peoples, if tonight's floor is to be believed). I couldn't QUITE managed to dance to everything, so I sat through the last few tracks to save energy for the encore. Definitely the best live power-noise act I've seen to date. BTW, if you're wondering where the other live reviews are, I usually got bored and left before I had a chance to come up with anything to write about – I'd only been into Ant-Zen type stuff for about a month prior to this show.

## The Crüxshadows at Slimelight – 10 Aug 2001

This was the setting for one my better Slime-nights of late. The Crüxshadows aren't the best known band on the scene, but it was refreshing to get an American band in the country, given the lack of trans-Atlantic crossings by favourite groups of mine in recent times. In fact, this was to be only the second American band I would get to see live, Fear



Factory being the only other one to date. Elektrowerkz even managed to get a decent support act in the form of **Mechanical Cabaret**. Roi was clearly at home in the cosy confines of the upper floor, taking the opportunity to play a bit of live keyboard in addition to the usual vox-plus-drum pads & minidisc set-up. I'd seen his act twice before, but somehow he's a lot scarier close up.

So **The Crüxshadows** sauntered onto stage, and instantly took the floor over. Let me first get the obvious out of the way: The Crüxshadows are a goth band, pure and simple. They're also a very good goth band. They sound exactly like what a goth bands SHOULD sound like, give or take the odd synth-poppy element. The lead singer (Rogue, as he is known) exchanged the usual mic for a hand-free headset, allowing him to swing from the gantry and wander around in amongst the crowd, allowing even those right at the back to join in with all the action.

A cover of the Pet Shop Boys 'It's A Sin' might have invited a lot of critical hammering, but their treatment of Tennant and Lowe's finest was undoubtedly the coolest thing I'd heard in ages, so I for one am not complaining. The crowd eventually turned the tables by climbing onto the stage for 'Marilyn My Bitterness', though I stayed back, happy with my viewpoint on the little 'step' at the rear. A one-song encore followed, and then it was back to the Djing, me now inspired enough to actually throw some energy in at last.

## **The Nine vs SPOCK – 9 Sept 2001**

First lets get this straight. I was not a happy EOL when I walked into this gig. Hardly knowing anyone present barring 'the usual suspects' didn't help, but my state of mind said 'Let's just not bother'. I only went on the strength of The Nine's last album, and I'd seen them three times before. SPOCK, amusing purveyors of sci-fi retro-electro that that they are, weren't going to get my blood flowing too fast. Or so I thought.....

**Narcissus Pool** opened the show. The sole support act to two joint headliners meant they didn't get all that much attention from the few people who'd made it in on time to catch their set. Their goth-industrial-rock crossover sound might well have had great appeal under certain circumstances, but they didn't really fit in with the synth-pop theme of the night. A couple of decent choruses and an energetic performance were enough to save them from disaster, but nothing they did attracted me down from the upper level of the Underworld main room.

**S.P.O.C.K.** thus took the opening leg of the battle-of-the-synth-pop-bands. Appearing on stage in their silvery sci-fi costumes, it was camp sci-fi retro from the word go. Happy little electronic tunes played to a gothed-up audience resulted in some kind of time warp for all those present. Song about Dr.McCoy and 'ET Phone Home'? A SPOCKendale strip show? Keyboard player and vocalist swapping positions – just for the sheer hell of it? Everyone displaying Vulcan 'V' signs at the end? Yes – even I was enjoying myself and I'm not a Trekkie by any stretch of the imagination.

**The Nine** then came onto stage for the 'home leg' of the show. Some people have condemned this trio as a charty pop band, and the chances are that they could well hit the Top 40 with the appropriate backing. But they'd be there on merit, and tonight's show was everything one could have hoped for. Their live guitarist managed to throw in some mighty riffs that reminded one of 'Pretty Hate Machine', whilst frontman Geoff seemed to be throwing a lot more energy into his performances these days. There were no gimmicks, aside from the band regularly joking at the age of some of their early material (this ones out on vinyl.....78rpm only, of course).

So, The Nine vs SPOCK came out as a high-scoring draw which satisfied both sides and left the crowd very happy. For me, it was the perfect medicine for my emotional ills of the time. It may not have been enough to pull me out of my current state of mind, but it was welcome relief nonetheless. One hopes all the concerts coming up over the next few months will be this much fun.

## **Killing Miranda (+ ION and Kiss The Blade) – 22 Sept 2001**

Amid all threats of terrorist action, the Killing Miranda show at the Underworld never seemed to be under any doubt, and whilst one of the supports (MaxDmyz – who I later discovered had never actually agreed to play the date) pulled out, the bill was still a strong one. Electro-industrial rockers **I.O.N.** thus opened proceedings, having grown to a five-piece since I last saw them play live. Their rock-oriented vocalist was in his element covering Metallica's 'Enter Sandman' (with KM's Metallimember lookalike Irish Dave on bass). Their own material isn't quite as good yet, but they perform well and seem to enjoy putting on a show, so hopefully they'll soon get their break up against a larger audience.

**Kiss The Blade** were tonight's 'special guests', having travelled in from Switzerland. The three piece line-up played old-style goth in the style of the Sisters. Unfortunately, that's all they did. They weren't helped by consistent technical problems, but they just totally failed to do anything exciting within the constraints of their chosen sound. I was avidly waiting for the end of their set, as I needed cheering up, and this little lot weren't gonna quite hit the sweet spot.

**Killing Miranda** eventually took to the stage, choosing this time to open with 'Teenage Vampire'. Rikky was on top form as ever, though he seemed a little disappointed with the crowd response at times. Still, the usual bout of tongue-in-cheek goth-rock and amusing inter-song anecdotes (nay, insults!) kept us amused. Interestingly, the dull Blessed Deviant track 'Pray' found it's way into the set, and sounded so much more dynamic live than in recorded form. The one song encore was (thanx to crowd pressure) the Ramones cover 'Somebody Put Something In My Drink'. While the gig as a whole might not have been anything really special, it was a hugely enjoyable precursor to Slimelight, a nice diversion from all the worlds problems.

## **VNV Nation (+ In The Nursery and Sulpher) – 8 Oct 2001**

VNV might have been busy working on their 4<sup>th</sup> album (yes, I count Advance and Follow, even if some others don't), but that's wasn't going to stop them doing a tour promoting some of the new music. This was the UK date – and having outgrown the LA2, Flag Promotions secured the use of the more spectacular Camden Place for tonight's show. A couple of big name support acts had also been secured. It was thus THE place to be if you had any connections with the London goth/industrial scene.

**Sulpher** were first on, and this is almost certainly going to be their last ever show at the bottom of any bill you happen to see. I already felt that this band could be the long-awaited UK answer to Ministry and NIN, and now tonight I know it. Every track was a fully focused assault on one's senses. When 'One of Us' kicked into life, it could have BEEN Reznor and co up their singing it. Sulpher clearly work better in the larger venues, and hopefully they'll soon get a support slot in a more metallic environment that'll kick them to well-deserved stardom.

I'd also seen **In The Nursery** before, but they were curious addition to the bill, a different a band to Sulpher as you could imagine. For those of you not familiar with ITN's sound, their forte is sweet synths and thunderous orchestral/military drumming, with two group members constantly playing percussion (and occasionally three). They're getting on a bit

now, but they went down quite well, and their presence was welcome as it was refreshing not to see a whole bill of EBM acts, many of whom would have killed for one of tonight's support slots.

**VNV Nation** were thus well set-up to blow the crowd away, as the crowd were now nicely worked up and Ronan seems to have taken the mantle of EBM's 'spiritual leader' these days (though he swears he never intended it to be that way). Launching their set with 'Kingdom', it instantly became clear that there was no reason not to jump wildly up and down, singing along to whatever songs one could remember the lyrics to. Three new tracks were featured, 'Genesis' (released on single last month), 'Epicentre' and an additional encore 'Holding On', a slow track that gave Mark a chance to play some live keyboard. 'Frika' from 'Advance and Follow' also found its way into the set, a welcome addition to the line-up, and apparently only it's second airing live in the UK.

Of course, new tracks meant old ones were removed. Sadly 'Joy' and 'Forsaken' were amongst those that got the chop. Their absence didn't upset the show too much, and neither did the odd technical hitch and the obscure setlist that resulted in Ronan having to listen to each song's intro before knowing what he had to sing! One minor fault was that catching the tube home was a bit difficult when the show ended shortly before 11:30pm on Sunday night, but at least it had stopped raining, so I guess everyone found their way home happy enough.

## **De/Vision and T.O.Y. – 20 Oct 2001**

Firstly some background. I was planning a shopping trip in London followed by a Slimelight trip, and needed some way of filling the three hours in between. The cinema was considered as a option, but I eventually decided to go and see what all the fuss was about over at the Underworld. After all, De/Vision are apparently supposed to be massive in Germany and T.O.Y. were known to be a superb live act under their former guise of 'Evil's Toy'. So it had to be worth a try, then.

**T.O.Y.** were the first act on the bill, and it soon became clear exactly why they cut the 'Evil' out of their moniker. The hard industrial blast of the like of Slimelight fave 'Organics' had gone, replaced with, erm, synth-pop. Very good synth-pop, I might add. But how many Euro-techno-futur-electro-bleepy-80s-acts have I seen in the last few months? More than a few. Tracks like the hugely catchy 'Space Radio' ensured they at least caught my attention and got me to dance, but I now regret never seeing them live in their original form, as I feel that really would have been right up my street.

So, whilst (Evil's) T.O.Y. may have been new to the German pop sound, they at least proved they knew how it was done. How would arch-exponents of the art, **De/Vision** fare? They certainly had a few strong songs in their set. They were certainly every bit as musically competent as any other act I'd seen in recent months. But at the end of the day, De/Vision were for the most part boring, knocking out precise, bland pop music, song after song. Don't get me wrong – I stayed for their entire set, but one wonders if I was just timekilling before Slimelight. I suspect I was.

## **Black Celebration 2001 – 28 Oct 2001**

So to Frank's latest 1-day mega-bill. Covenant were secured as headliners months in advance, and whilst the bill underwent the usual last minute modification (Man(i)kin out, Halo Black in), just this once I felt I knew what to expect well in advance. **Freudstein** opened in strong style, despite their guest vocalist (Liz from Swarf) only arriving just in time to play her cameo role in the days proceedings. The duo otherwise concentrated on their up-tempo industrial dance sound, something they seem to have got to grips with

pretty well. They still need to work out how they're gonna set themselves apart from the rest of the crowd, but they're doing pretty well right now, and their singer has the makings of a great crowd-worker, even if being at the bottom of the bill means you never have much of a crowd to work with.

**Synthetic** were second on the bill, with a slightly more pop oriented sound (if you excuse the cock-rock guitarist). It may be yet another 80s throwback, but I did enjoy Synthetic's set from start to end, even if nothing they did nothing that I really remembered when I look back upon the day. It was then time for Flag Promotions perennials **The Borg**, who did nothing of any interest whatsoever. An old Numan covers act that should have kept to what they knew best, The Borg was positively apologetic at the end of their set, and rightly so, as they did very little to excite me or many of the other people present.

Thankfully, salvation was at hand thanks to the almighty **Leech Woman**. An industrial metal three-piece with a fetish for hitting stuff and making noise by whatever means come to hand, Leech Woman threw a bit of old-skool industrial spirit into the day's events, even to the point where they ripped their shirts off at the start of the set in a 'we're here to do work' manner. The metallic vocals and ceaseless riffs may have upset the EBM heads present, but Leech Woman were the first act on the bill that really got me moving. Why can't we have some more acts like this?

Well, maybe we can. I popped outside for a gulp of fresh air, but got back in plenty of time to see American act **Halo Black**. Their sound was a more moody, gothic affair than the industrial thrash of Leech Woman, but they still made for a highly enjoyable addition to the bill. Raymond Watts (the guy from Pig, as if you didn't know) came on stage for their last two songs, adding his disturbing vocal tones and guitar stabs to the overall sound. It's not often that we get American industrial acts playing in London, but I was pleased to find that they've already got another show scheduled early next year.

You'll find them supporting **Sulpher**, who by now must be wondering what on earth they're doing supporting electronic acts all the time. Minor technical glitches aside, Rob, Monti and the crew gave us the full-on NIN-wannabe performance that we've come to expect from them. Sadly, not everyone in the crowd seemed to in the mood for so much 6-string action, but I was of the belief that this was a good thing given that the LA2 sound system seems eminently better suited to guitar acts than anything electronic.

I only say this due to the minor disaster that was **Suicide Commando's** set. And Johan van Roy was not to blame. It took two songs before the mix even allowed you to hear his vocals, and even then he sounded like he was doing bad Skinny Puppy impressions. The master volume was turned down to the point where you could easily talk over our Belgian friend's vociferations, and talk we pretty much did. The energetic act that worked so well in the tight confines of The Slimelight's upper level back in February seemed here to a case of trying too hard. Good as it was to dance to 'Hellraiser' one more time, today's performance just didn't win me over like it did last time.

This left **Covenant** to round off the day's fun and games. While I have my doubts that starting the music before any of the band members are visible on stage is conducive to a genuine live performance, the strong vocals and catchy songwriting at least made for an entertaining set that kept the mass crowd happy. Unable to see anything from the main stage, I eventually found some clear space behind the sound engineers booth. The set contained all my favourites, so much so that I didn't bother waiting for any encore, but rather made a beeline for the exit before the inevitable crush at the end.

Right, then? Let-down or let-up. Well, the bill was strong and most of the bands put in committed performances. Nightbreed running a discount CD stall was a bonus and I got to

meet a lot of familiar faces throughout the day. But there was something missing from the day, the feeling that we'd been witness to a truly great show. Maybe it was the soundsystem, maybe me, but there's still something that needs sorting for next year. If it's me, I only hope I work out what it is sooner rather than later.

## **MaxDmyz at The sICk Night In – 10 Nov 2001**

Imperial College Union makes it's second attempt to host MaxDmyz in the form of it's sICk night in. Three support acts were secured, but as thrashy-death-punky-indie-hardcore bands aren't my cup of tea any more (if they ever were), I won't knock 'em down by insulting them here, as they all seemed to attract some form of following along the line. My own contribution to the night came in the form of an industrial metal DJ set before **MaxDmyz**, now a 7-piece act, took to the stage.

Opening as last time with 'Made In Heaven', it soon became clear that finally given the slot they deserved, MaxDmyz were pulling out all the stops in their efforts to win over the student metal audience who decided 'fuck it, November was waaaay to early to start revising, let's go and release some tension'. They followed up with 'Muthablud', their strongest recorded track to date, and took on a new dimension in it's live form.

It was by now that people started to realise that MaxDmyz were more than just a metal band. Addam, their resident performance artist, was starting to draw blood (his own, in case you're worried), which might have been slightly disturbing for those expecting an innocent display of rock music, but instead it seemed only to encourage audience members to engage in their own showy indulgences. A three-way snog soon formed up on stage whilst down below, a mass of seething bodies were attempting to enact some kind of scene that obviously had more meaning to them than it did to me.

Liquorique Allsorts were passed round at one point, but it did little to detract from the harsh, uncompromising shock-metal coming from the stage. An Eminem cover on most nights would have been more than enough to send me reeling from the stage in disgust, but Twister and the gang made it into one of their own. The set concluded with their trademark force-meeting-of-TV-set-and-sledgehammer, and an old keyboard was ripped to bits also, just for the sheer hell of it.

With bits of telly littering the dancefloor, one might have expected them to call it a night there. But they squeezed in one final track, giving Addam a chance to don the steel codpiece and switch on his angle grinder. With sparks flying through the air and glass scattered on the floor, their set finally came to a close. A truly anarchic show had given IC RockSoc one of their most memorable events in their short lifespan, and just for once, Slimelight seemed like a bit of an anti-climax.

## **Diary of Dreams, Assemblage 23 and cut.rate.box – 24 Nov 2001**

Here's another show I've been waiting for all year, Assemblage 23 having recently become one of EBM's 'great white hopes', were due to make their London debut at the Garage tonight, the threat of terrorist action proving no barrier to Tom Shear and friends. But wait a mo....isn't that Diary of Dreams at the top of the bill? Didn't they do a really good show last year at the LA2? Fucking hell, this IS a good bill. And Cut-Rate Box? Hey, I'll watch anything, me (as long as it's at least vaguely industrial).

Having met a new e-friend shortly before (hi Mahab!), I was already in a pretty upbeat mood when I wandered into the Garage. The opening act **Cut-Rate Box** provided all the usual uptempo-industrial dance sounds that form the basis of most of my Saturday nights.

It was a bit early to get groovin' though, me struggling to buy stuff at the merchandise stall at the back, but I was back down on the floor in time for the end of their set. Didn't make that much impact, but not bad at all.

Got a frontrow spot for **Assemblage 23**, which surprised me as I thought the front would be jam-packed. Of course, it's easier to dance if you step back a bit, but I managed perfectly fine up front. Assemblage 23's setlist contained all the favourites from the past two albums (plus the new remix/outtakes collection), incorporating a Psychedlic Furs cover into the set - chmaltzy . Tom Shear proved to be an excellent live vocalist (better than on his albums, methinks) and his mastery of the 'wave' dance sound is second to none. No real surprises, but hey, this was really fun!

And then to headliners **Diary of Dreams**, Adrian Hates sporting a totally new line-up (barring himself, obviously), having done away with the second vocalist and adding a drummer. This change was significant from a musical point of view as well as a visual one, as the set contained many reworked songs, slow epics like 'Rumours About Angels' taking on a dancier tone. The zombified motions of the 2000 tour had been replaced by a harsh cybergothic delivery, more energetic than previously, but still in keeping with the spirit of the band.

New maxi-single 'O Brother Sleep' proved to be as strong as most of the rest of the set, which contained tracks from across the DoD backcatalogue, but - chmal lifted from the 'One of 18 Angels' album. Of the old tracks, 'Retaliation' saw the most effective reworking, whilst 'Chemicals' was the track kept more or less exactly in it's original form (it being one of the dancier tracks they've released). An encore gave us a lively 'Butterfly:Dance!', and before we knew it, all of us were tramping off to Slimelight (bands included) for the aftershow party (OK, it was the usual trip to Slimelight, but 'aftershow party' sounds more impressive than 'night out!').

## Rammstein – Mutter Tour – 2 Dec 2001

Ok, I've bitched enough about the June cancellation. At least Rammstein bothered to re-schedule the gig (one in the eye for Trent Reznor). The Brixton - chmalt was secured for the night, it's high ceiling making it the ideal venue for the pyrotechnics show that caused so much trouble last time out. There was of course the small issue of a support act in the form of Swedish band **Clawfinger**. Now, rap-metal isn't something I usually pay much attention to, but Clawfinger made a better job of it than most, with competent musicianship, an energetic frontman and a few strong tracks (particularly closing number 'Do What I Say').

But there was only one band that really mattered tonight, and that was **Rammstein**. The mere act of the skinny keyboard player 'Flake' Lorenz (clad in some bizarre 'mad professor' outfit) wandering on stage and turning his spotlight on was enough to get the crowd one step on the way to hysteria and as the opening chords of 'Mein Herz Brennt' played through the PA, the one question on everyone's lips was 'where the hell is the singer. A shower of sparks soon gave us an answer as the 'steiners frontman, Till Lindemann rode down from the ceiling on some form of demented UFO, the ringmaster in tonight's circus of fire.

Did I mention fire? There was plenty of that. A huge wall of fire shooting up between the crowd and the band, explosions going off all over the place, sparks, Till setting fire to first his hand then his entire self, and head-mounted devices that allowed members to spit 20-foot jets of flame! The pyrotechnics took an already excellent industrial/gothic-metal set

into another dimension – as such tomfoolery might lead one to forget what made this group famous in the first place. For the best show of 2001 would be nothing without the best music of the moment to back it up.

For the record, they played all bar 2 of the songs off Mutter (missing only 'Spieluhr' and 'Nebel'), 'Du Hast', 'Engel', 'Buck Dich' (complete with dildo/spunk sodomy performance art) and the title track off 'Sehnsucht', 'Weisses Fleisch', 'Rammstein' and 'Asche zu Asche' off Herzeleid, as well as the B-side 'Hallelujah' and, as a final encore, their hilarious cover of Depeche Mode's 'Stripped' – the only English song in the set, and also a chance for Flake to go crowd sailing. In a rubber dingy.

The final verdict? Well, I've seen some good live shows this year, but when I look back on 2001, and probably most of my musical life, this show would have to be classed as THE ONE. They might have kept us waiting for it, but they made up for the June cancellation in style. Chatting to some fans on the train home, we were between us able to come up with a number of live memories that'll stay with us forever. But we couldn't agree on which ones. Except for this.

## **Mortiis (& Queen Adreena + Killing Miranda) – 18 Dec 2001**

This was to be my end-of-Christmas shopping stress reliever. Having attempted to do all my Christmas shopping without resorting to one major chain store (and chmaltzy !), I sorely needed a bit of rock music to relieve the tension, and this, my chosen gig from this year's K! fest, was my destination. chmalt up outside the LA2 nice and early, I was able to grab myself numerous articles of Kerrang! Memorabilia, including a huge yellow foam hand which I decided would make a great bonus present for my brother, him infinitely more suited to tacky trinkets such as this.

**Killing Miranda** opened up the night's festivities, it now seeming quite strange to see them with a short set at the bottom of any billing. They were thus forced to miss out a number of favourites (notably 'Burn Sinister'), but at least managed to show off a couple of new tracks along the way. Killing Miranda shows are always great fun, and tonight's was no exception (despite the fact that they never got a decent chance to show off their full set), the show hopefully giving them a little bit of much-needed publicity in the metal scene, especially after gig promoters Kerrang! Snubbed their excellent (IMHO) 'Transgression By Numbers' album.

The key point of interest for me tonight, though, was **Queen Adreena**. I'd heard an awful lot about Katie Jane Garside's live performances, even if the only experience I'd had of her music is Nils' regular spinning of 'Jolene' in Slimelight. Ironic, therefore that this song didn't make it into the set, though I didn't mind one bit, as the show was eye-and-ear-catching enough. Ms. Garside's piercing, edge-of-sanity vocals and regular forays into the front row of the crowd may have seemed a little disturbing, but the close confines of the LA2 made for a very special show. She deserves particular commendation for coming on stage on crutches with one leg in plaster, and not letting it spoil her chmaltzy one bit.

After this, **Mortiis** was left with a tough act to follow. An overlong neo-classical electro-gothic intro led to the band's arrival on stage, our Norwegian friend appearing complete with the pointy-ears-and-hook-nose troll disguise that I always thought was just a tiny bit silly. The music, a blend of electro-goth, synth-pop, industrial rock plus hints of his black metal past, had its strengths, but the Mean Fiddler soundsystem didn't do it much justice. If such bands are to make it in the UK, the venues really do have to get their acts sorted as regards PA quality, as I reckon I might have enjoyed this more if I could make out all the

component parts of the music rather than the jumbled mess that appeared to emerge from the black stacks up front.

And so I went home quite happy, despite the over-the-top nature of the nights performance going a stage too far by the time Mortiiis took to the stage. Getting photographed for Kerrang! Was a dubious highlight, and it did provide the release of tension I so much needed at the time. And yes, the Queen Adreena herself was seen hobbling out of the venue on her own strengths afterwards, because, despite the suggestions of one of my friends, there was no need for the men in white coats.

## **Fad Gadget (& Greenhaus + Psychophile) – 18 Jan 2002**

My first gig of 2002, coming only a day after starting a new job, and off to a dreary start, searching round Highbury for something vaguely edible. Joined the queue early, bought my ticket and took my place ready to watch **Psychophile**. A female vocalist with an impressive range and a hard electronic backing track, plus a healthy dose of live power chords. It's a project which sounds a little 'uncomfortable' on stage, the ingredients not always gelling as well as they might. However, if they can tidy things up a bit, the potential to excel is definitely there, if only because of the powerful vocals of their leading lady. I'm keeping a close eye on Psychophile.

**Greenhaus** followed next. I've seen them many times before, and thus wasn't really expecting any surprises. They have altered their set since last year – the guitarist play a more frontal role in proceedings nowadays and Frankie D actually bothers to talk to the audience (though this ruins the 'continuous set' feel that their live shows have had to date). Their set was therefore sufficient to keep me watching, but I still think they're milking too much out of their live shows – it's all too easy to get high profile support slots when you've got a gig promoter in the band.

It was **Fad Gadget** who we'd all come to see, though. Frank Tovey had recently completed his Depeche Mode support tour with mixed reviews, but as Fad is an act that really demands a small, close-up kind of venue, I was still anxiously waiting for a repeat of his show last Easter. And that we pretty much got, but with a few modifications. The key change being that the focus was on music first and gimmicks second. The prosthetic 'Ricky's Hand' was gone (though the drill remained), as was the can of shaving foam. The plucking of pubic hair and the 'tarred and feathered' look remained.

The set had a rock-oriented feel about it – keyboards now reduced to a backing track, whilst the Temple-X'ers remained as Frank's backing group. The highlight of the set was still 'Ladyshave' – even without the can of foam, the massed cries of 'Shave it, Shave it, Shave it!' were enough to make it stick in my mind. Little did I know that this would be the last London show Fad Gadget would ever do. Frank Tovey died from heart failure on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, less than three months after the show. A moments silence for a cult figure in alternative music, please.....

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – Harmonizer Tour – 5 Mar 2002**

Apoptygma's return to the UK, a first glimpse of the new album (except for those who snapped it up in the few days between release day and this show) and a first chance to visit Hackey's refurbished Ocean venue. A strange place for a show – nice venue, but awkward location in an area of London which doesn't strike me as being the slightest bit goth friendly. But I details, what about the bands?



Apop brought a couple of label-mates along on tour, though many wished they hadn't have bothered. **Echo Image** were up first with a style officially known as 'ultra pop'. The opening portion of their set was ruined by the sound engineer trying to get all the channels balanced, but once that was sorted, we were treated to a competent but very ordinary set. Common-or-garden pop with a bunch of power chords thrown? It was catchy in places, but I wasn't totally won over – they strike me as the kind of band who work well on CD but can't really translate it to the stage. As for **No Comment**, well, my thoughts exactly.

But who cares about them, when **Apoptygma Berzerk** are headlining? Not I, for one. OK, as a 'live' act they don't actually reproduce much of their material on stage, but they do look impressive, Stephan chmal looking every bit the dementedly friendly futuregoth we know he is. Opening with the anthemic new track 'Suffer In Silence', it became clear that all musical values were being put aside for the sake of out-and-out entertainment. And few do that better than Apoptygma Berzerk. The Ocean had a lot of very bright lights, and a bombastic soundsystem too, and it would have been a great shame had they not been used to their fullest.

The opening part of the set was a mix of new material and old favourite from '7', with some 'Welcome to Earth' and 'Soli Deo Gloria' material appearing later on. The new song all appeared to be more commercial and less aggressive than the older stuff, but they all had some kind of appeal. Some neat projections played in time with the music, and whilst it was a pity that they couldn't get a female vocalist or some more bona-fide musicians along, Apop seemed to be doing very nicely without them. I honestly don't know how many times I can watch this band without it losing it's appeal, but my second live experience of Norway's top futurepopper was a good one, and thus I still recommend anyone reading this now to see Apop at least once, even if their studio output is starting to decline slightly.

## **Leech Woman (+ Katscan, 85<sup>th</sup> Day & Fist Fuck Deluxe) – 8 Mar 2002**

Now, this was supposed to be Sulpher's album launch party. Britain's finest NINpersonators had built up quite a reputation with their exhaustive live schedule, and this should have been their crowning moment. Except they never turned up – lead singer Rob having injured his leg. Giving the choice between pulling out and performing whilst seated, he chose the former and let Frankie D and friends sort out a revised billing. Frank's solution was to move all the support acts up a slot (Leech Woman thankfully a sufficiently high-profile act to headline a show like this), and bring in a new band to open up proceeding. Entrants were also offered a £3 discount on Sulphers rescheduled show – a nice touch.

Nice idea. Pity about the 'new' act – **Fist Fuck Deluxe**. Four vocalists, two of each sex, plus backing track. Tight PVC, scary masks. And the result? Utter shite. The whole act looked and sounded so totally amateurish, with only the occasionally creative use of four-letter words providing even the slightest amusement. Maybe I'd missed something, but I can't remember seeing a band that impressed me so little.

Things improved from here. Massively. **85<sup>th</sup> Day** were on next, having changed their name from Sub-Rosa. A relatively conventional rock line-up, maybe, but good musicianship and a dynamic style helped them earn my attention – element of Tool sneaking in, which is a risk for any band, but 85<sup>th</sup> day carried it off pretty well. **Katscan**, meanwhile, provided the light relief that Fist Fuck Deluxe couldn't offer. An EBM act with a sense of humour, Katscan managed to earn the support of the crowd, despite the odd technical hitch. Another band to watch out for.

So then, onto **Leech Woman**. Revelling in the headline slot, the threesome proceeded to generate the kind of racket that hasn't been heard since the early days of industrial. Yes, the sound system was definitely replacing quality with quantity. Yes, anyone could bash an old dustbin and a couple of gas cylinders. But not half as well as this bunch. The dancefloor may have been half-empty, but those of us who actually bothered to stick around despite the headliners pull-out at least managed to release a little energy. Emerging from the Underworld with ringing ears, I was almost glad Sulpher pulled out – I doubt my ears could have taken another metal act in one night.

## **Sulpher (+ Greenhaus and Angelbomb) – 28 Mar 2002**

OK, here's the show I should've seen on 8<sup>th</sup> March, but didn't. The venue was the Scala in King's Cross – not renowned as a rock venue, but as Flag Promotions were having their Eurobeat in the same place, it made for a sensible set-up for an Easter Thursday bash, concert attendees invited to stay for the nightclub if they so wished. **Angelbomb** got to open up proceedings, another goth-rock act, who were clearly trying hard but lacked the 'edge' that was needed to hold my attention. **Greenhaus** on next, taking forever to get set up, and whilst their new material was promising (slower, more atmospheric than before), I only lasted four track before I needed a seat in the quiet (having spent most of the day rushing round London on a pay-day shopping extravaganza). Knowing Greenhaus, I'm pretty sure I'll catch 'em again before long.

**Sulpher** thus chmaltzy their first show following the release of their new album in front of a collection of hard-core fans (like me) and a bunch of Eurobeat early arrivals wondering why a metal band was chmaltzy at a techno club. And so Rob and friends chmaltz into their set guns ablazing. It might have been a similar set to their performances last autumn, but it's lost none of it's power. 'Fear Me' cropped up again (having not appeared at their recent shows), whilst 'One of Us' and 'You Ruined Everything' proved once again to be highlights. Sulpher are going to need more material and a little more variety if they are to take the next step on the road to stardom, but on the evidence of tonight, Part 1 of their journey into rock history has been completed with honours. I thus left happy after their set, a nice warm bed preferable to a night of techno and drum n'bass, complete with another Greenhaus show.

## **And One – 30 Mar 2002**

**And One** were due to make their UK debut at Elektrofest, but Slimelight got in there first and thus the German trio got to play to the gathering in Electrowerkz the night before they headlined Flag Promotions latest all-dayer. The stage set-up was simple – one vocalist, one keyboard player and a third guy who switched between the two. And the music was pretty simple, too. And One don't like to complicate things, you see. Chunky EBM rhythms and catchy vocals is all they really need, early songs from the Front 242/Nitzer Ebb school, their later material slightly more synth-pop oriented. Sound system wasn't too great, but And One's relatively simple sound palette meant it didn't matter as much as it might have done.

And so they went about reeling off the favourites, one by one. 'Get You Closer', 'Metallhammer', 'Techno Man', 'Panzermensch', 'Deutchmachine', and many others. Bounce up and down, sing along when you know the words, and bounce more when you don't. Fall for all the bands crowd-working stunts and try not to be too self-conscious. And One thus proved to be an enjoyable one-off live experience, not the best act I've seen in

recent months, but not the worst by any means, and a minor coup for Slimelight for getting them to play. The chance to see them for a second time wasn't all that tempting, but if nothing else, it made my schedule for the rest of the weekend a little easier.

## Elektrofest 2002 – Mar 31 2002

Having not even slept since returning from the previous night's Slimelight, it was a tired and weary EOL who found his way into the Mean Fiddler for Elektrofest. The bands were going to have to be pretty good to keep my attention this year, as I wasn't in a fit state to keep going under my own steam. Thankfully, a selection of cheap CD stalls renewed my enthusiasm for the day in general, and when I heard the first band spring into life, I was keen to get down to the stage and see what they had to offer.

The band in question was **Kinetik**. The number of Kraftwerk T-shirts in the crowd gave a pretty good clue as to what this act had to offer. They weren't a copy of the Dusseldorfers by any means, but instead used similar concepts to make their own sound. A vast bank of electronic gadgetry and three hard-working uber-geeky musicians frantically manipulating their machines. Some simple but effective CGI in the background completed their stage show. Have to say, Kinetik did nothing but impress me from start to finish, ultra-catchy songs like 'ISDN' and 'Go Elements Go' sticking in my head long after the show was done. Pity I'd already invested my supply of cash on the discount CD stalls, as I'd have liked to have picked up an album or two.

The next band were **The Sepia**. They too were working from a strong musical base, but they couldn't quite get it to hold together like some of the other bands of the day. Their chmalt industrial sounding set was perfectly OK, but I think I'll need a second dose before I make my mind up. **Swarf**, however, really did make an impact, and it was a very good one. Their take on the EBM/gothpop sound of the day is proficient and lively, and leading lady Liz proved to be one of the most down-to-earth and charismatic people to grace the stage during the course of the day. A technical hitch failed to dampen their spirits, with my final impression that this is a very complete act that deserves to succeed.

**Synthetic** hail from the same part of the country as Swarf, and they were every bit as impressive, despite the short notice of appearance that they had (Man(i)kin pulled out following a major shake-up with their line-up, and initial replacements V2A also had to quit from proceedings late in the day). Like many of today's bands, they had three members, but the contrast between them couldn't be greater. The guitarist looks like a member of a 90s Britpop act, the singer resplendent in his campy black garb and dreads whilst the meek girl handling the electronics preferred her PVC. But it all came together when the music started – the two guys throwing so much energy into their performance that it was hard not to be drawn in by it all. This was my second Synthetic show, and this time it really clicked into place.

In the words of John Cleese, and now for something completely different – **Komputer**. I have an album by a band of that name – a cheesy Kraftwerk rip-off, like an extended length remake of 'The Man-Machine'. What I heard tonight, however, was nothing of the sort. If anything, their sound was reminiscent of 'traffic-cone' era Kraftwerk, though the technique was very different. Two scruffy guys sitting round a sampler, each one mixing the signals it produced to create some of the least conventional soundscapes found this side of the most elitist of DJ cultures. They looked out-of-place, with only a NON sweater on one of them providing any sense of allegiance to the scene at all. Yet I slowly found myself being drawn in by the sheer weirdness of it all. An interesting change, then, and not what I was expecting at all.

Time then, to return to familiar ground with **The Nine**. My fifth chance to see them play, and unlike some acts who play as much as they do, I am yet to tire of them. Sitting somewhere between NIN and Erasure, a concert by The Nine is a demonstration of how to do contemporary synth-pop. Despite my rapidly fading energy level, The Nine kept me moving for the duration of their set, with closing duo 'My Fallacy' and 'Transmission' still very much my favourite. Other may swear by Mesh, but for me, The Nine beat them every time.

The first foreign act of the day, **Beborn Beton**, got second billing tonight. Musically, they weren't all that far away from the rest of the 'wave' pantheon that dominates the setlists at most goth/industrial hangouts at the moment. They were clearly enjoying themselves on stage, and I did my best to summon up my last ounces of energy to dance for the duration of their set. Ultimately, they didn't do anything THAT special or memorable, but we all enjoyed it, so I'm holding nothing against them.

And so it was time for **And One**. But I wasn't there to watch them. I'd seen them only the night before, and whilst that was fun while it lasted, a second helping wasn't what I needed following 38 hours of being awake. I hardly think they could have totally re-designed their set overnight, so I'm pretty sure if you read my earlier review of their Slimelight show, you'll get a pretty good indication of what tonight's set was like. I'd come, I'd saw, and I had a lot of fun. But all good things must come to an end, so I left whilst I still had enough energy for the drag back to Essex

## **Inertia, Project-X & E-Craft – 6 Apr 2002**

Cryonica Records' latest billing, topped by the schmaltzy Inertia, attended by me on a 'what the hell?' basis. The Camden Underworld was tonight's venue, but even by this venue's small standards, the place was suspiciously empty. It probably had something to do with the frequent UK shows by both Inertia and Project-X in the recent past, whilst E-Craft remained something of an unknown factor around here. Anyway, at least I'd have plenty of room to dance about.

**E-Craft** opened up the billing, and could almost smell the hallmarks of a 'German EBM Band'. The war-oriented videos projected onto the back walls, the industrially-styled stage set and the commanding vocals stance of their singer. It might not have been truly original, but all credit to them, they played their show like the floor was full, and even shared their water with the few of us who bothered to dance to their set. I doubt they'll look back on this show as they day they broke the UK, but they got my attention.

**Project-X** next, starring Torny in full attack mode, despite the wide open spaces in front of him. He really throws himself into his show, no matter what the circumstances, though the other two band members really didn't add anything to the performance. Still the best show of the day though, and the band were even happy to mingle and chat afterwards, passing the time until **Inertia** came on. Anyone who's seen Inertia live knows the story by now – the major development is Alexys B getting a full vocal track to herself (and she's a pretty good singer). The rest was the usual hyped-up-Reza doing his best to get the crowd moving, via means of new songs or old ones. That done with, it was time to go home to bed.

## **Death In June & NON – 5 May 2002**

Possibly one of the most unusual concerts I've ever been to, and a long way away from my usual industrial-dance-wave sound-of-choice. Two bands with a cult following so

esoteric that I'd hardly heard either of them before. But I knew that this was a genuine one-off, so off to Elektrowerkz I went, ready for 12 hours of excess, the first 4 courtesy of the scene's two most controversial bands. The two had worked together quite a lot over the years (notably on the recent 'Wolfpact' CD), and whilst they made guest appearances in each other's sets, each act had it's own distinctive sound

Before the show, we got to/had to see a film called 'Pearls Before Swine'. Starring Boyd Rice in the lead role, it was a flick fully in keeping with the spirit of the night, full of guns, bondage and overtly political/religious overtones. The 'fucking under a Nazi flag' scene in particular was possibly a case of taking it too far, though the film as a whole wasn't bad at all, if somewhat misplaced in terms of holding up the live action.

Anyway – I'd come to see live music, not to debate politics. And Boyd Rice of **NON** eventually came on stage to make some noise. Yes, noise. Opening with the terrifyingly frank 'Total War', there was no doubting that this was one man who understood the meaning of what he was saying. Was he being provocative, or did he mean it for real? I'm not going to start that debate he – suffice to say, the all-too-short half-hour set sounded pretty damned impressive and that was enough for me, chilling that it was.

**Death In June** played a longer set, the masked Douglas P. opening up with a couple of drum-heavy tracks before picking up the acoustic guitar and regaling us with his trademark apocalyptic folk music. It's been a long time since I saw an acoustic guitar played live in concert, and while the sound of 'di6' wasn't what I'd normally listen to, it certainly had it's attractions. Boyd Rice, always one up for a meaningful collaboration, came on a couple of times to offer commentary on some of the songs.

I did eventually have to retreat to the side of the stage due to the sheer level of heat in the room (the place was PACKED!), which allowed me to watch the tail end of his set more comfortably. It seemed a shame that there weren't any more of the drumming/industrial tracks in the set, as they proved to be my favourites – the acoustic tracks started to seem a little samey after a while (though as I don't know Death In June's music that well, that's not really a surprise). But I'm glad I went, if only to get an insight into part of the gothic/industrial scene I had yet to try, even if I was quite glad to hit the familiar VNVised gothwave floor at the end of 'Heaven's Street'. There only so far I want to take my alternativeness.

## **Rammstein – Mutter Tour – 16 May 2002**

Rammstein's first UK show was a low-key affair at the 200-capacity Powerhaus in 1997. Few of us knew about them then, least of all me. The 2000-capacity Astoria proved incapable of holding their show when they eventually came back to the UK, a view that proved to be pretty much on the ball when they proceeded to pack out the significantly larger Brixton Academy in December 2002. And with the story of their live show spreading like wildfire, it took the huge expanse of the London Arena to hold their triumphant return. Whilst the venue wasn't used to it's fullest, there were still over 9000 people in attendance. And this was only one of 4 UK shows.

So you've got an idea of scale, then. Well, naturally there'd be hundreds of bands willing to snap up such a lucrative support slot, then, wouldn't there? So how the fuck did **Raging Speedhorn** make it here? A meaningless blur of noise, spelling everything wrong with the current metal scene, and an anti-gothic rant to boot. A insult to all thing musical, if you ask me. We also got **American Head Charge** – thankfully a massive improvement (not hard). Their singer looked the part, the music was strong (think SOAD – but not quite there) and they threw a lot of effort in. Possibly too much. I'm afraid if you want to be taken seriously as a keyboard player, dragging the thing round the stage isn't going to help. I skipped part

of their set as they didn't impress me that much – it's such a pity that the previously-billed KMFDM had to pull out – they would have been SOOOO much better.

Ah.....**Rammstein!** Almost forgotten why I came here. Didn't take much to remind me, of course, Herr Lindemann springing onto stage strapped into a chair-like construction, and once again it was time for the opening blast of 'Mein Herz Brennt'. It quickly became clear that this was to become a case of 'Brixton Academy Chapter 2' – the bands exhaustive touring schedule meaning they hadn't actually had a chance to redesign their stage show massively in the intervening period. But what the hell, this was really fun!

The guitars burned, the singer burned, so did Richard's guitar and the two backing vocal mic stands. Flake got the dildo treatment for 'Buck Dich' and the flame-spitting headpieces were called into service for 'Feuer Frei!'. Christoph's drumsticks exploded at one point and there was the wall of flame during 'Engel'. And the final encore gave us more crowd sailing in a dingy during the Depeche Mode cover. Of course, the element of surprise wasn't there any more and the sound wasn't perfect, but it's still the best metal show on Earth, so seeing Rammstein for a second time was as good as seeing any of my other favourites for the first time. But please, boys – bring some decent support acts next time!

## Monolith, Dive & DROG – 25 May 2002

Slimelight occasionally offers a 3-band special for price of admission, and this was one such night, the lineup seemingly one of the best they'd assembled for some time.

Greenhaus were supposed to open, but pulled out due to illness. Having seen them twice this year already, I was more than happy to watch last minute stand-in **D.R.O.G.** instead – a two-piece EBM/synth-pop offshoot of 'Girls Under Glass'. And to be fair to them, they made a pretty good job of it. Unfortunately, it wasn't as good as the main GUG project, and while I was able to dance to some bits of their set, I found the whole thing a little bit static for my liking.

**Dive** managed to wake things up, the solo project of Dirk Ivens having gained quite some recognition over the past few years. And when I say solo project, I mean one guy singing and everything else on backing track. Not even a miming keyboardist or knob-twiddler. At least Dirk wasn't insulting anyone's intelligence by assembling a phoney band. And the music he had to offer was pretty strong stuff, a kind of EBM/powernoise blend. Given the age of the Dive project (and The Klinik before that), it now no longer surprises me that so many bands cite this guy as an influence, as he seems to have mastered the technique of blending the musical and the dissonant without one invading too much on the other. I would have been nice to see more 'live' music performed, but in the end I wasn't displeased at all with what was on offer.

Of course, a one-man show is de rigueur if power noise is your forte, and **Monolith** is one such act. Power noise is not always something that works as a live set, but this particular form of machine music came off pretty well, the combination of the grinding distorted rhythmic side and the high-frequency noise pasted on top providing a pretty good excuse to dance like a nutcase once more, with some interesting samples thrown into the mix for flavour. It wasn't quite as intense as Converter's set last year, but compared with some of the ignorable knob-twiddlers I've seen in the recent past, it was a relative success, proving to be both an absorbing listen as well as being pretty damn danceable as well.

## Gotham 2002 – 26 May 2002

Yes, it's that time of year again. The headliners from two years previously return to London one more time to promote their latest album 'Notes From The Underground', whilst I, along with several others, have to sit outside the Camden Palace waiting to get in, the doors opening inexplicably late. I won't go on about it too much, as Frank Flag was at least man enough to come on stage to apologise. I wasn't paying too much attention by then, anyway. I wasn't well. At all. The previous night at Slimes now taking it's toll, I wasn't in much of a state to dance like a lunatic this time, but being a predominantly trad-goth affair, such excesses were not necessary.

**The Ghost of Lemora** opened proceedings, and quickly threw down the gauntlet for the following five acts to ignore. Featuring a male vocalist in a long black skirt, organesque synths and a pretty solid overall sound, Lemorra proved to be the strongest of the days early bands, actually sounding gothic where others failed. **The Faces of Sarah** followed. They failed to impress me last time out, and despite their slightly unusual vocalist (both in terms of look and vocal style), their set was a pretty run-of-the-mill goth rock slog, which not even a newly-added female vocalist could lighten. There may be some who find their sound comforting, but it all seemed a little dated to me.

**Seize** were on next, but having taken a turn for the worse, I was forced to skip their set. I took a pew at the back for **D.U.S.T.**, with the intention of getting to my feet should they do anything to motivate me. They didn't. Loud guitars, and a 'fuck you' variety of vocalist. The guy was hopelessly out of place at a festival celebrating the melancholy – swearing loudly at the audience just doesn't cut it with the grown-ups, lad. **Midnight Configuration** were next in line, better musically than the acts before them, but I'm not sure where it was meant to be going. The vocalist was muttering some kind of 'Hail Satan' nonsense, which I successfully ignored.

We were due to get N.F.D. next, a new Nephilim offshoot, but for various 'shit happens' reasons, they pulled out, leaving **Altered States** in 3<sup>rd</sup> slot. Apparently, this band is 'legendary'. Erm....what for? First song goes OK, second one, not bad. And then another. And another. And on and on they go, milking their somewhat limited pool of ideas totally dry. I was watching the time, counting the minutes to the end of their set. And still they went on. The Altered States never once altered their sound, and it showed.

So then, not much to celebrate so far. But the days redemption finally came with Germany's **Girls Under Glass**. Not well established in the UK, but they still wiped everyone else off the floor. Their set was slightly more industrial in feel than any of the others, yet they seemed to keep at least part of the audience happy (and I couldn't have seen their set having been THAT offensive to trad-goths). The highlight of their set was their cover of Numan's 'Down In The Park', but their own material was pretty strong. This kind of sound is hardly original these days, but GUG are old masters in this field, and tonight they got a chance to show everyone how it should be done.

And so to **Clan of Xymox**, and a timewarp back to the 80s. Long dresses, backcombed hair, guitar reverb, keyboard atmospherics and all the vocal gloom you could want. Old songs mixed seamlessly with the new, every track going down well with the audience. The new album didn't dominate the set, but it was enough to convince me that I was right to pick up a copy of the thing, while oldies like 'A Day' and semi-oldies like 'This World' gave my tired self enough reason to dance at least a little bit. OK, there's nothing really new going on here, but we'll always need old school Euro-goth bands, and Clan of Xymox fill that need pretty neatly.

It was a good end to a very mixed day. Good as it was to see a couple of European acts make the trip over, the quality of the British acts really wasn't anything to write home about and some of them seemed particularly out of place. True, a whole day of just Sisters/Neph-style trad-goth probably wouldn't work too well either (last year was testament to that), but if Gotham is going to become a regular event for years to come, they have to get the balance right, as after an excellent first event in 2000, it's since gradually started to slip from the 'must see' category.

## Dark Jubilee – 2-3 Jun 2002

### Day 1

Whilst the previous weeks Gotham was attended more out of a sense of duty than any particular desire to spend Sunday listening to lots of people sound miserable, this was one event that just HAD to be attended. The kind of line-up that seemed to out-do even the ubiquitous InFest, this two-day extravaganza took place over the 4-day Jubilee weekend. Yes, QE2 has been on the throne for 50 years. The long public holiday was meant to be a means of celebrating her glorious reign. Dream on.....

Whilst there was some confusion as to what band was on where, and which of the billed bands were actually playing, it eventually transpired that there would be two floors, five bands playing on the main stage and four on the smaller, upstairs stage. The timings were eventually staggered so you could catch at least part of every bands set. On the first day, though, I managed only a glimpse of the upstairs room (the weekend demanding social I as well as musical ones). Angelbomb and DUST I had both seen recently anyway, and really didn't fancy a second helping. Man(i)kin, meanwhile, had a new (female) singer, but I didn't get much of a chance to watch her in action. SPOCK I didn't get to see at all, the dancefloor too packed for me to get close.

So what about the main stage? The **Revolution By Night** duo kicked off the event with their own take on the synth-pop/wave sound of the day. The band are gradually finding their feet as a live act, showing a slightly greater degree of confidence on stage than they did supporting Funker Vogt last year (but please Steve, no need to dance like a German!). They still have the tongue-in-cheek sense of humour (dropping bits of VNV Nation into 'Empires and Dance'), and they still know where the roots of their sound lie (hence the Ultravox cover – 'Visions In Blue'). They could still do with a little more live presence, but the music is coming along nicely, at least.

Next up was **In Strict Confidence**. A surprisingly high-profile act for such an early slot, but yet they still attacked their material with conviction. Their sound offers scathing vocals mixed with an electro-industrial backbone, but with the tiniest hint of 'gothicness'. They thus have potential to appeal to quite a wide audience, and that includes me. Their recent single 'Herzattacke' was particularly memorable, as was old favourite 'Zauberschloss'. This was my second ISC show, and this time it really clicked into place.

**Killing Miranda** were of course, an old favourite of mine, this being the fifth time I've seen them play to date. Except this time they had something new in store. Yes, I proudly present the all new Killing Miranda – same great sound, but now with added pyro! They're not quite up to Rammstein standards yet, but they rocked the joint anyhow, showing off a couple of good new pieces, a rocked-up cover of 'Are Friends Electric' and all the old favourites. Audience reaction was maybe a little disappointing, this being the only guitar band on the main stage on the first day, but those of us who know a good thing when we see one gave our appreciation.



And thus came the main point of interest on day one – the UK debut of **L'Âme Immortelle**. A dual-vocal electro-goth outfit from Austria, very much a favourite of mine in studio form, and thankfully still very impressive on stage. Sonja proved to be not only one of the strongest vocalists of the event, but also the sexiest. And Thomas Rainer – well, he might come across as being a little bit pompous, but I'm going to allow him that on account of the songs being that good, the band wisely choosing to pick the best tracks from across their discography rather than plugging one particular disc. English, German – it works either way. The first band of the day to get an encore, L'Âme Immortelle, like Killing Miranda before them, provoke mixed reaction amongst the people I spoke to, but I'm very much in favour of what they do, and am eagerly awaiting their next visit.

It seemed impossible to have a festival like this without having **VNV Nation** somewhere high up the billing, and sure enough, they were called upon to headline the first days proceedings. Their first UK show since 'FuturePerfect' was released was a comparatively 'controlled' affair by Ronan and Mark, unleashing most of the favourites (barring 'Joy' and 'Legion') plus the dancier numbers from the new album and the usual token rarity (here the limited edition 'Further'). They worked the crowd up into their usual frenzy, got a couple of encore, and even did a dual-keyboard job for 'Electronaut'. Of course, most of us have seen all this before, but we still love it, and after a long, tiring day, a succession of chmaltzy EBM-dance-trance numbers was really what we needed – and that's exactly what we got. An excellent day, an OK journey home followed, and onto day two.

## Day 2

Monday's proceedings had a different feel about them – whilst I knew the music of all nine of the first nights bands at least relatively well, day two would bring me new discoveries at almost every turn. **Goteki** (the band formerly known as Sneaky Bat Machine) kicked off the main stage billing with their bleepy-cyber-synth thingy. It was OK for a bit, but ultimately lacked depth. I thus chose to leg it upstairs to catch **V2A** instead. This was much more like it – harsh industrial electro from Kevin Stewart (Live keyboardist with Sulpher). Another two-vocalist act, though this time the femvox were as aggressive and harsh as Kev's. Keeping the trend for 80s cover versions going, they ended their set with a scathing 'Fade To Grey' – laying down foundation for a band which, in my view, really does have a future.

Back downstairs in time for **Icon of Coil**. I wasn't too impressed with their recent album, but IoC live proved to be a repeat experience of last time. That is – they come on stage, failing to convince me that they're anything more than another Apoptygmatic VNV ImpersoNation, but song by song they began to grow on me. And by the time 'Access and Amplify' came along, I was bouncing around like 90% of the other Ocean 1 inhabitants. EBM, synthpop or trance, Icon of Coil are a dance band first and foremost, and that's how their music is best treated.

I hate to delve into I, but now for something completely different – **Theatre of Tragedy**. I'd heard all sorts of things about this band, and I was expecting some form of gothic metal. Wrong. They're another dual vocal band, with two singers dressed in a manner at odds with not only the rest of their band, but also most of Dark Jubilee's attendees. The music proved to be a mostly enjoyable alternative rock set, the blue-denim clad lady behind the mic providing a vaguely commercial feel to the music. I'm not sure if this was really my kind of thing, but it kept me watching, if not dancing.

I was really waiting for **Das Ich** to come on. A bizarre moving metal construction held their keyboards, and while the band were late coming on, when they did arrive they instantly proved that our anticipation was worthwhile. The two girls on keyboard held their ground,

but Bruno Kramm was happy to chat to the audience, whilst the skinny devil of a vocalist, Stefan Ackermann proceeded to bark, twist and intimidate in pretty much equal measure. It was a truly impressive sight.

And the music? Whilst some of their album recordings seem a little bitty, live they put many other bands into the shade. Harsh vocals and a stew of gothic/industrial/traditional noises came together to offer a treat for anyone able to appreciate such extremity. Their last-minute pull out at Black Celebration 1999 was forgiven – the band knew it was a mistake and were out to make amends. London's favourite Das Ich song (Destillat) appeared in their encore, but their set worked well as a whole – even though I haven't heard much of their more recent material, this show proved I was wrong to miss it. Time for a trip to Resurrection, methinks.....

There was still time at the end to pop upstairs to catch a hefty chunk of **The Crüxshadows** set (I'd caught brief glimpses of Inertia and Void Construct, but chose to skip them having seen both enough times in the recent past). An American goth band that puts most of the UK scene to shame, The Crüxshadows have a distinctive singer that spends most of the set wandering round the crowd, and a live violinist (which isn't something you see often). They went down a storm with everyone present – how many bands can you watch from the rear balcony and still get close to the singer. I caught one encore – Marilyn, My Bitterness (what else?) – I later established that there were more to follow, but I'd left by then, to get a good position for tonight's headline act.

That proved to be deceptively easy. **Paradise Lost** were the headliner, and the singers comments that 'I bit fucking sparse' proved to be something of an understatement. The cyber/electronic fans had left after Das Ich, while the gothic contingent were still watching the final acts of The Crüxshadows. And yet they still went about their set in a professional manner, rocking as hard as ever, every song as good as the last, and still getting enough of a response to get the inevitable encore. You could almost feel sorry for them – they'd done better swapping headline spots with the previous weeks Gotham – Clan of Xymox might well have kept some of the synth-fans till the end, PL, for all their experience, couldn't. But I at least tried to show a little enthusiasm. No lack of crowd was going anti-climax THIS weekend, no matter how grumpy Nick Holmes was.

And the final opinion? A damn fine weekend, a chmalt one-off that brought together some of the scenes finest acts and threw in a few surprises along the way. Two days off work would follow, the chance to recover very welcome. Some people might have complained about this and that along the way, but at the end of the day, the man/woman/androgynous in the crowd can't have had THAT much to complain about.

## Hocico, Accessory & Monosect – 30 Jun 2002

You don't get many Mexican bands playing the UK circuit, especially of the industrial variety. Though 2002 has seen something of an upsurge in the Central American electronic music scene, with Cenobitia playing this slot not so long ago (apologies, readers, for missing that one) and tonight Hocico. Back home, they supported Rammstein in Mexico City (and we get Raging Speedhorn? Mako no senso!). How will they cope here?

I'll tell you in a minute. First time to do justice to the support acts. **Monosect** were up first, aka Man(i)kin with a new singer. Don't know quite why they changed the name, as new clean-cut front lady Lisa is more manikin-like than Seth ever was. She's a pretty reasonable vocalist, too. As for the music, well, it starts where Man(i)kin left off. Tracks like 'Deity' are still in the set, though the Depeche Mode cover has been replaced by a EBM

cut of the Sister's 'Alice'. Watching them play, however, and it becomes clear that the set-up hasn't really broken in yet, their stage presence still a bit 'distant'. I'll see what kind of new material they come up with in the coming months, as in their current form, Monosect could sink or swim.

**Accessory** were the second band of the night. One lone keyboard player, but two vocalists. The music was pretty standard contemporary EBM, though the fired-up dual vocal efforts reminded one of Front 242 or Nitzer Ebb in their heyday. They thus found it quite easy to get the now quite substantial crowd dancing. That said, in terms of depth, Accessory did seem to cut it a bit short. Having got the picture, I left looking for a seat a few songs from the end of their set, unsure if I really enjoyed myself or whether I was consciously making an effort. Another band which requires a second helping before I make my mind up one way or the other.

This left **Hocico** in top slot. A two-piece act doesn't give much chance for full-on 'live' performance, but at least the vocalist looked the part, aggressively snarling the opening numbers. Except it took 20 minutes before the sound engineer actually worked out how to make his vocals audible, meaning the duo were already off on the wrong foot. Once the sound balance was sorted, the whole thing started to make sense, the vicious distorted vox lying somewhere between Johan Van Roy and Dani Filth on the extremity scale, whilst a hard electronic backing played away in the background. So I was impressed. For a little bit.

However, it became clear after a few more tracks that that's pretty much all Hocico had to offer, at least in a live sense. OK, those on drink, drugs or 'miscellaneous' had plenty of cause to dance about the place. And as industrial dance bands go, Hocico certainly rank in the upper echelons in terms of proficiency. But the flaw of working at such extremes is that the details tend to blur, making each track sound much like the last. I'm hoping that their albums (which I've yet to really try) offer a little more variety, as on stage, Hocico were briefly enjoyable, but lacking the necessary diversity to really leave a mark.

## **Assemblage 23 (+ DUST and Monosect) – 14 Jul 2002**

So Tom Shear's little industrial/wave outfit returns to UK shore for the second time. Having played second fiddle to Diary of Dreams last time out, Assemblage 23 returned as proud headliners. One of the few American electronic acts to make a mark on the UK's small, select scene, this gig was to be a small celebration of what Tom has achieved so far. Pity the rest of the band didn't turn up, but more about that later.

Being a Frankie D. run show, varied/suspect (delete as appropriate) support acts were the name of the day. **D.U.S.T.** mysteriously made another appearance, and this time I watched them when fully awake (after my Gotham experience two months back). They weren't much better this way, Mikey the over-enthusiastic vocalist still overplaying his hand, and his back-up band still not able to come up with anything more than common-or-garden alt-metal bluster. A decent guitar riff or two is what this act needs, then their main man's enthusiasm might appear more justified. **Monosect** I for the most part missed (catching up with friends), but they sounded pretty much the same as they did in Slimelight a few weeks back.

No, **Assemblage 23** was the band we'd all come to see. Now with just a lone guest to play around with the keyboard, Tom Shear was having to use all his performance talent to fill the stage up. And that task he fulfilled with honours, working the crowd up and delivering his songs (both new creations and old favourites) with much conviction. Tom's a great songwriter as well as an all-round electronic musician, and this was a pretty good showcase for him, not accounting for the lack of genuine 'live performance'.

And that was the key problem with this evening's performance. The on-stage keyboard clearly had nothing to do with the music being heard (Tom's mate eventually giving up pretending to play it and just throw in some backing vocals), the drum pads from their 2001 tour had gone, so what we effectively got was a Tom Shear karaoke performance. Despite this, it was all good dance-around, sing-a-long futurepop fun, a handy warm-up for Slimelight, though in the annals of EOL-Audio, it's hard to believe this gig will be remembered for anything special two years down the line.

## Wasp Factory – Album Launch Night – 26 Jul 2002

Wasp Factory, a small-but-growing UK independent label held the launch party for their 2<sup>nd</sup> compilation album 'Working With Children and Animals Vol 2', in a hot and cramped Garage upstairs (hardly the most glamorous venue) on one of the hottest Friday nights of the year. For once, 'Being Boiled' stopped being an old Human League track and actually started to become a genuine risk. But maybe the bands could divert my attention away from temperature-related issues?

**Ariel and the Flames** seemed to have got the message RE: the heat and came up with their own solution – Ariel opening her set with a brief (in more sense that one) costume change, before launching into her songs. The Flames, meanwhile, were reduced to one guy in the DJ booth, the rest unable to make it. On the musical side of things, a dark electronic soundtrack provided appropriate backing for the singer's offbeat vocal musings. A very strange way to open the night, though I'm reserving judgement.

**Deathboy** were next, a more accessible electronic-rock set-up. Like Ariel, these guys were newcomers to the scene, at least in a live sense, and whilst the sound quality wasn't great, the energy and conviction behind their show was admirable (considering the band hardly fitted on the stage), and they were pretty entertaining to boot, provoking as much bouncing as the cramped conditions would allow. Their tongue-in-cheek style might well make them a good support for the likes of Killing Miranda in later months, but right now they're off to a good start.

**Psychophile** was the first 'established' act to hit the stage, and whilst the heat forced Lucy to compromise her stage outfit a little, vocally she was pretty much on the ball all the way through, her impressive range shining over the substandard PA. The new guitarist gelled in well with the overall setup, even providing the occasionally backing vocal. Having seen them a few times before, I was hoping that Psychophile would tighten up their live show over time, and tonight's evidence is that they're well on the way.

Backed onto this was Brighton's town-mates **Swarf**, with their approach to the female-vocal 'wave' sound. Whilst Psychophile rely on multi-octave vox, Swarf instead rely on Liz's angelic, often other-worldly, vocal tones, mixed with a solid electronic backing track and some down-to-earth charisma. This lot are clearly onto a good thing – in a market swamped with vaguely dark synth-pop, Swarf are starting to shine quite brightly. I'm looking forward to their debut album already.

**Freudstein** thus headlined the night's proceedings. Now rapidly turning into a jack-of-all-trades industrial/darkwave act, this Brighton-based two piece (what is it about that town?) offered us a diverse and entertaining set, the two swapping around between vocals, guitar and electronics between each track. One minute we're getting a Suicide Commando style horror-movie texture, next we're almost in future pop country, and then suddenly we're in classic EBM mode. One might accuse them of lacking focus, but they clearly know what they're doing, and deserve support for keeping the variety flag flying.

I had to leave shortly before the end of their set, as it was almost midnight and some of us have trains to catch. I'd already seen enough to impress me, however. It's just a pity we had to endure a pokey little venue like the one we had. C'mon Frank, I know you can find somewhere better than this? Bands shouldn't look like their about to fall off the stage all the time.

## M'era Luna 2002 – 10-11 Aug 2002

### Day 1

OK, I'm here to review bands. That's what this section is about. But to only write about bands would do no justice to the full experience that was M'era Luna 2002. My first time abroad in years, my first sleep-over festival, and the first time I watch live music outside. The sheer number of bands I saw mean I won't be going into too much detail about any of them this time. This is here more to sum up the thrill factor that such events offer.

First the set-up – two stages – one outdoors and one in an aircraft hangar. Quite close, and lots of stalls selling wurst, bier and all kinds of goodies – clothes, CDs, jewellery, and at good prices too. The campsite was ok, a bit bumpy but fine, and despite the rain, only small bits of it flooded. Yes, the Germans are good at organising themselves. As for the bands, well with two on stage at once, the sets overlapping, there was the outside chance I could see them all, but I didn't manage that (a man has to rest at some point). So apologies to The Gathering, Ikon, Nosferatu, Ataraxia, The 69 Eyes, Welle:Erdball, Rosenfels, Psycho Bitch, Pinkostar and The Cascades. They all played, but I wasn't around to see them. Maybe some other time (Welle: Erball due at InFest in the UK in two weeks, anyway).

So what about the ones I did see? Day 1 opened with the very German **Zeraphine** (project of ex-Dreadful Shadows members). Taking the German-language route to gothic rock, these guys got the festival off to a strong start, with their chatty singer clearly not perturbed by having a mere 20 minutes to do the chmaltz. Don't know if they'll ever try to break the UK, but local success looks likely for them. Over in the hangar, **Culture Kultür** were soon doing their thing. They seemed to be aiming to do the VNV Nation style of electronic anthem, their vocalist squeezing a fair bit of emotion and energy out of his voicebox. They actually sounded closer to current Icon of Coil, which isn't a bad compromise.

**Sonar** were next up in the hangar, the power noise duo who I managed to miss the last time they played in London. It's a sound they've got pretty much mastered, though like many acts of their ilk, they lacked the stage presence which makes for a full-on performance. The quality and intensity of their source material, however, was never in doubt. **Angels & Agony** followed, another future-pop act, apparently favourites of Ronan Harris (who offers production credits on their studio work). On stage, they gave us an entertaining, energised performance, though they still need something to set them apart from the rest of the crowd.

Time then to catch **Tanzwut** on the outside stage, the most metallic act to appear so far, and also the first chance to hear that oh-so-German instrument – bagpipes (ok, dudelsack!). The fusion of traditional and contemporary sound was undoubtedly successful, and their closing number – a Deutschmetall anthem based round Beethoven's 'Ode To Joy' amused and impressed in pretty much equal measure. Tanzwut were thus my first 'big discovery' of the weekend, though more would certainly follow.

Back to familiar ground then for **Sulpher**. The first big-name British act to play were also the first to suffer from the weekends changeable weather as the rain began to fall. Rob Holliday clearly wasn't happy with the thinning crowd and let his anger show (both verbally

and physically). And yet Sulpher continue to entertain me even after the sixth show playing a remarkably similar set. Legging it inside to catch **Seabound**, I bumped into the VMP crew from Slimelight. These were sufficient to detract my attention from the synth-pop two-piece on stage, Seabound's strong album tracks just not converting well to live performance.

A quick rest before **Assemblage 23**, who drew a huge crowd, the hangar now packed from front to back. Tom Shear took it all in his stride, delivering his songs with power and conviction. I only caught part of his set, though, preferring to watch the slightly sexier **L'Âme Immortelle**. The loss of Hannes from the line-up may yet upset their studio output, but on stage Thomas and Sonja are all you'll ever need. As with last time, L'Âme Immortelle live was like hearing a whole bunch of your favourite songs one after the other. With music this good, Thomas almost has the right to be the arrogant pop star he thinks he is. I just hope this act finds a way of holding together, as they're very much a favourite of mine right now.

**In Extremo** were next, taking the Tanzwut concept of 'past-meets-present German style' one step further, resulting in a stage loaded with just about every kind of instrument imaginable. The resultant sound was somewhere between Rammstein and a Dark Ages military tattoo, metally guitars thrashed alongside a mixture of dudelsack, horns, pipes, strings and drums. Not content with that, the band also offered some neat pyrotechnics and a few onstage acrobatics. And as for the kilt-wearing, I can only approve. In Extremo are a very German band, and reminded me once more why I actually bothered to come out here in the first place.

**Blutengel** started playing in the hangar as In Extremo was finishing off outside, and gradually launched into their seductive darkwave pop. I'd heard a lot about this band, and tonight's show was evidence that the compliments I heard were pretty much bang on. Sadly, my rapidly chmaltzy e level of energy meant I had to miss part of their set lest I collapse on the floor in one big fleshy wreck, though I left with the mental note: 'buy some Blutengel albums, soon'. Refreshed, I returned to the hangar to watch the scathing Mexican industrialists **Hocico** for a bit – good at what they do, but lacking in variety on stage, a half-hour dose was good to get the energy levels up again, but there were duties to be performed outside.

Why? Because **VNV Nation** were on next outside. And Jonny EOL does not miss VNV when they play in his vicinity. The rain was falling quite heavily by now, but Mark and Ronan weren't about to take that as an excuse for not dancing and launched headlong into their set. We all know what VNV Nation are like live now, and so I threw myself into the inevitable bouncy danceathon. 'Futher' served as the 'slow' track for the night, and the rain magically disappeared during it's final chorus. For some unknown reason, 'Solitary' DIDN'T make into the set this time, but it didn't seem to matter as much as I might have imagined.

Quick chance to pop inside to see **Suicide Commando**. The only band to play the hangar when it was dark meant that Johan Van Roy got the bleak industrial surroundings his set required. The sound mix problems which blighted his last UK show had gone, and suddenly I was looking at the Suicide Commando I first saw playing the Slimelight in February 2001, Mssr Van Roy clearly in his element playing to a crowd this size. Even if the set doesn't vary that much from the albums, it was still a powerful collection of songs, and I'm now convinced last years show was just a temporary blip.

This just left **The Sisters of Mercy** as mainstage headliners on day 1. I wandered as close to the stage as I could chmaltzy get, to realise that Andrew Eldrich had gone to new lengths in order to dump the 'goth' tag – he's bleached his hair. I have no idea whether he

was on some kind of substance or whether he's always like this, but he was in a noticeably odd mood, his intersong comments making little sense (no, 'Dominion' is NOT anyone's national anthem!). The long set meant quite a lot of obscure & currently unreleased material found its way into the set, and whilst the source material was strong musically as we know from the CDs, it was clear that The Sisters were way past their best as a functioning unit, going through the motions seemingly without any desire to put some real effort in. With that out of the way, I tramped across the mud and back to my tent.

## Day 2

Day 2 dawned wet, but thankfully the rain stopped long before the bands came on (it turns out we were quite lucky – some bits of Germany flooded while we were messing about here). **Care Company** opened up the main stage, but their music was far too far down the easy listening AOR road for me. Retreated to the hanger to see last minute addition **Z.e.t.a.X** instead. This was much more like that – hard, danceable EBM with plenty of hooks and a rich overall sound. Probably the best of the seven bands I saw during the morning.

**The Bloodflowerz** were next – a hard alt-rock act with a fired-up German girl on vocals. She got the 'rock bitch' thing just about right, propelling her band through their half-hour set. Inside, meanwhile, we got **Elusive**, with a more trad-goth oriented sound, which I found strangely uninvolved – I honestly couldn't see what was wrong, it's just I couldn't tell what (if anything) made them stand out from the crowd. **Schandmaul** were next to bat on the main stage – the third 'traditional-rock' fusion act of the weekend, with a truly bewildering array of German folk instruments. To me it sounds original – but of course we don't get many bands like this in the UK (maybe I've spotted a niche here?).

**Carpe Diem** were the first band on Day 2 that I'd seen before. Last time, I saw them in the Apop support slot, where they did their thing without igniting much energy. They've upped the energy levels since then, but they couldn't do anything to make me dance, which is a pity as from some angles their music sounds quite innovative. **Within Temptation** were the last band I saw as part of my morning 'stint' – I was planning to skip them until I saw the huge inflatable cacti on stage and went for a closer look. A gothic metal act led by a lady in a bright red ballgown, Within Temptation were not only eye-catching, but had the vocal talents to match. The music was didn't bowl me over completely, so I'm not sure if I'll become a fan, but I was glad I saw them.

Time then for some rest, some lunch and then grab a good space for **Funker Vogt** – the first of today's big hitters. For me, Funker Vogt shows are an excuse to dance without having to pay much attention to the fine details, which is pretty much the purpose their set served, so please forgive me for not writing more. **Oomph!** Were next on main stage, another German metal act, but this one very much with both feet in the present. Whilst they were neither as musically adept as Rammstein nor as creative as In Extremo, their 'tanzmetal' was still way better than most of the crap we have to endure in the UK.

But now for one of the weekends highlights – **Das Ich**. Germany's own mobile apocalypse were firing on all cylinders and the tightly packed hangar crowd knew it, and did their best to respond in the appropriate manner. Bruno Kramm and Stefan Ackermann have put together a truly mind-blowing stage show, which proved to be effective even from a distance (I couldn't even get close!). If British acts could somehow work out how to emulate this formula, our national scene may yet have a bright future.

I took an hour off in my tent after Das Ich, having been on my feet for a little too long. I returned for the final circuit of the weekend, starting with American goth-rock mainstays **London After Midnight**. Their ability to write a decent gothic anthem is never in doubt,

though their lead singer was noticeably lacking in charisma, wandering on and off stage at random intervals. One only needs to look at Rogue from fellow Americans The Crüxshadows to see how a goth-rock frontman should interact with an audience.

And then it was time for **Soft Cell**. Having seen the Sisters last night, I was already worried that I'd be seeing another burnt-out old 80s act, but I couldn't have been more wrong. A few wrinkles aside, Marc Almond was still very much the sleazy synth-pop star he always has been, and his free-flowing cheerfulness was at odds with London After Midnight's static singer. The set opened with some promising new material plus some obscure old tracks, before a run of hits towards the end, with 'Memorabilia', 'Bedsitter', 'Tainted Love', 'Say Hello, Wave Goodbye' and 'Sex Dwarf' all making an appearance. I'd forgotten just how good Soft Cell were (and seemingly, still are) and thus I might actually give their new album (due later this year) a go after all.

Still time to watch **Therion** in action in the hangar. Up front, they look like a death-metal act. But no gruff wild-animal vocals here – instead the voices came from a six-piece choir, singing live behind the axe-wielders, with an orchestral backing track to boot. I'd been waiting quite a while to find a band that used a live choir, and at last I've found one. The weekend was rounded off by **H.I.M.** from Finland. Obviously more popular in Germany than in the UK, H.I.M. had some good songs in their set (notably 'Join Me In Death'), but just didn't seem to have that 'spark' that so many of the weekends bands used to such great effect.

And my final opinions – fucking excellent is what I'd say. A fantastic mix of bands, a good variation of styles, with something for everyone (well, almost everyone). The price of the festival was a good deal cheaper than the British equivalents, the organisation generally excellent and good performances from many bands. One criticism – the schmaltzy wouldn't deliver tickets outside of Germany and the only web-sites selling them were German language ones. OK, it's a very German festival, but please, make it easier for us foreigners to get tickets. I wouldn't have wanted to miss this for the world.....

## **Sheep On Drugs (& Greenhaus + Mechanical Cabaret) – 17 Aug 2002**

M'era Luna just finished. InFest about to start. Somewhere in the middle of all this I found time for a trip into London to watch the Sheep on Drugs comeback show. I liked some of their old tracks, and thought a band with that kind of humour would be pretty good on stage. The evening got off to a bad start, though, when it became clear that this was going to be a hot night, the sauna-like conditions in The Garage getting worse as the place filled. Already suffering from minor heat exhaustion due to merely coming here, this was one gig that just had to deliver to make it worthwhile.

**Mechanical Cabaret** opened up proceedings, Roi now deciding to go with two keyboard players in the background (though their compere's description of them as a 'triple orgasm' was a little wide of the mark). Musically, they're still the funny warped synth-pop we know and love them for, with a nicely-done cover of Fad Gadget's 'Love Parasite' sneaking into their short set. **Greenhaus** also played, minus a guitarist though, and tonight they never really got going, technical problems forcing them to throw the towel in after five tracks. They were playing new tracks at the time, so I can't blame them for trying, but this really wasn't going to be their night.

With previously-billed 'Bagman' quietly disappearing from the bill, it was straight onto **Sheep on Drugs**. I was in no state to dance as they wandered onto stage, so I settled for finding a decent vantage point. From my view at the back, I could see Lee Fraser up front



fiddling with the electronics, a video screen showing seemingly random images, plus a guitar player who didn't seem to be doing much, but I couldn't work out where the vocals were coming from. Oh, they're pre-recorded. Erm....there's a lovely big stage up there. Surely there was room for Duncan?

Duncan did actually wander onto stage briefly, but he didn't sing for us, electing instead to smoke a cigarette. This left us with what was effectively a run-through of reworked Sheep on Drugs tracks, more of a DJ set than a live performance. Whilst these new versions weren't at all bad, the whole thing was confusing and lacked any kind of presence. Technical problem meant we got '15 Minutes of Fame' twice, and thus lost any hope of an encore. But by then, I'd lost interest, skipping Slimelight in favour of my kitchen tap's water supply and a nice soft bed.

## **Infest 2002 – 23-25 Aug 2002**

### Day 1

I'd read about InFest. I'd heard all the stories. I'd seen all the previous line-ups. But finally, in 2002, I got it together to actually get it together and go myself. Bradford Uni isn't the most central location, but it's got enough halls and hotels to hold us all, the drinks are quite cheap and it gave everyone a chance to get away from wherever they usually hang out for a weekend. Billed on the same Bank Holiday weekend as the Reading/Leeds festival, but with few clashes in style. Having flirted with guitar bands in the past, this weekend was predominantly an electronic festival.

The 14-band line-up could be split into three categories – synth-pop, EBM/electro-industrial and power noise/distorted beats/rhythmic noise (whatever you want to call it). There was thus enough there to entertain all those with a taste for vaguely synthetic music. There were also a host of stalls selling CDs, vinyl, all sorts of clothes, jewellery, hair and other cyber/gothic 'accessories'. Food was also available (edible, but nothing remarkable), and wristbands allowed you to wander in and out as you pleased.

First up on day one was **Revolution By Night** – the former goth-rockers than chucked away their guitarists, spent some cash on some neat electronic boxes and had a crack at fusing EBM dance grooves with new wave songwriting. The results are proving to be relatively successful, and the duo are now starting to appear more confident on stage, working round the technical hitches and getting to grips with their increasingly strong setlist. 'Faithless' remains their finest track, though we're all losing patience waiting for Herr R.Harris to pull his finger out and deliver the long promised remix that'll complete the much-anticipated EP.

The band I most wanted to see on the opening night was **Psyche**, a long established synth-pop act from Canada. Despite being around for a couple of decades, they're still yet to really establish themselves in the UK, but frontman Darrin Huss came on stage set on putting that right. Like many acts of it's kind, Psyche didn't have much in the way of on-stage instrumentation, so relied heavily on it's singer to make the show happen, a challenge met with honours, tracks from the excellent 'The Hiding Place' album (one of the finest examples of 'future pop' out there) sitting neatly along selections from their backcatalogue and a neat cover of 'Sex Dwarf' to boot.

Headlining the first night was **XPQ-21**, a band about which I heard very mixed opinions beforehand. Ignoring everyone and watching their set with an open mind, I too had mixed opinions on what they had to offer. Their music had a solid, energetic EBM/techno backbone, and they laced their sound with enough influences to keep me interested. It was all very intriguing stuff (industrial version of 'Bela Lugosi's Dead', anyone?), though some

tracks lacked focus and the set wasn't as consistently absorbing like Psyche's was. That over with, I stayed with everyone else to dance to the (excellent) DJ sets until 2am, and so to the end of the first night.

## Day 2

A wander into town and a visit to the National Film & Photography museum saw me through the morning, and by mid-afternoon I was back in the venue in good time for a bit of shopping before **Synthetic** came on. The Brighton three-piece looked more unified than they have in the past (Tim's long black dress suiting him perfectly), and their show was as entertaining as ever, still being able to pull off cheesy gothpop anthems like 'Country' with style and charisma. A couple of new tracks were chmaltz, and so far all looks good for Synthetic.

**Greenhaus** were on next, a band I've seen far too many times now (though this is the first time I've seen them on anything other than a Flag Promotions billing). It's good for them, therefore, that they continue to re-work their set, with the excellent chilled-out 'Stoned' standing out. Other tracks seemed less inspired, and a half-hearted 'O Fortuna' based track seemed like a self-conscious attempt to keep the goths interested. Greenhaus deserve a fan-base, but I'm still not convinced they're playing to the right audiences.

And so to **Winterkälte**, and into rhythmic noise territory for the first time this weekend, and the only band on Saturday I had yet to see play live. One of the very few acts of it's kind to use a live electronic drummer, Winterkälte ran headlong into their set with conviction, showcasing their noise sound in its various guises, with the only guarantee that each track was hazardous to anyone with delicate ears, blasts of synthetic weirdness blended with sheets of noise and held together with psychotic drumming. This is about as good as distorted beat music gets. If you didn't like this sort of thing, of course, there was always.....

**S.P.O.C.K.!** Yes, Sweden's bleepy trekkie boy band, called in at the last moment to replace NeuroticFish (asthma making him too ill to perform). S.P.O.C.K. weren't at full strength either, missing a keyboard player due to a space virus or a black hole or something. The two remaining members weren't about to let that get them down, however, giving us an entertaining set of their particular brand of SPOCK n'roll. They had us singing along, dancing and doing the chmal 'V' thing. A little shallow, maybe, but a lot of fun.

Second-top for the night were **Sonar**, who I'd last seen playing in M'era Luna's aircraft hangar two weeks ago. The shadowy confines of InFest were much better suited to Dirk and Eric's knob-twiddling headfuck, however, and we were treated to the mass of samples, loops and drones that make a Sonar set, complete with lots of wire-frame graphics zipping past on the screen behind them. Dancing like a nutcase was certainly the best way of approaching such extreme music, and like Winterkälte, they proved that power noise does have potential for variety if you try hard enough.

This left **Funker Vogt** to round off day two with a bang. A new video screen with shots from classic computer games provided the background, whilst Jens, Gerrit and the boys did their usual thing up front. This is the third time I've seen Funker live, and I have to confess that I'm starting to find their show is wearing a little thin. A messy intro didn't help, and Jens prancing around in an England T-shirt provoked more confusion than out-and-out support. They've still got some great songs in their set, and dancing was certainly on the cards. But live, Funker Vogt aren't really much advancement from their albums.

## Day 3

Day three was opened by **Aslan Faction**, the nearest thing the UK has as an answer to Suicide Commando and :Wumpscut: in the field of hard industrial dance. Vocal distortion was set somewhere in the Hocico range, which made the hulking brute of a singer seem scarier still. His back-up man, meanwhile, was left bashing away at the drum pads, supporting the backing track in the process. Their set was pretty solid from start to finish, but while they may still need some fresh ideas to advance a stage further, at this early stage they've done all that could be asked of them. And that evil vocalist actually proved to be a really nice guy up front!

**Asche** in English spells a crap indie band. In German, it's a one piece industrial noisemonger. Clearly disturbed about the non-image of so many of his fellow beat-twisters, the solitary member of Asche (A.Schramm) appeared on stage in a thin black dress and a cowboy hat. His set was probably the most far-reaching of the four noise-beat oriented acts of the weekend, incorporating some odd vocal samples and a slightly strange mixing technique that often worked but sometimes didn't. Despite this odd slip-up, Asche kept us moving pretty solidly throughout.

**Welle:Erball** were a band I'd heard years ago and then lost track of, so I was glad to get a chance to re-acquaint myself with their work, a retro-electro timewarp of sorts. The band were kitted out in conservative fashion, the two men in uniformic black suits and the two ladies in beige dresses circa 1945. On stage, their instruments were limited to a dippy little hand-held keyboard, a stylophone (yes, really) and a couple of drum pads, though their backing track was a source of much interest, much of it composed (as the band would often remind us) on a Commodore 64 – defined with much enthusiasm as 'a perfect product'.

And the music? Despite (or more likely because of) their limited means, Welle:Erball went all out in terms of maximising their equipment, their retro-sound uptempo enough to keep the EBM heads happy, but accessible enough for the synthpoppers, and nostalgic for almost everyone present. The vocals were strong, the lead singer friendly and in terms of a show, they came up trumps. The two girls would rotate the pole-mounted florescent triangles, then return to their podia for their slow, robotic, synchronised dancing. Balloons and paper aeroplanes were thrown to the crowd, who thoroughly enjoyed the first UK visit of this German quartet, and promptly bought up almost every Welle:Erball CD they could lay their hands on in the venue. Rumour has it they sold out of albums at 8:03pm; three minutes after the end of their set.

And now for a bit of history – the last ever scheduled European show by **Noisex**. Raoul Rotation's project has been going for 12 years now, and this most chmaltzy of harsh industrialists was about to disband his main project. The particular 'noise' act notable in that it used a greater-than-usual quantity of more conventional (undistorted) synth lines. Their set was thus more accessible to those scared off by the likes of Sonar and Asche, but it was certainly scathing enough for the noise-loving crowd who flock to InFest for exactly this kind of band. Offering everything between an almost EBM-like dance track to a mindblowing breakbeat piece (think Aphex Twin meets Alec Empire), plus a guest vocal from Inertia's Reza, Noisex gave us the farewell show we wanted, even though for me it would also be my first (and thus only) Noisex live experience.

There was one band left on bill still to play – **Mesh**. The general opinion was that they would fail to build on the energy built up by the bands that came before them and become the weekend's inevitable anti-climax. This opinion was a little unfair, and from my view, it was thankfully wrong as well. Compared with the band I saw at the Garage in June last

year, this particular incarnation of Mesh had teeth, the band clearly inspired by the acts who came before to actually put some real effort in.

The set was primarily based round this years 'Who Watches Over Me?' album, the songs performed strong enough to revive my interest in this particular disc. Old favourites 'Trust You' and 'You Didn't Want Me' appeared in radically reworked forms, whilst a guitar was brought into play to help beef up 'Retaliation'. The slide show in the background had been replaced with a full video (something many bands had made good use of this weekend), and whilst their set started to drag a little bit in places, for the most part, Mesh actually managed to justify their place up at the top of the bill. Strange but true, but a band I had almost disowned a few months ago now suddenly had my full attention once more.

The DJs did their thing for a couple of hours after this, and InFest 2002 eventually ground to a halt at 1am, leaving Bank Holiday Monday for the drag back to Essex. But as for the weekend itself, well, for me it seemed like nothing less than a total success. Lots of great bands, not a duff act among them, plenty of new people to meet and lots to stuff to buy, the only downsides being a caterer than ran out of food too soon and a few too many over-obvious cliques making the scene "pecking order" more obvious than it needed to be. Why didn't I start doing this last year, or the year before? Whatever – I'm pretty sure I'll be returning next year. Check back here in late 2003 for a review.

## **Haujobb (+ Goteki, Seize, Aslan Faction & Je\$us Loves Amerika) – 6 Sep 2002**

I had seen Haujobb play once before, long ago when I was still learning what this scene was all about, but I was very tired at the time, so never really got to appreciate what they had on offer as a live act. I have very mixed views on Daniel Myer's various projects, but I knew he had enough good material to make a repeat live experience worthwhile. And so I wandered on down to the Camden Underworld after work, having only a vague idea about what to expect.

An unwieldy four support acts were on offer tonight, each restricted to a half-hour set. Of course, that's still enough time to prove what you can do if you put your mind to it (indeed that's all some bands ever do, thank you NON), and so the cynically titled **Je\$us Loves Amerika** came on stage with exactly that intention. Except the sound balance was fucked. And so, it seems, was some of the equipment, everything grinding to a halt after their second song. Eventually, everything was sorted and suddenly I was looking at a relatively accomplished act, a sort of electro-industrial set-up with a Pitchshifter-esque punk vocalist, a strong character who was just born to be a front man. I'll still need a second dose before I make my mind up, but they got my attention, which is far from a dead cert these days.

**Aslan Faction**, of course, I had seen at InFest a couple of weeks back. For whatever reason, they were unable to offer us any video projections tonight, but the duo otherwise did their scary Hocico-style thing with their usual energy and conviction. **Seize** were on next, whose set I managed to miss at Gotham earlier this year. They were amore pop-oriented act than those who came before, with sweet female vocals and relatively sedated backing. My initial impressions were that they were OK but hardly revolutionary. However, as their set progressed, their music became stronger and more confident, with the highlight being the Delerium-esque penultimate track that might yet make for a decent darkwave club hit.

And now for **Goteki**. I met a fluffy pink girl in the crowd who I'd last seen at InFest, who said she'd come all the way from Norwich just to see 'her favourite band' play for 30 minutes. Figures. Goteki are a tongue-in-cheek electronic act, loaded to the nines with

flashy cyber-wear, C-64 sequences and dippy little ravey synth-pop songs, with just enough beat power to keep them from going under. They were entertaining for a while, the friendly singer clearly better suited to the confines of The Underworld than the large Ocean venue I'd seen them at last time. But in the end, Goteki didn't leave much of a mark on me.

**Haujobb** was thus left with the duty of bringing the evening to a close. His diverse backcatalogue might offer influences ranging from the Aphex Twin through to Skinny Puppy, though his stage show generally keeps to the dancier 4/4 beat numbers. The live drummer had gone, (a few keyboards, a laptop and some occasional guitar thus served as tonights backing), though Herr Myer was clearly not letting anything get in the way of his latest attempt to show London how he thinks industrial music should be done.

The tracks in tonights set were all uptempo and clearly intended to provoke movement amongst the Underworld's dancefloor. There were only occasional hints of Haujobb's more experimental side, although it's unlikely those tracks would have really worked live. The highlight of the evening was 'Penetration', an uptempo version that inspired Myer to wave his arms Ronan Harris-style as a kind of VNVimpersoNation. The show came to an end after a mere 45 minutes, the likely product of attempting to squeeze five bands on the bill.

## **Theatre Des Vampires, Killing Miranda, Season's End and Descendent of Cain – 14 Sep 2002**

This one was billed as a 'Gothic Metal Special', which made a change from all the EBM, synth-pop and power noise I'd immersed myself in over recent weeks. Italian act 'Theatres Des Vampires' topped the bill, but as each band brought along their own following, it seems only fair that I deal with all four acts as equally as possible. Who said I couldn't be impartial?

London goth regulars **Descendants of Cain** opened proceedings. Something had clearly gone wrong in the organisational department as they were still sound-checking when the audience (including me) were allowed down into the Underworld. Their lead singer dealt with it in a good-natured way as possible, and once they launched into their set, they proved once more that they're a highly capable goth-rock trio, though the confused atmosphere prevented them from conjuring up the dark majesty which locally is becoming something of a DoC trademark.

Next up were **Season's End**. A line-up twice the size of the Descendants, and a very different sound. Their use of a lead female vocalist worked wonders, her sweet voice shining bright above the atmospheric metal backing. Included in their set was a highly convincing cover of Radiohead's 'Street Spirit', closer to the original than one might expect such a band to get. Their own material also proved to be ear-catching in all the right ways, echoes of The Gathering or Within Temptation sneaking in. Not my usual kind of thing, but that's only more credit to them for getting my attention.

One band that always are guaranteed my attention, however, are **Killing Miranda**. Never afraid to try out new material or play around with their old stuff, tonight's offerings included riffed-up interpretations of 'Burn Sinister' and 'Pray' plus a selection of new tracks, the best being 'I Know What You Want', a sex-crazed mosh-pitter that's halfway between Ministry's 'Jesus Built My Hot Rod' and Wumpscuts: 'Christfuck'. This was my sixth Killing Miranda show, and I seem to enjoy their shows more and more each time I see them play. I might have written more than this, but, dear reader, I was too busy having fun to make a mental note of all the details.

This left **Theatres Des Vampires** to bring tonights six-string slaughtering to a close. This particular band was totally unknown to me before the show. As it transpired, their sound

was closer to black metal than anything else we'd seen tonight. OK, I do own a Dimmu Borgir album. I've never objected to Cradle of Filth's machinations. However, it's a sound which is of only marginal interest to me. TDV didn't go anywhere near the extremes these bands offer, so whilst I occasionally found their sound absorbing, it couldn't keep my attention for anything other than short periods of time. But at least I tried – maybe I was too worn out after jumping around to KM. Probably true, as I sat through most of Slimelight, too.

## Gary Numan (+ One Pity and Rubicks) – 21 Sep 2002

This was to be my first Numan show. I'd been meaning to go several times in the past, but tickets always sold faster than I could get my act together. For despite Numan's diminished commercial status since his early 80s heyday, he does keep a massive cult following who'd come through rain, sleet and overdrafts to see their hero play live. Now finally it was to be my turn.

Support bands were provided, of course, but the previously-advertised Sulpher was not to be one of them. Instead we got **Rubicks**, a fairly straightforward electro-alt-rock act with a competent but not amazing female vocalist and music to match. Nice coloured squares on the video wall, but even that wore a bit thin after a while. **One Pity**, meanwhile, were a nu-metal band. A passable Korn impression, but misplaced and not my kind of thing at all. I know Numan's a more metallic act than ever before now, but this is taking the concept a little too far in my opinion.

Anyway, we'd only come to see one man tonight – **Gary Numan**. He's had many an image over the years, though this doesn't seem to bother him as much as it used to, both he and his back-up men happy to dance around the stage in Camden Town-issue alt-wear (or at least something that looked VERY similar). The flashy stage show I'd read about in his autobiography wasn't there either – one's budget is clearly a strict business these days, even in rock music. Yes, rock music. Who'd ever heard of electro-pop?

But the minimal stage show didn't matter at all – it's the music that counts, and Mr. Numan clearly has no intention of growing old quietly. The songs from tonight's set were taken from his strongest studio albums, namely Tubeway Army through to Telekon plus his most recent three. The newer stuff was played pretty much true to the originals, but the older tracks were all re-worked, beefed up to fit in with Gary's new industrial-gothic metal sound. It was like having influenced a whole army of evil, black-clad electro-rockers, the original 'friend electric' was now raking some of that influence back for himself. Symbiosis or just recycling? You choose, but either way it sounds impressive in the final reckoning.

There was of course one major omission from tonight's set – Cars. The one Numan track everyone knows was missed out. And it didn't even seem to matter. Clearly we'd all heard it enough times to be spared any further re-workings. Anyway, how can anyone complain about a set consisting of 'I Die: You Die', 'Metal', 'Pure', 'Rip', 'Down In The Park', 'My Shadow In Vain' and one final encore of 'Are 'Friends' Electric?'. Depeche Mode might have gone all soft, The Sister of Mercy might have worn themselves out totally and even Marc Almond is looking noticeably frayed around the edges. But Numan? Going as strong as ever, and clearly enjoying every moment. As are we.

## Black Celebration 2002 – 27 Oct 2002

Last weekend in October, and thus time for the yearly eight-industrial-bands-in-eight-hours extravaganza, Black Celebration. This was the fourth such event in as many years, and one dominated by firsts. It was the first Black Celebration to be held in the larger London Astoria rather than the usual Mean Fiddler LA2 thingy. It was also to be the first BC where

all eight of the bands originally billed actually played. Finally, as a sign that bands are starting to realise that two-piece singer-plus-keyboard set-ups are getting a little tired, all eight bands incorporated at least one guitar player, though their contributions varied as much as the bands utilising them.

**Neurophoria** opened proceedings today. I'd seen them briefly at Slimelight once and my initial impressions were that I was right in not watching their entire set, the opening pair of tracks dominated by rather dull, pounding industrial beats and common-or-garden electronics. Once they got into their stride, however, they began to show a little more creativity in the programming and vocals, and so I was able to make my first few tentative dance moves of the day, though this act still has a little work to do before they climb my scale of recognition.

**Needleye** were the only band on the bill I hadn't seen before at some point, and I'd read quite a lot about them in the metal press, so I was quite interested to see what they had to offer. It took less than a minute to realise that they weren't the industrial metal act I was expecting, but rather a thrash/extreme metal band with programming and keyboard in place of a drummer. At their best, they were able to put together a pretty reasonable headbanger, though they often fell into the trap of overplaying, and so like Neurophoria, need to develop before they make any more headway in this scene, though they do have the option of casting aside all industrial connections and trying their luck alongside more mainstream metal acts.

Next up were another guitar-heavy band, though one that keeps very much on the industrial side of things – I am of course referring to **The Chaos Engine**. The energetic Lee Chaos was particularly fired up tonight, his strong vocals and frantic pad-whacking providing a good front to his string-strumming buddies riff-o-rama. The Chaos Engine are a much better live band than one may expect from their albums, which are produced on a very tight budget, so I was certainly happy to watch them do their stuff on stage once more. **Greenhaus** followed, and I'm losing track of the number of times I've seen them play. They had some good new tracks on offer, and 'Stoned' is still very much a highlight of their set, though in need of fresh air, I elected not to watch their entire show this time.

Having experience the fresh air Charing Cross Road had to offer, I returned to watch **Angels & Agony** in action. I'd seen them at M'era Luna with mixed views, though this time I was intent on watching their entire set. Their huge backdrop gave them the identity that many other future pop acts lacked, whilst the three guys on stage indulged us with a string of catchy pieces of dark synth-pop. Once, of course, the minor technical glitches were sorted out. They've doubtless been aided by Ronan Harris' production help, though they're a strong enough act to stand on their own strengths. Hopefully this show will help them take their place in the Uks notoriously picky wave scene.

Time then, to watch **Sulpher** one more time. It was to be the seventh Sulpher show I'd seen in two years, and whilst they're still playing a remarkably similar set to the one they started out with in 2000, it's something I'm yet to tire of. Rob Holliday is still playing the role of wannabe rock star, yelling the likes of 'YOU RUINED EVVERRYYTTHINNG' and 'DIS-INT-ER-GRATE!!', chucking his guitar at a stage hand (who made a pretty impressive catch) and chmaltzy the mic stand with worrying frequency. OK, now might be a good time to write some new songs, but given the current void that exists for top-notch industrial rock, Sulpher could well have the world as their oyster if they played their cards right (oops, two chmalt in one sentence).

Now getting incredibly tired (having not been to bed the night before in favour of Slimelight and the resultant after-party), I took my place on the terraces up on the Astoria's balcony for **Sheep on Drugs**. I'd been informed by one of my friends in the know that they'd

sharpened up their show since that uninspired night at the Garage last August. Well, their guitarist is playing a marginally more frontal role in things. They've got a pretty girl playing a keyboard. And a new vocalist (moonlighting from Tarantella Serpentine), who ran about the stage shouting at lot. Sadly, the technical gremlins brought them to a halt again, and the whole thing seemed like a mess. Once Lee Fraser managed to get all his wires into place, however, they did manage to at least sustain momentum. They stuck at it bravely, and the crowd was at least willing to show a little enthusiasm, though this is a comeback that still needs some work if it's going to succeed.

And now it fell to **Apoptygma Berzerk** to bring the evening to a (hopefully) triumphant close. Their recent album might have disappointed many, but despite their increasingly worrying penchant for sugary pop filler material, they've never been short of floorfillers either. Besides, unlike the Ocean show back in March, this particular Apop show wasn't so much about promoting a particular CD and more about running through all the old and no-so-old favourites, one after the other. Opener 'Mourn' seemed a little messy, but once Stephan and friends got into their stride, there was no stopping them. Despite the public transport crisis caused by the inclement weather and the fact they'd played London not all that long ago, the Astoria was still very busy on this particular November evening.

Whilst the sound quality wasn't as good as it might have been, it was definitely loud enough (almost too loud at times), and was aided by the guitar player's increased role in proceedings, riffs not present in the album tracks beefing up some of their more pop-oriented songs. It was thus a hugely entertaining way to see out the biggest Black Celebration to date. A few more foreign acts might have been welcome, but there was still plenty of entertainment to be had, and so I went home happy.

## **Diary of Dreams (+ Diorama, Faces of Sarah & Venus Fly Trap) – 23 Nov 2002**

It had been almost one year since Diary of Dreams last graced a London stage. The proceeding year had seen the band launch not only a new album ('Freak Perfume') but also a CD single 'AmoK' and a mini-album/EP 'Panik Manifesto'. There was thus plenty of interest in a repeat performance. The band also brought along label-mates and ex-member project 'Diorama' while Flag Promotions topped off the billing with a couple of local acts.

**Venus Fly Trap** opened up the nights proceedings. Despite only being a two piece singer plus guitarist/backing vocalist set up, with the electronics on backing tape, this particular band had a particularly rock-oriented slant about them. While their performance was thus, relatively energetic, they seemed somewhat misplaced on the bill, and didn't really succeed in the admittedly tricky task of getting the early arrivals worked up, despite their accomplished cover of Suicide classic 'Rocket USA'.

That left **The Faces of Sarah** with the job of getting everything moved up a gear before our German friends took to the stage. I'd seen them play twice before, and wasn't really too excited about watching a third show, but they exceeded my expectations this time, the six-piece goth-rock troupe working surprisingly well in the cramped confines of the Underworlds too-small stage. The Faces of Sarah finally had some teeth, and whilst there's something notably old-fashioned about their approach to the gothic sound, here at least it seems to have found an unexpected home.

So then, to what was the key point of interest for many people tonight – **Diorama**. The project of former Diary of Dreams 2<sup>nd</sup>-vocalist Torben Wendt, showcasing the more EBM/synth-poppy side of gothic music in a tight, professional performance. The vocals



were particularly strong, the songs more hook-laden than any music this moody has the right to be, and the band seemingly to genuinely enjoy their London debut. Diorama had it all, and the audience gave them the reception they deserved.

**Diary of Dreams** had of course, visited these shores before, though hardly on a regular basis, so the interest surrounding tonight's headliners was still very strong. Memories of the DoD 'UK breakthrough' show of two years ago were something of a distant memory, though. For while that show showcased the bands mystical, otherworldly side, tonight's performance was altogether more down to earth. The confines of the venue, the lack of so much as a single smoke machine, and the niggling technical difficulties made sure of that.

And yet the band rose above all these problems seemingly unperturbed, even when the guitarist had to disappear backstage to do a quick repair job on his axe (even when he returned, you couldn't hear it all that much – a pity). The setlist was generally dominated by tracks from the recent album and EP releases. Whilst I wasn't as au fait with these discs as I am with the Diary of Dreams backcatalogue (mainly thanks to the glut of releases by many of my favourite bands this year), the sight and sound of Adrian Hates and company doing their thing up on stage was still as captivating as ever.

Old tracks, when they did appear, turned up in radically re-worked forms, 'Victimised' and 'Retaliation' both very different from the 'End of Flowers' versions. Even 'Butterfly:Dance!' had morphed from it's original version on 'One of 18 Angels' into something very different. Only 'Chemicals' appeared in it's original form, though I doubt the studio version was recorded with two microphones in the hope that one of them might actually pick up a signal.

Two encores kept everyone happy until the end, and so all it remained to do was to wander out into the cool November evening and hop on a bus to Slimelight (though unlike last year, the bands didn't follow us – can hardly blame them given their exhausting schedule). Despite all the technical problems, line-up shuffling (Diorama at one point billed at the bottom) and the like, it was still a successful evening, with one excellent UK debut from Diorama, one rise to form for The Faces of Sarah and Diary of Dreams pulling off a successful show in circumstance where many bands would have simply flopped.

## **NeuroticFish (+ Revolution By Night & Seize) – 30 Nov 2002**

NeuroticFish had originally been billed to play at InFest, but for medical reasons, that had to be cancelled. A pity, but at least this left the door open for all the other UK promoters to get this particularly lucrative bit of fish on one of their billings. And the winner – PTF Promotions, a new face on the London scene. Whether they were set up for this one gig or will appear on future billings remains to be seen.

**Seize** were the opening act for the night. I'd seen them before supporting Haujobb and I have to admit, they are starting to grow on me. They've certainly got a good vocalist, whilst the accompanying music made them sound something like those trance/house remixes of Delerium songs so beloved of DJs cross-genre. They'd also brought along a dancer – slick and sexy she might have been, but I still think the group have to think a little more about how to integrate her into the stage show.

Next up were **Revolution By Night**, complete with a video screen and a second live keyboardist. Aside from the musical benefits that this might have had, it also meant that Steve no longer had to fill an entire stage. This helped calm many of the nerves that have dogged their recent live shows, and so the now-trio were able to roll-out the likes of 'Empires and Dance', 'Faithless', 'Condition One' and their version of 'Visions In Blue' with more confidence than ever before, and still found time to throw in a few in-jokes along the way. All we need now is the EP.

And now time for tonight's headliner – **NeuroticFish**. In the studio, this is the solo project of Sasha Mario Klein, though his live show adds a couple of keyboard players (which the band hastened to show were genuine live players and not mime artists). As for Sasha, his energetic demeanour, straggly blonde hair and goatee beard gave the impression of a most amicable madman, the kinda bloke you need to give an act like this some character.

The setlist held few surprises, pulling the better tracks off the two NeuroticFish albums to date. And of course, there isn't THAT much variety in the NeuroticFish sound, futurepoppy anthems all the way. But this didn't matter, nothing did, because it was just so much fun. Sasha soon had us singing along to the better-known tracks, even reprising the 'Velocity' chorus to make sure we all joined in the communal sing-song. It was all highly entertaining stuff, and having spent a year watching lots of very serious bands doing very serious things, this particular show proved to be as effective as light relief gets.

## **Killing Miranda (+ ION & Auto-Mata) – 13 Dec 2002**

For the second year running, I undertake the annual Christmas shopping mission around London before attending a Killing Miranda concert. This one prefaced the Xxtortion club night in the same venue, with free entry offered to early arrivals. Of course, if you arrived too early, you were left standing outside until they were ready. Organisation was for whatever reason confused at the best of times, with KM trying to get their set moved as far back in the evening as possible thanks to differing messages coming out of different channels. There wasn't even a support DJ – yours truly eventually offered a compilation CD to the guy in the sound booth to give a little entertainment before the main show.

What's more, **I.O.N.** had to go on stage so early that hardly anyone got a chance to see them. I did, however. It's clear that the band are heading in a more rock direction than ever, with the addition of a full live bassist and their vocalists increasing aggressive stance. The first track was a little too much of the textureless shouty ilk, but then he began to show his varied range, proving he can sing properly, shout loudly and meld the two into a combo that'd serve any decent metal band well. Unfortunately, they were off stage before they could get keyed in, making this a gig the band would probably just want to forget.

**Auto-Mata** at least got a fair crack of the whip, which helped me as they were the only band of the three billed with which I was not already familiar. The set-up was of the usual 5-piece industrial-rock variety (vocals, drums, bass, guitar, keyboard), though at least their music was relatively energetic and dynamic. The vocalist in particular was pretty keen on trying to rock the still-sparse crowd, at one point diving off the stage and knocking over a girl, who (thankfully) saw the funny side (actually, I'm pretty sure they know each other, as she was otherwise one of their most vocal fans). Me? I quite enjoyed it, but I wasn't into it as much as some, though I could blame it on the soundsystem, which wasn't coping too well tonight.

This left **Killing Miranda** to play, eventually agreeing to start their set at 10:30pm. This was never going to have the potential to be one of Killing Miranda's all-time classics, instead proving to be a test of how the band copes in less-than-ideal circumstances. There were numerous technical troubles, plus a crowd that was somewhat sparse by KM's recent standards. But they were here, dammit, and got on with the show. Once the cardboard cut-out of Chewy was out the way, of course.

The set tonight contained a selection of new tracks – the excellent 'I Know What You Want' already becoming a live fave while the promising 'Enter The Dagon' featured some interesting bass work. Of the old tracks, 'Pray' got its now-usual beefed-up live treatment, while for reasons unexplained, 'Touched By Jesus' got its last ever live run-through. 'Teenage Vampire' still seems to be the audience favourite, a shining example of the

band's sense of humour riding high over a 3-minute goth-rock anthem. Someone even offered the comment to me afterwards 'But I AM a teenage vampire!!'.

It wasn't a long set by any means – 'Burn Sinister' was left out and there was no encore – the set being dismantled before anyone got a chance to call for one. The general impression was that this was all just one big preface before the club night. But a free show from one of my favourite bands in London is something not to be sniffed at, no matter how difficult a night it was for the band and others. Here's hoping they make it back onto the big stage soon.

## **Signe Signe Sputnik (+ Goteki, Mechanical Cabaret & Conspiracy) – 20 Dec 2002**

This was to be the last gig in an exhausting 2002 schedule. From Fad Gadget at this very venue back in January, to Germany and Bradford and back to London again, I'd seen a total of 112 different bands, some more than once (thank you Greenhaus...) and what better way to round off the year than a bit of light-hearted entertainment courtesy of the silliest band ever to grace my CD collection. Tonight's bill started serious and got less and less so the further up you went.

**Conspiracy** thus opened proceedings, a new EBM/electro-industrial project from Leicester. The band were intent on promoting their debut single 'Electric Bitch', and they kindly sent me a copy to review along with a cost-price ticket to tonight's show. Not that they're a one-song band by any means, the trio performing an energetic, colourful EBMesque set, with some well-placed live guitar giving their sound some extra backbone. The only thing I would say is that they did seem a little uncomfortable of stage – the girl on keyboards portraying an icy staticness, though lead-man John did appear to get into the swing of things later in the set. This problem is one easily solved by experience, of course, so I'll keep you posted when these guys return to stage early next year.

**Mechanical Cabaret** up next, now very much a 3-piece live. Technical problems dogged the early moments of their set, whilst Tobi had to do the entire set sitting, suffering from some form of leg injury (though it didn't stop him dropping his keyboard twice). Bruce seemed to be having fun wearing his purple dress, but it was left to Roi to hold the show together. That he did, but this still didn't strike me as one of MC's more successful shows. **Goteki** followed on from this, the same band I'd seen twice earlier on in the year. They can pen a catchy tune, and their singer certainly has the charisma to front such a band, but I still think they're lacking a certain depth.

Of course, depth isn't essential if you wanna be famous. Just ask **Signe Signe Sputnik**. Any band who tries to fund the recording of their debut LP by selling advertising space between each song can hardly be taken seriously at the best of times, and in their case, it makes them all the more appealing. Degville and co. might be getting on a bit now, but it hasn't affected their dress sense much (though their were no fishnet-tights-on-head chmaltzy tonight).

The Spunik set is quite simple. Repetitive drum loops and one-keyed sequences provide the backing, whilst the guitars and vocals are alternated up top. There were new songs in the set, notable for sounding pretty much like the old ones. Clearly they see no need to modify the formula than got them this far. Only occasionally did the band change pace for the 'slow' tracks 'Ultraviolence' and 'Atari Baby'.

But somehow the repetition didn't seem to matter. Why? Because this was FUN!!! Nothing revolutionary, just some good old fashions synthetic rock n'roll from a bunch of boys who never grew up. Working a passage from 'Sympathy for the Devil' into 'Love Missile F1-11' sorta summed up the level of musical integrity here. And the crowd went with it all the way. As did I.

## Icon of Coil, Assemblage 23 and Swarf – 19 Jan 2003

My first gig of 2003, featuring what has to have been Cryonica's biggest billing yet. Fighting for attention in the London EBM gigging scene, these 'small fish' (in live band terms at least) nevertheless had an ace or two up their sleeves, namely Icon of Coil, and Assemblage 23 along to boot. The queue outside was pretty impressive compared with most shows at the Underworld I've been to, and once inside I picked up that the show was in fact a sell-out.

Before the big-hitters, however, we got **Swarf**, rapidly becoming a draw in their own rights and unlikely to be footing the bill for much longer. Liz clearly has both the charisma and the voice to front such an act, and the EBM-inspired musical accompaniment is spot-on. They chmaltz a new track, ('Supine', I think), which still sounded a bit rough at the mixing level, but I can't blame them for trying it out. One thing puzzled me – crowd members showed their appreciation by throwing knickers onto the stage. Is this a 'done thing' that I haven't picked up on yet?

So to **Assemblage 23**. This time we got the band and not just Tom Shear-plus-unknown-keyboard-player. The focus was still very much on the vocalist rather than the group as a whole, however, and Tom duly launched into his set, taking the best tracks from all of his albums. There's not really all that much to be said about this show. It was fun, the songs were good and the crowd really got into it. But it didn't seem much like a major musical event, just some like-minded people popping down to the Camden Underworld to sing along with one of their favourite songwriters. That aim was at least met, so I won't bitch any more.

I could say the same thing about **Icon of Coil**. These boys have taken the future-pop concept to further extremes that even VNV Nation could imagine. That is, it is now definitely pop and not industrial, EBM, techno-goth or any of those other terms banded about during late-night flamewars on net.goth. Like Assemblage 23's set, you could see what was coming pretty far in advance. This was handy for those with glowsticks and/or drugs left over from the previous night, as it was incredibly easy to get into.

And even easier to get out of. By mid-set I was starting to feel like I was in some kind of loop, stopping and starting to dance in a 5-minute cycle. It picked up toward the end, at least, with 'Floorkiller' grabbing everyone's attention in time for their cover of 'Headhunter'. Predictable but fun, with Tom Shear and Mark Jackson (he of VNV) coming on stage to join in the fun. And that was it. Show over. Time to go home and back to bed.

## Ministry – Animositisomina Tour – 3 Mar 2003

This is one of those bands I've been meaning to see live for ages but never really got the chance. Thankfully, with 'Animositisomina' sorted out, Al, Paul and the boys could hit the road once more. The Astoria was chosen as the venue, and **Raging Speedhorn** called in as support. I'm not really at liberty to comment about these boys. They come on stage, and instantly start making lots of noise – no subtlety, no decipherable lyrics, no apparent pattern to any of it. If someone could explain the point behind this band (or at least what they're singing about), please get in touch.

**Ministry** were also intent on making lots of noise. Indeed, anyone hoping to see an 'industrial' band play would have been disappointed. The deeply-cutting precision of their finest studio efforts isn't part of their stage show. What we do get is a ballsy display of pure testosterone from the meanest bunch of Americans known to man. Al, with his grey dreads and 'motorbike' mic stand, looks like he's 60 years old (actually 45 as of gig day) and falling to pieces. But the energy is still there. He still WANTS to do this.

Anyway, after a quick C&W intro, the band launch into their set, opening with a selection from the latest album. However, whilst that disc might have been an improvement on their previous studio efforts, it's the old favourites that everyone wants, and once 'Dead Guy' (hate that track) was out of the way, we got them. The slowed-down 'Filth Pig' went better than it's recorded equivalent, but 'Bad Blood', the first of the classic Ministry riffs, was the one that forced this show up a gear.

Interestingly, the 'raw' nature of tonight's performance made some of the weaker studio tracks (such as 'Supermaniac Soul' and 'Crumbs') come to life. It was final run of 'N.W.O.', 'Just One Fix' and 'Thieves' that really made it for me tonight, though. By the time we got to closing number 'Jesus Built My Hot Rod', the over-the-top nature of tonight went into overdrive. Reversing the trend seen with 'Crumbs', this particular song doesn't work as well on stage. Not that I had any energy left to dance to it.

Two encores were provided. 'Breathe' followed by an insanely long 'Stigmata' saw one of the two drumkits collapse. And then to see us out, their recent cover of 'The Light Pours Out Of Me' came almost as a respite. Never have I been to a show more physically demanding than this. The morning after, my ears are still ringing. More than once did I get caught up in the inevitable mosh-pit. But these boys can still rock. They might well have been better, say, ten years ago, but for the most part, they've still got what it takes today.

## **Christian Death (+ Killing Miranda, Lover of Sin & Diet of Worms) – 7 Mar 2003**

A last minute choice this one, not least because of the current nature of Christian Death's line-up, one that has practically nothing to do with the trad-goth legends in their original form, but seems to continue to find ways to survive. But with Killing Miranda and two other supports, there was still a pretty good chance of a decent nights entertainment. It later turned out that the two 'previously unknown acts' were side-projects of two of CD's current line-up. Both would impress more than the parent band.

**Diet of Worms** opened with a strong, forceful set, packed full of scathing vocals, solid riffs and some particularly intense drumming. Reminiscent in places of Ministry or the more metallic Marilyn Manson tracks, Diet of Worms served as an effective preface to tonight's events, though towards the end their set began to drag a little, in a 'thanks, I've got the idea now' fashion.

More notable was **Lover of Sin**, a doomy metal band with a screeching banshee of a singer (Maitri – none other than Christian Death's bassist and second vocalist), a scantily clad lady who practically scared you into paying at least some attention. Her backing band played a suitably gloom-laden set, echoes of the slower Metallica tracks or the more serious Type O numbers in the downtempo parts, with a more black metal of sound elsewhere, but it was the shrieking, screaming, screeching vocals that did it for me.

**Killing Miranda** were next – now the eighth time I've seen them perform. The backing track has been remixed, but it's otherwise Rikky and friends doing what they do best. They clearly enjoy their live shows, and some of their recent creations are coming on very nicely indeed. One hopes they'll get at least another EP out sooner or later, though what this

group really need are some high-profile support slots and a well-funded record deal that'll allow them to break away from the London scene and make a mark over a wider area.

**Christian Death** have of course made their mark many times before, though one does wonder to the validity of the current line-up. To me, Christian Death always used to equate to Rozz Williams. And he has long since left this mortal coil. Valors project really needing a separate name (does 'Sin and Sacrifice' mean anything?), particularly after assembling a totally new line-up back in 1993. So why is the band still going? Money? Self-indulgence? Or is there some chmalt musical reason why this most notable of gothic band names remains alive long after the death of it's founder. The group clearly has some musical talent in there, so let's forget about history and ask 'Does the group in front of me now stand up on it's own merits?'

Well, on the basis of tonights set, I'm not sure I really care. Whilst I'd stop short of calling it totally awful, the Christian Death I saw on stage was a far cry from my 'Only Theatre of Pain' album. It's now a distantly gothic metal band with former Cradle of Filth member Gian Perres on guitar proving the point. It's just a pity they couldn't hammer their acts into gear – lots of mumbling about sex, drugs and delayed flights does not a memorable show make. The whole thing sounded like a second-rate goth-metal act.

Their set had one saving grace, of course – Maitri. Her bass playing didn't really stand out, but given the quality of the material she was working with, that's hardly surprising. Nope, it was her vocals that did it, and she got behind the mic just about enough to prevent me heading doorwards and onto an early train home. But it remained a truly strange night, with the curious circumstance of all three supports out-doing the headliner on this occasion.

## Wasp Factory Special – 29 Mar 2003

The second Flag chmaltzy /Wasp Factory night I've been too, this time celebrating the release of Psychophile's first studio album, with the band in question bagging top slot on the bill, with Freudstein, Deathboy, Arkham Asylum and Impulse 9 taking the four support slots. The venue being what it is, it felt more like a gathering of goth buddies than a major live music event. But review it I shall.

**Impulse 9** opened up tonight's entertainment. An interesting set-up, with the keyboard player handling lead vocals and guitarist merely backing. There sound of choice was a hard, danceable EBM variant, lying somewhere between VNV Nation and Hocico on the spectrum of intensity. Possibly indicative of their newcomer status was the presence of three cover versions – the Sisters 'Lucrecia My Reflection' and NIN's 'Sin' rolled off in an accomplished manner, but 2 Unlimiteds chestnut 'No Limits', with a cameo vocal from a girl with plastic hair, seemed to be the crowds favourite. Their own songs are coming along nicely, but they've still got work to do in terms of defining a distinctive sound. That I will check up on at a later date.

Next up was **Arkham Asylum**, a sort of high-speed electro-punk set-up, borrowing from the likes of Pitchshifter and Ultraviolence in their attempt to define a distinctive sound. Energetic they certainly were, but they really seemed to be overplaying their hand – massively. Their guitarist seemed to be substituting quality for quantity, blasts of distorted noise accompanying the fired-up vocalist, who might have impressed me more had he played down all the anti-war invective that's already becoming a bit I.

I might have said the same thing about **Deathboy**, but given the support this act got tonight, I'm not sure if I dare. The newcomers I saw on a hot night last July now really seem to have got their act together, balancing their guitars, synths and vocals into one relatively inviting techno-rock set-up, with plenty of in-jokey tongue-in-cheek humour

(cover Tears For Fears, why don't you?). It was clear that much of tonight's crowd had come specifically to see Deathboy's performance, a statistic that might very well see them grace some larger stages in the near future.

That I very encouraging to **Freudstein**, who played to a half-full floor, many of Deathboy's fans tramping off once their local heroes were done. Poor choice, IMHO, as the Brighton duo put on their usual enthusiastic performance, frantically switching between instruments as their performance progressed, both getting a go on guitars and vocals as well as the medium-sized stack of electronic gizmos on stage. Embracing several forms of the 'industrial' sound at once, Freudstein remain an entertaining live experience, and it seems a shame that so many people chose not to wait around and check it out.

Fellow Brightonians **Psychophile** also suffered from the thinning crowd, but a headline spot is still the best one to have on paper, and so Lucy and Smogo launched into their set in their usual style. Lucy's voice remains this act's key attraction, multiple octaves thrown in for the price of admission, though admittedly it's not to everyone's tastes. While I was now getting unbelievably tired, I at least got to my feet for 'Vice Girl', my personal favourite Psychophile track. Anyway, it was a good way to see out a largely excellent night in what is ironically one of London's worst venues.

## Elektrofest 2003 – 6 Apr 2003

This time Flag Promotions went too far. Advertising a seemingly random line-up months in advance, without even the venue confirmed, then releasing a 10-band billing that took bewilderment to new levels. It seemed inevitable that some bands would drop off at some point, with Siobahn Fahey (ex-Bananarama!?), T.O.Y. and Computorgirl all dropping off the bill in the late stages (Discoordinated replacing Computorgirl, the other two acts too late to substitute), whilst SPOCK, Statemachine and The Borg quietly slipped off the billing months before the event.

Eight bands thus remained, and to confuse things further, the event was moved at the last minute from the London Astoria to the smaller adjacent LA2 (which the owner will insist is called the 'Mean Fiddler', but LA2 is quicker to write). The event was also moved from its usual Easter Sunday slot to two weeks previous, which might have made things difficult for the many of us attendees that didn't live locally and had work the next day. But the bill remained strong, and Nightbreeds dead-giveaway CD stall helped ensure all chaos was soon forgotten.

The **Ju Ju Babies** opened the days festivities. They of all people must have regretted the move to the smaller venue, as eight-piece bands don't tend to take well to tiny stages. Two scantily-clad female vocalists fronted the act, both adorned with decency-sparing silver duct tape. Add a keyboard player, electronic drummer, guitarist and live theremin operative and for good measure, throw in a couple of performance artists. Ju Ju Babies don't do things by half.

Musically, they seemed to be aiming for a electronic cheese-rock, vocals generally shouted rather than sung and with a OTT, cartoonish feel. That aim they certainly achieved, though the performance art did seem a little half-hearted. Musically, however, the group do have a surprising amount of cohesion considering how new they are and how many of them there are. Some decent slots in fetish clubs and the like (where the stops can really be pulled out performance-wise) should see them develop further.

Next up was **Kinetik**, three people and towering stacks of electronics returning one year after their Elektrofest debut last year. Clearly out to produce a genuine live show, it seemed inevitable that there would be some technical gremlins to iron out. Sure enough,

things did grind to a halt a few times, the trio concentrating on fixing the problems rather than playing to the crowd, but what went on when all the machines were talking to each other more than compensated.

Obvious comparisons can be made to the chmaltzy Kraftwerk, but also to more contemporary acts (Orbital spring to mind). It was hard to resist making my first dance moves of the day, intricate programming and catchy little melodies all gelling together perfectly. The 80s-style computer graphic projects dovetailed this nicely. Highlight once again was 'Go Elements Go', with Shirley-Ann (Kinetik's classically trained member) giving us a neat electronic clarinet solo.

Last-minute substitutes **Discoordinated** then took to the stage. These three were never really going to be my kind of thing, the gigantic dirty basslines far too much on the bowel-churning side. The quirky little vocalist was clearly keen to work the crowd a bit, and whilst his yapping style sat in well with the music, I couldn't really get into it, so unfortunately you'll have to look elsewhere for a review which will tell you whether these boys are any good at whatever style of music it was that they were playing.

Back on familiar ground then with **Goteki**. I did actually pick up their album 'Goteki O/S' a week previous to this as part of a Wasp Factory special offer, and was pleased to find a good variety of the sound thereon (touching on rave, synth-pop, EBM and even drum'n'bass). This show was very much the band promoting this disc, dropping even 'Boneshaker' from the Sneaky Bat Machine days in an attempt to give the new disc plenty of airtime. No other surprises, but I am slowly starting to warm toward Goteki's set.

**Marlow** next, a band completely new to me. Prior research told me this was a project centred on Robert Marlow from Basildon, who'd collaborated with Vince Clarke (yes, the quiet one from Erasure) many moons ago. Sort of figures, really, as this was shameless old-fashioned synth-pop, complete with synchronised dancers/backing vocalists and a lone keyboard player in the background.

So an Erasure clone? Nope. Robert Marlow himself was about as far away from Andy Bell as you can get. No camp gay icon here, but a portly, down-to-earth Essex man. A friendly sort of bloke really, and whilst I don't think he's gonna be topping the charts like his old Basildon buddies, he clearly enjoys what he does and has in fact come up with a quite catchy little collection of songs. I wasn't exactly bowled over, but not bad at all.

Retro-synth still clearly the order of the day, as it was now time for **The Droyds**, practioners of the oh-so-trendy 'electroclash' sound. It's not a new style, but it is one I like. Utilising dual male-female vocalists, both besuited and loaded with attitude, it was exactly how one would expect such an act to handle themselves on stage. I have to admit to liking quite a few of their songs, though the fuzzy synth dominating much of their sound started to drag a little towards the end.

And now time for **XPQ-21**, main beneficiaries from the late shake-up, finding themselves promoted from mid-bill to main support to Covenant. The act have yet to really establish themselves in the UK, but tonight might just have made a difference. Having added a live drummer since their InFest show last year, XPQ-21 are still very much a Jeyenne-led affair, Nicque quietly getting on with the keyboarding in the background, the drummer almost out of sight.

And lead the show he certainly did. Dressed in a white shirt and black waistcoat combo, he looked the very model of European decadence. Musically they were strong too, their slightly quirky take on the Euro-electro sound on the day starting to make more sense with repeated listens. They don't actually play their more extremely experimental stuff live, but



what they did play was engaging and intriguing. Add a couple of straight-ahead floorfillers (notably 'White & Alive') and you have a very complete band worthy of your attention.

All that it remained now was for **Covenant** to round off today's festivities in style. A delay in getting set up didn't help matters, but once on stage, the Swedish trio got straight down to delivering their ultra-catchy EBM specialities. Of course, with an ever growing discography, some favourites would have to be dropped – though I'm not certain skipping out 'Theremin', 'Figurehead', 'Go Film' AND 'Tour De Force', all released on single or EP was quite the best way round the problem.

Anyway, what was left was still a setlist of distinction, with the dancier tracks from the excellent 'Northern Light' album holding the set together. The token obscurity of the night was 'Wasteland', whilst 'Stalker' and 'Tension' were the only other 'old' tracks to make it in – the rest were from 'United States of Mind' onwards. A small technical hitch brought 'No Man's Land' to a halt, but otherwise the set held it's energy from start to end.

And that's really all I can say about the Covenant set. They don't sound particularly different to their albums when on stage, but those albums ARE very good in their own right. You can sing along, dance along or just stand and watch. Eskil's a charismatic frontman, not as engaging or energetic as some, but that nice bloke that you don't mind spending Sunday evening with.

And that was that – an enjoyable end to an event that seemed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Would have been nice to get the larger Astoria or the complete advertised billing, but what was on offer tonight was good enough for me, so I'm not going to complain any further.

## **Sheep on Drugs (+ DUST Retox, Katscan & Deathboy) – 3 May 2003**

OK – let's get this straight. I'd seen all four bands on tonights billing before. One (Deathboy) were clearly on the way up, another (Katscan) were doing pretty well already, a third (Sheep on Drugs) was sliding down the slippery slope and a fourth (D.U.S.T. – now with 'Retox' appendage) had never really impressed me at any point. But band line-up, philosophies and styles are hardly stable, so all seemed worth another viewing.

**Deathboy** hit the stage first, launching straight into 'We Will Destroy', opening track on their recently released album. Now becoming a sizable draw in their own right, their blend of broken beats, industrial synths, metal guitars and punky, in-your-face vocals is seriously starting to gel into a distinctive and seriously threatening concept. Their cover of 'Mad World' is just a little 'tightening' away from perfection, but their own material is good, too. Hopefully they'll get a go on a 'big' stage some time soon.

Next up were **Katscan**. A sleazy, sub-gothic trawl across an electro-industrial soundscape, the now-duo clearly know how to pen a catchy track and get the best out of it musically. It's just an act of this nature really needs more than a vocalist and lone keyboardist to transfer their nefarious creations onto stage. I actually bought their album after the show on the basis of this performance, but a guitarist, pad-whacker or even just some visuals would spice up their stage show no end.

And now to **D.U.S.T. Retox**, a tweaked version of the band that kept cropping up on various billings last year. Their vocalist has gone for more of a cyberish, glam-rock look, but his usage of the word 'fuck' and it's many variants still stink of rock I. Musically, they're more balanced than they once were (i.e. you can now hear the keyboards over the guitars),

but I still remain to be impressed. Every now and again, we'd getting a promising chorus, fragment or musical excerpt, but IMHO, it never really came together.

**Sheep on Drugs** were another band who sorely needed to sharpen up their game, if recent performances were anything to go by. Marcus from Tarantella Serpentine has gone, as has the shy guitarist. This leaves Lee Fraser and the former keyboard player, now handling bass from the top of an impossibly high pair of platform boots. So who's doing vocals now?

Actually both of them had a go, Lee proving to be reasonably accomplished at rolling off his old tracks Duncan-style, whilst his back-up lady took to the mic late in the show to plaster some sexual overtones to a couple of tracks. But it still all seems a little sad – an old band continually shifting their line-up in an attempt to keep the thing alive. So it wasn't as bad as I was expecting, but there was a strong feeling amongst the crowd that the support acts were a bigger draw than the headliner once more. Come to think of it, I probably wouldn't have come myself if it wasn't for Deathboy and Katscan.

## **Gotham 2003 – 18 May 2003**

The first Gotham event in 2000 was something of a personal watershed, it being the first time I'd been to a genuinely 'gothic' event, as well as my first experience of two personal favourites – Diary of Dreams and Killing Miranda. The former has made the occasional return to the UK since then, whilst the latter are now very much regulars on the London (and indeed, the Uks) goth-rock circuit. Which included this gig, supporting one of the punk scene's few bona-fide survivors, The Damned.

OK, a punk band headlining a goth festival? Well, Vanian's dress sense, mixed with their more, let us say, 'reflective' musical direction in their later years gave them a little bit of goth credibility (and face it, the two scenes are inextricably linked). And then what does Flag do? Give the main support slot to In Strict Confidence, a German electro-industrial four-piece who really should have headlined their own (smaller) event rather than get crammed into the billing here.

And so we wait outside for an hour while soundchecks do or do not happen within, and we finally get in an hour late. Anyway, once inside, we get treated to a wholesome set by **Excession**. A female-vocal goth-lite of sorts, reminiscent of All About Eve and bands of that ilk. Very tight, competent set, but lacking a vital spark that grabs your attention, but still a good way to kick off the days proceedings.

Then we get the **Descendants of Cain**, though their singer was suffering from a case of 'Descending of Mic-Stand', crouching and stretching in the hope that his words might somehow make it to the other end of the PA system. Despite this, they still managed to deliver their usual technically proficient and generally professional mini-set, a pixel-perfect portrait of how to 'do' goth rock in four songs or less. Not as engaging as some, but impressive nonetheless.

Onto **Psychophile**, Wasp Factory's contribution to the days events. I do actually remember liking Psychophile's set in the past, but this time out it just didn't work. Clearly the soundchecking difficulties hurt this duo more than most, as Smogo's guitar swamped everything, including Lucy's vocals. They threw a hell of a lot of energy into their performance, an over-compensation which spoilt their show on this day. Better luck next time, OK?

**The Ghost of Lemora** were on next, suffering countless technical difficulties which delayed the event even further. But their set was worth the wait. Clearly a goth band intent

on having 'fun', the Lemoran quartet proved exactly what was possible if you mixed the Descendants of Cain's technical proficiency with Psychophile's bubbly enthusiasm. They just generally seemed to 'get it right'.

Somehow managing to come up with a sound that was both clearly rooted in goth yet not a schmaltzy of Sister/Neffs/Siouxsie/etc, The Ghost of Lemora weren't only the first band to pay tribute to today's headliners, but left a relatively effective marker for their own achievements. Twinkle's decidedly 'theatrical', nay, camp approach to his adopted role as frontman might not have appealed to everyone, but what do you expect with a moniker like that?

Now for **Mechanical Cabaret**, called in late in the day to replace Attrition. Agreeing to play a brief three-song set to help get things back on schedule, Roi clearly had his work cut out to make a mark, particularity as he only had one back-up man today. Nevertheless, he launched into his set in the usual way, maybe not picking the very finest songs in his set (what's an MC show without 'Nothing Special' anyway?) but fun for a few minutes at least.

Time then, for **Killing Miranda**, taking a break from recording album no.3 to play this particular billing. The time constraints meant tonight's set was restricted to the best of the 'Transgression..' tracks plus their most practised new 'uns, opening with 'I Know What You Want', rapidly developing into a searing riffastic anthem that might just shoot them out of cult goth status and into a wider audience.

They made no secret of the technical glitches that had caused so much trouble for so many tonight. But their attitude was very much a case of 'fuck it, let's rock this joint anyway'. And rock it they did, clearly at home in front of the now-sizable collection of young goths, old punks and industrial heads of varying age filling out the various viewing positions the Camden Palace has to offer.

And then for some strange reason, we got **In Strict Confidence**. Now don't get me wrong – I LIKE In Strict Confidence. They were one of the reasons I came. But between Killing Miranda and The Damned. No way! OK, they've got a guitarist now, but this was hardly rock music. Industrial beats and hoarse German vocals might just have been excusable to the gothic contingent of the crowd, but the punks and ex-punks waiting for the headliners were not best pleased.

Things weren't helped by the poor sound quality, their opening track sound like a complete and total mess, the mix of live and programmed drums sounding like someone fitted a malfunctioning delay unit to the PA. Once they got into the swing of things, however, they started to sound more cohesive, with 'Kiss Your Shadow' and 'Zauberschloss' the best. But they were forced off stage after these two were done, having come all the way from Germany for six songs, and 'Herzattacke' not one of them, either.

And now to **The Damned**. Formed in the mid-70s and then having slipped in and out of view ever since, this is a very old band touring on a 'we're not dead yet, it's just Vanian's costume' basis. Or, to quote an anonymous critic 'old punks never die, they just tour with the Damned'. Patricia Morrison, (ex-Sisters, Gun Club, etc) is currently on bass, for instance. Original Sensible and Vanian at least provide the essential element of continuity.

And how did they sound? Well, it wasn't exactly punk in it's purest form (too atmospheric), but it wasn't quite goth either (too raw). Maybe the Damned do have a sound all of their own – atmospheric punk, perhaps? Or maybe just grown-up punk. Anyway, they could still teach their successors a thing or two about stage presence – there's something in Vanian's delivery that many rock frontmen could do well to learn from. He's getting on a bit, but there's still something there.....

That said, the final result really wasn't my kind of thing. With early closing on the tube Sundays I left after 45 minutes of their set, satisfied with the evening's events, though a little irked with the curtailed sets endured by many of my favourite acts on the bill. Frank Flag the promoter openly admitted that he's not coming back until they fix up the venue, for while the Camden Palace is an impressive place for a gig visually, technically it just isn't up to hosting something like this right now.

## **L'Âme Immortelle (+ Revolution By Night and Beautiful Deadly Children) – 1 Jun 2003**

L'Âme Immortelle haven't exactly played the UK to death in the past. In fact, prior to tonight, the only show they'd done round these parts was their slot at Dark Jubilee, a day short of a year ago. Still, someone out there saw it fit to give them their first headlining show in the capital. The Underworld was eventually chosen as the venue (though early ads indicated the Highbury Garage instead), while Revolution By Night and The Beautiful Children took the support slots.

And so the elaborately named **Beautiful Deadly Children** took to the stage. Visually, they lived up to their name, the two singers adorned in a couple of the most outrageous outfits ever to be seen on this most petite of stages. Their keyboard player operated her box of tricks from a coffin by candlelight, whilst a strange masked demon was knob-twiddling in the background. So they've got the visuals sorted.

Musically, however, they were somewhat lacking. Their vocalist has high camp theatrics down to a tee, true, but the backing track let them down, the repetitive industrial beats not striking one as particularly imaginative. They did best when the sub-par soundsystem allowed you to hear something other than percussion, as their basic four-beat treatment didn't really gel with the 'gothic pantomime' occurring on stage. Get that sussed, and they might actually get me listening as well as watching.

**Revolution By Night** were next up, having finally released their 'Faithless' EP after a few years (yes, YEARS!) of various difficulties. On stage, meanwhile, they continue to grow out of their formerly nervous disposition, thanks in part to the projections in the background (including what is effectively a full video for 'Faithless'), but mainly due to Steve finally feeling at home on stage without any guitarists. But there's still no need to dance like a German.

The set they played was similar to the one from their 2002 shows, opening with 'Empires and Dance' and closing with their Ultravox cover 'Visions In Blue'. They did take the opportunity to air a new piece (tentatively titled 'Motion'), which sounded reasonable enough but still clearly in it's infancy in terms of development. The rest of their set, however, is now sounding very professional indeed. The EP might have been a tale of a hundred and one difficulties, so one only hopes they get a clearer run when they come to record the album.

And now for tonight's starring attraction – **L'Âme Immortelle**. Austria's finest (only?) goth-wave act now have a guitarist as well as a keyboardist, though the focus of everyone's attention were on the two vocalists – Thomas Rainier and (especially) Sonja Kraushofer. Here to promote their latest album 'Als Die Liebe Starb', tonight's set took a fair chunk of it's songs from that particular disc, padded out with the essentials from their backcatalogue.

Some tracks (notably 'Gefallen') were substantially different from their studio equivalent, though other kept quite closely to the studio versions. The addition of live guitar was

welcome, though it didn't have too much effect on the overall 'feel' of L'ame's live sound. As for notable highlights, Sonja's all-out performances on 'Betrayal' and 'Life Will Never Be The Same Again' were probably the high-points. Thomas' solo spot on 'Changes' gave Sonja a chance to go for a costume change, though I still get the feeling he overplays his hand when gets the whole stage to himself.

The set didn't last too long – one hour, including a single-song encore of 'Bitterkeit', and it was all over. This at least prevented any repeats of the Gotham dilemma (stay till the end or leave in time for the last train?), though it would have been nice to get a few more of the classics ('Epitaph' and 'At The End' were notable by their absence). But what was done was done well, despite the lo-fi nature of the venue and the fact that a Sunday night show meant the bulk of us had to be at work the next day.

## **Marilyn Manson – The Golden Age of Grotesque Tour – 4 Jun 2003**

Perhaps it's true that Mr.Manson is not as famous as he once was. Maybe potential 'spooky kids' really are being drawn away by the competing attraction of rap and nu-metal. And maybe my own musical tastes have moved some way away from the chosen style of 'The God of Fuck'. But the one thing I never managed in my Mansonite era was actually seeing him play live. Tonight, I was to realise that aim.

Some mention must be made of tonight's support act – announced at the very last minute as **Queen Adreena**. OK, stylistically they're not actually all that close to the headliner act, but Katie-Jane Garside's shrieking on-edge performances have an attraction all of their own. Essentially, if you want to do fucked-up bitch-rock, you have to sound pretty fucked-up to carry it off, and that aim was achieved with style.

But really all eyes were focused on **Marilyn Manson**. Constantly re-inventing his image with each successive album (Bowie's idea, I know), the recent album 'The Golden Age of Grotesque' suggested a decadent, 1930s-Berlin look, and tonight's set, complete with huge towering backdrops and a central podium, confirmed their album image was indeed being taken through to the stage show.

The drawn-out intro eventually led us into 'This Is The New Shit', with the elegantly dressed fearsome five actually behaving like a proper band rather than the satanic freak-show some make them out to be. The 'performance' part of tonight's show was provided by two young ladies, clad with less and less tribute to modesty as the show went on, who would alternately play drums, piano or just dance about revealingly. There was no shortage of visual stimulus then, but what about aurally?

The lions share of the set was given over to the new album, 'mObscene' and 's(AINT)' proving to be my personal favourites out of these. Of the old tracks, 'Portrait' was completely abandoned, with ACS being represented only by 'Irresponsible Hate Anthem' (complete with mass middle-fingering) and set closer 'The Beautiful People'. But let's face it, it didn't really matter which tracks these guys played – they are consummate performers, and MM himself is, like him or not, a pixel-perfect example of how one plays the 'rockstar' game.

Strangely enough, there was no encore, the house lights going straight on once the last track was done, though it wasn't clear whether this was down to time constraints (the show not starting until 9:40pm) or just the band choosing to deliver their whole set in one go. He might not be as popular as he once was, potential spookykids instead drawn away by the rap/skater scene, but he knows how to play his own game, and as long as he is able to do so, he's gonna have a pretty big following for some time to come.

## Ministry – 2 Jul 2003

Ministry return to London for their 3<sup>rd</sup> UK visit in four months – the first being the March show, the second a slot at the Download festival (not really their crowd) and now a UK tour. The London leg saw the band returning to the Astoria, and doing away with the support band. Relieved as I was not to have to endure another Raging Shithorn performance, it would have been nice to have something to fill up the two hour gap between doors opening and band coming on – I spent most of the wait thinking of bands that could have filled this slot nicely. There's lots of decent bands out there that'll fill these slots perfectly, but since companies like Clear Channel won't work with anyone not inside the music industries 'inner circle', it isn't going to happen.

But anyway, **Ministry** was the band we were all here too see. Opening up in the same style as the last London gig, it soon became clear that this was going to be a very similar experience to four months previous, opening with the trio 'Animosity', 'Unsung' and 'Piss' from the new album, then 'Dead Guy' and 'Filth Pig'. The longer slot did however allow them to slip in the long grinding expanse of 'Scarecrow', something many people had waited a long time to hear played live.

On we went then into 'Psalm 69' and then 'Bad Blood', this track once again being the 'accelerator' sending the crowd's core into another seething mosh. 'Crumbs' followed, and I took this as an opportunity to escape to the balcony and take a look at the band from a distance. This of course allowed me to take in the projections which last time I had largely missed last time out. Images of war, destruction, volcanos and other politically sensitive issues form the bulk of the slideshow, though 'Just One Fix' saw images of the late William Burroughs (inspiration for both the song and much of the band's philosophy).

Strangely enough, there was no 'Jesus Built My Hot Rod', though if my memory serves me correctly, that isn't a song that works as well on stage as it does on CD, so it wasn't a serious an omission as it might have been. It was good to see 'So What' make an appearance, even if Al's take on this song doesn't quite match the Chris Connely-sung original. 'Stigmata' ended the main set, not quite as OTT as it was last time (as in both drumkits were still standing by the songs completion).

The encore offered us 'Breathe' and then two cover versions to see us out. 'The Light Pours Out Of Me' went down well enough, but 'Supernaut' from the 1000 Homo DJs project was the better of the two, vicious and biting as ever. So I left happy, not quite as wrecked as last time, but still glad to see an 'aren't they dead yet?' act still pulling out all the stops to put on a show and offering a middle finger to everyone outside of the venue at the same time.

## DefCon 2 Launch Party – 3 Jul 2003

This was the launch party for 'Defcon 2' – the second Armalyte Industries cut-price compilation, showcasing the rockier and harsher sides of industrial music. The Underworld was chosen as the venue, the small venue made smaller when the main bar was roped off and everything was contained around the small stage. Four of the contributing bands were called up to provide the entertainment tonight, Leechwoman headlining this time out.

First up, however, were **Action Directe**, a trio from Leeds, consisting of keyboard player, guitarist and vocalist plus backing track. In keeping with the spirit of the night, they were a hard-edged industrial rock act, with Ministry-grade riffs and forceful beats, topped off with half-sung, half-shouted vocals. It was certainly listenable for quite a while, and they had a

few good tracks in there, but also a few that didn't really go anywhere. There may well be some potential here, but this band hasn't really come of age yet – they need to build on their better elements and see where it takes them.

Next up were **The Sepia**, last seen by me at Elektrofest in 2002. They've re-jigged themselves a bit since then, bringing the guitars more into the mix and replacing two of the standing keyboards with hand-held controllers a la Jean-Michel Jarre. Musically, they were hovering somewhere in an electro-rock-industrial no-mans land, the sparse vocals not really achieving much. They seemed to be enjoying themselves, but they were still a little anonymous.

The key point of interest for me tonight was **Interlock**. They'd been described to me as industrial metal, though after listening to their split CD (with Needleye), I was of the opinion that they were certainly more metal than industrial – an opinion reinforced tonight. The interesting bit being the vocalists – one male, one female. This wasn't any Theatre of Tragedy though, each of them as full-throated as the other, playing off each other and getting a real vibe going.

Musically, they were pretty strong as well, with elements of Fear Factory, Metallica and Tool all evident somewhere in their set. Most importantly, they had a grasp of dynamics. As opposed to a full-throttle non-stop hammering, this quintet were able to work the audience beautifully, with a couple of anthemic stormers that got the front rows positively bouncing. Interlock might not be the type of thing I'm listening to much these days, but that's all the more credit to them for getting my attention.

This left **Leech Woman** to close. This particular trio had almost blown my ears to bits once before, and with three bands and last night's Ministry gig behind me, I was determined to take it easy this time. They however, ripped their shirts off and went about it in their usual way, their trademark gas cylinder-dustbin-and-washing-machine-innards percussion set-up ready to take it's usual hammering.

Not that that was the only noise that makes a Leech Woman set. The bass, guitars (both heavily treated for maximum noise value) and additional noises on backing track were mind-blowing enough. Add Alex B's throaty vocals and there was a severe risk of the whole venue exploding with extreme noise tension. Nine tracks plus a brief encore later and it was all over – a short, sharp shock, nicely laying out Armalyte Industries mission statement in the process – 'a sonic Jihad against the system' they say. It's a tough job, but they've already got people listening. If, of course, they can still hear anything after a Leech Woman live set.

## **The Crüxshadows (+ Katscan, Chillburn & Spermwhale) – 14 Jul 2003**

The USA has produced many a gothic band in it's time. Christian Death, London After Midnight and Sunshine Blind all spring to mind. And then of course there are the Crüxshadows. Making what is now their yearly journey to our beloved capital, Rogue and company this time managed to surpass the club and festival slots and headline a show in their own right. On a Monday night. Don't know who's idea that was, but at the same time that was no reason to miss a show from this most unique of live acts.

The support acts tonight started with **Spermwhale**. Their style sort of went from hard synth-pop to a dirty drum n'bass sort of thing. Their on stage image included a Adam Ant-style white stripe over the face, white leg warmers and pleated skirts. That worked better

than it might of, but musically I just didn't think it ever really gelled into anything cohesive. I don't think the soundsystem did them any favours, but at the same time I think they've got to sort out their vocal/music interplay before they go much further.

Amsterdam's **Chillburn** were next – ironically their symbology involved snowflakes and matching polar-white stage outfits on what was the hottest day of the year so far. Their style was a biting electro-metal sort of thing, using drum pads and a synthetic backing track plus live guitars, bass and vocals. It's a perfectly viable musical concept, echoes of Filter and (in places) Zeromancer, but hand on heart, they just didn't seem to be playing to the right audience, which is a pity, as they seemed to be enjoying themselves.

The besuited **Katscan** followed – their electronic sleaze music again proved to be good in small doses, but having seen them a few months back, they weren't really a priority act for me to watch tonight. Their punchy delivery is perfectly OK, certainly better than many synth-vocal duos past and present, and the custom-made Katscan tie looked pretty cool, but I still think they could do so much more with their stage show, given their underlying attitude and lyrical content.

But then again, they might just have suffered in comparison to **The Crüxshadows**. Those of you unfamiliar with this band's stage show might be wondering what's so special about them. The live violin player is one thing you don't see everyday. The two sexy dancers are another novelty. But at the end of the day, it's lead singer Rogue that really carries their set. Wearing a radio-mic headset, he delivers only part of his set from the stage. The rest of the time he wanders off stage, into the crowd, along bannisters and stairways. Let it be known – no other band is quite as good at making the best of the quirks of small music venues like the Underworld.

The set wasn't just an isolated selection of songs, either, each track chmaltzy with little bits of mythological rambling which turned the performance into a cohesive whole. The first part of the set generally kept to their lesser-known tracks – yet even those which I thought were no better than average on the albums worked a treat here. This of course was leading up to a run though their all-time greats at the end – Return (Coming Home) accelerated the show up another gear, and then after singing 'Happy Birthday' to one of their dancers, we got the incredible 'Tears'.

The show ended on 'Marilyn, My Bitterness', and the trademark stage-invasion that comes with it. By now the vast proportion of the audience were singing along without abandon. But once that was done with, the house lights came on before anyone got to call for an encore. We called for one anyway, and in a break with Camden Underworld tradition – actually got it. 'Resist/R' was the track chosen, but it scarcely mattered – The Crüxshadows had done it again. British goth bands pay attention – you don't need Rammstein-esque budgets to put on a stage show that makes a difference.

## **The Infidels, The Heady Vapours and MaxDmyz – 17 Jul 2003**

It's sort of strange turning up to a gig to watch the opening act. But I'd already done so for Deathboy a couple of months ago, and would do so again tonight, for MaxDmyz were returning to the stage. The band's original line-up had split after their late 2001 gig at IC, with only lead-man Twister and performers Syan and Addam remaining. All the musicians had been replaced. The other two bands were completely new to me – but I was set on watching all three, if only because I knew I had to write this thing at the end.



And so **MaxDmyz** took to the stage shortly after 9pm, launching straight into 'Made In Heaven'. The band's performance tonight covered few of their best-known songs, having to drop favourites such as 'Muthablud' due to the lack of a backing track. The on-stage antics were also toned down on previous performers, though Addam's angle-grinder-and-steel-codpiece combo made a welcome return on their closing track. Musically, however, the band are now back on track, the new members now broken in and ready to play the bigger billings once more.

Next up were the low-key duo **The Heady Vapours**. Their stage set-up was a vocalist/guitarist up front (bearing a striking resemblance to Vince Clarke of Erasure), plus his back-up man alternating between keyboards and another guitar. Conceptually, their sound was an interesting combination of dense Curve-esque guitar lines, disconnected Joy Division style vocals and the lo-fi feel of Suicide's first album. Unfortunately, it fell down in the implementation. Despite their interesting concept, it just wasn't very engaging to listen to. And that isn't something that's easy to fix.

The last band of the night were **The Infidels**. I'd call them headliners, but the thinning crowd didn't really indicate them as such. I personally spent the opening portion of their set in the gents too deep in conversation with members of Angelbomb and Auto-Mata, and nothing I heard tempted me out. I did eventually go for a listen, and all I heard and saw was a very ordinary rock act, with the only interesting aspect being in how they rotated their vocalist between songs. I waited for variation, didn't get it, and duly left.

## **Deathboy, Pro-Jekt, The Last Cry and Earth Loop Recall – 26 Jul 2003**

It was one year ago to the day that Deathboy made the leap from bedroom project to the live stage. Filling out the tiny stage found upstairs at the Garage, their rough n'ready performance clearly had potential if only they could tighten up their act. And so they did. Releasing their first full studio album on Wasp Factory was an important step, and a series of live shows in London and around the UK gave them plenty of chance to tweak their live show. And when Tarentella Serpentine pulled out this billing, Deathboy were brought in for their first headline show.

With opening act Lupine failing to show, it was left to **Earth Loop Recall** (the latest Wasp Factory signees) to kick off proceedings. Their set up was a girl on an Access Virus plus two guys up front – a vocalist (and backing guitarist) plus guitarist (and backing vocalist, completing the symmetry). Their style of choice was an interesting combination of metall-yet-artistic guitars and vocals with industrial rhythms in the background. They did of course have to contend with that ultimate bugbear of any band electing to play in the upper level's of Highbury's Garage – sound quality. The first track was completely spoiled by the cloudy mix making it impossible to hear any vocals. The second track (with a pounding beat reminiscent of recent industrial dance hits) was better (the sound balance improved slightly) – and then they went for a slower piece, featuring some innovative guitar sounds, which at least proved their credentials as actual musicians. From then on they were on track all the way – let's hope the album offers greater sound quality than the live sound they had to endure tonight.

Next up were **The Last Cry**. It was very brave of them to accept a booking in such a small venue as a five-piece band with keyboards AND full drum kit strikes one as being just a little bit too much for the stage on offer. Anyway, they went about their set in accomplished style. Unfortunately I soon established the name was a pretty good indicator of their sound

– for The Last Cry are a trad-goth band. Technically they were pretty good, with a powerful vocalist and a committed drummer the highlights. It's just it all sounded rather old-fashioned. They were good at what they did, but so are (or more accurately, were) many other bands playing the old-skool goth game.

Of more interest to me tonight were **Pro-Jekt**, a band I'd heard some time ago, and often seen billed at various events, but never until tonight seen play live. Their set-up was the guitar/bass/keyboard/vocalist assembly that signals a band wanting to combine dance and rock elements into one sound. And Pro-Jekt's approach was darkwavey synths with big metally guitars played over the top. In other words, it was exactly the sort of thing I usually like.

It was a pity then, that few amongst the crowd seemed to share my enthusiasm. A void existed between the stage and crowd, a few lone dancers venturing into the twilight zone to throw in a few moves. The singer was perfectly well aware of this and started venturing over the monitors himself in an attempt to get some sort of connection with anyone that was up for it. The thing is, I LIKED Pro-Jekt. I want to see them again. But not in here. And with a more enthusiastic crowd.

**Deathboy** however, weren't short of enthusiasm. A year to the day since their live debut, they took to the stage, now stripped to a four-piece with keyboards on backing, and launched straight into their anthem 'We Will Destroy'. A mysterious technical glitch delayed the second song, but at least that gave us a chance to return the favours by singing 'Happy Birthday'. From then on, however, they stayed on track for the distance.

The 'Mad World' cover was dropped with the live keyboards, as were their other 'novelty' tracks. My personal favourites 'Sick World' and 'Decimate' were still very much in however, and the whole feeling was of a band that had found their feet. Adam and Jason (on bass and guitar respectively) seemed more confident than in the past, and whilst Scott wasn't as chatty as he has been as the past, he generally seemed able to ride the technical flaws from track two onwards.

And so ended a curtailed night in a what is ultimately a glorified scout hut in Highbury. My third visit in a year to my least favourite venue, and the third which I ended up enjoying despite the poor sound quality and claustrophobic (or just plain hot) atmosphere. So I'm ending once again by suggesting politely to Frank Flag (if he ever reads this) to seriously consider the alternatives as these Saturday Night 'bargain' happenings just aren't bringing the best out the bands billed.

## **M'era Luna 2003 – 9-10 Aug 2003**

### Day 1

After last year's debut, I elected to return to M'era Luna 2003 as very much a last-minute decision. This time, I elected to do the festival from a guesthouse rather than a tent – or rather the group I travelled with chose that option and I was happy to follow suit – happy to get a daily shower and a proper breakfast, that is. This did of course mean commuting to the site, which in turn meant missing some of the early bands, particularly on the Sunday. Nonetheless, I did see enough live performances to justify writing about the event here.

The first act I made it to was **[:SITD:]** in the hangar – a German act who'd already made waves with their 'Snuff Machinery' EP. Their style of choice is the harsh electronic industrial, with droning vocals and plenty of harsh synthesiser. Hardly an original style, but they're getting together a pretty decent collection of songs, which should make their forthcoming debut album worth a listen. At one point, however, the singer disappeared

from stage and let one of the keyboard players take the mic, with the vocals notably weaker during these tracks.

The first band I saw outside was **Zeraphine** – the ex-Dreadful Shadows project who'd impressed me with a 20-minute slot last year and now had twice the amount of time to play with. The Zeraphine sound is that of a shameless goth-rock band, with only a slight electronic influence on the synthesised backing track. My opinion remains as it was last year – that they are very good at what they do, but I can't honestly see them breaking out of Germany. Not that they'd need to, given the crowd they drew.

Back into the hangar then for **Qntal** – one of the relatively few acts I saw that was completely new to me. They're a three piece set up – female vocalist, keyboard player (who occasionally switched to guitar), pre-programmed drum loops and a third member who alternated between a whole host of 'traditional' instruments. Their eventual sound was therefore an intriguing electronic-folk combo. Again, it's the sort of style that's 'big in Germany', but it's also one I've warmed to quite a bit in recent times, so I may yet check out their CDs.

The crowd pouring out of the hangar after their set was formidable – I couldn't escape at all. So I elected to wait inside until **Dive** came on. Dirk Iven's solo project remains a solo project on stage – he sings and dances over his backing track, and that's essentially it. His show was as good as such a minimal performance could be – pre-recorded, yes, but he's written some strong and highly influential material over the years, his stripped-down distorted EBM (under this name, and earlier as part of The Klinik) inspiring the likes of Suicide Commando, :Wumpscut: and countless others.

I did leave before the end to catch some of the **Red Lorry Yellow Lorry** set. Didn't seem worth the bother – good as they once were, this particular goth/new wave throwback seemed uninspired and hopelessly dated up against everyone else. I went back into the hangar to watch **Haujobb** – and was equally unimpressed. Daniel Myer was throwing a lot of energy in, but the vocals and music just didn't seem to gel at all. They sounded so much better at the Camden Underworld last year, and anyone who's been there will know that's a fairly unusual thing to say.

Redemption, however, was to be found out the doors and through the now-massive crowd around the main stage. Why? Because **The Crüxshadows** were on. And they are not a band to miss when they play live within earshot. This was, however the first time I'd seem them on a 'big' stage – but that didn't stop Rogue climbing the scaffolding and making little trips down to the crowd. Even the so-so album tracks sounded great when played live, and Rogue endeared himself to the (mainly) German crowd by being the first foreign singer to speak to the crowd in the local lingo.

Back inside for **Melotron**, who do a good line in chunky EBM/electro-pop hybrid material. Reminiscent of And One's more melodic side, true, but strong enough to stand up in it's own right. I had to leave their set early, though, because **Killing Joke** were on outside. Recently reformed after a 7-year break, the 'Joke had recently produced one of their heaviest, noisiest and hardest albums in ages, and their live show reflected that. Forget 'Love Like Blood' – Jaz Coleman's slightly demented metal singer demeanour provoked extreme opinions in our camp, both positive and negative, but I'm very much in favour of their current direction – alas, the searing heat made it all but impossible to truly get into it.

The late afternoon heat was taking it's toll now, so I went in search of water afterwards, and took longer than I should have done to find it, eventually settling for a tap somewhere out in campsite land. I made it back in time to see the last two songs of **In Strict Confidence**. They did an excellent rendition of 'Zauberschloss' and then an awful

'Herzattacke', so more polarised opinion there. But I had to dash outside before pondering over that one, because **Deine Lakaien** were on.

Now, here another one of those 'big in Germany' acts, the pairing of Alexander Veljanov (vocals) and Ernst Horn (music) joined by a guitarist and a string section. Veljanov is a good base for such an act, a strong and emotive vocalist – but the thing that really set Deine Lakaien apart is their music. Ernst Horn switched between synths and piano, which, twinned with the other players, offered a quirky but unique sound, mixing traditional and contemporary elements confidently. Undoubtedly an acquired taste, but one I'm glad I've acquired.

Back onto familiar ground, then, for **Mesh** – one of the most successful British synth/wave bands in terms of making headway in the crucial German market. The video backdrop sat in very nicely with the music, their Depeche Mode-inspired synth-pop accessible and easily digested. There aren't really any surprises in store when Mesh play – if you like their songs, you'll enjoy the show, but if you don't, you won't. Thanks to timetable clashes, I had to skip the end of their set, but I was happy enough with what I saw.

And why? Because **Project Pitchfork** was on out on main stage, and since they hardly ever play in the UK, I felt they took priority over Mesh. And let it be said that Peter Spilles and co are strong performers, delivering their material with conviction and working the crowd nicely. Unfortunately, their set was almost entirely given over to their most recent material, IMHO not even picking the best tracks to play. I never got my head round the 'Inferno' album, though admittedly the tracks selected did sound better delivered live. An 'A' grade performance from a 'C' grade setlist. Always thought they were a bit strange.

The last act of interest on day one was **Blutengel**, headlining over in the hangar. The first of two Chris Pohl projects to appear this weekend, this particular act was another that didn't have much to do with live music – only the vocals were actually performed live. But no worries, the music, a lush electro-gothic soundscape, was as good as we know it to be, and there were also some nice background videos. There was also some on-stage 'performance art'. Opinions about whether this was artistic or tacky varied wildly. I thought it was OK – apart from the bit where one of the girls started aimlessly waving ribbons around. But like with Killing Joke, views hit such extremes that you can't take my word for it.

So despite the negative comments of those around me, they still got two encores. When the hangar finally closed, we wandered outside to be confronted with **Nightwish**. I'd heard them on CD some months ago, and to be honest, they didn't sound too bad. However, on stage they blew everything out of proportion. Sounding like an 80s metal band with a soprano vocalist, they went for style over substance. The pyrotechnics might have got my attention, but any band that covers the theme from The Snowman isn't ever likely to be taken seriously by me. And so ended day one.

## Day 2

Day two started quite late for me, the rest of my travelling compadres electing not to set off until early afternoon. We made it in time to see the second half of **Wayne Hussey's** solo set. There was a standing keyboard, plus a couple of guitars. Wayne's clearly tidied himself up since his 80s heyday, but he still swigs from a bottle of wine and calls it 'breakfast'. His set was mainly Mission songs done in the unplugged style, and I have to admit his acoustic versions of his well-known material do have some appeal, but I'd rather had seen the whole band.

I still had time to go outside to watch **Within Temptation**. They, like Nightwish the night before, specialised in female soprano-vocal metal. Their stage set centred on a huge white

angel statue (with moving wings!) but musically they were surprisingly strong, not overplaying things like Nightwish did. Back in the hangar, we got **NeuroticFish**. Sasha Mario Klein looks and acts a bit like a wild animal on stage, but musically he's a very solid purveyor of that future-pop thing. Sing-a-long favourite 'Velocity' was once again the highlight of his set.

Phillip Boa was playing as I left the hangar, but nothing he played attracted me to the stage, so I wandered round the stalls until **Subway to Sally** came on. They were of particular interest to me as they were this year's 'medieval/metal' fusion act, following In Extremo's remarkable show here last year. This particular group are, however, slightly closer to a mainstream rock band in sound, using fewer traditional instruments. They did, however, still impress me with their approach, a strong stage show (with some limited pyro) and an energetic performance allowing them to stick in the memory.

Now for two personal favourite, annoyingly overlapping on the schedules. **Diary of Dreams** played the hangar. Regular visitors to the site will know how much I like this band, and Adrian Hates did little to disappoint. The set was made up mainly from tracks from 'Freak Perfume!', with 'She', 'O Brother Sleep' and 'The Curse' all standing out. Personal favourite 'Chemicals' didn't appear, but his excellent re-works of 'Ex-ile' and 'Butterfly: Dance!' made up for that.

And then it was outside for **Apoptygma Berzerk**. I'd missed the opening tracks, but arrived in time for 'Non-Stop Violence'. This was a very strange show by Apop standards – they aren't the kind of band that you'd expect to play during the daytime. The video backdrop was missing, and their keyboard player still needs to decide whether he's going to at least pretend to play his instrument or just become Stephan's official backing vocalist. So it wasn't the strongest Apop show I'd ever seen, but I'll always like their songs despite the fluctuating nature of their live shows.

I had to go in search of water again after this, but made it back in time to watch the end of **Terminal Choice**'s set – Chris Pohl's second project to play this year. Big beat, big guitar riffs and big vocals is all I can say – strong hard rockin' EBM-fuelled rock, but maybe lacking anything to make it distinctive. The same could not be said for **Apocalyptica**. Four cello players and a drummer covering old metal songs! A remarkable 'Enter Sandman' was a highlight, but they also had some bespoke material and an adaptation of 'The Hall of the Mountain King', exacting more sounds from their instruments than you might have thought possible.

I didn't get to see Camouflage finishing off festivities in the hangar, but that's because I wanted to catch the entire set of **Placebo**. Now, Brian Molko's slightly camp alt-rock band seemed at first to be an unusual choice to headline this very German festival. But it soon became clear what their purpose was – to offer one final band that would appeal to as many people in the audience as possible. Maybe guilty of aiming for the lowest common denominator, but I don't blame them for getting such a big name on board.

Anyway, the boys came on stage in identical white outfits, and launched straight into a selection of their finest tracks, many (but certainly not all) taken from their recent album. Their stage show was impressive too, a sheet-metal backdrop adorned with coloured lights. Brian Molko also broke convention by speaking to the crowd in (admittedly quite basic) German, something appreciated by all present. My personal favourite, 'Pure Morning' closed their set and the festival as a whole, but the performance was strong throughout.

So a total success? Not quite. The bands were generally good, some excellent. There were plenty of interesting stalls, too. My CD collection got quite a boost. There was no rain, either. There was, however, lots of heat, temperatures hovering in the 40C zone outside,

more in the hangar. This had been the case in Europe for quite some time now, and warnings were being broadcast everywhere that people should drink lots of fluid to keep hydrated.

And yet the security staff were VERY difficult about what drinks could be taken on site (I established after the event that tetra paks were permitted, and will attend future M'era Luna festivals suitably prepared!). They were clearly worried about things being thrown on stage, and whilst their actions might protect a few musicians, they endangered several thousand spectators as a result, the drinks sold on site in small cups that did little to quench thirst (and I couldn't find still water anywhere). So, whilst I would like to recommend M'era Luna to anyone vaguely into this kind of thing, I will not do so until they sort out this little issue. 'Tis a great festival, M'era Luna, but there's something here that could be sorted out so easily, and make the festival that much better again.

## InFest 2003 – 22-24 Aug 2003

### Day 1

After a hugely enjoyable InFest 2002 (at least in terms of live performance), it was with no regrets that I elected to return the following year. This time, however, we had a line-up that was 'interesting' to say the least. VNV Nation might have been the most obvious choice for a headliner, but what was billed beneath them ranged from intriguing to just plain weird. Nevertheless, there were enough bands and solo projects to convince me that a return trip to Bradford was called for.

First – the event. Bradford is not-my-most-favourite-city-in-the-world, but at least the in-halls accommodation was cheap and no-one had to venture far from the site if they didn't want to. The on-site food was improved on the previous year, the market stalls a fantastic collection of all things underground. And the event ran largely to schedule. Though 45-minute gaps between bands might be regarded as a little excessive.

Bands? Well, we kicked off on Friday with **Tarantella Serpentine**, solo project of Marcus Lanyon, joined on stage by a few mates (including Lee Chaos and a hairy man in a sequinned top). The sound of the project appeared to be a sort of performance poetry over a drum'n'bass backing track. Each half of the combination appeared to have it's merits, but sellotaped together on stage, the two elements just didn't seem to gel. I couldn't dance to it, and neither could I get much grip on what Marcus was on about, barring a song with lots of 'Co-cain' references.

Next up were **Scrap.edx**, standing in for the absent S.I.N.A. This of course, meant it was time for the first of the weekend's knob-twiddling bands. This particular act started out sounding like Aphex Twin and ended up more like Imminent, but never quite managing to capture the magic of either acts. The 'continuous set' nature of their set might have offered continuity, but it also led to their entire sound becoming blurred, as they moved from style to style without really getting the best out of any of them.

Headlining on Friday was **cut.rate.box**. I had actually seen this US act before, and my opinions of them last time more or less matched what I thought here. That is, they do a good line in danceable electro-industrial. The vocals were quite strong, and (in contrast to tonight's other two acts) it was quite easy to get into. However, what it wasn't was distinctive. They sounded just like every other band working in this style, and despite some strong songs ('Radical' the best), they just didn't leave a mark. I left the DJs to do their thing and went back to my room, frankly unimpressed with the first night of InFest 2003. Maybe tomorrow would be better.

## Day 2

It was. And it was thanks to trio **Je\$us Loves Amerika** that the second day of InFest became better than the first at the untimely hour of 4pm. I'd seen them briefly a year ago (admittedly with a minute set with multiple technical troubles), and even picked up their album. This show cemented in my view that they are the proverbial 'one to watch', Suicide Commando-type industrial electro with hard-edged shouty vocals that remind one of Ministry at their best. Danceable yet hard rockin', they set the standard for the rest of the day.

And **Culture Kultür** managed to keep the energy going. One of very few Spanish acts to play in an InFest-fit style, this particular act were one of many making their UK debut here this year. Despite their use of English lyrics, the singer wasn't really that confident talking to the crowd, but the music made up for it, a highly polished VNV/Icon of Coil type sound – not hugely original, but intensely catchy in places, particularly the excellent 'Forever' (cliched title that it is) and closing number 'War Is Over'.

Then it was time for another stylistic switch, this time to solo knob-twiddling laptop-toting **Tarmvred**, project of Swede Jonas Johansson. I'd heard some of his stuff before, and was duly impressed by his extended-length distorted-beat electronic compositions. But what really made his set wasn't the intricate maze of synthetic masochism (good that it was), but the incorporation of Commodore 64 sound-chip noises! Of the weekends four table-top 'noisebeat' projects, therefore, Tarmvred would prove to be the most memorable.

Back onto future pop soil now, for **Seabound**. This particular project had been billed in the UK before, but never made it – until tonight. I personally had seen them at M'era Luna a year previous, and wasn't exactly impressed. Here, however, in the dark confines of Bradford University Union, it all came together beautifully. With a few exceptions, Seabound's style is a close cousin to the softly-sung Wolfsheim sound, though with more of the electronic 'oomph' associated with VNV and their ilk. 'Hooked' was my favourite, but it was a strong set throughout, even slipping in a cover of New Order's 'Confusion'.

And then, following a brief marriage proposal (no, not me) on stage, we got **Needle Sharing**, another solo project, though it has to be said that the muscle-bound manically-grinning Roland Danielzig was at least able to offer the stage presence his contemporaries lack, though it did mean he spent more time punching the air and shouting (without a mic, which made it kind of pointless) that tending to his machines.

Musically, the Needle Sharing sound was essentially an attempt to morph drum'n'bass into something so totally fucked up that it bore no relation from the style from whence it emerged. And somehow it still managed to keep a relatively busy dancefloor moving consistently. I personally was more of an interested observer, unable to dance to something this twisted, but other more adventurous souls clearly got their money's worth, so I'm not complaining.

Tonight's headliner was American duo **God Module**, another UK debut, this time to back up the recent release of their sophomore (as it is known in the USA) album 'Empath'. Visually, the band turned a few eyes, the sizeable Jasyn Bangert and his youthful looking back-up man (who could have easily passed as a prep in a Hollywood teen flick) not what any of us were expecting, the two of them swapping between vocals and keyboards almost every song.

But it's the music that counts, and God Module already have quite a pedigree behind them, going for a hard-edged EBM sound with various vocals effects and hooks aplenty. They opening with their minor classic 'Illusion', then took us on a journey through the new album

and accompanying EP, eventually building up to a finale featuring the ultra-catchy 'Resurrection' and new track 'Perception'. Their encore offered 'Where Even The Stars Don't Shine' – a personal favourite and the track I was least expecting to hear. I stuck around for the Djing, but was sort of worn out after all this.

### Day 3

Anyway, Sunday's festivities were kicked off by those lo-fi electro-punks **Arkham Asylum**. I'd seen 'em upstairs at the Garage earlier in the year, and couldn't really tell if it was the soundsystem in there that made them sound like this, but no, they really do sound that underproduced. Ripping apart 'You Spin Me Round (Like A Record)' gave you an idea about the level of respect this crazy bunch show for anything. Nice angle grinding in the finale, though.

Anyway, that out of the way, it was time for Australians **Resurrection Eve**, who were until today totally unknown to me. Technically, they were very good, with a strong vocalist and a well-assembled synth-pop/darkwave backing. What it wasn't however, was engaging. It was almost too clinical, a pixel-perfect portrait of how to do this particular style of music. And that's really all I can say about it.

Rather more attention grabbing were **[:SITD:]**, who've recently been filling dancefloors with 'Snuff Machinery', and had thus already earned themselves some degree of support. They went out their way to be friendly to the crowd, even though their music was an evil, :Wumpscut: style of industrial nastiness (right down to the colons). Opening with recent release 'LaughingStock', with it's trademark cries of 'We Came To Kill', **[:SITD:]** were off on a flier.

Taking us through a short but sweet set, some tracks yet to be released, this German duo (lacking their additional live player seen at M'era Luna) endeared themselves to the crowd with their charming attempts to master the notorious hard-to-please English audience – more calls for hands in the air than VNV Nation, more 'Thankyou's than Covenant, but 'That's Great' was a cliché of their own. An encore seemed inevitable. Except they'd run out of songs. So they just did 'Rose Coloured Skies' again.

Following on from this was **Hypnoskull**, the best-known project of Belgium's arch-exponent of the fucked-up beat, Patrick Stevens. It's a far-reaching project, for sure, sometimes adhering to the core Ant-Zen pounding head-rush sound, but more often heading off into cut-up IDM or digital hardcore territory (particularly when the speeded-up vocal samples come in). Like Needle Sharing the night before, it was pretty handy if you could keep up with it, but on this occasion I couldn't take it. The over-repetitive backing video didn't help.

It was thus left to **VNV Nation** to bring the festival to a close. This was to be my fifth VNV live experience, so by now I knew pretty much what to expect. And sure enough, they opened with 'Kingdom' (vocals growlier than I would have liked), followed by 'Epicentre' and 'Fearless'. And so we danced away, without really needing to pay much attention. That was just as well, as the backing video was barely visible behind the smokescreen, while the soundsystem was obscuring many of the songs finer details. Things stepped up a gear when 'Solitary' tinkled into earshot, that one essential VNV track that they still managed to miss out at last year's M'era Luna.

But they left the stage right after than song, with half their set-time still to play. Inevitably, it was 'call for an encore time'. And so we got one. Actually, we got two, and after 'Electronaut' it was time for a surprise. Mark Jackson, previously the drummer, had a go at doing some vocals on a cover of Nitzer Ebb's 'Closer', aided by :SITD:'s Thomas, and



promptly left stage with ten minutes of allocated set time left.. All in all, a shambolic muck-around which made for a light-hearted way to see the festival out, though I have to admit that I left rather disappointed by what was probably the weakest VNV show I'd seen to date. The Djing continued for another three hours, but with an early coach the next day, I just went back to my room and slept.

Have to say, it wasn't as good as last year. Good stall, good bands, good food (that's certainly been improved). But I feel it really needed at least one more 'big name' – good as God Module and cut.rate.box are, they aren't exactly in the same league as Funker Vogt and XPQ-21 (who held their slots last year). What it did do, however, is bring a lot of promising lesser-known acts to the UK and gave them a chance to shine. Not all of them did, but those that succeeded at least justified attendance. It's just in the final reckoning, I think I was hoping for more.

## **Mortiis (+ Susperia, Needleye and Interlock) – 19 Sep 2003**

The former Emperor man is always guaranteed to draw a crowd. His black metal legacy ensures plenty of 'pentagram and long black hair' types will put in an appearance, whilst his troll-like prosthetics have grown in acceptability since 'The Lord Of The Rings' made demi-human races the 'in thing'. And me? I just liked his last album, a strange mix of electro-pop, industrial and a vague hint of his black metal past. But more on that later.

There were three support acts tonight, starting with the excellent **Interlock**. Their dual-vocal industrial metal (with the emphasis on metal) works very well on stage, particularly in close venues such as this. They've not always had line-up stability, but the current quintet are playing pretty tightly all things considering, and aside from the odd hitch, they got a good response from the already-busy Underworld.

**Needleye** were on next, having previously shared an album with Interlock, and now playing with a conventional drummer instead of a keyboard player. The soundman didn't actually manage to fade out the support DJ until AFTER they'd started playing, but this only compounded the non-stop adrenaline feel they seemed to be after. The closest parallel I could draw was early Fear Factory (when they were a death metal band with industrial influence), thought the 'Cunt' T-shirts and expletive-laden banter struck me as being a little cliché.

Now for **Susperia**, the only band on tonight's billing that was completely new to me. Now, I'm a little bit at a loss as to how to describe this act, as they are musically some way away from my musical sphere of interest. At times they sounded black metal, a style much beloved of many a Norwegian misanthrope, though elsewhere they were more like a Metallica-imitating thrash set-up. Doubtlessly it was enjoyable for many present, but it all sounded a bit old-fashioned, whilst still being neither one thing nor the other.

Anyway, who cares about them when **Mortiis** is headlining? Appearing complete with the aforementioned troll-costume, this show was a straightforward run through the tracks on 'The Smell of Rain', with only their intro track not taken from this particular disk. Unfortunately, 'Everyone Leaves', my personal favourite, was then only track not to make it in. Sarah Jezebel Deva was also absent, the backing vox confined to tape. One might also cast some doubt over basing an entire setlist round a two-year old album.

But fairs fair – it was a still an enjoyable show. The cut-down Mortiis live band was infinitely more accomplished than the nervous set-up I'd seen at the LA2 a couple of years back. What we had, then, was essentially a beefed-up version of the album, guitars playing a more frontal role, but Mortiis leaving no doubt as to who ran the show. The

house lights went on the moment their set was done (vintage Underworld tactic), leaving us with a choice of Electric Ballroom or home. I chose the latter, and went.

## **Killing Joke (& Queen Adreena) – 11 Oct 2003**

I remember sitting in the Brixton Academy not so long ago, explain with much enthusiasm to a nu-punk mate of mine the virtues of Killing Joke's 'Requiem'. I might have made a better job of it had **Queen Adreena** not come on stage just when I was getting somewhere. And so they appeared again tonight, the screeching excesses of Katie-Jane Garside a good warm-up for what was to come, despite lacking a bass player (temporary loss or a permanent omission, I wonder?).

But **Killing Joke** was band we were really here to see. Their recent self-titled comeback album had garnered more than a little critical attention, despite being lambasted by some of their hard-core fanbase. A quarter of a century in the music business had seen Jaz Coleman's gang climb the peaks and plunge the troughs. But there was more than enough good material to make the live show worth another view. Yes, I'd seen them at M'era Luna earlier this year, but the Saharan conditions there weren't conducive to 'getting into it'. Tonight, I was going to do it properly.

Killing Joke aren't exactly afraid of bringing outside influence into the fray, and so it came as little surprise to find that the opening track 'Communion' featured a live violin as well as the usual guitar, bass, keyboards and drums. It was the second track 'Requiem' that really got the crowd going, however, that one-note synth pulse sounding as good today as it did in 1980. Then it was onto the current album, with the seething 'Total Invasion' the first new 'un to rear it's head.

The band managed to blend their old and new tracks well, tracks like 'Blood on Your Hands' sitting seamlessly alongside the likes of 'Wardance', with some tracks from 'Pandemonium' in there as well. Their new-wave 'middle-era' stuff ('Love Like Blood', 'Eighties') had been for the most part dropped, but it wasn't really missed – this was a punk band gone metal, so even if they had played their 'greatest hits', there's no way they would have fitted in.

If I had to pick a highlight, it would be 'The Death and Resurrection Show'. Seven minutes of mythological adrenaline, jagged riffs fused to a soaring chorus, climaxing with cries of 'O Beloved Woman of Liberty!'. But pretty much everything they tried came off tonight. The 'Joke were back, they were fighting fit, and clearly set on showing the punk/metal pretenders of the day how it should be done.

The impending 'G.A.Y.' night (held at the same venue) meant the early switch-off time of 10pm, but they managed to slip in a one-song encore of 'Pandemonium' right at the end. And that was essentially it. Killing Joke had clearly picked the perfect time to return – with the increasingly stale metal scene sorely in need of something new, this bunch of old punks-cum-metallers had ironically proved that there was still hope for the guitar wielders of the world, if only they bothered to use a bit of imagination.

## **Laibach – WAT Tour – 12 Oct 2003**

Do Laibach qualify merely as a 'band'? Aren't they more of a socio-political statement set to music? Having devoted much of their time to setting up 'the world's first global state', even issuing their own passports and suchlike, one wonders how they find time to do

music as well. Sure, they save on songwriting effort by doing lots of cover versions, but even these are far from the note-for-note copies some bands seem set on churning out.

The ticket promised 'plus guests', but no support band was in evidence. This means either a) the guests were playing in Laibach's line-up (and since they prefer to highlight the band as a whole rather than individual members, this isn't a relevant point) or b) the promoter screwed up. So we stood around for two hours waiting for stuff to happen. Why not just open the doors later, or put the band on earlier?

Anyway, **Laibach** hit the stage at 9pm, launching straight into 'B Mashina' from the new album 'WAT'. The drums reverberated massively, the synths throbbed – the band's militaristic tone plain for all to see. They followed this up with 'In The Army Now', electing on this occasion to open up with a selection of old favourites before breaking the bulk of the new material. 'Alle Gegen Alle' and 'God Is God' most notable amongst these.

Lead single 'Tanz Mit Laibach' saw the band joined by two near-identical drummer girls, chmaltzy to perfection. That and the lack of any interplay with the crowd (not even a 'Good evening' or 'Thank You') did give the entire show a very pre-rehearsed feel. But fair's fair, it was an impressive sight, the seven-strong line-up and backing projections providing ample stage presence, whilst even the weaker tracks from the new CD worked well on stage.

They ended on the new album's title track 'WAT' (We Are Time), which proved to be suitably climatic. There was of course the inevitable encore, which saw the old chestnut 'Sympathy For The Devil' make a welcome appearance. It's a much-covered song, but ironically it's one that sounds more suited to Laibach than original pensmiths The Rolling Stones. Then again, Laibach have the capability of making ANY song their own. They just get away with stuff like that.

## **The Galan Pixs and Combichrist – 25 Oct 2003**

The warm-ups to Flag's latest festival (Black Celebration V) occurred (in time-honoured fashion) at the Slimelight, with The Galan Pixs headlining and Icon of Coil's Andy LePleuga electing to give his new side-project a run as support. With daylight savings time clock changes occurring at 2am, the night was indecently long (10-and-a-half hours of clubbing, anyone?), but the bands came on at sensible times (12:30am and 2am respectively), though it did mean the Pixs ended up finishing their set fifteen minutes before it started.

**Combichrist** up first then, with Andy LePleuga and his back-up man manning their Virus keyboards and getting down to work. The Combichrist sound lies somewhere between the more extreme forms of electro-industrial and out-and-out rhythmic noise (draw parallels with NoiseX and you wouldn't be far out). Sadly, proficient as they were at the style, on stage it just didn't work. Andy occasionally came forward to throw in the occasional vocal, but it all seemed a little half-hearted – a studio project that had nothing to be gained from nightclub soundsystems and perfunctory stage shows.

**The Galan Pixs** weren't lacking any stage presence, though. A full band-line up (yep, even a live drummer, and a bloody good one at that) isn't often seen in Elektrowerkz's upper levels, but The Pixs know the secret of a proper 'live' performance. Naturally, their set was largely given over to their excellent new album 'Boredom International', a set advanced quite some way from their earlier effort 'Pink Film Edition'. Sure, there were industrial/EBM influences in there somewhere, but unique to them was a strong hint of UK indie in their new material.

The alt-indie influence shined through particularly in tracks such as 'Can't Get Enough', which, placed in front of a different audience, might just get the baggy trousered brigade bouncing to a band that isn't British or American. Other highlights were the Zeromancer-like 'Crackerjack' and set closer 'Use the Slimelight' (sic). Talking of 'Closer', the NIN track of the same name (covered on their 'Pink Film Edition' album) didn't appear on this occasion. Then again, they've got plenty of good songs of their own now. Who'd ever heard of Trent Reznor?

## Whitby Gothic Weekend – 30 Oct-Nov 2 2003

### Day 1

This was to be my first visit to Whitby's biannual goth festival. Legend would have us believe that Dracula's landing place in England was within site of the venue doors, Bram Stoker having spawned his famous novel whilst in his seafront hotel room. Even without the vampire connection, it's a fine place to hold a gothic festival, the entire town more than happy to accommodate the twice-yearly invasion of the goths. Whitby wants this festival as much as we want Whitby, despite the difficulties in travelling there and finding chmaltzy e.

Let's just go over the key attractions: The Bizarre Bazaar, featuring stalls from all kinds of gothic retailer large and small from across the land. The sandcastle contest on the beach. The football match between goth stars and local journalists, sportingly organised by Mike from Manuscript. There's the ruined Abbey, some old churches, and all kinds of little shops selling all kinds of miscellania (and not just the usual boring old seaside souvenirs, either). Local charity shops get out their goth-friendly stock especially for the weekend, and there's numerous satellite events organised in the towns pubs.

Oh, there's also some bands on at the Spa. Twelve bands were playing this particular Whitby (a new record), though the numerous other distractions (primarily getting ready in the evening) meant that I missed a couple. Goteki I'd seen many times before, so wasn't too bothered about that, but I also managed to miss my chance to see Rose McDowall (billed as 'Sorrow') – I might be too young to remember Strawberry Switchblade, but I'd always liked her cameos on NON and Current 93 albums, so that was regrettable. Please also note that due to the party-like atmosphere of the weekend, these reviews won't be as analytical as they usually are. It wasn't the kind of event for picking out details.

The first night opened with **Deathboy**, Wasp Factory's rising stars playing their biggest stage so far. After a short moment of confusion, they launched into their anthemic 'We Will Destroy'. Unfortunately, the early part of their set was marred by a muddled sound mix, possibly a symptom of being the first band on. Also, there was a new track (who's name escapes me) that didn't seem entirely stage-ready. Once settled however, they rolled off the likes of 'Decimate' in a more effective fashion, and sure enough we were soon watching the Deathboy we know and love from their frequent slots 'down south'.

The key interest on Day One, however, was **Faith and the Muse**, who were standing in for Sunshine Blind. Faith and the Muse almost didn't make it, too – late arriving members meant it was almost 11pm by the time they hit the stage. All was of course forgiven once they started playing, however – led by the besuited Monica, Faith and the Muse quickly established themselves as one incredibly tight bunch of goth-rockers, with strong ethereal vocals the highlight of a very complete sound, offering a range of diverse influences. I'd hardly heard the band before tonight, but left, as did many others, as a fan. Album reviews will follow once I've bought some...

Proceedings on the opening night were brought to a close by **Inkubus Sukkubus**. I'd seen them once before at Gotham 2001, but their free-spirited Pagan demeanour was far better suited to the festival atmosphere of Whitby, which guaranteed them the crowd's support from start to finish. Tracks old and new zoomed past, each one as strong as the last, with the band going for a fun ending with a cover of 'Can't Get You Out Of My Head' and a tribute to their favourite tippie 'Jagermeister'. They finished on 'Vampyre Erotica', the house lights coming on before they'd even finished. The night had zoomed past so quick that hardly anyone had noticed that it was already 1:30am!!!

## Day 2

Following on from the Bizarre Bazaar and countless other events were the three bands billed for Day Two, kicking off with **All Living Fear**. It has to be said that my hopes weren't high, as All Living Fear date back to the early 90s UK trad-goth sound, an area of the scene's history that I've not traditionally been a great fan of (though, as suggested above, I'm quite keen on Inky Sukky). And sure enough they sounded exactly like the old-school goth band I thought they were. What did surprise me, however, was that I managed to enjoy myself all the same. All Living Fear clearly belonged here as much as they belonged at the first Whitby event all those years ago.

The real surprise of the night came courtesy of **The Chaos Engine**. The high-octane, low-budget creations of Lee Chaos never seemed to work all that well on CD, but live they usually manage to get away with it. Tonight, however, Lee and friends managed to take their project to an entirely different level. Opening with 'Me and my Army', the quartet utterly seared through their set, their twisted electro-metal working the crowd to it's biggest frenzy of the weekend. They climaxed with utterly insane covers of 'Gimme Gimme Gimme' (with a bit of The Bad Touch thrown in) and 'Kids In America' (complete with stage invasion). The Chaos Engine just made it happen tonight – now all they need is to work out how to make it all work as well in the studio.

From a packed stage, therefore, to the mirror opposite – **Wayne Hussey**, solo. Just him and a guitar (occasionally switching to keyboard). There was a backing track for a few songs, but this was otherwise an unplugged set in the purest sense. The set was largely made up of Mission songs, with the genuinely solo nature of the set meaning Wayne was able to take requests from the crowd at will. All the old favourites were called for and got, the highlight being 'Wasteland' with a bridge of 'Like A Hurricane', but a number of less-well known songs also made it in. Wayne was also notable in the fact that he's now very much cleaned up his act, no longer playing the off-his-face rock star. He concluded with the announcement everyone wanted to hear – 'I'm coming back in April, and this time I'm bringing the band'. Cue much cheering.

## Day 3

Day three (or as I called it – 'Bleep Night') opened with Goteki, but I didn't make it in time. **Sheep On Drugs** were thus my first band of the night, with the line-up now seemingly settled as Lee Fraser and Kate. Lee now seems very comfortable in the role of frontman, sneering his way through the songs in a John Lydon sleaze-punk style. Kate seemed less at home on bass and occasional vocals – she just didn't seem to be behind the songs as much (this is something to watch over time). But following on from their awful 'comeback' attempt last August, the Sheep on Drugs Mk2 project now has some degree of credibility.

**Icon of Coil** were headlining tonight, and they're rapidly becoming one of the most willing of the European EBM bands to play the UK. Now, I've always had mixed feelings about IoC live, not always finding their sets engaging for the duration, but tonight our Norwegian friends proved to be the right band at the right time. Who cares how similar a lot of their

songs sound – a set-load of catchy future-pop was exactly what we needed at this time. As ever, they finished off with their 'Headhunter' cover, soon to be released as a B-side to the promising new 'Android' track (also aired tonight to a generally positive response).

## Day 4

As mentioned above, I missed Rose McDowal's set, so the first band I saw on the final day was **Manuskript**, who I'd previously gathered were something of a favourite round these parts. My first impression was that they were something of a boy-band for the goth scene. Thankfully, it soon became clear that they had the musical integrity to go with it. It seemed entirely possible that these boys might go chart-topping with the right record deal, their catchy goth-pop incredibly easy to swallow. Not my usual style of choice, but great fun, nonetheless.

The final band of the weekend was **All About Eve**, who used to be something really big many years ago, but seemed to lose their way after a brief taste of success. This of course gave them the plus that they were as down-to-earth as any big-name band could hope to be, leading lady Jullianne happy to chat with the crowd on a regular basis. Like Manuskript before them, All About Eve were something of a goth-lite proposition, their music not cutting exceptionally deep but still accessible for most of those present. The band were thus eminently suited to this particular slot, and whilst they don't sound as distinctive as they once did (several vaguely gothic female-vocal bands having emerged in their wake), they went down a storm and brought the festival to a close nicely.

And that was that. Some stayed on for Manic Monday, but most of us had to return to the real world come sunrise the next day. What was refreshing, however, was that I couldn't find one person who didn't enjoy themselves. The residents of the town were also happy, with just about every shopkeeper I met on my Monday-morning present-buying frenzy asking me if I'd had a good weekend. It's not the biggest Goth-fest in the world, nor the one with the most bands, but the reality is that Whitby has a charm all of it's own.

## Das Ich (& Void Construct) – 16 Nov 2003

Asides from the scene old-timers in the audience, few members of the audience knew what to expect when Das Ich came onto stage at last years Dark Jubilee. A VNV remix of 'Destillat' had meant that the band's original songs didn't get all that much club-play, whilst the band's unreliable attendance record had meant few newcomers to the scene had had any chance to witness the Das Ich live spectacle. Suffice to say that they had finally arrived. Now we all wanted another dose.

Despite scheduling a couple of speculative dates for June, then September on their website, it took until November before a promoter, venue and support act could be arranged. The support in question was **Void Construct**, who'd I'd seen a couple of times before, but since that was years ago (April 2001, if I remember rightly), I thought a second go was in order. Hell, I would have turned up even if I had no urge ever to watch 'em again – these reviews don't write themselves you know.

They've sort of moved on from their Front Line Assembly style beginnings, and now seem to be more akin to their label-mates Inertia. The lead vocals definitely sound like a mix of Bill Leeb and Reza, whilst their up-tempo EBM sound bears all the hallmarks of a Cryonica production. Competent as it was, however, it failed to really do anything distinctive. It just sounded like every other band doing this type of music. Whilst it's encouraging therefore to

see a UK band work in this style, they're going to have to come up with a few more ideas before they take the next step forward.

One band that could never be accused of being indistinct, however, is **Das Ich**. The metal construction that holds the keyboard barely fitted on the Garage stage, whilst their twisted metal mic stand came a few inches short of poking through the ceiling into the upstairs room (would probably have improved the I up there, come to think of it). Bruno Kramm came on to offer a quick introduction, getting his political rant out of the way before starting with the music.

And that was the cue for Stefan Ackermann to enter. No strolling up to the mic for this man. Nope, striding on like a man possessed, the skinny, soot-covered singer proceeded to march dementedly up and down the stage before twisting round to the mic and then getting on with the vocals. Bruno and the third live member (whose name escapes me) provided regular backing for their frontman in addition to their keyboard efforts.

They gave up the early part of their set to their lesser-known tracks, clearly saving up all the favourites for the home run. There was the odd technical problem – Bruno lost his mic stand during 'Vater' and the stage hands quickly had to improvise in terms of gaffa-taping another to his mobile keyboard stand. Throughout all this, there was Stefan, gurning and gesturing at the audience between each verse, the focal point of the Das Ich visual spectacle. If Gollum ever fronted a band, it'd probably be a Middle-Earth incarnation of Das Ich.

Aurally, the Das Ich sound has always been an acquired taste – their apocalyptic electro-goth isn't really easy listening. But on stage, they look like they sound and everything comes together. Their main set concluded with a re-worked take on 'Kain und Abel', my personal favourite. There were two encores, Bruno clearly impressed that the assembled crowd was capable of asking for more in German (ZUGABE!). Their take on 'Gottes Tod' was truly inspired, Stefan wrapping himself round the mic stand in the process, whilst the night was brought to a close with 'Destillat'.

And so it finally happened. Das Ich came back, and showed all present exactly how one can make a keyboard-based band work on stage. So not everyone wants to cart round loads of scaffolding to every gig....but use some imagination, for fucks sake!!! Tonight was a demonstration of the possibilities – I'm only hoping that some fledging bands were watching and picked up a hint or two along the way.

## **Death In June on the HMS President – 22 Nov 2003**

Death In June live might not have been a completely new experience to me, but last years show in Elektrowerkz hardly counts – I was almost completely unfamiliar with Douglas P's work at the time and hence wasn't exactly in the best position to review the goings-on. There were also statements to the effect that that was the last ever Death In June show in London, but I've heard that before. Sure enough, they returned 18 months after their last show, to a boat.

A boat? Yep. No more pissing around in packed clubs, hold the show on the H.M.S. President! This particular boat doesn't actually sail anywhere, but the Thames by night is a still a pretty sight, and made for a refreshing change to abandoned warehouses, glorified scout huts and pillar-infested basements. A vegetarian buffet was provided, surprisingly principled for a band whose last studio album was called 'All Pigs Must Die', but, hey, I guess it was all in the spirit of things.

A support act wasn't really on the cards, so it was instead decided to hold the show in two halves, running from quarter-to-ten through to.....well, I'll describe the ending in a moment. The standing drums from the 2002 show were gone – this was now Douglas on guitar and vocals, and his back-up man John Murphy on percussion (wood blocks, chimes, maracas, etc). Keen for a warm-up, they went out on deck just before the doors opened and played to the queue!

Anyway, **Death In June** came on stage, Douglas electing for his sniper veil rather than the white mask. Even this was lifted after a few songs, so we uncharacteristically saw more of his face than we'd historically expect. With a few notable exceptions, tonight's set was totally acoustic – no backing track or backing musicians beyond the lone percussionist. This being, of course, the most loved configuration of Death in June.

Douglas also provided commentary on the history of each song – 'Rocking Horse Night' was revealed as a story of David Tibet's (Current 93) near-death experience as a child, whilst a number of others were now clearly highly prophetic predictions as to the fate of the world as a whole (more believable now that when the songs were wrote). This was Douglas at his most humble, and he openly admitted his nervousness. It only really hurt when he tried to emulate Boyd Rice's spoken-word contributions to his albums (a brave attempt, but just not sinister enough!).

There were a couple of moments in the first half that stuck out. Launching into 'Hullo Angel', Doug got two chords in before stopping and informing us that he'd 'forgotten it'. Or rather he'd forgotten the chords. So he sung it a capella instead! The other memorable moment was 'Till The Living Flesh Is Burned', one of the few non-acoustic tracks to make it in. Lacking a drum kit or beatbox, the audience were instead required to stamp out the beat on the floor! Another surprise was the appearance of former Di6 member Patrick Leagas, to sing 'The Calling', something much appreciated by those long-time fans who still remember hearing the 'Nada!' album for the first time.

The second half followed after a short break. The first three songs after the break didn't seem all that inspired – obviously the nerves were working against them. They were back on course come 'Rose Clouds of Holocaust', however, and soon it was time for requests. 'Giddy Giddy Carousel' and 'Fields of Rape' proved to be the highlights of this part of the show, but there was clearly some trouble on stage. Douglas was rapidly losing his guitar strings!

Thankfully, there were just enough strings left to fit in 'But, What Ends When The Symbols Shatter?', but that would have to be it. The audience has other ideas however, there being one essential track we hadn't yet heard. The track of course was 'Heaven Street'. There was no guitar left to play it on, so Douglas once again resorted to an a capella treatment, but this time, everyone sung along. And so the show came to a close. The night was scheduled until 2am, but the live part was over before midnight, so me and several others used the opportunity to get the last trains home.

Walking ashore, with 'But What Ends...' stuck in my head, I reflected on what I'd just heard. For a band so often associated with contentious imagery, this was refreshingly friendly and down-to-earth. The military uniforms were still much in evidence at the audience, but it never felt threatening or uncomfortable. At the end of the day, Death In June live could well be taken as 'sing along with uncle Dougie'. Leave the politics to those who get kicks out of it – I'm just in it for the music.



## Pity for Monsters – 23 Jan 2004

A new and much-needed event on the London musical underground occurred at the Water Rats on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2004. With the mainstream metal scene focused on just a few choice bands, whilst even the more accessible elements of the gothic and industrial scenes were now rooted firmly in electronics, there was nowhere for the bands that fell 'somewhere in the middle' to go. The duo that were Devilish Presley thought otherwise, however, booking the Water Rats and three other bands and seeing if there really was any demand for this sort of thing.

Well, first let me say that a sizeable crowd DID assemble. Not packed to the gills, but fairly busy for an 'opening night'. I must also add at this point that whilst various aspects of the promotion focused on the goth-friendly elements of the night, this was ultimately a rock-oriented gathering. Lots of guitars, evil vocals and not one live keyboard seen at any point. This wasn't any real surprise – I'd seen three of tonight's four bands before, and was looking forward to a few hours of power chords and shout-a-long choruses.

**Global Noise Attack** (aka G.N.A.) kicked off proceedings, initially playing to a big empty space between the stage and a few people gathered at the back. Not that worried G.N.A.'s happily demented singer. Restricted only by the length of his microphone cable, the provocatively-clad psycho spent most of his set wandering in amongst the ever-growing crowd, eventually picking one to take back up on stage to join the rest of the band.

This was the second time I've seen G.N.A. , and this show was indefinitely better to the one I saw back in 2001. The group has been reduced to singer plus one guitarist and one bassist, resulting in a less cluttered sound than before, with some particularly strong bass playing shining through at times. I might suggest that their singer would do well acquiring a head-mounted radio mic à la The Cruxshadows. Whilst that would mean he'd no longer be able to tie up photographers with his mic cable, it would at least leave him with both hands free to commit even more nefarious deeds.

Next up were the ever-improving **MaxDmyz**. Regular readers will be aware that I've been following this band for quite some time now. There was an enforced hiatus when half the original line-up disappeared for several reasons, but Twister isn't one to give up and so he set about building a new band. The new line-up needed a few test runs and a bit of tweaking before it was fully broken in, but the band I saw tonight seemed relatively comfortable and generally 'back on track'.

Performance artist Addam has also altered his approach, now only appearing on stage when he has something to do (tip: if you've got a phobia against needles, blood or angle grinders, steer well clear). Also notable is rise of female vocalist Morgana, her deep voice distinctive in a scene becoming dominated by girlie-vox, and even taking the lead role in one song. The backing track has returned, which in turn meant the welcome appearance of old-favourite 'Muthablud' in amongst the promising new material, the two vocalists really getting a vibe going.

Now event organisers, the inanely named **Devilish Presley**, got a go. Clearly cheered by the fact that people turned up, the duo were basically out there to have a good time, as it soon became clear that this was not a band that wanted to take itself too seriously. Going for a sort of macabre variation on the rock n'roll sound, Devilish Presley knocked out such good-time numbers like 'Levi's Dog' (anag.) and 'Black Leather Jesus'. They're not going to make it as big as the singer to which they so obviously pay tribute, but they were entertaining nonetheless, a good way to lighten up the mood of the night as a whole.

This left **Interlock** with the home leg. The uninitiated might first have noticed that they do in fact share two members with MaxDmyz, though neither one plays the same instrument in both bands. Interlock's drummer Matt has recently taken charge of the bass in MaxDmyz, whilst the bassist here, Dazy, had previously been seen helping Addam cause damage to himself earlier in the night. Not that this hurt the music of either band.

Another similarity with MaxDmyz is the use of dual male-female vocalists, though this is where the similarity ends. Whilst the Twister/Morgana interaction is about contrast, in Interlock it's a case of Hal and Emmeline taking each other on to see who can scare the most. This was fierce, energising industrial death metal, a sound which as seeing a surprising level of vitality since the disappearance of founders Godflesh and popularisers Fear Factory.

I have to admit to flagging slightly and pulling towards the back as Interlock's set was progressing – a mosh pit was in embryo and I was in no mood to fight. But no worries, the night had served its purpose. I'd gathered from the organiser that this event was a pilot and would only continue if the venue felt it successful enough. One hopes that it was, because with Deathboy and Earth Loop Recall potentially lined up for next time, it would be a pity to see it collapse for the want of a few extra people through the door.

## **Pity for Monsters – 27 Feb 2004**

Last month's Pity For Monsters went well, well enough for a follow-up, with a slightly different emphasis on this occasion. Whilst last month's event, offering sets from the likes of Interlock and MaxDmyz, had a very metallic feel about it, this time round the focus was more on an electronic rock sound, with not one regular drum kit sighted all night. The fast ascending Deathboy were chosen to headline, with new label-mate Earth Loop Recall also appearing on the bill, with organisers Devilish Presley playing in between.

Before any of them, however, was **Faetal**, a two piece act, vocalist and guitarist, with the rest on backing. There seemed to be some trouble with getting the right sound balance from the monitors, which led to the live and pre-recorded elements of their sound not quite 'meshing' at times, particularly on the faster tracks. When things slowed down, however, I suddenly found myself watching a rather accomplished indie/electro crossover band, who knew how to pen a decent track and carry it off musically. I'll need to catch them on a better night before I'm totally convinced, but impressing despite technical trouble is something all new bands need to learn how to do, and this duo did so effectively, and can now focus on tightening up their sound.

This is something that **Earth Loop Recall** have now very much done. The show I saw at the Garage's scout hut last July was merely a sampler of what they had to offer. Their use of a fierce electronic backbone, yearning vox and a combination of different guitar styles demanded a soundsystem capable of handling such a complex sound, and the Water Rats seemed at least up to the job. This was also notable as the first ELR show in London since the release of their debut album 'Compulsion', with the word going round before their show that this might be something very special indeed.

And it was. The rigid synthetic rhythms provided the base, the framework which was so elegantly filled out with some of the most inspired guitar work I've heard for some time, topped off by Ben McKees vocals, which somehow managed to climb over the awesome wall of sound to lead their band through their short but highly effective set, each successive song proving to be more climatic than the last. Their attendant knob-twiddler picked up a bass for the finale, a huge, expansive song that brought their set to a

spectacular close, the resultant cheering proving to be the only thing capable of out-doing the ELR machine in the intensity stakes. I might have cheered more myself, but, dear reader, I was more intent on getting down to the Wasp Factory stall and bagging one of their CDs.

Time then, to get back down to Earth for **Devilish Presley**. The event organisers might well have been worried about how they may or may not be able to follow up a class act like ELR, but the reality was that they needn't have worried, because the two bands are just fundamentally different animals. Whilst ELR seem set on whisking you off to another dimension, Devilish are more about having a laugh, poking fun at anything that takes their fancy and generally living up to old-style rock n'roll values. They don't pretend to be anything else, which is refreshing in a climate of elitism which pollutes so much of the music scene elsewhere.

Anyway, with bassist and backing vocalist Jacqui Vixen playing the sultry biker chick from hell and Johnny Navarro the OTT, pants-on-fire frontman, it was very hard not to have a good time, the duo surging through their set in enthusiastic style. It's not often I enjoy watching the same band twice with only a month between the shows, but for this duo, I'll make an exception, as they serve as a reminder that rock music doesn't have to be all complex and esoteric to work. The highlight of their set was once again their set-closer 'Black Leather Jesus', which led to impromptu stage invasion, which I can't deny I enjoyed being part of.

And so it was left to **Deathboy** to bring the evening's entertainment to a close. This was to be my sixth experience of the Deathboy live experience, and showcased the first major reworking of their set, now electing to open with the full-throttle 'Cheap Shot'. The early part of their set tonight was given over to their newer, or otherwise more obscure, material, saving up the big hitters for the home run. There were a couple of early tracks that didn't seem quite 'there' yet, but I don't deny Scott Lamb's approach of uploading every track and it's dog in MP3 form for anyone to download is one that can be extended to the stage. Deathboy like to work in public, it seems.

Anyway, the set went up a gear once 'Sick World' wandered into earshot, with a mini-mosh of sorts now forming on the main floor. The 'token' EBM track 'Change' went down surprisingly well considering the spirit of the event, though their double-barrelled closing shot came in the form of anthem 'We Will Destroy' followed by 'Decimate', two killer tracks that remain some of the most powerful bullets in the Deathboy arsenal. Not that this is a band that want to build a reputation on a couple of good tracks alone.

And so the second Pity For Monsters came to a close. From a musical point of view, it was an undoubted success. There also seemed to be a fair few people in the house, though whether the turnout was enough to keep the event going in a such a prime Central London location remains to be seen. It'd be a pity if it wasn't, as this is already starting to evolve into a much-needed shot in the arm for London's live music scene. With all the media focus on the big-name shows, the smaller bands not only need events like this, but also need people to turn up, cheer them on and ultimately buy their CDs. Particularly if it's Earth Loop Recall's one.

## Invitation 2004 – 5-7 Mar 2004

### Day 1

Whilst the European gothic festival scene is something mainly associated with Germany, there's nothing to stop the other countries having a go. The UK has Whitby and InFest (plus a couple of others currently in their infancy), Holland has it's GothAM, and Belgium

isn't exactly afraid to join in the fun either. Eurorock may have died in 2002, but The Invitation festival, held in a sports complex in Ghent, is very much alive. Having now got the festival bug, I decided to check it out.

The first thing that strike you about The Invitation Festival is the line-up. The six bands listed at the top suggests that this festival was more oriented towards concentrating the entire scene into one weekend, rather than breaking lots of new bands. Even those bands near the bottom of the bill, such as [:SITD:] and God Module are established going concerns, likely to attract a fair sized crowd on their own accord. The quality of the line-up was reflected in the price of the ticket, significantly more expensive than M'era Luna for fewer bands and only one stage. But add together how much it'd cost you to see this lot separately, and suddenly it doesn't seem too bad.

Setting off from England at lunchtime, we arrived in Ghent early in the evening, making it to the festival site bang on 8pm. This did mean that we missed the first three bands (Rosa Crux, Saltatio Mortis and ASP), but since I'd never heard of any of them at time of writing, this wasn't too critical to my enjoyment of the festival. The first band I saw, therefore, was **Tanzwut**. These boys have been regular visitors to my CD player in recent times, but their stage show, complete with pseudo-medieval costumes, bagpipes, zany hairdos and big fuck-off riffage, is something else again. It was almost too much to take in this early on in the festival, but you can't deny these boys put on a proper show.

Next up were **Diary of Dreams**. The line-up and set-list was similar to the one heard at last years M'era Luna, with some old favourites added at the end, with a neat rendition of 'Rumours About Angels' finishing off the set. The mohawked guitarist seems to have a more frontal role in the mix than he once did, which did the overall live sound no harm at all. Also welcome was a backdrop, which, unlike those of some bands, was actually synched to the tracks. Face it, if it's electronic goth you want, it's pretty hard to beat Diary of Dreams.

Time then, for the regular indulgence of **VNV Nation** live. Those of you who've been following my reviews of VNV shows over the years will know what to expect here, and sure enough they knocked out their usual selection of future-pop floorfillers. The set has been tweaked only slightly over the past few years, now electing to open with a reworked 'Genesis' and playing the slow versions of 'Solitary' (aka 'Solitude') and 'Standing'. The highlight tonight was 'Beloved', which in Ghent became something of a communal sing-along. I'd still like to know what happened to 'Rubicon', 'Joy', 'Saviour' and all the other tracks they never seem to play, but somehow they get away with it nonetheless.

## Day 2

The afterparty went on late into the night, but we still made it in time for **[:SITD:]** the following day, who, despite playing the opening slot at 12:15pm, still got a 1-hour set. Fortunately they seemed to have found a way of stretching out their set since InFest, as they didn't run out of tracks this time. Their singer still has to stop dressing like a nu-metaller (hoody, shorts AND woolly hat?), but [:SITD:] otherwise seem on course to continue their climb up the electro-industrial rankings, with 'Snuff Machinery', 'LaughingStock' and 'Rose-Coloured Skies' all minor classics from the word go.

Second up today was **Violet Stigmata**, a 'deathrock' band from France, who ultimately proved to be pretty dull. I'm sure they had at least one good song, but since I can't remember how it goes, it probably wasn't that good after all. Taking us back onto EBM territory were **Pride & Fall**. Their debut album was strong technically, but also rather derivative. On stage, they made fairly good use of an additional guitarist, but the singer

seemed uncomfortable and not really ready to front a band such as this, his attempts at crowd working sounding very forced.

Then followed two really interesting bands. First the electro-traditional fusion trio **Qntal**, who I'd first seen at M'era Luna last year. Their set today was stronger and more dynamic than the one I'd seen on that hot summers day, but there was a slight lag in the middle, cured by a truly inspired delivery of 'Ad Mortem Festinamus', a classic track of the genre that secured the biggest cheer of the crowd so far today. This in turn inspired them to achieve greater things with their remaining tracks and the resultant, inevitable, encore.

But then came **Kirlian Camera**, one of the very few scene bands to originate from Italy, and not the most prolific live performers either. Dresser in identical white shirts and black ties, they marched onto stage in rank file and took their positions behind mic and keyboard. Delivering an icy-cold set of rigid electronic gloom, the quartet seemed to be one of the very few bands who can actually turn their static stage presence to their advantage, whether it be on the droning 'The Desert Inside' or the almost-synthpoppy 'Eclipse'.

Next up to bat were the Dutch gothic stalwarts **Clan of Xymox**. Many critics have passed CoX frontman Ronny Moorings as a burnt-out old goth, but tonight's set seemed to indicate that they still had some creative energy left. Their set included a number of their newer tracks, which are more electronic than anything they've done in the recent past, though they wisely kept 'A Day' in to keep all the old goths happy. They didn't create the atmosphere that Qntal or Kirlian Camera did, but they weren't bad at all.

The highlight of the weekend, however, was next. **Covenant**. Predictable but true. Unlike VNV, Covenant's sets vary more from show to show, whilst Eskil's live delivery makes even the weaker studio tracks come alive (I'd never got into 'Wall of Sound' until tonight!). It was great to hear 'Figurehead' early on in the set and even better to be spared another run through 'Dead Stars' (you read right – they didn't play it). The ultimate highlight, however, came during 'One World One Sky', when it became clear that virtually everyone in the room was singing along. There's something very special about that.

**And One**, those nutty purveyors of diet EBM, were scheduled to round off night two. Unfortunately, following on from a series of sets that varied from the interestingly obscure to the downright anthemic, And One were always going to sound a little bit trivial in comparison. Chris Ruiz soon abandoned his keyboard to become Steve Naghavi's backing vocalist, the pair of them prancing round the stage like two kids high on sugar and additives. Some of their tracks came over OK despite this, but really these boys should have been the starter leading up to the main course that was Covenant, rather than serving, as they did, as the over-sweetened dessert.

### Day 3

Once again, an afterparty (and nightmare journey back to the hotel) followed, but we still made it back in time for **God Module**, who opened up the final day. They brought along female vocalist Courtney Tittiger this time, having left her at home for last year's InFest performance. They generally sounded exactly like the albums suggest they do, which is OK if you like the songs, but their backing video, consisting of various clips from horror/gore movies probably wasn't the best thing to show a crowd prior to lunchtime.

Putting off the aforementioned lunch for a while, I duly sat down to watch **Elusive**, who looked like a cross between The Sisters of Mercy and Fields of The Nephilim. And they sounded like they looked. Sorry boys, you may have some good songs, but I'm really starting to tire of this stuck-in-the-80s thing. Following on from this was **Decoded Feedback**, a sort of harsh-vocals EBM thing. Technically they were quite strong, with a

couple of potential club stormers in there, though their stylistic palette never really ventured far from that particular technique, which led to their set tailing off towards it's close.

Anyone seeking something a little more distinctive was in luck however, as the strangest band of the entire weekend would follow directly after. **Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio**. A sinister, percussive neo-folk act from Sweden, with a cold, chilling spoken-word vocal style, evoking memories of Current 93, spoken-word era NON or even Der Blutharsch. True, they didn't have any more stylistic variety than Decoded Feedback, but they actually used this potential flaw to their advantage, delivering a hypnotic set that might have repelled many, but had my uninterrupted attention for the duration.

From the truly bizarre, then, to the almost predictable. **Icon of Coil**. Their first big show since launching 'Machines Are Us', the Norwegian trio were lacking Seb, their founding member and key musician, replacing him on this occasion with Mel (previously seen playing with The Chaos Engine and a few other English bands). They delivered one of their better sets tonight, having successfully established which tracks work best on stage, with new tracks 'Android', 'Shelter' and 'Alive Enough For Death' all enhancing the consistency of their performance.

Next up were **De/Vision**. I'd seen them play once before, back in 2001, when they appeared to be little more than another European synth-pop act with chart ambitions. What I saw tonight surprised me to say the least, as they've added a live drummer (and a bloody good one at that) having generally 'rocked up' their set. They seem to come over better this way, conveying more energy. Unfortunately, their singer is not the best crowd-worker in the world, and their hit rate of good songs isn't as high as some. That said, De/Vision have my attention again, which I'd never had believed had you told me before the weekend.

The penultimate act of the weekend was also the oldest – **DAF**. Formed in the mid-70s, the duo of Gabi-Delgado Lopez and Robert Gorl essentially laid down the prototype for electronic body music, then disappeared for nigh on two decades. Tonight's set was a mix of old and new tracks, with slender lead man Gabi dancing like a militaristic lunatic and delivering his vocals drill chmaltz style. They played most of their best known songs ('Der Mussolini', 'Alle Gegen Alle'), but thanks to an 80-minute set, they also played lots of similar but weaker material. There's only so much one can do with one or two synth lines, a drummer and a vocalist, and DAF had done it all by 1982. This show wasn't only a reminder of how they rose to fame. It was also a reminder of why they stopped.

This just left **Wolfsheim** to headline. The stage set was impressive, built out of translucent white cubes that lit up in different patterns as the show progressed. Peter Heppner, meanwhile, stood still at stage centre for the entire set, reading his lyrics from a lectern. The man does have a decent singing voice, however, and this still carried despite his static delivery. He and Marcus (keyboards) were joined later in the set by Achim Farber (drums) and Carsten Klatte (guitar), the four of them eventually knocking out a spectacular version of 'The Sparrows and the Nightingales', with some well-timed pyrotechnics completing the picture. Anyway, our party had to leave whilst Wolfie were doing their encores, as we intended to make it back to Blighty by sunrise. And indeed did so without difficulty.

But what about the festival as a whole? The line-up was about as good as they get, and several bands gave superb performances. I do have some complaints however. One, long sets (an hour or more) are best kept for high-billed bands who have enough A-material to fill the slot up without compromising quality (for that, read 'Covenant'). Secondly, I object having to pay to get in, then pay again to use the toilet (this may acceptable for a public facility, but not at an event like this). Finally, we had all kinds of dramas getting taxis.

Flemish is not a widely known language outside Benelux, so us 'fernners could use a little help in this department, as ringing local firms ourselves provided, erm, 'mixed' results.

Anyway, I hope the organisers eventually get to read this and accept my congratulations on what was a generally excellent event. There's still bits that need improving, but it's refreshing to see that Germany doesn't totally monopolise the goth/wave scene in Europe. In these days of European Union, single currency and suchlike, Belgium proves to be ideally suited to holding such events. Let's hope they continue to build on this.

## **Kraftwerk – 18 Mar 2004**

I have to be honest. I never thought I'd actually SEE Kraftwerk play live. I'd discovered their music in 1997, and quickly got the impression (correct at the time), that they'd shackled themselves up in their studio in Dusseldorf and refused to come out. 'Expo 2000' didn't exactly set the world on fire, whilst last years release of 'Tour De France Soundtracks' generally just indicated that their best days were behind them. But their legacy was plain for all to see. And I wasn't exactly about to turn down a chance to watch them on stage.

This was their first UK show since 1997, part of their first tour since 1991. Back-to-back gigs at the Brixton Academy would follow, though this show, held on the South Bank in the more intimate surroundings of the Royal Festival Hall, appeared to be the one to be at. The sound system, more used to classical performance than electronic rhythms, was at least crisp and well-defined, whilst the all-seated structure at least gave everyone a good view of the stage. The concept of a 'support band' seemed quite alien on this occasion, with **Kraftwerk** appearing on stage at 8pm.

The band elected for their 'Man-Maschine' mode of dress (black suit, black tie, red shirt), and indeed opened their set with the title track from that very album. The four members of the band (admittedly consisting of only two members, Ralf and Florian, who recorded the groups most-influential material) each played an identical keyboard, with Ralf proving occasional vocals on a head-mounted mic. With their stage set-up kept to the bare minimum, the visual focus was on the backdrop, a combination of blocky 80s computer graphics, contemporary CGI and video clips. It was an appropriate backdrop, but also an essential one – there's only so much fun one can have watching four old men play keyboards, no matter how famous they are.

Anyway, after 'The Man-Maschine' have evoked memories in everyone who'd forgotten what makes this bunch so important in the history of music, we got a series of more recent tracks. 'Expo 2000', the 'Tour De France' soundtracks and 'Vitamin'. The first two of these dragged a little, the drawn-out minimalist 'Tour' in particular impressing no more on stage than it did on CD. 'Vitamin' was more successful however, a neat turn of phrase in the lyrics and a clanging, metallic rhythm seemingly all that was required to make a successful song.

Anyway, things went up a gear once the original 'Tour De France' kicked in, the song sounding significantly better with the melodies in rather than out. After this, we got a straight run of hits. 'Autobahn' still sounding as good today as it did all those year ago, followed by 'Neon Lights' and 'The Model', the two Kraftwerk tracks that were ultimately most influential to electro-pop (as opposed to techno, house, trance, hip-hop and just about every other music style that's used a drum machine in it's time).

And then the track I personally was waiting for more than any other – 'Radioactivity'. Prefaced with a series of ominous statistics about our increasingly nuclear society, the quartet launched into a version of the song not unlike the one that appeared on 'The Mix'

album way back then, a track I always believed was a lesson in the right way to rework an old track for the modern-day market. And following the climatic 'Trans-Europe Express', the curtains drew shut, and goodnight.

Except there were encores. Three of them. The first took in a medley of tracks from the 'Computer World' album – 'Numbers', 'Computer World', 'It's More Fun To Compute' and finally 'Pocket Calculator'. Encore two saw no human beings on stage at all, just the four Kraftwerk robots moving to the sound of, erm, 'The Robots'. Finally, the band themselves came back on stage, wearing matching black jump-suits with neon yellow grids (???) to play 'Elektro Kardiogramm', 'Aero Dynamik' and finally (very finally), 'Musique Non-Stop', those huge beats finally bringing their set to a close.

So maybe Kraftwerk are past their best. Maybe they really are out on a 'let's tour again before everyone forgets about us' mission. But the reality is that they HAVEN'T been forgotten. The size of the crowd tonight was evidence of that. No matter how long they continue putting out albums once a decade and then hiding away in Kling Klang whilst everyone else does the hard work for them, the reality is that these boys invented modern dance music. Forget about the last decade or so – this, my friends, is where the vast majority of the music covered on this site started from. Don't forget that.

## **Einstürzende Neubauten (& Mono) – 3 Apr 2004**

This is one of those bands whom I've known in terms of album recordings for some time, yet still wanted to see live if only to picture exactly what goes on in terms of their music-making process. Neubauten are after all famous for their rather 'unusual' recording methodologies, choosing to play their so-called 'instruments' live rather than take the easy route out and sample them. It was therefore that had to be sampled on stage at some point, and this, their London date to support 'Perpetuum Mobile', was to be my chance.

Support tonight came courtesy of **Mono**, a Japanese band. Resembling the UK 'shoegazer' scene of the early 90s and the post-rock sound that came shortly after, both in terms of their effect-laden walls of guitar noise and in their 'disconnected' stage presence, not even choosing to provide us with any vocals, they nonetheless managed to generate quite a bit of atmosphere with their huge, drawn-out compositions. So drawn out, in fact, that they only managed to squeeze three or four songs into their set. Others I spoke to found it all rather tedious, but I personally found it quite absorbing, a proficient guitar band that avoid the obvious and generally succeeded in making something of this particularly lucrative support slot.

Lucrative, of course, due to a certain German collective known as **Einstürzende Neubauten** appearing on stage in London for the first time in four years shortly after. Blixa Bargeld made an immediate apology for the low volume of the first song due to potential feedback problems. The song was of course 'Ich Gehe Jetzt', the opening track from the new album, characterised by a couple of the band members blasting jets of air into plastic tubes, the mics at the other end picking up the resultant blast of noise, the whole set up carefully tuned to ensure a recognisable tune emerges out through the PA.

This, of course, is the appeal of this entire group. Whilst they weren't alone in the old-skool metal-bashing club, the Neubauten boys seem to be alone in the respect that they eventually realised that there were only so many different noises one can make by hitting metal things with other metal things, and so duly developed a whole host of other instruments, toning down their songs to a minimal level where the individual sounds are able to shine. Utilising a guitar, bass and keyboards in most songs, the EN sound of 2004 was surprisingly accessible compared with their early works, but their percussive set up ensured their sound remained distinctive the whole way through.



As is the custom, most of the early part of their set was given over to the new album, with 'Selbstportrait mit Kater' proving to be my personal favourite of the new tracks. One other notable feature of their set was that Neubauten actually play their really long, drawn-out tracks live, taking the concept to the limit with back-to-back renditions of 'Redukt' (10 minutes) and 'Perpetuum Mobile' (14 minutes!). There's VERY few bands that could possibly get away with this kind of self-indulgence, but it seems Neubauten is one of the rare examples.

Anyway, they played on after this, picking and choosing old and new tracks more or less as they saw fit. I was a little disappointed not to hear 'Der Interimslieben', the track that introduced me to this band in the first place, but that was compensated for by a truly inspired rendition of 'Sabrina', showing the kind of delicate restraint that reminds you exactly why these guys are still going whilst most of their contemporaries have been forgotten by all but the most fanatical scene devotees. Another highlight was everyone gathering down the front to play the tinkly little ditty 'Grundstück'.

But this was not the kind of gig to go track spotting at. It was a gig that played on, and succeeded via, the overall spectacle. The uninitiated might wonder why watching six middle-aged Germans practising DIY set to music is spectacle worth the price of admission. It's a tricky question to answer, but it's probably got something to do with the fact that they don't overplay their home-made 'instruments', treading the line between excess and minimalism oh-so-carefully and providing a fine evenings entertainment as a result.

## Elektrofest 2004 – 2 May 2004

The original billing suggested that Elektrofest 2004 would be headed by Wolfsheim, Mesh, B-Movie and Client at the Astoria. Slowly but surely this began to untangle, the event moved to the 'Carling Academy' a mile up the road in Islington. Wolfie and Mesh elected to play dates later in the month, whilst Client and B-Movie both disappeared from the billing. Nine bands remained – and against the odds it was still a respectable line-up. It just might have looked better to have fixed the top half of the billing before promotion began.

Anyway, things started just before 3pm in the Carling Academy (formerly known as the Marquee), with **Ex-Rental** kicking off proceedings. They were billed as an electroclash act of sorts, though in reality they were more of a straight-ahead synth-pop set-up, with a lead male vocalist with a female keyboard player adding backing vox on occasion. They had a few decent songs in their set, but I didn't think it was anything special, the punchy loops and synth strings coming over as being proficient enough but without the makings of greatness.

Next up were **Schmoof**, another boy-girl pairing, this time with the lady up front, clad in a short silver dress and matching shoes. Their sound-of-choice was analogue synth-pop of the cheesiest variety. Utilising the most basic of synthetic techniques, the Schmoof set worked mainly because they were so totally shameless in what they did. Songs like 'Chocolate Boyfriend' give some indication that this duo don't really take themselves that seriously, a theorem proved by their utterly insane (but deeply catchy) cover of ageing rock stalwart 'Sweet Child O'Mine'.

And so on to **X-Lover**, the most truly 'electroclash' band of the day, having earned themselves the tag thanks to their contribution to the last City Rockers 'Futurism' comp. Like Schmoof, they were led by a scantily-clad female, this time a lusty blonde that sounded like she looked. And she looked like a 'kiss my boots' kind of uber-woman that

just oozed a sense of superiority regardless of her short stature. Their version of the 'electroclash' sound incorporated live drum pads and bass, which worked well enough, although it had no more depth than any of their contemporaries, so it remains to be seen whether they'll survive once the media tires of this kind of thing.

The **Ju Ju Babies** were the first band on the bill that I'd seen on stage before, and, believe me, it's not something I'd be likely to forget. Not content with keyboards, drum pads, theremin, vocals and performance artists, the Ju Ju crew have now added a couple of pom-pom waving cheerleaders to the line-up. At one point, I counted ten people of stage! Admittedly, their music is a fairly straightforward form of 'electrotrash' (that's what they call it), but it's still fun to listen to. I still think the non-musical elements of their stage show need a bit of 'tightening up' (the pink wig and banana thing just has to go!!), but there's still something there worthy of development.

Finally breaking free of the simplistic synth-pop theme were the Anglo-French electro outfit **Seize**. Combining elements of drum'n'bass with harder dance textures, the sound of Seize has developed significantly since I first saw them a couple of years back, with Sandrine now more at ease as lead vocalist than at any point previously. Their first track might have been spoiled slightly by a mixing glitch leading to overly dominant bassline, but from track two through to the end of their set, Seize looked and sounded every inch the professional dance act which they might well aspire to being. Seems strange that they play primarily to the 'gothic' audiences, but hopefully someone out there can put them in touch with their wider potential fanbase.

The other 'dance' band of the day followed straight after, namely the ubiquitous **Greenhaus**. They've finally decided to add a vocalist to the line-up, but the tiny little oriental girl chosen didn't seem quite up to the job of fronting a band that had previously drawn criticism for lacking stage presence. The saving grace of their set was once again the excellent 'Stoned', a Jim Morrison-inspired chill out track of the highest order. The rest of their set was variable in both concept and quality, and their decision to play substitutes with the vocalists for the last three tracks just created confusion, able singers that Roi and Sandrine are.

Then it was time for **Billie Ray Martin**, formerly of S-Express and Electribe 101. I really didn't know what to expect from this particular set, unfamiliar with both the singer and her former bands. And even following on from her brief set, I'm not entirely sure what to make of here. She's got a good voice on her, and the song about not having any brakes on her roller-skates seems to stick in the mind. But for the bulk of her set, the songs sounded rather ordinary, just another female-fronted electronic pop act on a billing full of girl singers, and hence any potential interest I had in her was soon lost.

And then chaos descended on to the Carling Academy, with many confused bodies wandering around stage trying to get **XPQ-21**'s equipment ready. The billing, running no more than five minutes late, was half an hour down by the time Jeyenne and co took to the stage, and even then they had to do another half-song live soundcheck before leaving stage and coming back on again. I could see the tension on stage, whilst the audience was left confused and hungry for some music.

Eventually XPQ-21 did make it on stage, but with their set curtailed to a mere six songs they had a lot to do in not a lot of time. But they threw themselves into their set nonetheless, Jeyenne playing to the crowd for all he was worth. Three new songs from the not-yet-released new album went down fairly well, though their cover of 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' got the best response. Their new keyboard player took the opportunity to play a little bit of live guitar, another string to their musical bow. But in the end, it was a 'best of a bad

job' situation, and their set went off as well as could have been expected given the enforced absence of club hits such as 'White and Alive' and 'Darkness'.

This curtailment could have had something to do with **Project Pitchfork's** impending set. Whilst XPQ-21 have played the UK a few times in recent years, Peter Spilles gang haven't been here since 2001. It was always going to be an interesting set, as it'd been 18 months since 'Inferno' came out, an album which had dominated their European setlists, but had never really caught on here. The boys still new the value of a decent anthem, however, so duly launched into 'Timekiller' as their opener, which got the crowd moving. Then they started to break the 'new' material.

Having now added Carsten Klatte to the live line-up, there were quite a few of the guitar-based track in the set, which would have disappointed the Pitchfork purists, but I though these track worked particularly well, especially 'Mine (Beast of Prey)' and 'I Am (A Thought In Slow-motion)'. Of the old favourites, there was no 'Souls' (a track I now understand has been long since dropped by the band), but 'Requiem' made a welcome comeback, the band having not played it during their recent European dates. A one-song encore of 'Existence' followed, but there was no time for any more, which was a pity considering how much A-material was left out.

But in the final reckoning, it didn't seem to matter, because even the weaker album track just seemed to work when delivered on stage. It was a suitably unusual note to see out a very unusual event, the line-up changing every time you looked at it. The nine bands that did play were still worth the price of admission, so there wasn't really anything to complain about unless you happened to be a B-Movie fan, many fans travelling (or at least planning to travel) miles only to be disappointed. But there was always the feeling that Flag were hanging on by their fingertips trying to keep this event alive. That can't be good for the UK scene.

## Wolfsheim (+ Silence is Sexy and Trademark) – 8 May 2004

The second visit within a week to the 'Carling Academy Islington' (as it is now known, it seems), this time to see a very rare UK show by the top German synth-pop duo Wolfsheim. I'm not sure if it's their first ever UK show, but it must be the first since their stock shot up following the release of their 'Spectators' album in 1999. Since then, unfortunately, they seem to have slid down the tired synth-pop slope with follow-up 'Casting Shadows', certainly one of 2003's most disappointing album, if not quite the absolute worst to pass through my fingers (thank you T.O.Y.....)

They're not a cheap band to hire, either. £13 is quite expensive by scene standards, with neither support band being particularly well established. **Trademark** were on first, all lab coats and analogue synths. They were a particularly geeky ensemble, looking like a bunch of science teachers, complete with a rather naff 'practical demonstration'. Whilst they were far from a total failure, I can't honestly say I was too impressed, ultimately sounding like just another synth-pop band. And I've had enough of 'just another' synth pop bands by now.

Next up were **Silence is Sexy**, currently both managed and largely promoted by Flag Promotions. They'd thus got at least a mention in most of the scene press, though they were completely new to me until tonight. Given the nature of much of Flag's events of late, one might have expected them to be an electroclash act of sorts, though what we actually got was more of a cabaret style of synth-pop performance – with the exception of a few stabs on a tiny keyboard, the vocals were the sole live element of the SiS show. Fortunately, they at least put some effort into both their singing and their stage costume,

looking like a stylish couple from the decadent 30s, so they were at the very least an improvement on Trademark.

But the real focus of the night was on **Wolfshiem**. Let's get all the downsides off my chest to start with. Peter Heppner does indeed have to take a songbook on stage with him lest he forget the words. Many of the songs of the latest CD were not amongst his best. And he doesn't move all that much either, never straying more than a few steps from his centre-stage spot. But, and it's a big but, at least the man can actually SING on stage. I say this due to a number of rather substandard vocal efforts by certain EBM bands in the recent past. And that was enough to keep me interested.

Eventually he and keyboard player Markus were joined by Carsten and Achim on guitar and drums, which gave the set-up a little bit of extra stage presence. Once again, my choice track of the night was 1991's classic 'The Sparrows and The Nightingales', a track I have yet to tire of despite constant playlisting. Two encores were called for and got – the first consisting of 'Kein Zuruck' and 'Find You're Gone', whilst the second encompassed London's favourite Wolfie track 'Once In A Lifetime'. And it was only afterwards that we found out how close they came to not playing it.

It has to be said that there were mixed feelings to be found asking round after the show. Some people were utterly blown away by Heppner's heartfelt deliveries, whilst others were left twiddling their thumbs at the static stage presence. I didn't actually find the lack of movement on stage a problem – Wolfshiem's music is not generally that upbeat, and there was still a nice collection of light-up pyramids on stage to look at for visual stimulus. The only problem I had was with some of songs proving to be overly pedestrian, and most of the worst offenders were out of the way halfway through. A very mixed night thus came to a successful end, though I only wish I'd seen them when they were at their peak.

## Death In June (+ Fire and Ice & Forseti) – 21 May 2004

This was to be my third live experience of Death In June. Whilst it seemed a shame to be leaving the classy surroundings of the Thames Riverside in favour of a return to the bleak surroundings of London's Elektrowerkz, we at least had the attraction of two support bands, both of which I'd heard in cameos on other artists' albums, but to date hadn't had a chance to experience in their original form. A vegetarian buffet was also included – a nice feta and spinach roll with couscous went down nicely, though the veggie sausages were horrible.

First band on were **Forseti**, a German act fronted by Andreas Ritter. Utilising a combination of acoustic guitar, cello and drums, they were every inch the European neo-folk act I was expecting them to be. Notably, the vocals were in German only, and I was in no position to play translator, so I'm not sure what they were singing about, but they carried off their set in proficient style, with Andreas later picking up an accordion to add an extra continental twist.

The three members of the band were soon back on stage again, however, this time as backing band to Ian Read's **Fire and Ice** project. And it's here that I really start to wonder why this style of music classed as 'industrial', as this was Pagan folk at its very best. Read has a very delicate voice compared with some of his contemporaries, a trait he played to his advantage, giving truly heartfelt renditions of 'Long Lankin', 'The Wind Shakes The Barley' and 'Dragons In The Sunset'. A brief encore saw Douglas P. make a quick cameo prior to his own set, but all my attention was focused on Ian Read, a master of his art and a musician I'll surely be checking out more in the future.

Anyway, **Death In June** came on stage shortly before 11:30pm. I'd pretty much accepted by then that with last trains to catch, I wasn't going to be catching all of the set. Suffice to say that this was a very different set to the one witnessed on the boat last November. The additional space offered by the Elektrowerkz stage allowed percussion man John Murphy to make use of a number of timpani and a gong, giving tonight's set a more percussive feel than the 'unplugged' set from last year.

They opened with a trio of thunderous drumming tracks, most notably 'Till The Living Flesh Is Burned', before Douglas donned his sniper veil and picked up a Rickenback 12-string, electing to 'go electric' for this performance. He duly launched straight into 'Heaven Street', obviously wanting to get it out of the way before his guitar disintegrated on him again. A short set of favourites from Di6's vast backcatalogue followed, most notably 'Hullo Angel'.

Andreas from Forsetti was then invited back on stage to play accordion, reprising his role on the 'All Pigs Must Die' album. A suite of tracks was played from this CD, with the title track in particular benefiting a good deal of extra 'bite' from the electric treatment. The final track was 'The Enemy Within', Douglas electing to change the key lyric to 'These are strange days for you and me and Britain' – it might well have been an obvious way to play to the local crowd, but it was a touch that certainly seemed to have its own perverse relevance.

Unfortunately, I had to leave before the inevitable encore, as it was quarter past twelve. The event had run late and as I live outside of reasonable night bus range I had no choice. It was still a good evening despite this, with Fire & Ice in particular making their mark (as if they hadn't done so in the past) on London's neo-folk fanbase. I just hope organisers start to realise that running late means people have to leave before the end, as well as people like me (who have few friends who are also into this sort of thing) having to wander around aimlessly during the early part of the evening.

## Gotham 2004 – 30 May 2004

With half the world's gothic contingent holed up in Leipzig and the other half saving up for the summer round of festivals, Flag decide to go ahead with Gotham on the same weekend. Both Clan of Xymox and The Crüxshadows were pencilled in to play this event, but both of them eventually felt the stronger pull of Germany and pulled out. Diary of Dreams, however, decided to play the 'big fish in small pond' game and settle into second slot here, behind Inkubus Sukkubus.

The event also returned to its original home of the Mean Fiddler, The Camden Palace unlikely to see any live action until it gets refurbished. The event thus opened with The Voices of Masada, but I wasn't able to make it in time to see them, meaning my day opened with **The Scary Bitches** – and what a strange sight they were, too. A kind of ultra-camp electronic rock with some of the most outrageous stage outfits I've ever seen. There was something of a 'style over substance' feel about them, but their songs were at least fairly amusing in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, and so they got my afternoon off to a light-hearted note.

The first real act of interest of the day, **Devilish Presley**, followed directly after. Like the Scary Bitches, they don't exactly take themselves too seriously, though they were significantly more dynamic musically, the twisted rock n'roll from the devilish duo (Jacqui and Johnny) getting the first real dancefloor movement of the afternoon. Johnny in particular was on electric form, a seemingly infinite supply of snappy one-liners keeping the crowd entertained between each song, before he finally left Jacqui on stage alone to finish off 'Black Leather Jesus', popping down to mix with the audience rather than mope around on stage like one of those 'goths'.

Ah, yes, 'goth'. Was wondering when we were actually going to get some. It came in the form of **The Faces of Sarah**. I do remember their November 2002 at the Underworld as being a significant improvement on their previous performance. Unfortunately, they seemed to have since taken a step back into the realm of common-or-garden gothic rock. There clearly is some merit in their technical style, but I got bored and wandered off after about four songs, and that was pushing my patience. Sorry boys, but this all sounds very dated to me.

Next up was **Midnight Configuration**, another band who had provided me with some very, erm, 'mixed' live experiences in the past. They do actually have quite a lot going for them musically – gothic electronic sequences mixed with live guitar and bass, with lead man Trev providing some death-metal style vocals. I actually found their set quite good to dance to, but the vocals didn't seem sit in too well with the music. After five songs, however, it all began to grow on me a bit, so I can ultimately regard this particular set to be a relative success. And Trev only said 'Hail Satan' once!

Then it was onto Italian goth/black metal act **Theatre Des Vampires**. This band had recently toured with Christian Death, which makes sense as stylistically they sit neatly between Valor's current CD sound and Maitri's 'Lover of Sin' side-project. Utilising dual male-female vocals, the six-piece combo were occasionally effective in generating a cathedral-sized apocalyptic atmosphere, but I never found their songs to be particularly engaging, so I sat at the side and watched the small contingent of dark metallers who made it in have their moment of guitar-fuelled fun.

But now for the band who I'd waited around so long to see – **Diary of Dreams**. They'd made it to the venue at the very last minute, not setting up their merchandise stall until just before TdV's set and missing their soundcheck to boot (apparently they were partying at Slimelight until the small hours). Amazingly enough, not only did they make it on stage on time, but they sounded pretty good from the outset. You could even hear the guitar this time, an aspect which hurt DoD's live set circa 2002-2003.

Building a set built largely from the 'Panik Manifesto' and 'Freak Perfume' CDs, Adrian Hates worked through a one-hour set which covered most of their recent live favourites. The only technical flaws came during 'Butterfly: Dance!', but it was a relatively minor issue compared with their last hitch-laden London show in November 2002. There was even time for a short one-song encore – the song of course being 'Chemicals', and what a rendition it was, too!

After this, it was left to **Inkubus Sukkubus** to round off the evening's entertainment. Like many, I've always regarded the Inkies as a band with a good basic concept (in their case Pagan/gothic folk-rock) which they've duly milked well and truly dry. Tonight they had something of an answer in store, having replaced the bodhran with a full drum-kit, an addition which worked relatively well, but it wasn't enough to make their sound truly distinctive, either. Live bodhran AND drumkit – now that would have been worth a listen!

Nonetheless, they still played a good, solid set, opening with the chanting 'Hecate Cerridwyn' before launching into a selection drawn from their vast backcatalogue, playing only a few songs from their recent 'The Beast With Two Backs' CD (the Inky Sukky CD I'm most familiar with). Two unplugged tracks made sure they offered at least some variety, though my personal favourite moment was Candia's heartfelt rendition of 'We Belong With The Dead'. They didn't play a massively long set, even though they had the time to do so if they wished – one quick encore of 'Jagermeister' and it was all over.

And so the fifth Gotham ended, and at the unusually early time of 10:30pm (about the same time headliners The Damned came on stage last year!). It was certainly the best

organised Flag all-day event for some time, even if the line-up had a bit of the 'round up the usual suspects' feel. At least the stylistic spread was there, with a decent mix of the guitar-based and electronic elements of goth. It's just that it suffered in comparison with Leipzig. But as a low-cost, low-pressure alternative, it worked fairly well.

## Pity For Monsters – 6 Jun 2004

The first two Pity for Monsters events had proved to be fairly impressive, offering a decent Friday night's entertainment in a rather unstable London live scene. chmaltzy e, they weren't successful enough to keep the monthly slot at the Water Rats. One does not succeed in life, however, without at least a little imagination, and sure enough the PFM contingent continue to host shows whenever they get a venue slot and a decent line-up together. And tonight was one such case.

One notable link that has to be mentioned is the one with the 'Dead and Buried' deathrock club, the two outfits co-operating significantly in recent months. That might also explain the presence of opening band **Undying Legacy**, one of a large number of 'old-school' gothic bands, complete with a mohawked bassist and a glamorous chmaltzy for a vocalist, who had all the theatrical vocal dramatics a band like this requires.

Musically, meanwhile, they sounded a bit like the original incarnation of Chrisitan Death, brought back to life having stopped off to nick Dr.Avalanche off Andrew Eldrich along the way (drum machines definitely the order of the day here!). It has to be said that this really isn't my sound of choice at the moment, but fair's fair, they make a good job of the sound, and will doubtlessly have a major role to play in London's part of 'deathrock revival'. Even though tripping over the beat box and killing the backing track during your closing number isn't the best way to end a set.

Of greater interest to me was **Living With Eating Disorders**. There was rumours going round that their drummer hadn't turned up. He did appear eventually, with all kinds of confusion going on onstage, with Undying Legacy methodically tidying up their equipment whilst various promoters and band members huddle around trying to get their show on the road. They eventually made it, with their delicate little female singer finally wandering out wearing a pair of patterned tights, a glittery sliver top. And not a great deal else.

Though it's the music that counts, and it has to be said that LWED does a good line in Hole/Queen Adreena style angry fem-rock, the fragile, crystalline vocals constantly sounding like they were about to shatter into millions of pieces. The most notable aspect of their songs were the often unconventional structures, a brave concept that isn't quite realised yet, with some pieces coming to an unexpected halt just when you wanted them to burst into life. But I guess the 'messing with my head' aspect was deliberate, and that they certainly succeeded at.

Now time for the duo largely behind tonight's event – **Devilish Presley**. Having only seen them a week ago (as well as two shows earlier this year), I was slightly concerned that I might not be able to find anything fresh to say, but as usual, Johnny and Jacqui came up with something. The topic of tonights rant was.....drummers. As promoters as well as performers, the PFM pair came within 20 minutes of one of their support bands having to do an impromptu 'unplugged' set, which can't have helped the nerves.

Presumably using a beat-box because you only have to punch the information into it ONCE, the devilish duo went headlong into their set, each song seeing more dancefloor movement than the last, climaxing as ever on 'Black Leather Jesus', that oh-so-catchy closing number which is just so shamelessly old-school that dancing to it is compulsory and cheering loudly afterwards even more so. In a night full of very 'technical' bands,

therefore, Devilish were the 'balancing element', living proof that simple could often prove to be very effective as long as you have the attitude to carry it off.

**Earth Loop Recall** were headlining tonight, a well-deserved slot following on from their incredible February show and the release of the best 'debut' album by any band for as far back as I can remember. Tonight was where the razor-sharp 'raw' side of ELR was exposed, a band who seem keener than most to 'do it their way', launching straight into two thrashy industrial metal tracks ('Reconnect' included) before the audience even had a chance to get warmed up.

It soon became clear that no-one had bothered to write a set-list, the quartet winging it with a refreshing sense of individuality – 'Let Yourself' was dedicated to the recently-deceased Ronald Reagan, a move of dubious taste, and hence highly appropriate for an event of this nature. They eventually decided to call for requests from the crowd, and I was more than happy that they took me up on my suggestion of 'Like Machines', eight glorious minutes of alternating moods and intensity, and a song that I personally just can't seem to listen to enough times.

They finished the main part of their set with 'Please Stop Hurting Me', with the eponymous frontman from next month's headliner Deathboy triggering a seething mosh pit, something almost unheard of in the 'goth' scene these days, but then again re-writing the rule book seems to be ELR's trademark. An encore was called for and got, with 'Petra Lena' giving everyone who wanted to a second chance to thrash about in front of the stage.

All good things must come to an end, and with work the next day, I left to catch the next bus to Liverpool Street. Such was the adrenaline pumping through my system post-ELR, however, that actually getting to sleep once home proved to be nigh-on-impossible. A Monday of bleary eyes, unquenchable thirst and ringing ears was the price I had to pay for the evenings festivities. But was it worth it?

In the words of Johnny Navarro – 'Hell Yeah!'.

## **Fear Factory – Archetype Tour – 21 Jun 2004**

Well, we'd all thought they'd split for good, and what's worse was that they went out with a whimper rather than with a bang. Most bands do eventually manage to get themselves back on the road eventually, of course, and Fear Factory were to be no exception, with the obligatory shift in the line-up. Dino Cazares had left, Christian Olbe Wolbers promoted to guitar, with Byron Stroud of Strapping Young Lad now handling bass. The 'comeback' album might have been something of a disappointment in my eyes, but the band responsible for my first ever experience of a live metal gig were not to be missed now they were back on the road.

The queue outside the Astoria (on a night of a major England match, too!) was living proof that Burton's boys hadn't been forgotten. It was so long that by the time I'd made it in, I'd missed the first support act, whoever they were. I did manage to catch **Johnny Truant**, but I kind of wish I hadn't. They're one of those 'shout loudly over fast guitars' type of bands, a rather tedious affair to watch and listen to, and the crowd seemed to share my sentiments. No-one was really interested in any band barring the headliner tonight, and for once that included myself.

Anyway, **Fear Factory** finally took to stage, launching straight into 'Slave Labor' and 'Cyberwaste' from the new album, two full-throttle songs that were blatantly better suited to live play than the home listening I'd experienced them under to date. It was clear that while Fear Factory's new material wasn't a significant advance on their better-known works, it



wasn't actually that much worse than what came before either. Fortunately, they didn't overplay the new material either – song three was 'Demanufacture', and once that kicked in it was just like old times.

This was in many respects a 'Greatest Hits' set, with a few surprises along the way. 'Shock' and 'Edgecrusher' was dispatched with ruthless efficiency, though I doubt many of the assembled masses were expecting the lads dig up their cover of 'Dog Day Sunrise'. Another surprise was 'Arise Above Oppression', a short, two-minute burst that dated back all the way to the band's early demos. It went down well amongst some, though for me it seemed a bit primitive when held alongside 'Pisschrist' and 'Resurrection', two Fear Factory greats which inspired me to fight to the front in much the same way as I'd managed back in December 1998 at this very venue.

This of course put me at the centre of the action for the cover of Nirvana's 'School'. Nirvana songs, even in the form of slightly misguided cover versions, inevitably mean mosh-pits. But what the hell! Relive old times! A few more newer tracks followed, leading up the finale of 'Replica'. An encore was called for and got, a brief two-song affair that encompassed the final surprise of the night, Burton C. Bell left alone on stage to sing 'Timelessness'. Unexpected by just about all present, but that only made the experience all the more memorable.

And so we all filtered out of the Astoria, greeted with news of England's 4-2 win over Croatia and the usual selection of slightly suspect T-shirt salesmen. Skirting round everything, I caught up with my Essex-bound compadres and reflected on the evenings entertainment. Whilst it could never equal that life-changing night in December 1998, it was still a mighty show from a significant and highly influential band, one who might be past their best in terms of songwriting, but know exactly how to make it work on stage. That alone was enough for me on this occasion.

## **KMFDM – WWII Tour – 16 Jul 2004**

I'd waited quite a while for this. KMFDM had originally been brought to my attention in 1999 via two kids going shootabout in a Columbine school. Suffice to say that the media hysteria surrounding such incidents provides nothing if not suggested listening for disturbed little souls such as myself. Anyway, having heard a cross-section of their output and liking what I heard, I then had to sit and wait whilst Sascha and co decided what way round to spell the band name. Then Tim Skold defected to Marilyn Manson. Despite all this 'WWIII' came out in 2003, and a year later, a UK show was finally scheduled.

Support for this show came in the form of **Panic DHH**, the latest signing to Alec Empire's Digital Hardcore label. This particular band was more rock-oriented than most DHR acts, hitting upon a breakbeat-industrial-noise-metal sound. And the element that hit me the strongest was the noise. Blasts upon blasts of it, coming from every direction and occupying every available frequency. Occasionally, they hit the sweet spot, sounding like the full-on rock terrorists they clearly want to be, but more often everything just got lost in a wave of (you guessed it) noise. It was too full-on for its own good.

Not that any of that mattered. We were only here to see **KMFDM**, after all. OK, it's not the original line-up. Far from it, in fact – only Sascha Konietzko remains of the 'classic' line-up, with 'regular guest' Raymond Watts electing not to join the gang on tour. Sascha thus confronts the band with Lucia Cifarelli, who handles the female vocals now Dorona Alberti is out of the picture. KMFDM is still very much a 'band' as opposed to a solo project, though once Sascha gets into his swing, there's little doubt as to who's in charge.

Anyway, the assembled fivesome launched straight into the title track from 'WWIII', full-on aggro industrial metal, with Lucia crying the refrain 'World War Three' in true riot-grrl style, sentiments shared by the majority of the assembled crowd. Next was 'From Here On Out', before getting down to the first 'old' track in the form of 'Leid Und Elend'. It has to be said that some of the newer songs didn't impress me all that much on stage – 'Blackball' in particular sounded rather uninspired, though 'Stars and Stripes' truly rocked the house, a suitably in-yer-face political statement given the vintage KMFDM treatment.

But let's face it, as it was my first KMFDM show, I really wanted to hear a few old favourites, and the closing trio of 'Megalomaniac', 'Light' and 'A Drug Against War' fulfilled that desire. The inevitable calls for an encore took an interesting form tonight, the crowd shouting 'KMFDM SUCKS!' in unison. The band clearly got the joke, as they came back to unleash a further trio of songs, finishing on 'Godlike', the oldest song to make it into the set, and a suitable enough anthem to see out the night.

So I left the Mean Fiddler relatively satisfied with the evening's show. I have to admit that I whilst KMFDM's recent material offers strong hints at their former greatness, it isn't consistently brilliant, so a couple of duff songs in the set were inevitable. However, it is also clear that bands like this are particularly important in the world of today, as we need acts from all genres to stick by their anti-establishment stance and (more importantly) beat their sentiments into kick-ass songs that might remind us to keep our heads out of the sand while the landscape changes around us.

## Nightwish – Once Tour – 16 Jul 2004

I'd seen Nightwish once before, but my semi-conscious slumped-by-the-Zillo-tent effort at M'era Luna scarcely counted. Against expectations made at the time, I did later develop a taste for their spectacular brand of operatic metal. With their fifth studio album 'Once' making all the right noises, I decided to give them another go, as did a couple of thousand other Nightwish fans, the queue outside the Astoria almost looping round the block down Oxford Street.

Supporting tonight were **Brainstorm**, making their UK debut. Now there's only one word I can use to describe this band and that is 'big'. Big vocals, big riffs and big long songs that filled out the Astoria from the stage to the balcony. They were very much a power-prog type of metal band, with the Iron Maiden style vocals sitting in very nicely with the headbanging excess going on behind. Admittedly this isn't really a style I enjoy, but the crowd received them enthusiastically, joining in with all the air-punching, hand-waving and suchlike. Brainstorm made their mark, which is more than I can say for some supports for big-name metal acts I've seen lately.

And it really does seem like **Nightwish** are becoming a big-name metal act. I mean, I can buy their albums in HMV and Virgin – no need to hop on the bus to Resurrection like I had to to get my After Forever CDs (the full staff of which proving ironically to be the only people I knew that I could find amongst the packed crowd!). It's also notable that despite the liberal smattering of goths round the venue, in the UK Nightwish are seen as a 'metal' band first and foremost. Not that such things matter to a genre-hopper such as myself.

Arriving on stage before the clocks had hit 8:30am, the Finnish fivesome launched straight into 'Dark Chest of Wonders', keeping the tried and tested route of 'open with first track from new album'. They proceeded to work through an impressive setlist, pulling a fine selection of songs from their ever-growing backcatalogue, the massed crowd giving every song the appreciation they deserved. The new material also met with approval, with the inevitable appearance of the blow-up cartoon fish during their rendition of 'Nemo'. Other

highlights included an inspired performance of 'Sleeping Sun' and a suitably bombastic take on 'Wishmaster'.

Having got the crowd under their spell, the band then proceeded to experiment a bit. Lead singer Tarja left the stage, leaving the Nightwish men to execute a decent cover of Megadeth's 'Symphony of Destruction', with bassist Marco proving to be an accomplished power-lead in addition to his usual role as Tarja's backing. They ended their set with their version of 'Over The Hills and Far Away', walking off stage with little ceremony, as if they knew that they would be called back for more before long.

And indeed they were. The encore wasn't so much predictable as downright inevitable. There was time for three more songs, climaxing on 'Wish I Had An Angel', dedicated to a birthday girl in the audience that the band had met earlier on in the day. It was proved to be the perfect ending to a memorable nights entertainment, the powerful dual vocals working particularly well, bringing the night to a close with a bang. Not a literal bang, of course. Nightwish aren't adverse to the odd bit of gunpowder on stage, but pyrotechnics ain't allowed in the Astoria (oh, don't we know....)

Not that it mattered in the end. Nightwish had done the business. Having completed their final song, the band spent a couple of minutes soaking up the crowds adoration. And it was adoration. A band this explosive is bound to incite an extreme response, and it was the right extreme. With the GAY club fast approaching, the early chuck-out of 9:40pm wasn't a complete surprise. I duly hopped on a tube train to Kings Cross, Egg Club and the second half of what would be a exhausting but very worthwhile night for this EOL.

## **Skinny Puppy (& Portion Control) – 19 Jul 2004**

Here's a band I was never expecting to see. I first started listening to industrial music properly in 1998, by which time Skinny Puppy had long since disbanded. I had a distant eye on the side-projects, but only as things to pick up if the 2<sup>nd</sup> hand shop didn't have anything better to offer. Even with the death of Dwayne R.Goettel, I didn't seriously believe, however, that they'd remain split forever. Doomsday 2000 was out-of-reach, but four years later we get not only a new album but a brief world tour, of which this would be the final date.

Picking a support band for such a date was always going to be tricky, but the recently-reformed **Portion Control** seemed to be a sensible choice, since they hailed from the same era and weren't dissimilar musically, packed to the gills with rhythmic electronics and matching backdrops. Unfortunately vocalist seemed to be working in separation from his two knob-twiddling band mates, with the inevitable descent into electro-industrial tedium, which is a pity as I'm sure there's something in their sound that deep down, I actually like. It just didn't work here.

But who cares about them? We've got **Skinny Puppy**. Or rather a long wait whilst the show is prepared behind a big white screen. Finally the curtain was raised at 9:30pm, and the show could begin – A guitarist and drummer on the left, with Cevin beavering away at his vast keyboard rank on the right and a gigantic projection screen behind them. Now, where might Ogre be? Maybe that big scarecrow that just wandered on stage might know....oh, hang on. That's our man!

They opened with a selection from the new CD, keen to prove they're still on the cutting edge (or at least thereabouts), with 'EmpTe' working particularly well with the live drums. Ogre would shed his outfit gradually as the early part of the show progressed, revealing as he did the evil industrial overlord we all know he really is. Cevin, meanwhile, was only

occasionally visible beyond his dreadlocked top-knot, but this was enough to gauge his impressive workrate.

And then they really got stuck in. Forget doing the 'greatest hits' show. That would have been far too obvious. No 'Assimilate', no 'Killing Game' & no 'Dig It', then. Instead, they drew from the more obscure corners of their backcatalogue, as well as the new CD. But on this occasion the songs played seemed to be of only secondary importance. It was the delivery that counted. The crushing rhythms shook every corner of the Kentish Town Forum. The live guitars added new force to a number of songs. And Ogre snarled away over the top in his trademark style.

And that was the story of Skinny Puppy's night of the forum. Every now and again Ogre would break from the vocals to engage in a foul practise or two, most notably squirting himself with a gun loaded with blood, with a final act involving wrapping the entire stage (including the guitarist), in police tape and then bidding us farewell. An encore was of course inevitable, with 'Smothered Hope' finally offering me (not as familiar as some with the Puppy backcatalogue!) a song I recognised. Not that I was in any fit state to go song-spotting after this.

I walked out of the Forum a zombified mute, totally bludgeoned into submission by the Puppy behemoth. This wasn't one of those friendly, hyped-up nights where the band played to the crowd, but neither was it a bunch of tired Canadians going through the motions. This was the act of the rightful rulers of electro-industrial returning to claim their throne from the pretenders, a musical route to showing everyone who's boss. They may now disappear or return to their side projects. But this should have at least given every practitioner of the sound (of which many a fine example could be spotted in attendance) a stout reminder of who gave 'em their ideas in the first place.

## **The Crüxshadows (+ Swarf, Silence Is Sexy & Tracer) – 31 Jul 2004**

The Crüxshadows first played at Slimelight back in 2001. They went down a storm, and had returned every year since, always playing to a packed crowd (admittedly in small venues, but that's the UK scene for you), and always playing a better show than their cramped surroundings should have allowed. They now returned to the site of that memorable show to headline a ticketed show, as opposed to their earlier 'nightclub guest appearance' slot. On one of the hottest days of the year so far. Sounds familiar?

Three support acts were booked, starting off with **Tracer**. They were the only band of the night that were totally new to me, so naturally I was curious enough to turn up early and check them out. They were a three piece industrial-rock outfit, with bass and guitar playing over an electronic backing tracks and a shaven headed singer fronting the whole thing. It was a reasonable enough set-up, but nothing they did ventured beyond the realms of the strictly ordinary. There just wasn't anything there to excite me.

More appealing were **Silence Is Sexy**, who I'd last seen supporting Wolfsheim a few months back. They may be the occasional twist on a tiny Korg away from being a bona-fide cabaret act, but their fancy stage outfit and stylish delivery suggests that that's exactly the effect they were aiming to achieve. There's been a glut of 'catchy synth-pop' thrown in my general direction of late, and I'm still not convinced that their depth will inspire me to buy their CD, but I'll happy watch them develop on stage for the immediate future.

I have after all been doing the same thing to **Swarf** since 2002, after all, and their 'worth-the-wait' debut album suggested that tonight's set was worth enduring the ever-growing heat. Unfortunately, it just wasn't going to happen for them tonight. The heat was sending

the machinery wild, and no amount of good-natured Liz Green banter was going to solve that. They sportingly soldiered on, but had to quit after 'Drown'. A pity, but I'm sure they'll bounce back next time.

This left **The Crüxshadows** with the challenge of entertaining a packed club of heat-exhausted goths in near-tropical conditions. But having done exactly that at last year's M'era Luna, I still had high expectations for tonight's performance. And I wasn't to be disappointed. Sporting a new guitarist in addition to the keyboards, violin and dancers, there remained the question as to where the vocals were coming from. Rogue appeared from out of nowhere, delivering 'Into The Ether' with his usual conviction, as it was on with the show.

The tour was entitled 'Fortress In Flames', after their recent remix album of the same name, though the songs performed were actually the album versions. There was plenty of material from 'Ethernaut', an album I never really cared for on CD, but mysteriously works a treat when performed on stage, Rogue linking each song into his Trojan War narrative. The best of these was 'Winter Born', ironic considering the conditions inside the venue.

As ever, Rogue took the opportunity to explore the various nooks and crannies making up the concern venue (and Slimelight has more than it's fair share of those). At one point, he was perched on top of a dancing cage (myself only making it halfway up last time I tried to climb one), never once breaking from his delivery. The rest of the band were fighting to keep up with him, the two dancers quitting stage before Rogue had a chance to do his customary introductions.

The main part of their set finished with 'Tears', my personal Crüxshadows favourite, and always a pleasure to hear one more time. A call for an encore was inevitable as we hadn't heard 'Marilyn My Bitterness' yet. Sure enough, the crew (minus the dancer) returned to the stage to do the song (in Rogue's words) 'everyone expects us to do'. Complete with the customary stage invasion. One day I'm gonna have to get up there myself....

With admission inclusive in the ticket price, Slimelight followed for most of those present, but I was not one of them. The concern portion of the night had taken too much out of me and I was forced to quit early. But I'd seen what I'd come to see – one of the finest live shows the scene has to offer in a venue not renowned for favourable concern conditions. Particularly when the weather takes a turn for the worse. Which in gothic terms, means 'hot'!

## **M'era Luna 2004 – 7-8 Aug 2004**

### **Day 1**

This was to be my third annual pilgrimage to Hildesheim's premier festival, and my most eagerly anticipated so far. My first was in 2002, not really knowing what many of the bands had to offer, whilst my second was a last minute bodge in the midst of a Europe-wide heatwave. This time, everything had been prepared at least a month in advance. Apart from our route to the car park at Heathrow. Which didn't help the nerves of a first-time flier like me. But never mind. We made it.

And we made it in time for **Soman**, who were opening festivities in the hangar. The Soman set was biased towards the power-noise end of the electro-industrial spectrum (without actually qualifying as power-noise par se, I might add), the chmalt-beats dominating, but set itself apart by the occasional use of female vocals – an interesting combination which

got my day of to an energetic start. Eventually, the singer gave way to a couple of go-go dancers, which was where my interest waned sufficiently for me to wander outside.

Outside to **Saltatio Mortis** – the first traditional-rock fusion act of the weekend, and a highly enjoyable one at that. The early morning crowd was massive even by M'era Luna standards, with the clocks not even yet hitting midday! I had to retreat to go Tetra-Pak hunting after this, but returned to find **Epica** launching into their symphonic metal set. I'd bought their album a few weeks previous, was suitably impressed and their live performance backed this view up. Even if I don't think Tony Blair was the best person to choose as a sample source.

Back into the hangar for **Rotersand**, another band that had impressed me on CD in the recent past, but unfortunately the trio were blighted by a poor sound balance (relatively uncommon by M'era Luna standards), with too much kick drum and not enough of the delicate synth textures which characterise their sound. They're due to play London in the autumn, Islington Academy with a rare chance to outdo the Germans in the sound quality stakes. I'll be keeping a key ear open.

But enough of that – back outside again for **Umbra Et Imago**. Not quite sure why I wanted to watch this band, as I'd found their last album to be a fairly tedious affair. Their stage outfits and performance fell into the 'erm...interesting' category, as 2pm seemed like an odd time to indulge in a fetish show with rock accompaniment. The music, a growly Deutschmetal thing, was reasonable enough, but this is really a band for dark, steamy clubs in seedy inner-city venues. Not an open-air festival in the middle of the German summer.

I decided to stay outside for the next couple of bands, starting with **Fiddler's Green**, another folk-metal fusion troupe. Another one? Well, this bunch are a little different. German they very well be, but their folk influences were more Celtic than Continental. If it wasn't for the 'Danke Schon's and the like, you could have closed your eyes and pretended you were on the Emerald Isle swigging Guinness! Certainly the funniest band of the weekend, at least.

Next on were **Tristania**, the next of the 'gothic metal' bands, and another one that had caught my attention on CD in recent times. This bunch utilised three vocalists (one female, two male) on their way to creating a very grandiose cathedral-sized sound, though I still felt very disconnected from what was going on up on stage. They seemed to be just going through the motions, creating a feeling roughly equivalent to watching a firework display on the telly.

Made a return to the hangar for **Icon of Coil**, now back with their full-line up after borrowing a Chaos Engine member for Invitation. Andy LaPlegua was particularly fired up today, barking words that are usually sung and putting every possible ounce of effort into getting the crowd worked up. Highlights were 'Shelter' and 'Alive Enough For Death', though they also gave their seldom-heard debut 'Shallow Nation' an run-through.

I had to leave after six songs, as I wanted to see **The Mission**. I'd seen Wayne Hussey play solo twice, but had never seen him play with his full band line-up. A line-up notorious for it's instability. Their 45-minute set was accomplished and professional, offering a nice selection from their backcatalogue, with a memorable 'Deliverance' the highlight. It wasn't really anything remarkable in comparison to some of the local bands, but at least Hussey's pulled himself back into contention. He did way better that Eldrich did here two years previous, and that's good enough for me.

Now it was time to enjoy the new-look **L'Âme Immortelle**. Having added a guitarist last year, Thomas (now working on a embryonic mohawk) and Sonja have decided to go the whole hog and include a bassist and drummer too. These additions have knocked some of the subtlety out of the L'ame live sound, but at the same time it has given them some real stage presence. It'll be interesting to see if these use this new line-up on the albums, but given my indifference towards 'Als Die Liebe Starb', it's something I'm actually looking forward to.

But now for the highlight of the weekend – **In Extremo**. If any band truly belongs in front of the German festival crowd, it's this bunch. Practitioners of the truest form of medieval/rock fusion, the In Extremo stage show is a sight to behold, whilst lead man Die Letzte Einhorn had the crowd in his pocket all the way. From the opening blast of 'Küss Mich' through an almighty set drawing the very best from their backcatalogue, the In Ex boys finally climaxed with 'Vollmond'. And EVERYONE seemed to know the words to that. Even me!

Another band not adverse to a big stage show are M'era Luna regulars **Within Temptation**, now playing a higher slot on the billing than at any time previous. This years set was based round gigantic columns, with drums and keyboards on risers. To be fair, they didn't have quite the level of crowd connection that In Ex had, but their performance was mightily impressive nonetheless, making more use of pyro than anyone else, with Sharon den Adel's voice soaring above it all. The new material they played sounded quite promising, though the track I was waiting for was 'Mother Earth', which appeared in all it's explosive glory at the very end of their set.

And now into the hangar one more time to see **Blutengel**. As creators of one of the most tedious albums of 2004 so far, I wasn't overly excited about this particular show, but I was actually pleasantly surprised with Chris Pohl's offerings tonight. True, they place more emphasis on stage show than live playing, but at least there's more to look at than one man and his keyboardist. They also made good use of a video backdrop, particularly as a means of milking the crowd for an encore!

I went outside to see **Wolfsheim** in the midst of their set. Like Blutengel, they'd disappointed with their last album, but unlike them, they couldn't actually resolve the issue on stage. The fancy stage sets seen at Invitation and London were gone, which meant Peter Heppner looked totally lost in the middle of the huge stage. I retreated to the rear, and wound down to the end of day one.

## Day 2

We didn't make it for the early bands on Day 2, but still arrived in time to see **Funker Vogt**. Anyone who's seen Funker in the past will know that their shows are a chance to enjoy some cheesy, catchy German EBM without worrying about the details, and that was exactly what happened today. Jens messed up the words to 'Gunman', but the crowd took it in good humour, and their set could be widely regarded a success.

The distortion levels turned up a few more notches for **Suicide Commando**. Johan Van Roy has made the curious decision to add a live drummer (acoustic, not pads) to his set-up. Didn't really affect the sound all that much, as the act is still very much a Van Roy-led affair, though Erk from Hocico did a cameo on one song. The set generally was split between the old faves and the new album, concluding with the quintessential 'Hellraiser'. Like Funker Vogt, you don't learn anything new from a Suicide Commando live set, but that's not the idea. Just dance. And dance hard.

I had to fight my way into the hangar to watch **Schandmaul**. It took 10 minutes, but it was worth the effort. This troupe are clearly massive in Germany, and possibly should have

been billed for the main stage, given the crowd they drew. As medieval rock goes, they're not as explosive as In Ex, but this also means that they're more authentic. Utilising a bewildering array of modern and traditional instruments, every single Schandmaul song had bore a hook, yet still kept it's historical integrity intact. This sort of band really sums up for me what festivals like this are all about. The EBM might eventually hit the darkened clubs of the UK, but traditional bands like this is where the true German flavour lies.

Unable to escape the hangar after the conclusion of their set, I elected to stick around for **Gothminister**, having been impressed with their debut album and also having heard good things about their stage show. I wasn't to be disappointed. Shaking off the hot August temperatures, the Gothminister collective delivered their 'gothic electronic anthems' with style and conviction. They probably win the prize for the best costumes of the weekend, but I couldn't watch their entire set. There were duties to be performed outside.

Namely, watching **Therion**, who had recently issued an spectacular 2CD set. They didn't overplay this particular disc, picking a fine selection of songs from their sizeable backcatalogue. Despite the unprecedented use of six (!!) vocalists, the attitude of Therion was very much one of a metal band, but the crowd didn't seem to mind this. Therion really delivered the goods on this occasion, and their rendition of 'To Mega Therion' reminded everyone as to who the originators of operatic metal are.

Any further advance on the hangar were now abandoned, with **Covenant** next up on main stage. Clearly the heat was getting to them – Joachim took to the stage in a open-necked red shirt whilst Clas and Eskil went for white Safari suits rather than their usual black. The Covenant boys provided a truly unusual set for us on this occasion, skipping 'One World One Sky', bringing out the largely-forgotten 'Wind of the North' and playing one song so new it didn't have a name! At least you can't accuse them of being stuck in a rut, even if this doesn't ranks amongst the best Covenant live show I've ever seen.

The penultimate act of the weekend for me was **Oomph!** (their '!', not mine). I gather that this bunch have recently had a couple of major hits in Germany, including one with Sonja from L'Âme Immortelle. This might explain their relatively high billing compared with previous festivals. They rose to occasion splendidly, though, knocking out song after song of bouncy 'tanzmetal', with more calls for hands in the air than VNV Nation. Given the popularity of Rammstein in the UK of late, I'm surprised this bunch haven't also made a mark yet. I grabbed their latest album whilst I could, as it looks like I'm going to have to do the job myself.

The festival finally came to a close with **Lacrimosa**. Like Oomph!, they're clearly way bigger in Germany than the UK, as I was only very vaguely familiar with their music prior to their set. Their sound was that of a very grand romantic rock band, with very distinctive German vocals (the singer wasn't the greatest vocalist I'd ever heard), but no-one seemed to mind). I found Lacrimosa's set interesting rather than wildly exciting, but it rounded off the weekend nicely. No encores were permitted, and before we knew it, it was time for everyone to filter out and make our respective journey's home.

And so it came to a close. Looking back on the weekend, it was probably the best of the three M'era Luna festivals I have attended to date. The weather was hot, but nowhere near as severe as last year. The line-up offered a good combination of styles without becoming the hopeless sprawl some festivals end up becoming. And I'd even come prepared with a tetra-pak to take on site. Suffice to say, I'm not forgetting this one in a hurry.



## Feindflug (+ Lamia and Psyclon Nine) – 13 Aug 2004

This must have been a relatively small show by this bands standards. It was certainly a coup for the Elektrowerkz management in getting them to play a pre-club slot rather than a self-contained gig in it's own right. I was certainly interested to see how Feindflug, a instrumental act, would turn their recorded sound into a genuine 'live' sound. There were also two support acts which I'd never heard of. True to form, I watched 'em anyway.

First up were **Psyclon Nine**, an American trio that appeared to be heavily influenced by their Mexican counterparts Hocico, Cenobita, Amduscia, et al. In fact, I'm sorely tempted to go beyond 'heavily influenced' and accuse them of blatant plagiarism. The white stage outfits and gas masks looked OK, though, and the set was good to dance to, but it all appeared very generic – uptempo electronic industrial with ultra-distorted vocals is becoming all too common an appearance in my eardrums right now.

Far more distinctive were **Lamia**, the second Argentine band I've discovered this year (after Punto Omega). The keyboard player opened with a fairly pedestrian instrumental, but was then joined by his vocalist. None of your distorted shouty fodder, mind, but a classical operatic diva in a extravagant white dress. Relieved not to have to find another way to describe another full-throttle, no-prisoners industrial dance band like Psyclon Nine, I stood back and keenly took in their performance.

The key interest in Lamia's sound came from the fact that whilst many rock bands have elected to utilise classically-trained vocals in their sound recently, few electronic bands have followed their lead. Their take on the electro-industrial sound was more downtempo than most, barring one wholly unexpected (but very welcome) cover of that long-lost 'goth-pop' gem 'Das Omen'. I was impressed enough by their set to purchase both their album and their EP there and then, though that might have something to do with how the Black Rain stall was undercutting their local rivals by at least £2 a disc. Nonetheless, this is definitely a sound I want to hear more of (Suggestions, anyone?).

And so then to **Feindflug**. A purely instrumental act such as this could well have been a one-man-and-his-sampler affair. And thankfully it wasn't. Feindflugs live show consisted of four musicians in total (two more than their studio setup!), complete with projections and a particular focus on live drumming. This was an important element of their live sound – Feindflug are a band with a very militaristic feel, and no such act could be complete on stage without having someone to hammer out a marching rhythm there and then.

And was essentially the basis of tonight's live entertainment. They pulled the best tracks from their various recordings, opening with 'Roter Schnee' (obviously cutting down on the extended outro), peaking on the almighty 'Glaubenskreig' and giving 'Stukas' an airing towards the end. It was a relatively short set, probably forced by the oncoming club night, but this actually worked in their favour. The short, sharp shock treatment suited them to a tee. One encore and it was all over. I stayed for the first set on the 'Alternator' club floor, but left around midnight, spotting the band signing autographs outside their tour bus on my way out – a nice touch.

## This Morn' Omnia (+ Inertia, Katscan and Deathboy) – 14 Aug 2004

My ticket for this event was for a Das Ich concert scheduled on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2004. As you can see above, both the date of the show and the headline band proved to be different. This was thanks to Das Ich first postponing their show by a couple of months before

disappearing entirely, leaving Flag with a headline space to fill. They went for Belgium's This Morn' Omina, an act who have recently made great strides in advancing Ant-Zen from being a mere power noise label to major players in contemporary industrial dance.

A wholesome supporting line-up began with **Deathboy**, making what is now a fairly regular appearance in front of their home crowd. Lead man Scott is nothing if not prolific however, reworking his setlist to the extent that even their anthem 'We Will Destroy' was pushed out in favour of lesser-played album tracks plus some new material. If I was to place a bet on the issue, I reckon 'Cheap Shot' will become their next 'big hit', at least in a local sense.

As for their actual performance, well, they were blighted by poor sound quality throughout, with lots of pops and crackles occurring around bass level. This bunch are so used to technical difficulty now, however, that they were able to take it in their stride and push on with the show. It's questionable whether their appearance on the bill was down to Frank Flag trying to get a few more people through the door, but fair's fair, they always put on a spirited performance which justifies repeated viewing.

Next up was **Katscan**, who have now dropped the suited look and have gone back to their 'surgeon' appearance. They've developed a good line in sub-gothic EBM-esque sleaze, but despite a more animated vocalist, I still feel mysteriously disconnected when watching this band live. There's certainly nothing wrong with what they do, and their sonic ingredients are fairly close to my usual 'sound of choice'. It just doesn't click in the final reckoning.

Main support slot tonight went to **Inertia**, playing their first show for Flag Promotions in a number of years. They'd recently released the handy 'Black Ice Impact' album, which had impressed me more than any of their previous efforts. Reza was his usual fired-up self, whilst Alexys has finally got herself a head-mounted mic, allowing her to drum and sing simultaneously. With Andrew Trail now occupying the to-date unstable keyboard player slot, Inertia now seem to have their live set-up 'sorted'.

Their set pulled the finest tracks from their new album, as well as 'No Defect' from their previous effort and old chestnuts 'Cryonica' and 'Retaliate'. The highlight was Alexys' taking on lead vocals for two songs, with her rendition of 'Shakalaka Baby' offering a reminder to all bands within earshot that if cover versions have to be assembled, they should at least avoid the bleedin' obvious. That's to take nothing away from Reza, who clearly relishes every one of his increasingly scarce live performances.

This left **This Morn' Omina** to bring the night to a close. I doubt anybody ever expected an Ant-Zen band to headline an 800-capacity live venue in London, but you have to remember that This Morn' Omina are different. Unlike their labelmates, they're not a power noise band but rather an intriguing combination of tribal electronics, industrial and goa trance. It was good to see them bring along a live drummer in addition to all the electronic boxes, whilst the use of projections prevented this mostly-instrumental band from becoming lost on stage.

They're still not as established as Das Ich are, so the Academy was half-full if that, but that's still not a bad turnout considering the lack of any real scene superstars in the house. And lets make one thing clear – This Morn' Omina's set is very good to dance to. Disembodied vocals, synched with low-key projections, driven by a combination of programmed and live rhythms. It would have been better in a nightclub context than a bona-fide live stage, but they got the floor moving, which was all we could have asked for.

With a strict curfew in place, it wasn't going to be a particularly long set, but they managed to pull the best tracks from their last two albums (the only two still easily obtainable!), with

'One eYed Man' my personal favourite. There was still the feeling that this whole affair was a "bit of a bodge" not helped by Das Ich's notorious reputation for not playing every show they're booked for. But it was their loss. Some bands need to treat the fans better than they do, and the Bruno n'Stefan show might well have lost a few more followers after this latest debacle.

## **Within Temptation – 29 Sep 2004**

The Dutch gothic metal band Within Temptation are starting to become seriously major players in Europe's rock scene. Their 'Mother Earth' album has been reissued a number of times following its low-key release on a Dutch label in 2001. They've also played a number of high-profile live slots, including a second-from-top show at M'era Luna this year. This, however, was to be their first visit to UK shores. The Scala was chosen as venue, but even its relatively large stage couldn't accommodate their full stage set. Not to worry – it's the music we're here for, after all.

Erm....music? Despite bearing a ticket that said 'Within Temptation plus Guests', it eventually became clear that there was actually NO support band. Nor could I find any merchandise stall. This is actually the second time Montana concerts have done this at a show I've attended (following on from Laibach's show here last October). Fortunately on this occasion I had some friends present to chat to, with a pretty major debate about the current state of gothic metal breaking out on the floor in lieu of any live action.

**Within Temptation** did eventually appear, utilising a video screen showing lots of 'nature' type imagery in place of their gigantic stage set. I reckon they must have been pretty surprised with the response they got, given that up until the UK release of Mother Earth a month ago, they were practically unknown on these shores. A few bars into 'Deceiver Of Fools', it soon became clear that this band already have a devoted UK following, and it not be too long before they become as big as Nightwish, Lacuna Coil and Evanescence. Oh sorry, did I mutter an expletive?

But back to the set – Within Temptation were as fired-up as they always are, playing their explosive brand of operatic metal with enormous enthusiasm, with Sharon Van Adel's voice soaring over everything her bandmates could muster. 'Mother Earth', their most anthemic track to date made a surprisingly early appearance, given that their highly memorable M'era Luna set had used it as a fiery closing number. Nonetheless, it worked a treat, with the crowd already caught by the Within Temptation spell.

The band continued on through their setlist, playing virtually all of the Mother Earth album (and very little from previous album 'Enter'), but throwing in the occasional new track. At one point, Sharon left the stage to deliver one song from the balcony, in attempt to make the best of what is a very small venue by their standards. Their set ended with the Kate Bush cover 'Running Up That Hill'.

The encore was inevitable, with the gang taking the opportunity debut another new song (can't wait for the new album!) before delivering an very nice acoustic version of 'Never Ending Story' and then finishing on 'Ice Queen'. And so it ended. Within Temptation had gone down a storm on their first UK appearance, and a return visit, to a larger venue with their full stage set (unless that's just kept for the festivals) can't be far off.

## Hocico & Spesnaz – 9 Oct 2004

Hocico first played the UK in 2002, at a time when they were a relative unknown (at least in the UK) rapidly on their way to becoming known. Maybe it was a backlash against future pop, or maybe just a trend for all things Mexican, but Erk and Racso's tracks have been making increasingly frequent appearances on DJ setlists over the past couple of years. And two years on, they make their triumphant return.

To Slimelight. Despite having moved up in everyone's consciousness over the last couple of years, for whatever reason Hocico still ended up playing a nightclub slot when they could well have made an appearance high up the billing (possibly headliners) at a ticketed show. It must have made sense at the time, and since Hocico's core fanbase are the hard-clubbing industrial heads of the world, it probably didn't upset anyone too much.

Support tonight came from **Spetsnaz**, who'd recently been touted as 'return' to old-school EBM values. Or in other words, they sounded like Nitzer Ebb. Throbbing but simplistic arpeggios, stompy beats and that testosterone-fuelled Doug McCarthy impersonation on the mic. I watched the entire set of Spetsnaz, and kept thinking of 'That Total Age' for the duration. Sorry boys – you may well be working with a valid concept, but music technologies have moved on. You can have more than 2 tracks of synth playing at once.

Anyway, the real focus of tonight was **Hocico**, appearing on stage at around 2am. And the crowd round the front of the stage was as tightly packed as I can ever remember it being – this duo clearly have a massive following now, and there must have been at least one promoter kicking themselves for not grabbing this duo and selling tickets on the back of their popularity. I eventually found an elevated viewpoint around the back part of the dancefloor and surveyed the scene.

The key changes since their last tour two years were the move from a head-mounted mic to a more conventional handheld model, plus the addition of a video backdrop, bearing images of corpses, iron maidens and other nasty imagery plus the occasional lyrical quote. Given this bands one-singer-one-keyboard-player line up, it worked whilst it lasted, but seemed to expire half-an-hour from the end of their set, returning only to show a credits roll at the end of their set.

As for the music, well, the recent release of 'Wrack and Ruin' led to a hefty proportion of the set being unfamiliar to the crowd. Not that it mattered – the Elektrowerkz live sound system was doing it's usual substandard job, with the result that most of the tracks sounded quite blurred and homogeneous. You could tell whether a track was mid-tempo or high-tempo, but any further analysis of their set would require a degree of concentration that one cannot achieve in the middle of a converted warehouse in the middle of the night.

Anyway, I stayed for the length of their set, and it was at least clear the lead singer Erk was giving it his all, rising to the challenge of entertaining not-the-most-easily-impressed crowd in the world. But I still think a shorter, sharper set would have helped. They did well enough to get an encore, with 'Forgotten Tears' finally offering a track that everyone knew and loved, muddy sound system or otherwise. But at the same time, they highlighted the inherent problem such bands have in producing a killer live show. There's a good reason why I spent most of this years M'era Luna watching goth metal and medieval revivalists.

## Mesh (& Mechanical Cabaret, Greenhaus & Trademark) – 10 Oct 2004

Karl Bartos (he of Kraftwerk fame) was supposed to be headlining this show (with Mesh as support) back on 16<sup>th</sup> May. News filtered through that one of Bartos' live band had been injured in a road accident, so the show was postponed to October. Then two weeks before the show, it was announced that Bartos wouldn't be playing any more, with various complicated contract-related reasons given, with Mesh now headlining. As it turned out, most of the people I knew were only planning to go for Mesh anyway, so no great loss.

This did result in the arrival of an extra support band in the form of **Trademark**, who were last seen supporting Wolfsheim a few months back. I was in two mind about them then, but am now definitely sure they need some sorting out. They've got the potential to be a rather geeky but still catchy analogue synth-pop revival band. But first they need to improve the vocals and dump all the naff gimmicks, like wandering off stage to change out of their white lab coats and into, erm...coloured ones, then waving their arms like 1998-vintage VNV. There's some nice songs buried in there, but they need to sort out the delivery if they're going to get much more attention, from me at least.

Next up were the ubiquitous **Greenhaus**, admittedly a band which have changed substantially since I first saw them back in 2000. The bands CD-manipulator Frankie D seems to have left the line-up, with the band now utilising two guitarists, a bassist as well as their Singaporean-born lead vocalist, Phoenix J, who seems to have gained some confidence as leading lady of the 'Haus. Or in other words, they've stop playing techno and switched to dream-pop. It'd be nice if everyone made sure the mics worked before the set started, but I won't make a big thing about it.

And let me first say there are some very nice elements to the 'Greenhaus v2' sound, since they can actually play their guitars and they've got a good overall concept. Unfortunately, the songwriting still seems quite shallow. I'm pretty sure the 4AD set had this style done and dusted many years ago, and whilst the bands techno background might yet take it in new directions, they haven't quite managed it yet. Interestingly, they left 'Stoned' out of the setlist, which was a pity as it was this song that signalled the bands move in this direction in the first place, and it certainly would have added a bit of power to their set.

**Mechanical Cabaret** were next playing what has to be one of their biggest audiences to date. They could certainly teach a few lessons to Trademark about how one should front a old-style synth-pop band, Roi very much the charismatic but oh-so-slightly pervy frontman, a confident and committed showman. The band have also replaced their traditional slideshow with a video backdrop – not yet as risqué as their former snapshot collection but I'll be looking to see how they choose to develop it.

Tonight's set was largely devoted to the band newer material, with relatively little taken from their 'Agenda' album. Of these songs, the new single 'Cheap and Nasty' went down rather well, with a hint of Sheep on Drugs in it's lo-fi fucked-up beat and delirious phrase repetition. They found time to throw in their cover of Fad Gadget's 'I Discover Love', a version which they have very much made their own. I'm still not sure all Mechanical Cabaret's songs hit the sweet spot in the way the likes of 'Nothing Special' did when I first saw them 4 years ago, but that might have had something to do with the suspect sound quality, and anyway, there's still time to get them nicely polished (or soiled, as the case may be) before album no 2 is assembled.

And so it was left to **Mesh** to headline. It was interesting to see that there was a hefty contingent of 'normally-dressed' people at the gig, which seems to indicate that Mesh have

long since graduated from the 'scene' and are now major players in the modern alt-pop arena. Lead singer Mark Hockings was wearing his usual wooly cap, but there's was no detracting from the quality of his vocals. The masters of post-Depeche Mode synth-pop always put on a decent show, and from the opening bars of 'Little Missile', we knew it was going to be a good night.

Their set tonight was drawn largely from their last two albums, with a few new tracks given an airing to an enthusiastic response. Three of the songs featured live guitar, though it didn't cut through the mix in the way you might have expected it too. It's hard to pick out highlights, but 'People Like Me (With This Gun)' was the first song that got everyone singing along. Naturally, the biggest cheer was saved for 'Trust You' and 'You Didn't Want Me', though these songs were notable as the only representative from the 'early' Mesh catalogue.

There was the occasional technical hitch, with a channel occasionally dropping out then returning, as well as the already mentioned less-than-audible guitar, though no-one seemed to mind too much. Mesh did well enough to earn themselves two encores, dynamic enough tonight to avoid the usual accusations of 'sameness' (accusations I'd made myself regarding previous Mesh shows). I'd still couldn't get that excited, though – there's only so much you can do with synth-pop when played live, but nonetheless, tonight Mesh did the business.

## Black Celebration 2004 – 23-24 Oct 2004

### Day 1

The biggest Flag Promotions event so far, and also one of the most controversial. It all started several months prior to this event, when Flag gave everyone the chance to vote for 3 bands they wanted to appear. Deathboy won the ballot, but weren't booked, as 'they'd played last year'. Yes, opening up what had to had been the weakest Black Celebration line-up to date. So weak that I didn't even bother to do (Icon of Coil AGAIN?).

The resultant line-up thus spread across two days, with six bands on the first day and eight on the second. Except Combichrist pulled out in the late stages, leaving a mere five acts on Day 1. Rumours were flying round the venue on Day 1 about broken promises, missed soundchecks and a general feeling of unprofessionalism. This is sadly become quite common on the London scene and needs to be solved if we want to bring more foreign bands over to play.

The festival opened with **Avoidance of Doubt**, described by another onlooker as 'riffstastic'. Said in a disinterested tone of voice. And the description was fairly close to the mark, certainly better than the words of one critic who described them as 'The UK's Answer To Rammstein'. Avoidance of Doubt were essentially a metal band with an electronic backing track – certainly more metal than industrial, and a slightly odd choice for this festival. Hopefully, someone will see sense and put them on a more metal-sounding bill shortly, as their huge riffs and crazy-haired vocalist had quite a bit going for them, even if the sound quality wasn't the best.

And it was this that really hurt **Earth Loop Recall**. With no soundcheck, it was too much to ask that two guitars, bass, drum track, two keyboards and three mics could sound cohesive by guesswork alone, with opening track 'Futureless' sounding a total mess. It took until track 4 (a new song entitled 'Glass') to get the mix sorted out, and suddenly we were looking at the ELR I'd seen and been blown away by previously, with finale 'Optimism Creeping In' particularly impressive. According to the band, this was to be the

last ELR show off the back of the 'Compulsion' album, and I'm pretty sure they would have wanted to give it a better send off than this. Bands like this deserve more.

On then, to **Discoordinated**, who I'd last seen playing at Elektrofest in 2003. They're an interesting set up, combining drum n'bass, electroclash, noise and synth-pop elements in the search of a distinctive sound. That they may have achieved, but the sound in question wasn't a particularly cohesive one. That yapping little vocalist still irritates me severely, and I couldn't honestly understand the relevance of Discoordinated's appearance here any more than that of Avoidance of Doubt. But unlike AoD, I won't be seeking them out on more appropriate billings.

The first UK debut of the day followed in the form of **Tactical Sekt**, the first of two Anthony Mather projects to appear this weekend, this one a collaboration with some German friends. The three of them put in inspired performances tonight, their mid-tempo EBM inviting the first real dancefloor movement of the festival. The drummer was busy assaulting his kit (acoustic, not pads as you may have expected) from all angles, whilst Anthony was busy playing to the crowd. This sound is hardly original now, but Tactical Sekt at least have the presence and power to carry it off.

**Funker Vogt**, those purveyors of the most cliché school of shouty German industrial, were headlining tonight. The opening bars of 'Tragic Hero' reverberated around the Islington Academy, as the four Funker Boys set about their set with their usual gusto. Gerrit Thomas was hidden behind a balaclava, Bjorn Bottcher had his usual alien make-up on, leaving Jens to carry the show forward. That he did, throwing himself into song after song, drawn from their sizeable backcatalogue. And it was fun! Completely predictable but fun! But nothing special either. Life and Funker Vogt are like that.

## Day 2

I arrived on Day 2 to be greeted by a virtually empty Academy. Obviously skipping Slimelight was a good idea if watching all 13 bands was part of your battle plan for the weekend. First up today were **Deviant UK**. They had a singer in a peaked hat, which looked rather stupid, but the music made up for it, a sort of Numanesque electro-rock, with huge power chords much in evidence. What else would one do with a flying-V, anyway? I quite enjoyed their set, even if none of the songs grabbed me that much. But doubtlessly there's something here worth of development. If only they dropped that awful hat!

Brighton's **Psychophile** were next. My opinion of this band has been somewhat varied in recent times – I seem to be in a minority amongst critics due my slight disappointment at their debut album, but this live show was enough to at least get my attention back. Despite the lack of a soundcheck (bad), guitar strings that last the entire set (worse) and a decent vantage point for the Mog (worse still), Lucy and Smogo still managed to eke a respectable performance out of their half-hour slot. Hopes are now higher than before in the EOL camp for their 2<sup>nd</sup> album due early next year.

**Aslan Faction** up next, the second of Anthony's projects to appear this weekend, and one which has earned itself something of a cult reputation amongst the hard core of electro-industrial fans the world over. Live, they are not a strong act as Tactical Sekt, with just a vocalist and an electronic drummer tapping away on a small square pad thing. Some strong tracks (notably closing number 'Death March') got the floor moving again, but now the backing projection seem to have gone, there isn't anything to be learned from Aslan Faction that can't be heard on one of their CDs.

So then to **Swarf**. I'd last seen them struggling to get their laptop to play ball back in Slimelight in July, but excluding that show, I hadn't seen them play live since they released

their album. It has to be said that Swarf, who openly admit they run their operation on a shoestring, are really starting to sound like a professional wave-pop band. They seem comfortable with a wide variety of dance styles, and whilst I'm not a massive fan of everything they produce, there's enough going on to justify repeated listens. Even if they chose not to play a new song called 'Bitch Slapping the Eyes of Hell' (now I wonder what THAT sounds like?).

The first of the big European bands followed in the form of Swedish trio **Run Level Zero**, making their UK debut here tonight. They're one of many danceable electronic industrial bands on the circuit, the third such act to appear this weekend. As with all such acts, there's always a hint of the Skinny Puppy/FLA influence in their sound, though I found their set enjoyable enough for the duration, even if technical hitches meant the pad-whacker couldn't be heard for the first part of their set.

And now the highlight of the entire weekend – **Rotersand!** Another local debut from a band who'd to date only made a modest mark on the UK EBM/future-pop scene. Tonight, however, saw Rotersand fire on all cylinders. From the pulsating 'Electronic World Transmission', through the pure wave-pop of 'Merging Oceans', the acoustic guitar on 'One Level Down' and the Teutonic surge of 'Sonic Agony', every song saw a better crowd response than the last. Rotersand won many new fans with this performance, and have seemingly breathed new life into an increasingly stagnant synth-pop scene.

Next up was the return to stage of chmalt-beat stalwart **Noisex**, a project that was originally intending to disband following their 2002 tour. Raoul clearly saw fit to hold the project, together, for whatever reason. Clad in identical red jump-suits, the three Noisex'ers soon got down to work with their knob twiddling, Apple Powerbook driven performance. This was a noisy performance, even by their standards, but not a particularly long one. Noisex are fairly handy at carving a danceable rhythm out of fierce walls of distortion (more so than most bands of this ilk), but, tiring after Rotersand's set, I watched the latter half of their performance from the back.

The festival was rounded off by **Assemblage 23**, who have become quite popular round these parts in recent years. Touring off the back of their 'Storm' CD, they seemed like a natural choice for a festival like this. And sure enough, they launched into a set made up of selections from the new CD plus a number of old favourites – including four songs from 'Failure'. It was all good sing-a-long fun, but despite this, Assemblage 23 no longer seem to be the fresh and invigorating concept they once were. There's nothing new going on here, and their set suffered because of it.

And so Black Celebration 2004 came to a close. It was certainly the biggest thing Flag have put on in the five or so years I've been attending their shows, and it did a good job at bringing together bands from all corners of the scene, even if this meant some of them seemed a bit out-of-place (you can get away with this at multistage summer fests, not smaller indoor events with one stage and little action elsewhere). Unfortunately, there was a bitter undercurrent regarding various issues behind-the-scenes, something which is becoming an all too familiar story. At least the line-up saw more stability than usual, and Rotersand's UK breakthrough was probably worth the price of admission alone!

## **Zodiac Mindwarp, Killing Miranda & Brutal Deluxe – 10 Dec 2004**

It said Zodiac Mindwarp and The Love Reaction on the ticket, as well as at the top of the page. They were headlining, after all. But I was really only here to see Killing Miranda tonight. They'd spent the last month or so touring the UK in support of 'Consummate'



(their long-awaited third album, and a damn fine CD it was, too), but were unable to get a headlining slot in London this side of Christmas. Hence their billing behind Zodiac Mindwarp.

Before either of these bands, however, came **Brutal Deluxe**. A three-piece metal combo, bare-footed and bare-chested. Their singer was wearing a head-mounted radio mic, a move which seemed rather pointless considering that a) the tiny Underworld stage meant wandering around was out of the question and b) he was also playing a guitar at the time. To be honest, Brutal Deluxe sounded just like any other metal act from the last 10 years or so. Only their last song, distantly resembling System of a Down, seemed worthy of any attention, and by then I'd lost interest.

And then came **Killing Miranda**, playing their first London show in more than a year. The album might have only been out a few months, but some of the songs on it date back as far as 2001, so most of the set was well-known to KM's assembled fan base. Unfortunately, they'd only been allocated a mere 30 minutes for their set, having to cut three songs from their setlist, leaving the foursome with the task of entertaining a not-quite-full-yet Underworld with a slot hardly befitting a band who were on their third album and rapidly starting to get attention from the metal underground.

Opening with 'Angelfly', lead singer Rikky, now dressed in a suit and sequinned shirt in true glam-rocker style, set about the unenviable task of getting the crowd (thin on the ground by KM standards) worked up. 'Teenage Vampire' saw a little more movement, and soon they were ready to unleash the newer material, 'Enter The Dagon' proving to be most the effective in its live incarnation. They finished on 'No More Love Songs', a song that failed to get my attention when I first heard it 3 years ago, but now seems to have been 'sorted'. It was unfortunate that they then had to leave the stage, even as a snippet from the 'Embrace' backing track slipped through the PA.

This of course was all intended to give **Zodiac Mindwarp** a long a set as possible. They were headlining after all. This wasn't my first experience of Zodiac live, of course. They'd headlined a night at Whitby earlier this year. There, I lasted one song before getting bored and deciding to spend the evening socialising. Here I was about to go and watch them play before stopping to talk to Filthy Rikky instead. Eventually I decided to see what was going on on stage. Though I struggled to get a view, as the Underworld now seemed to be populated by lots of denim-clad rockers.

And having wandered on to the sound of a guitar solo, it was little surprise why. Zodiac Mindwarp were a rock band, after all. A very old rock band. I guess I could make comparisons to Electric-era Cult, but only because both bands seem to have got themselves linked in some way to the goth scene despite both being 80s anthem-rock acts (The Cult did a couple of scene-friendly albums, don't know if this lot ever did). There was widespread outcry when they were announced as a Whitby headliner (barring a few people who'd pushed for their appearance for reasons known only to themselves). Here they appeared on the basis of their own reputation. Clearly old rock bands still attract new fans. But not me.

In the end, I lasted four songs before grabbing my stuff and walking out, rather miffed at having paid £12 to watch half an hour of music that I actually found tolerable. Those of you who read this site will know how rare it is that I leave a gig whilst a band are still playing, even if the headliner was not the act I came to see. I understand Killing Miranda are headlining back here in February, so tune in again in a couple of months to find out what happened. I just hope I'm never in a position to write about the other two ever again.

## Ultraviolence (+ Ping Pong Bitches and Goteki) – 11 Dec 2004

Ultraviolence last played London in 2001, back when I was out of work and unable to go to absolutely every gig, show and festival that came along. And then of course Johnny Violent went into some kind of hibernation, releasing nothing and playing nowhere. It's only recently that he's reappeared, and even this tour is intended primarily as an extended-length promotion of his new 'Best Of' CD. A tour based around old songs it might well have been, but I wasn't about to miss them play live. Actually I was (I'd only bought my ticket the day before), but I'm a busy man these days.

Anyway, I wandered into Slimelight at 8pm, sat around for a while and was eventually greeted by my first look at the 'Mk2' version of **Goteki**. Gone are the Anime-Cyber Costumes and keyboards, to be replaced with all-black stage costumes, plus live guitar and bass and one of those tea-tray style drum pad things. Despite all these changes, the synthetic backing track was still the most prominent aspect of the sound, the guitars barely audible and the bass failing to really add anything to the songs (though this may have something to do with the dreaded Elektrowerkz live PA). A couple of new songs were unveiled, as well as a few guitar-enhanced versions of older songs. There may yet be potential in the 'live' Goteki sound, but if there is, it wasn't apparent tonight.

Onto **Ping Pong Bitches**, the flier proudly proclaiming that they provided most of the voices on the last Prodigy album. And what was wrong with Keith Flint exactly? (On second thoughts, don't answer that). As an act in their own right, they were essentially a rocked-up electroclash act. Two female vocalists dressed with 'attitude', a third girl playing a mini Korg and a guitarist, who was at least more audible than Goteki's. In fact, his playing was the only really memorable aspect of their set – the rest seemed like a very self-conscious attempt at jumping on the overloaded retro-synth bandwagon. A couple of the songs had a decent hook, a few others a degree of sleazy street-cred, but I was still left rather unimpressed.

And so then onto **Ultraviolence**. Johnny Violent didn't bother with a spectacular entrance, wandering on stage to do a cynical prize-giveaway before launching into his set. He was accompanied by a female vocalist (Jessica) plus Mel Allezbleu on force-meeting of angle-grinder and steel knickers, with Johnny handling the male vocal parts himself. This generally amounted to a lot of shouting, swearing and egging the crowd on. He had a couple of keyboards to play with, but I'm not entirely sure how much of the music was being played on them, since the music seemed to be getting on just fine when they weren't being touched.

As the set was promoting a greatest hits album, the setlist was effectively a run through all the favourites – 'Hardcore Motherfucker', 'Paranoid', 'Adultery', 'Sex', 'Heaven Is Oblivion' – if it's had club play in the last ten years, it was probably in the setlist. And all throughout, Mel Allezbleu was sending showers of sparks flying in all directions. This looked good for a few songs, but as the novelty wore off, one started to wonder a) if she did any other tricks and b) exactly how long that metal underwear was going to last. Rumour tells me she nearly had a close call once, but it held up well.

And that was essentially it. Everyone danced away, hands were waved, choruses were shouted and no-one cared for the details. The only real surprise was the final track – 'Team UVR'. Not that they played it (it's a bit of an anthem for the whole act, after all), but that Johnny did the vocal himself rather than borrow a rapper from somewhere or just stick it all on the backing. This of course led to a second run-through of the 'Hardcore Motherfucker' theme, which no-one really minded. That over with, the trio wandered off, the DJ started and suddenly we were in the middle of Slimelight, as if no gig had ever I.

Talking to friends after the show, it has to be said that there was a feeling of slight disappointment from many of those present. Team Ultraviolence Racing were indeed hardcore and 'fucking fast', but we knew that already. This show might have been an excuse to dance to a selection of Johnny Violent's industrial gabba specials, but that was about it. The angle grinding may have added an extra layer of anarchy to proceedings, but an entire set of it was too much. And let's be honest – I could probably say the same thing about the music. Ultraviolence have written some awesome pieces of extreme dance over the years, but I think they're best enjoyed as part of a DJ set. There's only so much that can be done with them live.

## Laibach – Anthems Tour – 16 Dec 2004

I'd seen Laibach for the first time last year, playing the Scala in King's Cross promoting their 'WAT' album. The show was well attended, but the lack of a support band and any attempts to interact with the crowd prevented it from classing amongst the greatest gigs I'd ever been to. Tonight they returned to play the Electric Ballroom. It should have been the Ocean in Hackney, but they'd gone bankrupt a few weeks before (how exactly can an Ocean 'go under'?), and the show was moved to Camden.

This time, Laibach actually bothered to bring along a support act, in the form of **Bonfire Madigan**, a name unknown to practically everybody present. Of course, to me every unknown act is another candidate for a section on EOL-Audio, particularly when they're supporting a band with the stature and reputation of Laibach, so I was down the front, watching with interest. And a very interesting act they were, too. Bonfire Madigan is for the most part, a solo act, just one lady providing vocals and live cello, with occasional use of a backing track.

The vocals were an accomplished take on the Siouxsie/Danielle Dax feline post-punk style, though the real interest lay around her efforts on the cello, with a combination of bowed, pizzicato and guitar-style strumming used to extract a surprisingly wide variety of sounds from the instrument. David Coulter (Test Dept & many others) came on stage for a couple of songs, adding some squeaky sounds extracted from a bent-over handsaw. It was thus a quirky but entertaining opening for the evening, a refreshing change from the 'usual suspect' support bands that live music devotees such as myself are often forced to endure.

And so then, to **Laibach**. Utilising an long (possibly too long) intro track, the Slovenian collective finally appeared on stage to the sound of a victory fanfare, and got straight down to work on 'B Maschina'. It might have seemed strange that a tour promoting a 'Best Of' compilation should open with a song that didn't even appear on the disc, but then again, maybe this was just going to be a re-titled version of the 2003 'WAT' tour.

And in many respects it was. If my memory serves me correctly, the setlist for this show was, with a few exceptions, a straight re-run of the show I saw at the Scala last year, with 'In The Army Now', 'God Is God' and 'Alle Gegen Alle' all appearing early on, before the synchronised drummer girls (in skinny fit Laibach vests and plaits) appeared for 'Tanz Mit Laibach', who then stayed on stage for the remainder of the set, working through a number of the 'WAT' songs in the process.

Fortunately for us, the gig was still a valid musical event for two reasons. Firstly, the soundsystem in the Electric Ballroom seemed particularly well suited to Laibach's huge, bombastic martial sound. And secondly, Laibach are a very good band to watch live – despite heavy use of a backing track for the keyboards and massed voices, the sight of a politically-charged Slovenian delivering his manifesto with two perfectly-synced

percussionists on either side of him is still a sight everyone involved in this scene should witness at least once.

I still stand by my view that some of the 'WAT' tracks sound a little thin and uninspired (a view not shared by many of my fellow critics), though they still sounded better live than they did on CD. It was in the closing movements of the set that the band really got into the swing of things – 'Das Spiel Ist Aus' now sounds like the anthem it was always meant to be, whilst the title track of 'WAT' remains the most appropriate song in the bands repertoire for a closing number, an autobiographical epic that builds to a suitably spectacular climax.

And then came the encore, and with it a breathtakingly beautiful rendition of 'Mama Leone' – the 'previously unreleased' song on the new compilation, and reason enough alone to buy the thing. They finished off with a trio of classics – 'Sympathy For The Devil' done in the way only Laibach last time, plus the two essentials from 'Opus Dei' which got missed out last time – 'Geburt Einer Nation' and 'Life Is Life'. The band left the stage to a reprise of 'Tanz Mit Laibach', which I took as a signal to make a beeline for the cloakroom whilst half the crowd were still dancing in front of an empty stage.

It has to be said that for a set that was for the most part a re-run of the previous years tour, with a singer that does not attempt to play to the crowd or otherwise indulge in the usual rock-star attention-seeking trickery, it was still an enjoyable and memorable night. It was my first real experience of the Electric Ballroom live PA (having previously only seen a three-song set by MaxDmyz there back in 2000), and it certainly had enough 'oomph' to cope with the grandiose nature of tonight's headliner. Years after purchasing a 12" of 'Life Is Life', I'm still not entirely sure what Laibach's mission statement really is, but regardless of their political ambiguity, the live show is strong enough on its own strengths for me not to worry about what it's all supposed to mean.

## **New Model Army – 17 Dec 2004**

Punk gigs aren't usually my thing. I've got a lot of live shows to fit into my schedule these days, and given the amount of focus I put on industrial and gothic music, there isn't really time to fit much else in. But then again, those two styles are technically descendants of punk, so the occasional indulgence in 3-minute angry guitar anthems is not only permissible, but actually damn near essential. And what better band to pick for such an evenings entertainment than New Model Army, one of the few survivors of UK punk's '2<sup>nd</sup> Generation', thanks in no small part to the way they wear their beliefs and affiliations very much on their sleeves, a practise which is becoming increasingly rare in these days of shying away from sensitive issues to avoid alienating corporate record labels, easily-deterred fans and other irritating obstructions to making a real statement.

Before we heard anything from them, however, we had a support slot from **Goldblade**, who played a fairly straightforward brand of anthemic punk rock. They made good use of two drummers and multiple guitars and vocalists. It didn't really strike me as anything truly world-shaking, but they clearly have a small following of their own (especially the two girls joining them on stage to dance to the final song), and seem to enjoy what they do, so at least fulfilled their role as a prelude to tonight's key attraction.

The attraction being of course, **New Model Army**. This was to be my first live experience of this particular group, despite their fairly regular UK tours, usually around Christmas time. This one was particularly relevant on this occasion, as it was the first since the death of the band's original drummer, Rob Heaton. Of course, situations such as this only serve to inspire the surviving members to play harder, louder and longer than previously, so whilst

the loss clearly hit the band and their fans hard on one level, neither was there any question that the tour would be solemn and mournful.

And it struck me even before the show had started exactly what kind of following this band has – counting amongst their fan-base a collection of punks, goths, rockers, left-wing activists, hippies and various other deviant members of society. And when they came on stage and started to play, all hell broke loose. NMA clearly has a cathartic effect on their fan base. There was a decent battle going on in the mosh pit, of course, and it was hard not to get dragged in at some point. There was also an obsession with people standing on each other's shoulders, managing to get three high at one point.

The band, meanwhile, were knocking out the tunes in a determined fashion, with Justin Sullivan very much in control at the front. There wasn't a great deal of between-song crowd interaction, but as far as NMA goes, the songs do all the talking anyway. Picking out a highlight would be hard, partially because I'm not the most familiar with NMA's backcatalogue, but also because I was too busy trying to survive the frantic push n'shove down on the main floor. Thinking back through the gig, I'd say the early airing of 'Believe It' took the show up a gear, with the energy peaking for '51<sup>st</sup> State', with saw almost the entire Astoria ground floor heaving in one huge pogoing mass.

There were a few quieter moments which stood out, with the most notable of these being Justin's solo acoustic spot for 'Better Than Them', which had almost everyone present singing along (possibly excepting the aforementioned who were still trying to perfect their three-storey piggy-backs). The rest, however, was full throttle. By the time they got to 'No Rest' late in their set, I'd retreated to the bar at the back and left everyone else to it. A couple of encores would follow, though 'Vengeance' was not to be played – I'm reliably told that they dropped this from their set a few years ago as it led to TOO much free flowing energy on stage.

But given the frenzy generated whenever this bunch played so much as an obscure album track, I actually understand. I have to confess to not being the most rabid New Model Army fan out there, but it's still clear that in a world that's essentially made of shit (finely polished shit, for sure, but still shit), bands such as this are more relevant than ever. A new album is promised for next year, and given the increasing the musical maturity shown on recent recordings by this band, it might yet require attention here at EOL-Audio. But something tells me it won't quite equal seeing the band live.

## **Rammstein – Reise Reise Tour - 3 Feb 2005**

And so I returned to the venue and the band whom jointly provided my favourite show of all time back in December 2001. The effect that one show had on me as a person would later become clear – it was powerful enough to inspire me to get my life (and indeed, this site) into some kind of order. Three-and-a-bit-years later, and I was more than happy to return for a repeat performance. Maybe I didn't like 'Reise Reise' QUITE as much as the last two albums, but it was still GOOD, damn it! No worries – it's a must-see show. The Brixton Academy was a sell-out. And this was the first of three nights at the same venue!

And we even got an interesting support band this time in the form of **Apocalyptica**, the Scandinavian cellists with a taste for heavy metal music. Utilizing three cellos and a drum kit, they worked their way through a set comprised of cover version and original material, extracting a greater variety of sounds from their singular instruments that you might have thought possible. There were some doubts beforehand about whether the crowd would appreciate such an oddball act, but their inventive take on 'Master of Puppets' quickly put any such concerns to rest. In fact, the reception they received after their finale ('The Hall of

The Mountain King') was easily the best I'd ever seen for a support to a big name metal act.

And there are few bigger names on my play list these days that **Rammstein**, who'd risen from the ranks of obscure German rock band to major players on the world stage. The UK was slow to embrace their fiery brand of 'tanzmetal', but their live performances in 2001 and 2002 gave them the impetus they needed. With three shows in London and two others to follow further north, they must have sold over 20,000 tickets in the UK alone, which is impressive for a band that doesn't even sing in the local language. But with a stage presence like theirs, who needs to know what it's all supposed to mean?

This time, the stage set was hidden behind a giant curtain. It fell during the opening bars of 'Reise Reise' to reveal a huge custom-built stage set, with moving platforms and a set of sci-fi style sliding doors. Each band member was clad in their own extravagant attire, each one getting their moments of glory through the set. Into 'Links 234', then, and the first of many explosions to rock the Brixton Academy. 'Keine Lust' kept the energy up, before 'Feuer Frei!' saw the return of those head-mounted fire-spitting flame-throwers. Four songs in, and already the band had the crowd won over.

Then followed a series of songs drawn from the new album. 'Mein Teil' was the most memorable of these, featuring Till Lindemann dressed as a murderous chef, with skinny keyboard player Flake Lorenz in the cooking pot. He eventually escaped, only to run around the stage with sparks flying everywhere, having been nicely warmed up by Till's flamethrower (it ain't the same with microwaves). Even the one 'acoustic' track, 'Los' was given a spectacular treatment – Christian (the drummer) having a second kit set up for him in record time down front so he could go and jam with his German buddies for one song rather than spending the whole gig atop the stage set.

Other bands members had various parts of their clothing explode at appropriate points of the show, with jets of fire and flame going off more often than I can remember, and a huge animating lighting rig providing the visual stimulus when something wasn't combusting. Till got the lions share of the explosive action, though, with a huge, sparkling bow emerging for 'Du Reicst So Gut', followed by a gun which sent fireworks over the heads of the crowd during 'Du Hast'. The main set finished with the suitable grandiose 'Amerika', which started with Flake riding round the stage on a Segway and ended with the crown being showered in red, white and blue tissue.

There were of course encores – the first being a repeat of the 'Mutter' tour encores, with 'Rammstein', 'Sonne' and 'Ich Will' making their obligatory appearances – the flaming coat symbolic of the bands eponymous track now replaced with a couple of giant claws which shot huge jets of flame (you've seen these things in video games – these boys do it for real!). The second encore saw 'Ohne Dich' performed with a surprising amount of feeling, before rounding off once again with 'Stripped', complete with the crowd-sailing-in-a-rubber-dingy. There was no 'Engel', but it didn't matter – they could have played German drinking songs for all I cared and still put on a mind-blowing show.

I can only assume that the following two nights offered the same spectacle with the same level of crowd response – it would have been too much to ask to re-write the show overnight. But it something everyone likely to be reading this now needs to see once. This was actually my third Rammstein gig, so it wasn't QUITE the same as seeing them for the first time ever, but it's still a better show than pretty much any other band on the circuit has to offer. I only hope it doesn't make every other band I'm planning to see dull in comparison.

## Nightwish (+ Tristania) – 12 Feb 2005

Face it – Nightwish are now officially a Big Thing in the UK. In 2003, they sold out the LA2. In 2004, they sold out the larger Astoria. And in early 2005, they sold out the Astoria TWICE, once this week and once for the week after. And the UK isn't even prime hunting ground for them (they're even bigger in Germany, not to mention their native Finland). The queue went round the block, past Soho Square and into Oxford Street. Even getting inside the gig was an exercise in patience.

Fortunately, I still got inside in time to see most of **Tristania's** set. I wasn't overly impressed with their M'era Luna show last year, but as expected, close up their static stage presence didn't seem to matter so much. With three vocalists and two guitarists, playing songs generally in excess of five minutes, there was plenty of substance to Tristania's set. I'm still not convinced that they've truly mastered the art of extended-length song structures (and this after 4 albums), but their symphonic-metal meets My Dying Bride style doom-death has a lot of merit conceptually, and they went down just fine amongst the assembled masses.

But this was nothing compared to the utterly rapturous reception offered to **Nightwish**. The Astoria was packed to the gills, with one massive cheer for the four Nightwish men, and another for leading lady Tarja Turunen, rapidly becoming THE voice in the ever-growing collective of female-fronted metal acts. Opening once again with 'Dark Chest of Wonders' followed by 'Planet Hell', the Nightwish quintet then took the opportunity to experiment a little, concentrating on the 'Once' album but drawing songs from their previous albums where desired – 'Wishmaster' in particular clearly getting a better response than last time now that the band's backcatalogue is widely available in the UK at reasonable prices.

'Bless The Child' was the key highlight from 'Century's Child', whilst the old favourite 'Setting Sun' reminded us that Nightwish have been writing classy track like this since the mid-90s – it's just the UK audience only found out about them recently. There was however one real surprise – Tarja's 'rest break' song gave Marco Hietala a chance to take the lead for a cover of Pink Floyd's 'High Hopes', and it was here that the guy proved that whilst he was originally recruited for his bass guitar skills, he is also a VERY proficient rock vocalist. Tuomas's keyboards complimented this perfectly, proving that it is entirely possible to cover rock giants if you know what you're doing.

Tarja returned the favour later on in the night, giving the boys a break whilst she celebrated the launch of her solo career with a spot alone on stage, with an orchestral backing track for company. Singing in her native Finnish, it was unlikely that many people present knew what she was singing about, but it scarcely mattered – some things are best left to the imagination. They finished the main part of their set with 'Nemo' – a song some members of the crowd had been calling for since the start. There wasn't any inflatable fish like last time, but no worries. Nightwish did what they came to do.

And of course, there was an encore. Despite the ridiculously early Astoria closing time, they managed to squeeze in three more songs, climaxing on 'Wish I Had An Angel'. A song with 'Anthem' written all over it, it was the only fitting way to bring this most explosive of sets to a close. All five band members then came to the front to take a bow and soak up the crowds adoration. Again. Only this time they knew they'd be back for more the following week. By the time you read this, that gig will also be history, but given the bands exhaustive touring schedule, you may still get a chance to catch them live again before long. And if you get that chance, take it!

## Diary of Dreams & Psyche – 20 Feb 2005

Has anyone realised that I actually quite like Diary of Dreams? They don't have a huge UK following, but I seem to have been writing about them long enough, so obviously I'm going to have to work a little bit harder to convince people how good they are. Tonight's gig was of particular interest for two reasons. One, it was in support of the 'Nigredo' album, a complex concept piece that didn't seem to endear itself to a killer live show. And two, Darrin Huss' long-running project **Psyche** was supporting. Darrin had actually thought to e-mail me a few months ago, asking me why I wasn't writing about him. Well, here I am now.

Touring in support of his latest album 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour', Darrin came on stage and began singing to a dark, moody piano backdrop. I hadn't heard the new album prior to this show, but it was clear that the bright, pop-oriented sound of 'The Hiding Place' wasn't going to figure as much as the last time I saw Psyche, back at InFest 2002. There were still upbeat moments – 'X-Rated' was particularly danceable, and 'Sanctuary' went down well, being as it is Psyche's only real club hit round these parts. But the strength of the project was more apparent over the course of the show – our Canadian friend can sing, after all (and not everyone in synth-pop can), a trait particularly apparent on his rendition of 'Goodbye Horses'.

I bought 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour' after the show, then went to have a chat with Darrin himself afterwards. This had to be cut short, however, as **Diary of Dreams** were calling and Jonny EOL felt obliged to answer by legging it across the venue and down as near to the front as possible. The appearance of acoustic rather than electronic drums was a surprise, as was the return of Torben Wendt on keyboards and backing vocals, but even more surprising was the fact that lead man Adrian Hates was wielding a second guitar alongside his mohawked, axe-wielding colleague. Clearly Diary of Dreams are keen to push themselves as a genuine 'live' act rather than the karaoke show so many bands have become.

The opened with 'Menschfiend', and then a couple from 'Nigredo', before launching into 'The Curse', beginning a lengthy trawl across their backcatalogue. The dual-guitar set-up seemed to work well, allowing the slamming power chords and the more subtle guitar textures to co-exist in the same song. Another change was the appearance of some little-known oldies – 'End of Flowers' and 'But The Wind Was Stronger' replaced the more often heard 'Retaliation' and 'Ex-ile' respectively, whilst 'Methusalem' saw the rarely-aired 'Psychoma?' material enter the setlist.

'Butterfly:Dance!' and 'Chemicals' represented 'One of 18 Angels', but the most prominent album in the set was 'Freak Perfume', an album that has provided the basis of the bands live set for three years now. There was actually relatively little of the more recent songs, but those that did appear were well-chosen in terms of suitability for live play – 'Giftraum' and 'Psycho-Logic' the finest examples. The crowd was quite large by Diary of Dreams standards – clearly Adrian Hates admirable tactic of playing any territory that has at least a couple of fans is paying off. They now have a following here – which is more than you can say for many of their contemporaries.

So much of a following, in fact, that they got two encores! They played two songs in each, with the biggest surprise being a stripped-down, piano-based version of 'AmOK', which proved that they're great songwriters as well as musicians (a good song will always stand up to an 'unplugged' treatment). But the show was more important to me in other respects – at a time where battle-lines seem to be drawn between the EBM/future-pop, industrial and deathrock/tradgoth camps, Diary of Dreams seem refreshingly immune from such



pigeonholing. OK, I call them 'electro-goth', but they've got guitars as well. In fact, I don't care what instrument they play – they've got it sussed either way.

## **Killing Joke – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Show – 25 Feb 2005**

Killing Joke aren't exactly known for staying together for more than a few albums at a time, but splits or no splits, twenty-five years is a hefty lifespan for any band. They keep on splitting up and reforming, changing the bassist and drummers each time, but somehow Jaz, Geordie and friends never really went away, despite all their excursions to exotic locations such as Iceland, New Zealand and Battersea. There were numerous side-projects, extra-curricular activities and other drama, culminating the band reuniting in 2003 to release one of their finest albums to date, before this anniversary performance.

And so then, to the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary shows, one on Thursday and one on Friday (I'm writing about the Friday show here). A day or two early (the band was officially formed on 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 1980), but is that supposed to matter? It wasn't quite the original line-up either, but I'm not picking bones here. The Shepherds Bush Empire was chosen as the venue, presumably due to it's proximity to the band's old stamping ground in Notting Hill. Old buddy (and ex-roadie) Alex Patterson (The Orb) was called upon to do the warm-up Djing in place of an actual support band. Despite his reputation, he didn't really do much DJ mixing, and neither did his set have a unifying theme, dance tracks played alongside old post-punk numbers. It was just a precursor to tonight's main event.

**Killing Joke** eventually arrived on stage at 8:45pm, the curtains parting to the sound of the opening bars of 'Communion'. Despite not having a Egyptian Burial Chamber to sing in, Jaz Coleman mighty chorus still reverberated around the confines of the venue. Their 'big entrance' thus complete, the boys then launched headlong into 'Wardance', which was of course the signal for the collected mass of punks, rockers and metallers to ATTACK. Killing Joke were always a very physical band at the best of time, but this was something else again. Suddenly, the wisdom of having a dull warm-up act, giving plenty of time to drink lots of pain-killing alcoholic beverage, became very clear indeed.....

With the crowd nicely warmed up, it was time to take a journey deep into the bands backcatalogue – with a lot of focus paid to the first and third albums, the band not in the slightest bit afraid to avoid the obvious hits and play pretty much what they fancied. There was relatively little from their recent 2003 self-titled effort – it took half-an-hour before we got 'Total Invasion', for instance. The show really stepped up another gear, however, when they started a near-suicidal sequence involving 'Asteroid', 'Requiem', 'Whiteout', a couple of tracks which now escape me beyond the fact that they were painfully brutal, and then topping it all off with 'Pssyche'.

The band wandered off stage a little more than an hour into their set – treating the encore-baiting as more of a half-time intermission than a genuine 'Is it all over?' moment. Sure enough, they came back on stage, Jaz offering us a short speech on the bands plans for the year, including a charity gig in Cheltenham and a world tour of old Colonial Bars (only he could dream up such a scheme!). And then on with the music – digging out old gems such as 'Complications' and 'Are You Receiving?', allegedly the first song the band played as a group in rehearsals all those years back.

And on and on they went – with one real surprise still in store. Having blasted us for nigh on two hours with some of the most vicious post-punk/alt-metal known to man, they then launch into 'Love Like Blood', dedicated to their late fathers. Having avoided their mid-80s new-wave era on stage since reforming, this came as something of a moment of relief

after an extensive stint down in the mosh pit (you weren't expecting me to stand still at the back, were you?). I might be fed up of DJs playing the song to the point of excluding the rest of the bands material, but coming live from the people that wrote the thing, it took on a whole new meaning.

The show finally ended on 'Pandemonium', going out as they came in, with a huge, all-powerful anthem. The band and their associates then gathered on stage, to be greeted with (of all things) a birthday cake with twenty-five candles on top. A quick rendition of 'Happy Birthday' from the audience and that was it. Out into the cold, in search of water and a nice hot bath to soothe my aching limbs. This was my third Killing Joke experience to date, but this one was both the longest and the most significant. In an era dominated by 80s revivals, here's a band that still has what it takes a full quarter-century on. Ask me if I want to see Killing Joke for the 4<sup>th</sup> time or Depeche Mode/New Order/The Human League/etc for the 1<sup>st</sup>, and I'd probably go for the 'Joke. That's pretty much the state of play here.

## Faetal & Misnomer – 10 Mar 2005

It was a strange place to hold a gig. I wasn't entirely comfortable walking round Soho on my own, but I eventually found the tell-tale queue of black-attired music-lovers in amongst all the porn outlets and strip clubs. The whole reason behind this expedition was the launch party for Faetal's album [Sic]. It'd been available for a few months on an informal basis – I had personally bagged a copy from the Wasp Factory stall at Black Celebration 2004, about half-an-hour after it was 'released'. Then of course was opening band Misnomer, who I'd met a member of not-so-long ago. He thought the band were pretty good, but I needed convincing. The flier indicated Sma5h TV as headliner, but, as we will see, they didn't figure in my evening's entertainment.

Anyway, once I'd grabbed a couple of cut-price Stella Artois bottles, I wandered down to the stage to check out **Misnomer**, a band who, despite their low billing, I'm reliably told actually have a sizeable following. The only description I had of their music was offered to me about 5 minutes before their set, to the effect that they were like a combination of 'Rage Against The Machine, Tori Amos and Massive Attack'. I'll give them the latter two, but RATM? No way! What I witnessed was essentially a girl-fronted electro-indie-rock set-up, with programmed drums, two guitarists, keyboards and a noticeably groovy Russian (Anton) handling the bass.

The band weren't short of ideas – not afraid to combine New Order-style melodics with downtempo electro-beats and hard rocking aggression, with guitarist Yyvone taking to the mic to give a couple of tracks an 'urban' touch. The keyboards filled out the mix nicely, the vocals were proficient, and their sound generally felt 'complete'. Personally, I wasn't exceptionally bowled over, but it was more on a 'not my kind of thing' basis than any criticism of their music. This bunch are clearly on a mission – it's just I don't think playing opening slots in Madame JoJos is really the best way of going about it. Anyway, since I seem to get lots of Tori Amos and Massive attack fans visiting this site, I reckon there's a good chance you'll like what they have to offer.

I was really here to watch **Faetal**, the second time that I'd seem them play live, having missed their Whitby slot due to a car breakdown. It had been a full year since I'd last seen them, back at THAT night at the Water Rats (if you were there, you'll know what I mean, if not, too bad). Back then they seemed nervous, bugged by monitoring issues. Whilst sound quality wasn't in their favour tonight, confidence certainly was. Opening up with a new track 'Give' in, the three Faetal boys were giving it their all on this occasion. The album

was certainly electro-rock with neither electro nor rock dominating, but with two live guitars and bass, the live show certainly emphasises the 'rock' element of the Faetal sound.

'Can Anybody Here Me?' had transformed from a new-wavey pop song to a rocked-up monster, whilst a new track 'Home' was given an airing, a slow-building epic that has the potential to become something very special indeed. Ben McLees, was then invited on stage to play guitar on '21', clearly enjoying every moment of his post-ELR cameo with his buddies up on stage. After this we got 'Losing Control' before finishing on the bitter, scathing 'Liquid Hate' – the audience fell for the songs false ending, which indicates that they clearly haven't bought the album yet. Maybe some of them did so after the show? Anyway, there was time for a one-song encore in the form of 'Divide By Zero', a suitably apocalyptic track to go out on.

Sma5h TV were headlining. Unfortunately, the organisers were taking a long time setting the bands up. By the time they hit the stage, it was midnight. And since I had a train to catch, I decided it wasn't worth the risk of missing by sticking around to watch a band that I'd never heard of (and the people I'd asked didn't seem all that enthusiastic about them), I decided to call it a night here. Misnomer clearly have a lot to offer, if only they could get more suitable billings on bigger stages, whilst Faetal have clearly come a long way in the last year. With ELR seemingly over, Pete and Tim's project is now the Wasp Factory act I feel as the most potential. Potential which they are now really starting to deliver.

And if you're reading this, Deathboy – the bar is set higher now. I'm waiting for that second studio album with anticipation.....

## Elektrofest 2005 – 26 Mar 2005

Elektrofest 2003 was an organizational mess, featuring a line-up that changed every time you looked at it. Elektrofest 2004 was even more confused. But these two events pale into insignificance compared to the almighty cock up that was Elektrofest 2005. Originally billed at the Islington Academy, the event was then moved to Koko – the venue formerly known as The Camden Palace. SPOCK appeared on the bill and left almost as quickly, and then rumours circulated a week before that the whole thing was being moved to Elektrowerkz.

The official line was there were 'problems with the venue', but the general opinion elsewhere was that too few advance tickets had been sold. The line-up didn't exactly help, having featured unknowns such as Cursor Minor and Noblesse Oblige (who?), as well as Flag stalwarts Mechanical Cabaret prior to the last minute cut-down, keep-the-event-just-about-alive farce. None of the current Slimelight DJ favourites were ever billed, thus cutting out a substantial number of potential ticket sales. Not that I cared – one band remained that I wanted to see, and the other three had me at least vaguely interested, so with nothing better to do, I wandered down to Elektrowerkz and cashed in the £5 'Bank of Frank' voucher dating back to last years Karl Bartos no-show, along with £5 of real money, and wandered up to see the first band.

This band being of course **Trauma Pet**, an act with a substantial online following, thus making them obvious choices to open up and get the crowd in early. Due to a slow-moving queue, however, I only caught the last two and a half songs of their set. The set-up was quite straightforward – female vocalist up front plus another girl alternating bass and keyboards. Of the two complete songs I heard, one sounded a bit like Mesh with a girl singer, and the other more like one of Swarfs EBM-trancey numbers. Neither song particularly grabbed me, though I am informed that this is a very young band, so I'll reserve judgment until I see them play a full set.

Next up were **Lowe**, a band formed from former members of Statemachine (for those of you who don't know, they were a Swedish synth-pop act from the 1990s), promoting their new album 'Tenant'. Clearly some Pet Shop Boys references afoot, then? Well, kind of. The Swedish threesome played a fairly straightforward brand of synth-pop of the kind I've heard all too often over the last few years. They clearly enjoyed their performance, trying their utmost to woo the largely disinterested crowd. They seemed to win over a few fans in the process, but I was not one of them. Five years ago and I would have lapped this up, but not now.

Thankfully, for all it's flaws, this farcical event still had one saving grace – **Girls Under Glass**. I was only moderately impressed by their recent 'Zyklus' album, but to me, Girls Under Glass have always been about a concept rather than individual songs. They're one of the few bands who seem happy to combine substantial quantities of electronics with good, hard gothic rock, and thus cut right across the middle of the dreaded EBM/deathrock divide that's plaguing the UK scene at the moment. They sensibly chose their harder and heavier songs for tonight's set, those tracks that benefit most from a 'live' treatment.

Songs from the new album were sprinkled liberally across the set – 'In Der Einsamkeit', with strong vocals and huge walls of power chords, was particularly impressive, as was the fierce 'Feuerengel' and more accessible 'Ohne Dich'. They played quite a few of their more industrial metal NIN-styled material, too, and also saw it fit to give their cover of 'Frozen' an airing, which got a particularly good response from the crowd, many of whom were most likely completely unfamiliar with this band and their significance in the gothic music timeline. Thanks for the history lesson, guys!

This left **Visage** as the headliners, Elektrofest seemingly returning to it's original format of having an 80s act reform especially for the occasion. Only this time, it seemed rather misplaced. The 80s reformation boat left port way back in 2001, and Visage were never really meant to be a live band in the first place. There was certainly never any question of dragging Midge Ure or Billie Currie back into the line-up, which meant that Steve Strange's backing group was Seize. Yep, that top breakbeat electronica trio were called upon to support a man old enough to be their dad. The three of them were originally meant to perform as Ovni earlier in the day, but they too were victims of the last-minute cutbacks and had to settle for playing this apparently high-profile backing role. Well, as high-profile as you can get upstairs at Elektrowerkz.

Anyway, the assembled collective wandered onto stage and opened up with a rendition of 'The Damned Don't Cry', the first track in what was going to be an abbreviated set from Visage. Steve Strange was there all right, fronting up the band in his sequined suit and top hat, but it didn't FEEL like one of the New Romantic scenes legends was even present, never mind performing. He might have been suffering from illness prior to the performance, but with a performance this strained, it might just have been better to call the whole thing off and wait until Flag could sell some more tickets and Steve got some health back. Because this was forced. The whole set seemed like a contrived way of joining the 80s revival a few years too late.

Anyway, they pressed on, digging out 'The Anvil' and 'Visage', amongst others, and also unveiling a new track, admittedly not one that ever seemed likely to excite. They even managed to cock up the ending – Steve announcing 'two more songs', duly running through 'Night Train' and then walking off stage in a feeble attempt to pretend not to play 'Fade To Grey'. He soon returned to play the said song (as if he couldn't), with Sandrine have now left her keyboard to take another mic, at least making sure the song's distinctive French vocals were performed with authenticity.

And that was essentially it. Forty minutes of music and another 80s name to tick off the 'bands seen' list. Which is really the only purpose this comeback served. To be honest, I probably wouldn't have bothered had Girls Under Glass fell victim to the last minute cuts. As it was, they were the sole highlight of this largely disappointing event, which lacked any of the usual EBM/wave favourites, and seemed to further confirm that London isn't doing too well on the multi-band line-up concept right now.

## Nine Inch Nails – 31 Mar 2005

I can't seriously believe that it took me nine years to actually see this band live. I discovered NIN in 1996, shortly after their Downward Spiral era came to a close. It seemed like a long wait for 'The Fragile' in 1999, though the live show would elude me on this occasion, unable to secure tickets for the Brixton shows and then suffering the hugely annoying no-show at the Lost Weekend, and their subsequent disappearance from the live scene for nearly five years. Slow to pick up on the internet pre-sale, I queued fully five-and-a-half hours outside the Astoria on a freezing January night to secure myself a ticket. I had to prove myself to myself, did so, and this was to be my reward.

Anyway, this was the second of two 'intimate' pre-tour shows held at the Astoria, prior to their full tour in the Summer, incorporating another four London dates, this time at the Brixton Academy. Suffice to say that all these sold out pretty damn fast too – I myself securing two further tickets. It is at these shows that I fully intend to evaluate NIN as a live act in these post-industrial, post nu-metal, post-post-punk days. But tonight wasn't about that. It was about catharsis. Letting go. Scratching the biggest itch on my exhaustive 'bands not yet seen live' schedule. Simply put, after tonight, I could stop counting.

Further interest was provided by the identity of the support act. Checking down the list of previous NIN supports, Marilyn Manson and A Perfect Circle are now too famous in their own rights, Atari Teenage Riot are gone and the rest don't even register. Which may explain the presence of **The Dresden Dolls** tonight, as they are as un-NIN like as it is possible to get, taking the form of a female singer-songwriter on vocals and piano synth, a drummer and no-one else. No tedious angst-metal bands getting in the way tonight.

Technically, it was the stage equivalent of the pub sing-a-long, but the project still had a lot going for it, the vocals strong, the piano keys hammered with conviction, and the songwriting managing to be both quirky and hook-laden. Of all the songs on offer, the one about the coin-operated boy sticks in my mind the most, featuring a neat turn of phrase wound round a bizarre structure laden with false endings. The crowd's favourite seemed to be their cover of Black Sabbath's 'War Pigs', a fairly respectful interpretation given the instrumentation available. They were never going to upstage the headliners, but at least they provided a level of interest which a more standard rock band would have been unable to achieve.

But I was never likely to remember them all that much. Not when **Nine Inch Nails** are in town. I'd waited so long for this that I'd left nothing to chance, arriving at the venue early, going inside and obtaining position with time to spare. The members made their way on stage, with Trent Reznor playing keyboards centre stage. Despite indications that the new live set would concentrate on the new (yet to be released) album 'With Teeth', the collective opened up with 'The Frail', before Trent took his position up front for 'The Wretched'. That's when the crowd started to move. And I was caught up right in the middle of it all.

The early part of the set featured a couple of new songs – ‘You Know What You Are’ and ‘The Line Begins To Blur’, but otherwise the band were actually concentrating on old favourites. It’s too early to tell whether this material lives up to the exalted standards of the bands output to date, but the crowd seemed happy enough with it, regardless of any less positive commentary I’d heard elsewhere. The real mosh-pit action started during ‘March of The Pigs’, sandwiched between these two songs – it was after this that we got a tour deep into NIN’s backcatalogue. ‘Piggy’ and ‘Closer’ were two obvious inclusions, ‘Gave Up’ didn’t seem out of place, though the appearance of ‘Burn’ from the Natural Born Killers soundtrack was a real surprise.

‘Terrible Lie’ was the first of only two PHM contributions – I’m told that the guitar was distinctly out of tune for this song, but I was too busy fighting for survival to notice. I eventually had to take a break sometime around the end of ‘Suck’ and the start of ‘Even Deeper’, but threw myself deep into the the pit once more for ‘Wish’, explosive as ever. Backed onto this was Trent’s solo spot for the night, singing ‘Hurt’ on a lone keyboard up front. This was the only real opportunity I had to actually hear the rest of the audience sing along – and of course they all did. For me, it was the extremes highlighted by these two songs that proved to be the highlight of my long-awaited NIN live debut.

A third new track appeared after this (‘The Hand That Feeds’), before racing home with ‘Starfuckers Inc.’ and ‘Head Like A Hole’, which closed the set with one final wall of feedback, the band leaving stage, no question of an encore – job done. As previously stated, I’m still waiting for the Nails’ return in July to truly appreciate whether this show stands up to the theatrical extravagance of Rammstein, the industrial behemoth of Ministry or the tribal fury of Killing Joke. Maybe they’re past their best – NIN live veterans would later say so, but old rockers are usually cynical of comebacks, so I won’t read much into those comments yet.

For now, however, I can sleep safely knowing that the circuit is complete. From Jarre in 1997, through Fear Factory in 1998, Apop and VNV in 2000, Rammstein in 2001, more bands than I dare to mention from 2002 onwards, through to tonight, I have been gradually whittling down the list of bands I still wanted to see. I still have to capture a few big names – Tool and Depeche Mode spring to mind. But neither of these bands did for me what NIN did the first time I heard them. With this out of the way, I can return to being the observant, diligent reviewer I normally am. Or at least try to be.

## VNV Nation – Matter + Form Tour – 3 Apr 2005

With no UK shows scheduled at the time, any British-based scene aficionado wanting to experience the first leg of the ‘Formation Tour 2005’ was going to have to go a little further afield if they didn’t want to wait for a UK promoter to close a deal with Mr.Harris’ booking agents. So six of us duly set off in a Ford Galaxy, onto a cross channel ferry and then through France to Belgium. Despite delays and traffic jams, we made it to the town of Mechelen, presumably chosen due to it’s close proximity to Brussels and Antwerp. It wasn’t quite as easy as the shop hop over to Gent last year for Invitation (a festival which has now sadly died), but it was certainly do-able.

Anyway, despite delays, we arrived in time to see the vast majority of **Soman**’s set. Occupying as he does the increasingly rich middle ground between the hardest electro-industrial and pure power noise (at least in a live sense), Soman’s set was essentially a one-man rhythmic frenzy. The go-go dancers seen at last years M’era Luna were gone – this was all about Kolja Trelle and his keyboard and laptop. I made my first tentative dance moves, but chmaltzy e I just haven’t been able to derive much enjoyment

from such bands playing live of late – no matter what they're able to do with their portable set-ups, there's just not a lot to look at. The Soman live set was certainly more forceful than his studio recordings, but for me, it wasn't quite as dynamically engaging, either. Fortunately, the individual tracks were good, and I later picked up a copy of their not-really-released-yet up at the stalls.

Main support slot fell to **Diorama**. Torben Wendt, following a brief tour playing with his old buddies in Diary of Dreams, was back fronting his own project again. The two projects share a similar vocal style and (in places) overall feel, which made them something of a surprising choice as VNV's support act for the tour. Their combination of electro-goth with synth-poppy elements has always had an appeal to me. I'm not sure if I could rank this performance as an absolute classic – you couldn't hear the live guitar all that much. The new material sounded promising however (if not advancing on what has come before), and the airing of a couple of old favourites (finishing with 'Her Liquid Arms') rounded off the performance nicely.

But in the end, the only reason we'd come all the way to Belgium was to watch **VNV Nation**. This was to be my second experience of VNV in this country, and having witnessed the response they got last time, I was more than happy to drag myself out there to watch them again. There's been a few changes to the live set-up – the projections were still there, but there weren't any banners this time. Ronan and Mark were joined, however, by a couple of live keyboard players, the first time the project had gone beyond its traditional two-man line-up. But the real change was in the music. With the future-pop scene becoming more stagnant by the day, VNV had found themselves a whole new sound.

The first track was 'Chrome', released in download form only the previous month, and a good showcase for the new, hard-edged analogue VNV sound. There's something very retro about the sound, but it did still have a certain VNVness about it which many have tried to replicate, but few have succeeded. Following straight after this was 'Joy', a song I'd waited fully 4 ½ years to hear again at a VNV show, and sounding particularly good now that Ronan had decided to sing the lyrics rather than shouting them like he did last time. Already, the Belgian crowd were bouncing along happily, and the general feeling was that this was going to be a great night.

Despite the fact that 'Matter and Form' had not yet been released, there were no less than six new songs from this album played during the course of the evening, all barring 'Chrome' unknown to the vast majority of the audience. Our party was one exception, one of our number having been given a pre-released copy which was played to mixed reaction during the journey. Elements of early Project Pitchfork, acid techno and various forms of synth-pop were all in evidence – I'm eagerly awaiting getting my hands on my own copy so I can fully evaluate this new style.

There were plenty of old favourites, of course – 'Darkangel', 'Standing' and 'Legion' all appeared during the main set, as did 'Epicentre' and 'Honour 2003'. The delivery of the songs tonight was generally better than average, with more singing than shouting and a fairly good sound mix throughout, with only a couple of occasions when the vocals got lost in the huge wall of sound. The set finished on a new song called 'Perpetual', with the fact that an encore was coming not so much inevitable as downright obvious.

As usual, Ronan and co milked the crowd for all they were worth, with chants of 'VNV! VNV!' needed to draw them back out in front of the audience for more. Another new track preceded airings of 'Further' and 'Kingdom'. A second encore gave us all the chance to sing along to 'Beloved' once again (and the Belgian crowd ALWAYS sings along with this one), before finishing off as usual with 'Electronaut'. There was no 'Solitary', but then

again they let 'Joy' back into the set, so I guess it's a fair swap. After this it was finally over, and we duly filtered out ready for the long drag home.

But was it worth it? Of course it was! This was easily one of the best VNV shows I've been to so far, with a huge, extensive setlist and a crowd that truly appreciated what they did. Hopefully later this year VNV will indeed make it back to London (it's been almost 3 years since they were last here!) and remind everyone who isn't willing to travel these distances exactly why they became so popular in the first place. Here's hoping that there's still enough people willing to shell out for live shows rather than investing it all in Torrens St. Or going to one of those 'deathrock' shows.

## **Einstürzende Neubauten – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Show – 5 Apr 2005**

I might have seen this bunch last year, at this very venue in fact, but that show was enough to convince me that this collective is well worth experiencing live wherever and whenever the opportunity arises. Billed as a 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Performance, one could expect that it would be a 'Greatest Hits' set of sorts, and if there's one band good at hitting things, it is **Einstürzende Neubauten**. There was no support act this time, and so it was straight on with the show. Tonight's set was to consist of two one-hour performances with a break in between, followed by an extended encore, but more on that later.

Despite their esoteric style and eardrum-bashing intensity, the show began with a short talk from Blixa Bargeld, a pleasant, polite yet distinctly droll frontman, providing entertaining denials that his band once destroyed a London venue in their search for a secret government tunnel. Anyway, once all the meet and greet was out of the way, it was on with the music, starting off with a rendition of 'Yu-Gung' (aka 'Futter Mein Ego'), the looped phraseology and thunderous percussion made more significant following their innocuous entrance. This was the trigger for a haphazard journey across the Neubauten backcatalogue, material ranging from their early improvisational works right through to their more modern structured songs such as 'Youme & Meyou' and 'Dead Friends Around The Corner'.

It's only by watching Neubauten that you truly get to appreciate how ingenious bashing lots of old bits of metal and plastic can be. Merely hitting an old drainpipe doesn't really cut it – you need to tune them, amplify them appropriately, blow air down them and strike them at just the right moment. Then add some more conventional instruments and build the whole thing around Blixa Bargeld's vocals, a man who can alternate from a delicate spoken-word treatment to a screeching banshee with little if any warning. For me, the highlight was the drawn-out excesses of 'Redukt!', a masterly combination of alternating 'quiet' and 'loud' phases, and still not sounding a moment too long at ten minutes plus.

The second half of the show continued the back-to-back renditions of old and new songs. Once again, 'Sabrina' was a highlight, the most delicately intricate song in the Neubauten timeline. 'Perpetuum Mobile' is also starting to grow on me, having now established that the songs symbolic 'pile of rubbish on a turntable' was in fact combined with blasts of compressed air to become one of the key instruments that defined the songs whole sound. I also particularly enjoyed 'Selbstportrait Mit Kater' followed by 'Kalte Sterne', two songs from either end of the bands history, each bearing their own form of astronomical metaphor.

The second half ended with 'Ich Gehe Jetzt', the song they opened up with last time out. There was of course an encore, but rather than bash out a couple more old favourites, we were instead treated to a snippet from the forthcoming fan-club album. Actually, 'snippet' is



something on an understatement, as they proceeded to bash away for a further half-hour, performing an as-yet unreleased movement from what is intended to be a sought-after opus by all EN fans. In my opinion however, the performance of such a long, drawn-out piece stank of self-indulgence. Whilst I can tolerate 10-12 minute long percussive outings (either structured or improvised), this tail piece was just too much after two hours of such excess.

So it doesn't look like I'll be bidding too much on Ebay for this particular recording, though this performance has at least rekindled my interest in my Einstürzende backcatalogue. Indications are that this'll be the last Neubauten show in London for quite some time, so that alone made it worth seeing. Twenty-five years is a good lifespan for any band, and whilst it wasn't quite as memorable as the Killing Joke quarter-century celebrations last February, it was in it's own way quite interesting. These boys do like to indulge themselves on occasion, hence my waning interest towards the end, but they're still a band you need to see live in order to truly appreciate what they do.

## Dead Can Dance – 7 Apr 2005

It's odd how bands I 'never really expected to see' seem to keep on appearing at the Forum. First Neubauten, then Skinny Puppy and now **Dead Can Dance**. The Australian duo of Lisa Gerrard and Brendan Perry had split back in 1996, long before I was even aware of their existence (yeah, I'm kinda young for a know-it-all-critic). They'd already played one show at The Barbican the night before (pretty highbrow stuff, this), though virtually everyone I knew ended up here instead. For once, I was seated on the balcony rather than standing on the main floor, but fortunately, this is exactly the kind of band you can enjoyed seated, a drink in one hand and your beloved in the other. So with quenched first and one hand suspiciously empty, I set about watching the big comeback of Dead Can Dance.

First let me describe the stage set. Lisa Gerrard, wearing a grandiose yellow gown, took centre stage with her dulcimer. A whole array of percussion was set up on one side, whilst Brendan occupied the other with a selection of guitars and a hurdy-gurdy for good measure, with another guitarist/percussionist over by the drums. Two keyboard players occupied the rear, providing whatever remaining sounds that could not be otherwise be performed live. Given the huge range of influences that Dead Can Dance profess (European folk, Middle Eastern, Asian and even further afield), it's hardly surprising that some were given a pre-sampled treatment – I know some European acts that would think otherwise, but with seven people on stage, this was never going to be anything other than a very 'live' performance.

The performance itself took two hours, trying it's level best to encompass as many of Dead Can Dance's many influences as possible. The appearance of 'The Ubiquitos Mr Lovegrove' reminded everyone that even bands as artsy as this are allowed the occasion hit, with this performance probably making a number of the elder goths present rather nostalgic. The liveliest moment, however, was the performance of 'Salta Rello', a rollicking medieval number that reminded us all that folk music can be fun as well as educational. The other highlights were Lisa's solo slot, either accompanied by keyboards or done a capella. There was a bit too much chattering and 'ssshhh'ing in the audience, but the effect was not lost, particularly with 'The Wind That Shakes The Barley'.

But at the end of the day, this was no occasion to go track spotting. Dead Can Dance aren't a band that write huge anthems for club play or classic songs to sing in the shower. Instead, this was a high-brow comeback from one of 4AD's biggest names. The standing

ovation offered at the end of the set and the encores that followed was indication enough that a legendary act was present. Yes, they can be seen as being quite pretentious, and I've heard 'traditional' music given a much livelier transformation out on the Continent. But this site is about celebrating bands for what they are rather than complaining about what they're not. And Dead Can Dance are very good at what they do. A new album is mooted, and this, it's a comeback that generates genuine interest.

## Seabound, Pride & Fall + Seize – 9 Apr 2005

It's been a while since any of the 'bleep' contingent have visited London. There's been very little from the European darkwave/future pop sector since last year's Black Celebration. With the lack of any VNV Nation gigs to attend (Ronan! Mark! Get your arses over here NOW!), we had to make do with Seabound plus Pride & Fall. Even these two arrived a year late, having undertaken the 'Beyond Flatline' tour back in 2004. Despite claims on the flier, both bands had played the UK before, even if neither gig was in London. That said, we at least still got the free split CD, with two exclusive tracks by each band, included with the ticket price, which was nice.

However, the evening entertainment began with a short set from **Seize**, a band I have seen a number of times now, and they seem to improve each time I see them. They describe themselves as 'breakbeat electronica', which is certainly accurate as far as their (largely impressive) album 'The Other Side of Your Mind' goes. Tonight, however, they concentrated on their trancier, more commercial side. They might have opened with 'The Other Side', but from there on in, the bulk of the set avoided the complex breakbeats in favour of big kick drums and huge choruses. They unveiled a new song which sounded relatively promising (if not indicative of any major change in direction), though it was the anthemic, Delerium-like set closer 'Unbreakable' that made the real impact.

**Pride & Fall** were the first of the European bands to take to the stage, starting with 'Construct' before taking us through a set comprised of the vocal tracks from 'Nephesh' as well as three new songs. The vocals were a bit muddy to start with, and despite some improvements, their singer still lacks the utmost confidence that makes a great future pop frontman. That said, the songs themselves still surprisingly stand up quite well against the competition, particularly 'December', which has in recent times gradually crept its way onto club setlists and is on the verge of becoming a dead-cert floorfiller. The new material was quite interesting, making more use of the live guitarist than any of the Nephesh tracks – I really do hope they incorporate the six-string parts onto their future studio recordings, as it's probably their best hope of achieving real progression.

And so then to **Seabound**, playing their first ever show in London. I'd seen them play twice before, once at M'era Luna 2002 and again at InFest 2003. They've tweaked the stage show since then, adding a live drummer and a pretty green laser. This didn't affect the songs all that much, the set divided more-or-less equally between 'No Sleep Demon' and 'Beyond Flatline'. Personally, I've always been a bit ambivalent towards Seabound – they have some good songs and often give them an interesting twist come production time, but I still find a fair bit of their material quite tedious and pedestrian. Tonight's set showcased both sides of the Seabound coin.

On the plus side, 'Contact' made for a strong, electrifying opener, whilst 'Hooked' inevitably got the best response, even if the reworked version they played was not as good as the original. Also noteworthy was the energetic 'Go International', 'Transformer' and the ballad 'Watching Over You'. Letting them down were a number of weak, indifferent songs – 'Digital' proving to be especially turgid on this occasion. Their first single 'Travelling' is

also starting to sound a little tired four years on. Two encores were called for and got, though I believe they were pre-scheduled as the audience reaction, whilst generally positive, wasn't exactly ecstatic. They eventually ended with 'Poisonous Friend', a song I'd normally enjoy but I was already tiring of Seabound by the time they played it.

It was a mixed night, therefore, but the assembled crowd seemed to enjoy it. The Garage was certainly busy, if not packed to the gills, and on a personal level, it was good to see a number of friends who I hadn't seen since the last EBMwave gathering many months previously. Pride & Fall probably emerged the stronger of the two bands, clearly winning over a few fans in the process, though both acts seemed to enjoy their London debuts. It's a pity none of the scenes 'big hitters' seem to want to follow in their footsteps, as at time of writing, none of the real 'name bands' seem to have any shows scheduled round these parts. So we'll have to make do with this.

## Death In June with Patrick Leagas – 24 Apr 2005

Death In June concert are always worth attending – they have this certain feeling of being 'special occasions', even though they're practically a yearly event in London. This one was of particular interest due to the return of Patrick Leagas to the band's line-up for one night only, to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of 'Nada' album, one of the most loved and most diverse discs in the bands' sizeable backcatalogue. Patrick's own work as Sixth Comm had, despite some promising concepts, proved only to be a footnote to this story, whilst Death In June's development since then is a story long enough to be left until later.

But before any of this, we had a performance from **Naevus**, a band whose name I'd seen in print a few times but had not to date heard. The first song caught my attention, with both electric and acoustic guitars, bass plus some really militant drumming from John Murphy. Unfortunately, the rest of their set was altogether more sedate, with the drumming either toned down or absent from each subsequent song. This made the Naevus sound rather turgid after a while, none of the songs on offer really sparking the imagination. There were a few moments where I was reminded of Death In June's very first album ('The Guilty Have No Pride') and one song made a reasonable job of creating a Swans-like wall of guitar noise. But for the most part, Naevus failed to really make an impression.

Anyway, we were all really here for **Death In June**, playing a full set with Patrick Leagas for the first time in many years, though those who were lucky enough to be there will remember Patrick cameoing with 'The Calling' during that memorable night on the HMS President on a rainy November night in 2003. That night, the set was entirely acoustic. This time, we saw a collection of drums, handheld percussion, Doug's acoustic guitar plus (unusually) a Powerbook and keyboard, obviously brought in due to 'Nada's status as one of Death In June's more electronic albums. This also meant tonight's set was dominated by very old songs, as the collective kept to the songs that both Patrick and Doug had worked on many years ago.

There were no antics with sniper veils or white masks this time, so the trio dutifully got down to what must be a very rare rendition of 'The Honour of Silence'. Only it was clear that Patrick was nervous, looking uncertain as to whether to sing, bang the drum or play the keyboard. This tension lasted a few song, but he eventually got into the swing of things. When the collective gelled, the resultant sound was really quite impressive – 'The Torture Garden' went down particularly well with the backing electronics, while the percussive fury of 'Till The Living Flesh is Burned' bore extra brunt tonight thanks to the additional member.

'She Said Destroy' sounded as good as ever, but the highlight for me was the airing of the 'The Calling' at the end of their set – one very rarely gets a dance beat at a Death In June show these days, but to get an airing of one of the few Death In June songs that's made much of a mark on the UK scene beyond the neo-folk collective made attendance worthwhile. There were two encores – the first including the 'new' version of 'C'est Une Reve', complete with the 'Ou-est Bin Laden' soundbite. The second encore featured Douglas P and John Murphy only, playing three further songs (including 'Leopard Flowers' but none of their more recent favourites), before the show came to a close.

I have to admit that I felt a bit short-changed at this point – I was under the understanding that Death In June would play 'A Selection of Tracks' after the Patrick Leaglas re-union, and I sort of assumed that we'd get more than three. But never mind, the show served its key purpose – the re-union of two of neo-folks key names, and the live tribute to what was a classic album. I do wish they'd stop playing in Slimelight, though – nice as it is to get free entry to the club (not that I stayed for more than ten minutes), it's pretty weak as a live venue. Unless of course, it's because none of the other venues around London will take them.

## Wave-Gotik Treffen 2005 – 13-16 May 2005

### Day 1

Well, it took a few years, but I finally made it. I'd been to M'era Luna, InFest, Whitby, Invitation, all the London fests. I'd journey off to Belgium to watch VNV Nation, too. But I hadn't made it to the Big One. The biggest gothic festival in the world occurs each year in Leipzig. This was in fact the 14<sup>th</sup> such event to be held there – it nearly died in 2000 when someone ran off with all the money, but a more professional management came in to save it, and it continues to go to strength to strength. I don't have exact figures, but I understand around 20,000 people attend the event. There is a campsite for those so inclined, though as the festival is set over an entire city, we like many others opted for the comfort of a 4-star hotel.

WGT (as it'll now be referred to) consists of a variety of events taking place across the city in various venues. Given that there can be several events going on at once, and that there are a few miles separating the various locations, there is no way for one person to even get close to reviewing everything, even with free travel on the city's tram network included as part of the ticket price. I therefore decided to prioritize bands which I like but had never seen live. This meant a number of favourites got left by the wayside – including Girls Under Glass, Das Ich and Diary of Dreams, all of whom I'd pay to see in their own right, but sacrifices had to be made.

Friday was spent at the Agra Halle – a complex of very large arenas, and the focal point of the WGT. After checking out the HUGE market in Agra 1, I ventured into the Agra 2 (the biggest of all the WGT stages, and the one at which I spent the most time) to watch the opening bands on Friday. First up were **Siddharta**, a rock band who currently seem to be the Buzz Aldrin of Slovenian music (the 2<sup>nd</sup> most famous band from the country after Laibach, apparently). They played a hard, forceful form of gothic metal, not totally unlike Paradise Lost in places, but with a degree more grandeur. It otherwise didn't have any real distinctive points, but they've written some decent songs and made for a good way to kick off the weekend's live action.

Next up was a costume and dance show, an interesting moment of entertainment prior to the **Astrovamps** hitting the stage. I had absolutely no idea who they guys were, and frankly I wish I never found out. They're a shock-metal band from Hollywood, all fancy

make up, loud guitars and shouty vocals. They've clear got ambitions of being the next Marilyn Manson or something. Unfortunately for them, they seem to have forgotten that whilst Marilyn Manson might LOOK like a made-up clown, there is at least method in his madness – he has actually managed to write a few good songs over the years, something which his bunch have clearly failed to do. Fortunately, this was probably the low-point of the weekend as far as bands went.

A contact juggling and fire poi show took us through to **Apoptygma Berzerk**, or rather a lengthy technical delay whilst they tried to get their electronics to work. It was nearly an hour late that we finally heard the opening bars of 'Non-Stop Violence' as our Norwegian friends hit the stage. With no album for three years, this was only ever going to be a 'Greatest Hits' performance, with most of the old favourites delivered one after the other ('Unicorn', 'Eclipse', 'Starsign', 'Love Never Dies', 'Bitch', etc). There WERE two new tracks, though one of these was a weak Cure cover (never been a band easy to cover). The other was a new Apop song, less dancey and more rock-oriented than previous works. It's early days, but this could yet be an interesting new direction for the band, even if the song didn't strike me as anything incredible.

Tonight's headliner act were **Die Krupps**, celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (big year for silver jubilees, this). As a band who'd worked in a number of styles but had generally settled for a guitar-heavy EBM sound (or 'Coldwave', if you like), the potential was there to offer a decent live show with a mix of hard, danceable rhythms and plenty of live instrumentation. Which is pretty much what they did. Jurgen Engler occasionally left the mic to bash away at some metal piping (not up to Neubauten standards, but still a welcome tribute to their past), whilst the remainder of the five-piece line-up bashed away for the duration of their set. Highlights of the evening for me were a good rendition of 'Isolation' and the appearance of 'Bloodsuckers' in the encore. 'Machineries of Joy' also worked quite well considering the lack of Doug McCarthy to do the English vocal parts. It was past 2am by the time they'd finished – having been on my feet since early evening, I elected to abandon any ideas of clubbing and head straight for bed.

## Day 2

Saturday dawned gloomy and soon became wet. Very wet. Sods law at work, really, as this was the day I was planning to spend at the Parkbuhne, the only 'formal' outdoor venue at WGT (some bands perform spontaneous shows around town, however). I was greeted by a Czech band going by the name of **Silent Stream of Godless Elegy**. It was a cumbersome name, but the music at least was strong, a seven-piece folk-rock outfit. They went for the dual male-female vocal line-up, sounding not unlike Tristania at times, though the addition of live cello and violin gave their sound a touch of Eastern European flavour which helped make them memorable. They spent their set promoting their new album 'Relic Dances', though still found time for a reasonable Dead Can Dance cover at the end.

Next up were **And Also The Trees**, one of the few British acts appearing at the festival, and also one of the few survivors of the late 70s/early 80s post-punk scene. I had no idea quite what to expect from a band with a name as equally curious as the last band, but found the results quite interesting. What I heard was a melancholy form of art-rock, possibly candidates for inclusion in my newly-created 'post-post-punk' genre. The singer, dressed in the style of a 19<sup>th</sup> century gentleman, was giving a particularly dramatic performance, though the key point of interest of me was their guitar sound, their axeman extracting a number of rattling and echoing tones from the six strings at his disposal. The songs, whilst often poetic, didn't always strike a chord with me, but their performance was polished, professional and very slightly quirky, and generally worth staying out in the rain for,

I was really waiting for **ASP** to appear, having missed their sets a number of times in the past. And sure enough, they proved to be one of the highlights of the weekend. Combining elements of darkwave and riff-heavy gothic rock, ASP's songs have the potential to appeal to a wide cross-section of the WGT audience. Whilst they've just released a new (not yet heard) album, the set still offered up all the favourites ('Sing Child', 'Ich Will Brennen'), whilst the walls of flame and smoke were very welcome in the cold, wet Parkbühne. Simply put, ASP had it all – even if their singer is not the best, the explosive music and stage show more than compensate. With their set done, however, and the rain showing no signs of letting up, I elected to skip Mortiis, Das Ich and Zeraphine in favour of a tram back down to the Agra Halle.

Another look round the market took me through to **Zeromancer's** set – another band that had eluded me to date, and, as it happens, another band who really do make a difference live. Their sound may be a lowest-common denominator form of electro-metal, but this doesn't matter as long as the songs are good and the performance committed, two things Zeromancer have no trouble with at all. The back projections added an extra dimension to the show, getting everyone to sing 'K-Lone Your Lover' (that's how they spell it), and really adding a new level of black humour to 'Doctor Online'. But at the end of the day, Zeromancer are just plain good at what they do, and they aren't afraid to drag a crowd of thousands along for the ride.

With the rain still falling outside, I decided against both my originally planned excursions to watch either Estampie or Sol Invictus, instead staying in the Agra to watch **Spetsnaz**. And it was here that I started to get confused – how come a band so new, with just one album to their name, gets a slot this high up the bill on a stage this size. It turns out that they have actually vaulted themselves to 'big band' status here in Germany, thanks in no small part to sounding like Nitzer Ebb. Exactly like Nitzer Ebb. So much like them, in fact, that anyone with enough Pils (or pills) inside them would be hard pressed to tell them from the real McCoy (or rather real McCarthy). I can however, got bored rather quickly and just waited for the next band.

Namely **Hocico**. I'd decided some hours ago that this duo would be as far as I was going tonight – Visage were headlining and having seen them at Elektrowerkz in March, all I can say was that once was quite enough. Hocico, meanwhile, still had some appeal. Purveyors of the brutally harsh and fast school of EBM which we've christened 'Remache Musica' (and also 'Mexicore' and 'Latindustrial'), it was at least possible to dance to Erk and Racso's set, even if you don't learn anything new if you're familiar with the albums already. My legs were tiring by now however, so I took in the bulk of their set from the back, electing to leave in the later stages, having had my fill of live action for the night.

### Day 3

Day three was to be spent mainly at Haus Auensee, a distant venue outside of the city centre, but well worth the trip at least once during the weekend, even if it's a fair walk from even the nearest tram stop. It was synth-pop day, with **Legacy of Music** kicking off proceedings. My memories of this band were quite vague even by the time we'd reached the halfway point of today's schedule, never mind days later writing the review back in England. All I can remember is that the singer couldn't really sing. And didn't even try to hide the fact. All Legacy of Music did for me was to compete with Astrovamps as the worst act of the weekend.

Fortunately, things got substantially better once **Fictional** came on stage. I'm a pretty big fan of this particular Funker Vogt side-project, and I knew their live performances were quite rare, so I wasn't about to miss this. Gerrit Thomas was playing the keyboards at the

back, but all the attention was focused on Jason Bainbridge, the Scottish singer who'd joined the project for their second album, which dominated the set this afternoon. I actually preferred the debut, but I still really got into this, except for the bit where Jason decided it was a good idea to get his arse out. Thankfully, he redeemed himself soon after by bringing Tim Fockenbrock on stage to duet on 'Blue Lights', a personal favourite and a song I'm amazed never became a club hit alongside the likes of 'Techno Man' and 'Dead Stars'.

Next up were FAQ, a Swiss band formerly known as **Carpe Diem**, perhaps notable as the first band from the European scene that I ever saw when they supported Apop many moons ago. I wasn't too impressed with them back then, but thankfully the project seems to have woken up during the name-change. The assembled threesome (lacking violinist Mary) worked through a set largely drawn from their new album 'Is Pornography Art?', making especially good use of the live guitar on the snarling electro-rock of 'We Come In Pieces' and the more expansive 'Learning 2 Fly'. Even if some of the other songs were more straightforward synth-pop, I still snapped up the new album without a second thought.

**Ravenous** were the fourth band of the day, and the second Funker Vogt side project. I'd actually assumed quite some time ago that this project was dead and buried, replaced by Fictional come the turn of the century, but, no, they're still going, at least as a live act. Suffice to say that like Fictional, they've got a decent singer and some good songs for him to sing. At the same time, however, you can tell the similarity between these two projects, and the link to Funker Vogt is pretty obvious, too. One wonders if Gerrit Thomas is a one-trick pony, as he's pretty much exhausted the catchy EBM direction now.

Time then for the first of three North American acts in the form of **I Synthesist**, the only band other than Legacy of Music that was totally new to me. My initial thoughts were that they were a rather static synth-pop act, not offering anything that got the pulses racing in any way, shape or form. As their set progressed, however, their sound loosened up a bit and I gradually began to warm to them. To be honest, in a weekend full of new discoveries, I Synthesist aren't exactly going to be top of the list when it comes to buying their CDs, but there was some clever programming and interesting textures in the mix, and the backdrop was at least colourful, so there were merits, technically at least. The project just needs a bit more 'sparkle'.

**Iris** were the next of the Trans-Atlantic collective to make the journey to Leipzig and the Haus Auensee stage. The singer (Reagan Jones) had to approach the stage in crutches, but fortunately there was nothing wrong with his voice – in fact, he was probably the best actual singer in the Auensee today. Unlike I Synthesist, there was nothing esoteric or 'complex' about Iris – they're a shameless American melodic synth-pop band. I still find a few of their songs a little bit vacuous, but 'Annie, Would I Lie To You' is still an exercise in how to write a real pop song, which is essentially the appeal of Iris – when they write good songs, the music compliments it nicely – if the song doesn't work, however, there's nothing there to save it.

And so then to **Psyche**, the long-running project of Canadian musician and songwriter Darrin Huss (though I gather he spends most of his time in Germany these days). As the only band I'd see at WGT that I'd seen earlier in the year, Psyche weren't exactly at the top of my must-listen list, but I still always enjoy watching him perform. And Darrin didn't take the easy route out, either, skipping his biggest club hit of recent times 'Sanctuary' in preference to material from his recent album 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Album', much of it darker in tone than his earlier works. Some early songs did also make an appearance, the highlight on this occasion being his rendition of 'Goodbye Horses', appreciated by virtually all present as a particularly inspired cover version that avoids the obvious.

The Haus Aunsee festivities ended today with **Melotron**, the German-language synth-pop/diet EBM act who know how to mix good songs, dancey rhythms and little melodic touches into something worthy of a festival headline slot. This would also be my first experience of a full-length Melotron set, having previously only seen them perform a few songs at M'era Luna 2003 before running off to watch Killing Joke. And it was fun! By the time they were three songs into their set, most of our now-reunited posse were happily dancing around, singing along when we knew the German lyrics and just having a little dance when we didn't. They brought a female vocalist on for a couple of songs, but really this was Andy Kreuger and his mates rounding off a day of bouncy music in a light-hearted way as possible.

One commitment still remained, however – get into a cab and zoom right across town to the Agra to watch **The Human League**. I can't be only one to express a degree of surprise that a band this retro appeared on the WGT billing, but unlike last night's disastrous Visage set (I wasn't there, but EVERYONE was telling me how bad they were), The Human League were really quite good. Very good, in fact. Screw this, they were completely and totally brilliant! Phil Oakey can still sing as well as he could all those years back, and Susanne Sulley and Joanne Catherall still looked like the pop stars they once were, getting into the gothic spirit of things with a couple of pretty black dresses.

Opening up with 'Seconds', the 'League took us on a journey right through their extensive history, occasionally paying tribute to their newer material (such as 'All I Ever Wanted'), but generally concentrating on their biggest hits, playing plenty of material from 'Dare'. The appearance of 'Human' and 'Heart Like A Wheel' reminded us that even their weaker creative phase produced a few decent songs, whilst 'Empire State Human' and 'Being Boiled' paid tribute to bands early years. There was one brief moment where Phil's mic failed, but it didn't dampen things a bit. By the time they got to 'Don't You Want Me', thousands of us were singing our lungs out, including me! They eventually finished on 'Together In Electric Dreams', mission very much accomplished. Someone out there was obviously aware that Goths like Synth-Pop.

## Day 4

The final day of WGT was to be spent once more at the Agra, where it was medieval day. Out of all the days at WGT, today was where the most new discoveries were to be made, having chosen to skip the likes of Accessory and NeuroticFish in the hope of discovering something new. And those discoveries began with **Omnia**, a pagan folk act. Like other Paganic bands that I have seen, they clearly take the underlying message of their music very seriously, yet at the same time are fully aware that there's no point performing live unless you really do enjoy yourselves. Playing flutes, harps, drums and guitar, the collective entertained even those (including me) who didn't really understand what it all meant. I just felt the spirit of a time long past resurrected on stage, and for that I am grateful.

The next band on in the Agra was **Regicide**, a gothic metal band with male-female vocalists, live keys and violin in addition to all the usual rock instrumentation. Obvious comparisons to Within Temptation, Tristania and Lacuna Coil, though Regicide were at least distinctive with their strong keyboard playing and sense of grandeur. The live violin got a little bit lost in the mix, however, which didn't help matters, as Regicide are playing an increasingly ubiquitous style of music and still need to do that little bit extra to truly impress me, though I may yet choose to check them out further if I get a chance.

I decided to skip the next band in favour of another walk round the market, though I returned to see **Potentia Animi**, a collection of monks in black robes, about to give



ceremony. It quickly became clear that there weren't taking themselves too seriously, taking any opportunity to misbehave like naughty schoolboys, a stark contrast to their performance, chanting Latin verse with a surprising degree of unity, whilst playing a variety of traditional instruments, including a lute that sounding at times like it was attached to a guitar amp. This was a light-hearted take on a style of music so often associate with dour piety, a welcome approach to someone such as myself, who enjoys religious music with believing in it's ultimate message.

The first band of the day that I had prior experience of was **Fiddler's Green**, that crazy bunch of Germans who'd decided to abandon their own indigenous folk sound in favour of the Irish variant. Arriving on stage and delivering their rocked-up take on 'Follow Me Up To Carlow', Fiddlers Green soon had the crowd bouncing around happily. And whilst it was fun for a while, I soon began to find the novelty of a bunch of Germans sounding Irish wearing off. At least they were more interesting than **Down Below**, a rather dull metal band whose show I left after two songs in favour of a quiet dinner outside, before returning for **Faun**, a band I'd heard nothing about prior to arriving at WGT, but had since heard praises sung for them from a number of festival veterans.

And oddly enough, I actually realised what all the fuss was about pretty much from the outset. There's an increasing number of medieval bands willing to modernise their sound with a few guitars or a modern rock drumkit, but only a few that incorporate electronic beats, and these are usually masterminded by Ernst Horn (who's production style is definitely an acquired taste). Faun is the exception – mantra-like vocals, perpetually looped electro-beats and plenty of medieval flavour with the selection of lutes, pipes, hurdy-gurdy and miscellanea on offer. The two girls providing the vocals were synced perfectly (even when they were just soundchecking!), whilst the other three members managed to eke enough sonic variety out of their instrument collection to keep things interesting. Now, if only I'd had enough Euros left to buy some of their CDs.....

With the festival now simultaneously winding down and building up to a climax, I now needed to hear I band I was familiar with to keep the energy levels up. Enter **Tanzwut**, one of the most outrageous bagpipe-rocker collectives on the scene. I remember Uncle Nemesis once said of this band 'They play their bagpipes as if they were rocket launchers', which is fairly close to the mark. Fortunately, I enjoy overblown medieval metal greatly, and quickly got into the spirit of things, waving hands with thousands of others and singing along very loudly to 'Lügner' (the Tanzwut song I actually know all the words to). I still wish they'd play 'Gotterfunken' again one day, but I was satisfied with the show as it stood, nonetheless.

WGT 2005 in the Agra ended with **Subway to Sally**, regulars at almost every German festival and barely registering anywhere else. Mind you, with a fanbase as big as this, who needs the rest of the world? The Agra was packed out by the time they made it on stage, with such novelties as a huge flashing logo and a multi-necked guitar spicing up their stage show. Despite their presence on this particular stage, Subway to Sally are only a mediievally-influenced band (and on their recent material not even that) rather than an out-and-out mittelalter outfit, instead coming over on stage as a forceful German rock band. Flamethrowers and pyro both made an appearance during their set, though with energy levels flagging, I elected to only stay for 40 minutes before heading back to the town centre and waiting for M'era Luna, where StS are already confirmed (and likely to play a high-profile slot).

All that remained was to drop off my stuff at the hotel and return to the Mortizbastei for DJ Steve Weeks' 9-hour set, with a packed dancefloor, cheap beer and a selection of scene favourites (plus a few surprises) seeing the weekend out with a bang. We returned to our

hotel just in time to eat breakfast, sleep off the nights excesses and finally return to England late on Tuesday. Back to scene politics, a lack of synchronicity between 'bands big in clubs' and 'bands that play live' and local acts that shoot you down via LiveJournal flamewars if you say something about them you don't like. Even if the UK scene is much smaller than its German equivalent, putting WGT-scale events out of scope, this event was an eye-opener in how to do a festival properly. It's clear that good intentions and enthusiasm just aren't enough – WGT learned that lesson back in 2000 (I wasn't there but I've heard all the stories) and learned it well.

Maybe Whitby could start catering for all its attendees music-wise rather than putting line-ups that seem to be attracting less and less interest from those around me as each year passes, and then relying on people dragging their mates along to achieve a sell-out. And maybe InFest can find a city that doesn't leave you afraid to leave the festival site alone at night (even if it does cost a few quid more to host, as it's pretty cheap considering the usually strong lineup). And maybe somehow we can get some better events going in London. Because more and more people are getting the message, saving their pennies and travelling over to mainland Europe for the festivals there. The UK scene needs to learn from the experts, and fast!

## Gotham 2005 – 28 May 2005

Well, it's time once more for the once-yearly London goth festival, the only major 'gothic' event run by Flag Promotions during the year. Clan of Xymox were headlining for the third time in six years, whilst The Crüxshadows were making their yearly appearance in the capital as main support. The billing remained constant throughout the promotional period, barring the absence of Demeter on the big day. More significant was the move to the Islington Academy from Koko, a newly-refurbished venue that some of us are starting to doubt we'll ever get to see. Anyway, the bill was still looking relatively strong by the standards of recent years, so I once again turned up early to check it out.

On stage first were Swedish goth-rockers **Mists of Avalon**. It was a generic gothic name for a generic gothic band, for sure, but at least the songs were good and the musicianship competent. Their were a couple of flaws in the sound mix, with one song that was ALL bass and no twiddly bits, but by opening band at Islington Academy standards, at least most the knobs seemed to be in the right place for a change. I doubt I'll be checking out their albums (I prefer something more modern in sound), but if you're looking for a replacement for your worn-out old Nephilim albums, this bunch might well be worth checking out.

Next on were **Venus Fly Trap**, a long-running gothic rock project that never seemed to be able to pick themselves very far off the bottom of the billing wherever they play. They've been circulating as a two piece (vocalist and guitarist) line up for a while now, and frankly seem rather lost. The singer seemed to have no idea how to fill up the big empty stage, looking more like a used-car salesman trying to look sexy at karaoke night down the local, whilst the guitarist just stood there and played along with the backing track. This wouldn't have been so bad as the songs been any good, but I found the vocals flat and uninspired and the programmed backing static and unadventurous. Eventually I gave up and went upstairs.

Thankfully, all was good once more once the **Scary Bitches** came on stage. No question of any lack of stage presence here – outrageous costumes, a totally camp lead singer and all sorts of silly songs about Lesbian Vampires from Outer Space and the like. Their music was a fairly simple but catchy form of electronic rock, supporting the songs nicely. A saxophone made an appearance at one point, giving the song in question an added

degree of sexiness (though the lyrics themselves were utterly perverted), though they saved their best until last – an ‘everyone sing along’ rendition of ‘You’ll end up looking like the Scary Bitches’. I think that’s what you call a ‘Cautionary Tale’!

Hovering somewhere around the middle of the bill were **Attrition**. Now, I’m fully aware of their cult status in the scene. They were signed to Projekt for a while, have a string of albums to their name and a number of their songs are really quite clever. What they can’t seem to get right is the stage show. The knob-twiddling keyboard wizard was producing some promising sounds early on, the female vocalist was more in sync with goings on that the last couple of times I’ve seen them, but Martin Bowes, male vocalist and project founder, was lost, twisting, turning, crouching and mumbling into his mic like he really didn’t want to be doing this. I have no idea if this was the whole idea, but whatever the story behind his performance is, I simply don’t get it.

One band that certainly isn’t lost is **The Ghost of Lemora**. They’ve released their first album (must pick it up sometime), and have managed to get enough of a following to earn themselves a billing ahead of the long-established Attrition. Whether they’d do the same thing outside of London remains to be seen, but here they were playing to the hard core of their fanbase and did not disappoint. As goth rockers go, this bunch are firmly tongue-in-cheek, a good degree more musical integrity than the Scary Bitches, but always seeming to enjoy themselves on stage and tonight was no exception. Whilst Attrition lost it trying to be too clever, the Lemorran quartet just got on the job of knocking out some decent gothic rock numbers, not hugely original, but more than compensating for that in the delivery.

And then to the highlight of today’s proceedings – **The Crüxshadows**. They seem to play London once a year now, each time drawing a bigger crowd. The stage show has improved still further, with larger backdrops, better synchronization of the dancers and Rogue getting even more adventurous in delivering his set from every corner of the venue, standing on the bar during ‘Tears’ and even making it up to the top of the lighting gantry at one point. He got a communal sing-along going for ‘Eurydice’ and by the time we got to the closing duo of ‘Marilyn’ and ‘Winter Born’, we were all singing along anyway. An encore was called for an got, Rogue treating us to an a capella moment whilst the laptop was rebooted! Even if their take on electro-goth isn’t advance as some when it comes to the album recordings, their live show easily trounces the competition.

Namely, **Clan of Xymox**. Playing their first London show in three years, this was a ‘Greatest Hits’ set not unlike the one I saw at Invitation last year. There, songs from their more electronic album ‘Farewell’ and grand scale of the venue sparked up the live set nicely. Here, the same songs sounded insipid and uninspired. There were few lighting effects, no smoke machine (a Xymox stalwart!) and no e-drummer. With these, the static nature of Ronny Mooring and his bandmates suddenly became VERY apparent. They worked though a set containing ‘A Day’, ‘Jasmine and Rose’, ‘There’s No Tomorrow’ and ended on ‘Farewell’, but it never seemed like anything more than a going through the motions set from a bunch of worn-out old goths.

It was an anti-climatic end to a very mixed day, but I’m still glad I went as the good certainly outweighed the bad, and with plenty of friends present, it was easy enough to get some respite from the strains of CoX, Attrition or Venus Fly Trap. It’s still a bit sad that it’s billed as London’s premier goth festival. Given that the likes of The Mission, Alien Sex Fiend and All About Eve can still draw sizeable crowds, I still think it’s possible to get a bit more ambitious with the scale of such an event. It might take well-heeled promoter to achieve that aim, but lets be honest here – goth is far from dead. It’s just some of it’s practioners aren’t far off....

## Nine Inch Nails – With Teeth Tour (Brixton Show 1) – 4 Jul 2005

Having finally seen NIN in March, having waited nine years to do so, it was with rather less excitement that I advanced upon the Brixton Academy this evening. Nothing is ever quite the same second-time round, whilst the new album 'With Teeth', released in June, failed to have quite the same impact on me as *The Fragile*, *The Downward Spiral*, *Broken* and *Pretty Hate Machine*. But one does not miss a chance to see a band that has had such a profound impact on one's self-development (for better or worse), and with an increasingly large ground of friends assembling outside Brixton tube, I advanced upon the Academy with increasing enthusiasm.

There was of course the issue of the support act, with **Saul Williams** doing the honours for the UK dates. Initial signs were not good – a rapper plus a DJ is not the kind of line-up that sets my pulses racing, and the hip-hop rhythms that reverberated round the already-crowded Brixton Academy sounded alien to the stompy industrial-head that I apparently am. On closer observation, however, it was clear that Saul still had quite a lot going for him. His wordplay was often inventive, his delivery often more performance poet than hip-hop 'attitude', and the backing track indicative of a certain attention to detail that must have impressed Mr. Reznor. I doubt I personally will become a fan, but doubtlessly many of those in attendance would have been won over by his performance.

But really, I was just here to see **Nine Inch Nails**. The front rows of the Brixton Academy were getting very crowded by now, and speculation was now being cast on the issue of what song they were planning to open with. Given the residual tension, one might have hoped for a gentle lead-in, maybe with 'All The Love In The World' or possibly 'The Frail'. As the lights went down and the band came into view however, the intro tape could be heard over the roars of the crowd, and it was playing 'Pinion'. This of course meant only one thing – they were going to open with 'Wish', sending the front rows into a seething mosh pit right from the outset.

Next up was 'Sin' – making an appearance after being left out in March, and with the crowd nicely warmed up, only then did Trent & Co offer us anything less than a decade old. With the album now out for over a month, new material was more prominent than last time – 'The Line Begins To Blur' and 'The Hand That Feeds' working well when played live, 'With Teeth' slightly less so, its indefinite and slightly sloppy structure not really working. Despite this and several others, it was really the old songs everyone was waiting for, with the surprise appearance of 'Something I Can Never Have' alongside dead-cert favourites like 'March of the Pigs', 'Terrible Lie' and 'Closer'. At one point during 'Piggy', Trent (rarely known to be a pro-active crowd-worker) even went down to the front row of the crowd and got a member of front row to sing along.

The non-album tracks also got a look-in, though – the 'With Teeth' bonus 'Home' failed to excite but the two 'movie soundtrack' specials 'Burn' and 'Dead Souls' proved to be amongst the evenings highlights, with 'Dead Souls' in particular standing up as one of the finest Joy Division covers I've heard to date. Generally, the performances of the songs tonight were more accomplished and more confident than back in March – Jeordie White finally seems comfortable in the role of live bassist, whilst Jerome Dillon's drumming really gave the NIN live show a definite 'value added' feel – especially on the slower songs, which really benefited from the additional backbone live percussion can grant.

As with last time, the latter part of the set offered 'Hurt', a song now bearing more resonance than ever following Johnny Cash's take on it shortly before his demise, but always uniting the audience in the biggest communal sing-along the UK alt-metal scene has to offer. The penultimate 'Starfuckers Inc' got the adrenaline levels raised once again,

ready for the inevitable finale of 'Head Like A Hole'. Bouncing around with the last of my remaining energy, I found myself surrounded by friends from all my walks of life – old uni friends, cyberhippies, rivetheads, the lot! It seems that whoever I write about on this site, no matter how hard I like, no band has quite such a profound effect on a wide a variety of people as Nine Inch Nails.

As with other shows on the tour, there was no encore – NIN now seem to prefer getting the whole set out of the way in one fell swoop. All that remained now was to retrieve our bags, gather outside the Academy and trapse off to the tube station. I didn't wake up with the sore back and raging headache that I had last time, but it didn't seem to matter. This wasn't the catharsis I experienced on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005, more of a generalised stress relief with a group of friends, entertainment courtesy of the biggest name in industrial music.

Yes, industrial. It's come a long way since the days of Throbbing Gristle, hasn't it?

## **Nine Inch Nails – With Teeth Tour (Brixton Show 4) – 14 Jul 2005**

This was my second NIN show in the space of two weeks. Between these two dates, NIN had toured the UK, London has won the 2012 Olympics and a group of terrorists decided it was a good idea to blow up some tube trains. The death toll was unknown at the time, but I was humbled by the fact that they could very well have taken me along with it, only for this usually-concienious critic to be late out of bed on the day in question. It was therefore with a much heavier heart that I attended this show, the last of 4 London shows and probably the last NIN show in the UK for quite some time.

**Saul Williams** once again provided support. I'm still wondering if they considered rotating the support slot and giving someone else a go, but netherless, Saul seems to be building himself a nice little fanbase as a result of this tour. Along with Maxi Jazz (Faithless), he's the only rapper (using the term in it's most generalised sense) who seems not to fancy himself, and hence I found his set listenable as a result, particularly one track with some very NIN-style textures on backing. It's still 'not really my kind of thing', though.

One thing is clear, however – A LOT of people regard **Nine Inch Nails** as their "kind of thing". The Academy took a bit longer to fill up compared with last weeks show, but it was still packed out come show time. The NIN boys threw us a bit of a curveball at the start, however. This time, the intro tape consisted of a looped excerpt from 'Beside You In Time'. Only THEN did they lurch violently into 'Wish' and set the mosh pit in motion once more.

Then it was straight into 'Sin' and on through what was a few tracks short of a re-run of the previous weeks show. From what I gather, NIN do vary their setlists from show-to-show, drawing on a selection of approximately 30 songs from their backcatalogue – it's just I happened to pick two shows where the music was remarkably similar. Missing this time, however, were 'You Know What You Are?' and 'The Big Come Down', replaced by 'Getting Smaller' and 'Every Day Is Exactly The Same'.

With that established half-an-hour into the show, I decided to quit paying attention to the details and got on with enjoying myself. I still think there's a few songs from the new album that they haven't played yet (new single 'Only' and 'Right Where It Belongs' spring to mind), and there's still a few favourites from the back-catalogue ('Heresy', 'Ruiner' and 'We're In This Together') that I haven't heard them play. I understand that some new live versions are being developed for the next leg of the 'With Teeth' tour – whether that'll ever make it to the UK remains to be seen, however.

As the show once again closed with 'Head Like A Hole', I emerged from the pit, now with three NIN shows on my personal tally, satisfied that my NIN-itch is one very much scratched. At a time when the landscape was changing in my own personal life as well as the world around me, NIN provided the soundtrack live, just as they provided it on CD back in 1999 when 'The Fragile' came out and even back in 1996 when I first heard 'The Downward Spiral' (how I pity the way I was back then!). When I first saw NIN back in March, I knew the live band mission was complete. With two more shows under my belt, the victory lap is complete now. Not sure quite what to do with myself now.

## **Killing Miranda, Deathboy and Summa – 16 Jul 2005**

Whilst I'd seen Killing Miranda once already on their Consummate tour, the half-hour slot supporting 80s dinosaurs Zodiac Mindwarp failed to really fuel my hunger for a decent live showing from a band who had clearly come a long, long way from their early days in the late-90s London goth scene. With Europe now in their sights, Killing Miranda were making no secret of the fact that this was to be their last London show for several months, possibly longer. The fact that I'd seen them 10 times previously mattered little if anything – I wanted more, and wasn't about to miss this.

First up, however, was HFM, recently renamed to **Summa**. Treading the line between extreme and hardcore metal, they bore an uncanny resemblance to Raging Speedhorn – a chmaltzy I would normally regard as derogatory if it wasn't for the fact that a) They sounded tighter and more dynamic than the aforementioned 'Horn and b) They didn't have the attitude problem which seems to be de rigeur with bands occupying this part of the metal spectrum. The fact that enjoyed their set despite this being 'so not my kind of thing' was probably compliment enough – if, however, high-speed riffology, relentless drumming and blood-curdling vocals ARE your kind of thing, you might well want to check this bunch out if they ever play in your rough vicinity.

Then came **Deathboy**, taking a break from the recording of their second 'real' album to play this one-off support slot, and therefore fulfilling a 3-year old prophecy of mine that they would one day support Killing Miranda. Once again, they opened with 'Cheap Shot', coming along nicely as their next cynical, foul-mouthed anthem. They then took us through a selection of new tracks, completely abandoning their 'Music To Crash Cars To' material in favour of their work-in-progress.

This wasn't any bad thing – whilst the likes of 'We Will Destroy' and 'Decimate' were powerful in terms of defining the Deathboy Mission Statement, they weren't particularly complex musically, certainly not when placed alongside 'Slip', a song which initially sounded a little underbaked to be playing live, but eventually built into this huge electro-rock monster, indicative of a maturity that might yet prove to be the key song in advancing Deathboy from 'popular local band' status to significant players in the UK 'Scene'. Exactly what 'scene' they eventually make it in however (goth? Industrial? Rock? Breakbeat electro-punk?) remains to be, erm, seen.

This left **Killing Miranda** which their first decent headline slot in London since 2001 – their support and festival appearances were of course memorable, but I'd rarely seen these boys play for more than 40 minutes at a time, so I . Filthy Rikky had found himself a 'Fcuking Chav' T-shirt to wear as part of a not-very-elaborate joke, but it was the music that mattered, and all I can is that once again, the KM Quartet Delivered. They played all bar one of the songs from 'Consummate', even making the seething crawl of 'Boy Meets Gun' work in the live environment.

'Transgression By Numbers' was still well represented, the likes of 'Discotheque Necronomicon' and 'Teenage Vampire' defying their relative musical simplicity to slot into the set nicely, with the unexpected appearance of 'Touched By Jesus' the only song offering any suggestion of the band's oft-forgotten origins. The only other 'old' (Pre-Transgression) track to make it in was 'Pray' – this particular cut amped up sufficiently live to hide the thin production quality on the original version.

With time still an issue, the decision was taken not to invoke the old rock l of wandering off stage and waiting for the crowd to demand an encore. Instead they just got on with playing the songs, with Irish Dave taking the mic in order to sing their version of 'Anaconda' (just don't think that qualifies them as 'goths', OK?). From here, it was a straight run to home, another successful show out of the way, and in some respects the end of an era, as the band are now planning to go off to write new material and seek higher-profile live slots in the process. Various rumours had been circulated about the planned musical direction of KM's fourth album – suffice to say that another 'Consummate' isn't the gameplan at present.

## M'era Luna 2005 – 13-14 Aug 2005

### Day 1

Time then, for my once-a-year excursion to an old airfield in the middle of Germany for M'era Luna – the festival that was once called the Zillo festival, before the Zillo festival went off to become it's own event in July, only for it to be subsequently cancelled. To make things even more confusing, two additional scene festivals (Taubertal and another in Utrecht, The Netherlands) were taking place in Europe the same weekend. What's more, the weather forecasts looked about as promising as the prospects for the next Blutengel album. Not that any of this mattered to me – there were bands to be watched.

I arrived on site in time to see **Qntal**, appearing remarkably low on the billing for a band with four albums, at least one big club hit and a substantial scene following. One does not usually have to struggle for a decent viewing spot in the hangar this early in the day, but thanks to a late-running schedule, I made it in and was there for the duration of their set. Now operating as a four-piece line-up, it's becoming increasingly clear that this collective are doing everything possible to pull out from Ernst Horn's shadow – 'Ad Mortem Festinamus' was absent from the setlist (maybe due to time constraints?) in favour of a number of new tracks, with the band's sound taking a more dream pop-styled sound (especially on 'Blac') than their earlier German-folk-meets-retro-electronics. The crowd still got to clap along enthusiastically to a perpetual drum beat for the finale, though – it's just this year it was done to the accompaniment of 'Stetit Puella' rather than 'Ad Mortem...'.

I stayed in the hangar for **Potentia Animi**, that crazy bunch of singing monks last seen at WGT. I'm really not sure how seriously to take this bunch – they've got their Latin chanting tight and well-harmonised, but their delivery is more akin to a group of naughty schoolboys misbehaving at choir practise than a solemn religious occasion. Then there's the lutist, who's decided that if he has to amplify his instrument, he might as well plug the thing into a guitar amp, throw on the overdrive pedal and give all assembled a virtuoso solo. The amount of respect this act show for their source material is clearly not as high as some, but despite this (or maybe even because of it), they've got a stage show far more engaging than some bands on offer at the festival.

Like **Autumn**, for instance. Their name was quite appropriate, really – temperature were well down on previous years and the sky was overcast for most of the day (it wouldn't rain until Day 2, but more on that later). It's a pity their music matches the rather dreary but

otherwise non-descript weather – female-vocal rock is an increasingly saturated genre in 2005, and unlike every other such band I saw this weekend, there was very little that set them apart from the competition. I didn't find their songs dislikeable as such, just wholly unmemorable. They did pay a degree of tribute to tour buddies Within Temptation, however – now **THERE'S** a band who know how to leave a mark on their audience. Autumn clearly have a lot to learn in that department.

I stayed outside to watch **NFD**, a band who seem to think that having the ex-bassist from The Fields of the Nephilim actually makes them the rightful successors to Carl McCoy's crown (where IS Carl these days, anyway? And why haven't the Wrights from Last Rites elbowed their way into contention, either). Suffice to say that what we had here was a stage of very old goths, with ex-Nephilim bass (good), ex-This Burning Effigy lead guitar (very good) and ex-Sensorium vocals (erm....oh dear!). To be fair, I didn't actually LIKE Carl McCoy's vocal style that much, but he still made a better job of sounding like himself than the red-dreadlocked frontman on stage now. In the end, I just tuned out the vocals in my head and enjoyed the music.

Back into the hangar then for my first shot of EBM of the weekend, courtesy of **[SITD]**. It was clear pretty much from the start that their set was going to be afflicted by significant sound problem – the booming bass drum stomped clumsily over the mix, obscuring all the details barring Carsten's vocals. Either he couldn't hear what was coming out the monitors or he got out of bed the wrong side, because today it's really seemed like SITD was an abbreviation of 'Singer Is Tone-Deaf'. The truth is, they deserved better. I KNOW they can put on a better show than this, and I hope their London support to VNV later this year sees all the knobs in the right place from the word go.

As it happened, I decided to quit after 'Laughingstock' and see what **The Crüxshadows** were up to outside. On a busy schedule, a band I'd seen less than 3 months ago and 6 times in total wasn't exactly on top of the priority list, but there's something about this band that lets me ignore their musical simplicities and enjoy them for what they are rather than complain about what they are not. Rogue was doing his usual wandering antics, though the large stage area meant that he had a tendency to wander out of radio-mic range a little too often. When he could be heard, however, I found I was able to enjoy myself, even though I was only there to take a breather before the next band in the hangar.

Namely **The Neon Judgement**. Now there's a blast from the past. They're often lumped in with Front 242 and co as members of the original EBM fraternity, a label that's a bit hard to evaluate given the non-availability of their backcatalogue from any of my usual sources. The hammering old-school drumbeats weren't much of a surprise, neither were the regular blasts of analogue electronics. I just wasn't expecting the frontman to be a leather-clothed guitarist who resisted the opportunity to laden every track and it's dog with endless power chords, and instead chose to take us on a guided tour of his collection of guitar effects. Add this to Suicide-esque vocals and the open-ended song structures, and suddenly I've found the bridge between post-punk and vintage EBM. OK, the individual tracks weren't all that memorable, but the whole experience scored highly on the 'erm, interesting' scale.

Choosing to stay around the hangar in order to avoid seeing 'The 69 Eyes' (who wrote a song called 'Gothic Girl' in order to jump on the HIM bandwagon, and actually got a surprising number of teenage grufi-girls to fall for it), the next band I saw was **Combichrist**. I'd seen them once before, back when they were a 2-piece quasi-powernoise act with a pointless live show. Now, with THE industrial dance albums of 2005 behind them, they've expanded to a six-piece on stage, complete with a couple of go-go dancers and Andy LaPlegua now very much the frontman. The sparse nature of bespoke vocals on the album clearly meant nothing to him – he shouted out the samples from the original songs, and



egged on the crowd during the instrumental parts. There was no subtlety here, no rivet-headed elitism, just in-your-face industrial anger. I still felt the performance needed a little more tightening, but this act could yet become a must-see, must-dance affair within the next year or so.

I had to leave before the end of their set, as **Schandmaul** were playing outside and unlike Combichrist, I doubt I'll ever get to see them outside of the German festival circuit. I mean, their songs are all in German, all the liner notes in the inlays are German, and everywhere that sells their CDs and related memorabilia is (you guessed it), based in Germany. Having packed the hangar to beyond capacity last year, they returned to the roomier surroundings of the main stage on this occasion, shooting up the billing in the weeks leading up to the festival. And so they launched into their set with their usual gusto, working the crowd and generally having a good time. It didn't quite have the sense of grandeur of last years 'shoehorned-into-the-hangar' set, and their rendition of 'Walpurgisnacht' lacked a certain something (the mic on the shawm seemed to be malfunctioning), but it was still an entertaining hour – just a little disappointing after last year.

And now time for **VNV Nation**. This was to be my eighth experience of VNV live, but the first time I'd seen them on the same stage more than once. Electing this time to open with a slightly revised version of 'Honour 2003', it took a couple of songs before Ronan's voice lost it's now trademark growl, but it was OK for the balance of the set. They played what I believed to be best four songs from 'Matter & Form' (Chrome, Perpetual, Homeward and Entropy), plus an interesting selection of old favourites, with 'Joy' now seemingly replacing 'Solitary' as the one genuine PTF-era song and 'Legion' the best of the three 'Empires' tracks tonight. It didn't quite equal that memorable night in Mechelen in April, but they still seem to have that certain something that allows them to entertain live where imitators (yes, Assemblage 23, I'm looking in your direction) are beginning to bore me senseless.

Choosing to skip Mesh and Hocico in the Hangar, it was left to **Skinny Puppy** to bring my first day at M'era Luna 2005 to a close. The show I saw tonight was in many respects similar to the one I saw at The Forum last year – Cevin's keyboard and drum pad rack, the double-necked guitar and the gore-encrusted Ogre taking centre stage as ever. As with all festival slots, their setlist had to be curtailed to fit into the timetable, but in many respects, this helped them – there's only so much Puppy a man can take in one helping. The new line up is also sounding more cohesive than before – 'VX Gas Attack' now actually conveys it's evil undercurrent come performance-time, whilst 'Tin Omen' and 'Smothered Hope' really do sound like the industrial anthems that we all know they really are. The on-stage antics don't really shock the way the band probably think they do, but Skinny Puppy is thankfully still more than a namecheck-friendly entity in industrial music.

## Day 2

Day two dawned wet, windy and largely unpleasant. The site was rapidly turning into a swamp and the umbrella I picked up on the way to Heathrow proved to be a particularly inspired purchase. None of this was going to keep me from watching the bands I wanted to see. And that included **Faun**, last seen high up the billing on mittelalter day at WGT. They suffered more than most from the groundloop hum that seemed to be afflicting the soundsystem at various points of the weekend, though they battled through the technical and climatic setbacks to put on a fine show, their mix of mantra-like chanting, alternating wind instruments and electronic beats an entertaining and highly appropriate start to the day.

**Gate** were on next, another folky, female-fronted rock band. The singer, in her brightly coloured dress, lipstick and blonde hair, stood out visually if not vocally, her vocals too insubstantial to really take a frontal role in the bands sound, which was occasionally pleasing to the ear but never really made a massive impact. I eventually chose to retreat inside for **Amduscia**, who dished out their common-or-garden Mexican-school terror EBM. They're a band who sorely need some fresh ideas to stand out from their contemporaries (if Punto Omega can manage it, why can't they?), as the four songs I managed to endure all sounded like second-rate Hocico impersonations.

I might have stayed longer in the hope of something interesting happening, but I decided I'd take a chance with the unknown and see what Canadian act **The Birthday Massacre** had to offer on main stage. Another girl-fronted rock band? Well, yes, but this time with a difference. The bloodied Catholic-school uniform imagery was notable enough, but their music, a kind of hard-edged but noticeably catchy electro-metal, with analogue electronics dovetailing nicely to the hard rockin' aggression, was to be one of the most effective stylistic combinations I'd hear during the weekend. And that's not to mention the vocalist, whose fragile, edgy tones, delivered with a surprisingly innocent undercurrent gave the project real character.

I stayed outside for **Zeraphine**, playing their third M'era Luna set in four years, and in their highest billed slot to date. The vocals have improved substantially since the 'Dreadful Shadows' days, whilst their songs (some in German, some in English) are starting to develop into real goth-rock anthems, even if their sound lacks any real degree of originality. For that reason, I still don't think they'll break out of Germany any time soon, but given the response they drew from the crowd today, I don't think they'll ever need to.

From this point, my stage-hopping had to be stepped up to another level as the concentration of must-see bands became higher than at any time at any previous M'era Luna. I thus made it over to the hangar to make sure I caught at least some of **Flesh Field's** set. Creators of the most powerful industrial/electro album of 2004, Flesh Field's live set thankfully included the live guitar in addition to the keyboards and dual vocalists. Their combination of these elements plus ear-bleeding percussion, adrenaline-fuelled sequences and flying strings essentially amounted to a compulsion to 'DANCE', and dance hard. Even in my increasingly dampened, muddy and battle-weary state, I found it in me to throw in a few moves before once again returning to the increasingly stormy conditions of main stage.

I would not have done this had it not been for the appearance of Italian goth metal heroes **Lacuna Coil**, who had been billed two years ago but cancelled come the final reckoning. I'd also managed to miss every London show they'd put on to date, but nothing, not even the increasingly heavy downpour, was going to deny me this time. Even though they're not my absolute favourite band in this genre (my personal preference hovering closer to the symphonically-driven Nightwish/Within Temptation variant of the sound), they're still technically one of the most proficient gothic metal bands of all, with their alternating light female/growled male vocals an effective front, whilst their metal sound is melodic enough to appeal to wider variety of listeners than some of their contemporaries, even if I feel only a few of their songs are truly memorable – today's performance, whilst lacking any real surprises, was well executed despite the adverse conditions.

With timetable congestion now becoming unbearable, I elected to skip Melotron in the hangar, in favour of a short shopping trip out on site prior to watching **Subway To Sally**, the rain finally easing off in time for their performance. Having seen them play at Leipzig earlier this year, I was already familiar with the Subway show circa 2005, and sure enough they launched into their almost ludicrously over-the-top folk-metal, complete with

pyrotechnics, a triple-necked guitar (or was my vision just getting a little blurred) and a live violinist (and she was HOT!). Aside from one highly memorable acoustic excursion, the StS set today was full-throttle, bombastic and VERY, VERY German. My festival companions, emerging from Melotron, hated it with a passion. I couldn't quite break it to them that I wasn't much of a Melotron fan any more. Each to their own.

chmaltzy e, there was no time for pleasantries as I zoomed passed them on my way back into the Hangar in the hope of seeing as much of **Diary of Dreams** as possible – the fact that I've seen them play seven times in the past meant absolutely nothing to me at this stage. With a full drum kit and two live guitars, Adrian Hates' collective are more of a live band than ever before, and they were also blessed with the best live sound I'd heard in the hangar all weekend. Adrian, of course, is experienced in venues of all sizes and quality, and his voice filled every corner of the Hildesheim hangar, whilst the extra 'live' instrumentation gave new power to songs such as 'Chemicals' and 'Butterfly: Dance!'. There's not much new material in the set at the moments ('Nigredo' doesn't seem to lend itself to live performance the way the last two albums did), but those songs he did play ('Giftraum' in particular) still conjured the uber-gothic darkwave stomp that is a DoD speciality.

I would normally have stayed for the duration of their set, but on this occasion I elected to give priority to **Deine Lakaien**, as unlike DoD, they never play the UK and I've become quite a fan of their music since they last played here two years ago (the only time prior to this that I've seen them play live). Live, Deine Lakaien consists of Ernst Horn and his stack of vintage analogue synths (a real one, none of this piano synth rubbish for Ernst), lead singer Alexander Veljanov, whose deep, soft tones remain one of the scene's most distinctive voice, plus a three-piece string section and a live guitarist, instruments which feature only occasionally on their album tracks.

And that is the key reason why Deine Lakaien are such a compulsive live act – there really is a 'value added' aspect to their performances, re-working their material for their performances. Despite having a new album to promote, they opened up with two very old songs – 'Dark Star' and 'Down Down Down' (possibly due to this album's recent reissue?) before moving onto the new material, with 'Over and Done' sounding more anarchic here than it did on 'April Skies'. Every song they played had its own appeal, but my favourite was 'Return', a long drawn-out epic, played on piano and strings rather than the synths of the original – totally unlike the album version, but in its own way surpassing it. Time restrictions meant we only got a 50 minute set, but there was still time for a rollicking rendition of 'Overpaid', before the finale of 'Love Me Until The End'.

That for me was the highlight of the weekend, but even here there was no time to stand and soak it all in, as I was straight back inside to watch **The Klinik**, nowadays a Marc Verhaegen solo project in the studio, but featuring original vocalist Dirk Ivens on stage. With Marc barely visible at the rear of the stage, it was in fact left to Dirk to run the show. The influence this band had on both power noise (if you take out the vocals) and terror EBM (if you richen the mix with extra arps and horror-movie melodies) is undoubted – The Klinik's sound in its raw form, however, was exactly that – raw, untamed and uncompromising. It took a while before I found it even remotely listenable, but gradually I became drawn into their more danceable rhythms. Like Skinny Puppy, the live show doesn't truly sum up the influence this band have had on industrial music – the comparatively sparse crowd in the hangar was probably indicative of this.

After forty minutes of such fayre, I decided to exit the hangar for the last time and watch the bulk of **The Sisters of Mercy**. Having seen their weak, insipid performance three years previously, my hopes were not high. It surprised me, therefore, that Andrew Eldritch

(now sporting a shaved head) and friends could in fact play their own songs after all. Occasionally, the vocals sounded a little strained (such as during the final lines of 'Alice'), but the performances were more forceful & more committed and the inter-song banter refreshingly free of the nonsense Eldritch was spouting the last time I saw him play. The unreleased (but not exactly new) 'Summer' made an appearance, 'Dominion' sounded purposeful this time round, whilst their final encore 'Vision Thing' really saw the festival out with a bang.

It was an unexpected high point in what would ultimately prove to be a mixed but largely successful festival. The rain on day 2 turned the site into a swamp – the only reason we escaped the car park intact was thanks to a couple of our friends leaving the site early on the assumption that the Sisters weren't going to be worth sticking around for. I still haven't got all the mud off my boots, either! On a personal level, it didn't quite have the sense of occasion as last year – possibly due to my first visit to WGT in the middle of it all, but at the same time, each festival has it's own appeal. Leipzig certainly beats M'era Luna on sheer scale, variety and grandeur, but as a concentration of quality acts in an enclosed space, M'era Luna still beats every other site-based festival in the scene.

## SonVer – 18 Aug 2005

Earth Loop Recall's 'Compulsion' album might have been voted my favourite of 2004, but despite praises sung by myself and many others, the writing was on the wall. Just over a month into 2005, and ELR was no-more. Two of the members (Mark Waterhouse and Gareth ----) have not been heard from since. Ben McLees, however, has been more than vocal about his other works following (and even prior to) the ELR split. The names of various band line-ups and projects have been touted, but the one constant factor in these rumour has been **SonVer**, a project featuring him on guitar and Jo Quail (formerly ELR's keyboard player) on cello.

This small scale project has since has a habit of playing shows in the most obscure locations with very little promotion, this particular show, in the upstairs bar of the Ritz Cinema in Brixton, fairly typical of the kind of venue they've been playing. The sound system was a temporary set-up roughly equivalent to something you'd see at a village fête, with the player for the backing track balanced on top of the mixing desk, though they still managed to find space for a projector and screen, which cycled through a sequence of rural imagery for the duration of their set.

As for the set itself, I was advised by Ben prior to the event to 'Bring a Book!'. I had a hefty China Mieville tome lurking at the bottom of my bag, but instead settled for the drafting notes for EOL-Audio v7. Why not get a bit of work done while you can?. Not that I actually managed to achieve much during the set, even though the point that SonVer effectively provided a form of 'background music' was certainly true. The backing track provided subtle keyboards and the occasional drum loop, these recordings filled out by Ben's oh-so-delicate massaging of his guitar strings and Jo's electric cello (yes, they do exist), alternating between bowed textures and hypnotic plucked melodies.

Despite their rather minimal stage presence, it often wasn't clear which elements of their sound were being played and which were pre-recorded, and neither was it apparent how much of the material was improvised – the only representative example I have of their recorded work is 'Khat Show Host' (offered as a free mp3 download some months back) and their open-ended structures make such analyses difficult to say the least. An album HAS been recorded, but a label to release it on has yet to be found.

Suffice to say, there IS something of musical merit here, as if Ben and Jo had created a project that simply did away with all the parts of the music business they did not like

(rebellious guitarists, drummers, adolescent poetry passed off as lyrics, I song-structure, etc) and left the few beautiful things remaining hang there, unobscured and unimpeded. It's post-ELR, post-rock, post-post-punk, post-pretty much everything. A kind of hint that being in a band gets in the way of writing music. It may bore you senseless or you may be drawn in and exit totally enchanted. You'll have to go and see them play before you know for sure.

But take a book along, anyway. You won't be dancing much.....

## InFest 2005 – 26-28 Aug 2005

### Day 1

Eagle-eyed readers might have noticed the lack of an InFest review for 2004, for the simple reason that I wasn't there. The only bands of interest that I wasn't going to see elsewhere that year were Converter and Lights of Euphoria (though in retrospect, I decided quite a few of the other bands would also have been worth a watch). It also had something to do with my general indifference towards the 2003 event, which featured the weakest VNV show I'd seen to date, a lack of any other really 'big name' bands, overly-cerebral power noise bands and a Friday that was, for me, a waste of time. This year, however, would be different. More friends attending the festival, more bands of interest than before and a real sense that the weekend would be something really special.

I'd arrived early on Friday morning, wandered around town a bit but still arrived in time for the opening band **Univaque**. The official programme claimed that they're a London-based setup, but despite that, I'd never heard of them. They turned out to be a three-piece act, playing a common-or-garden variety of contemporary synth-pop. Their songs were listenable and quite pleasant on the eardrums, but they struggled to make an impact, their singer clearly quite nervous and clearly in need of more stage experience. It's clearly early days for them, but this is still a project that will require quite a bit of work before it has my full attention.

The first band of real interest was **Po[w]der Pussy**, a collaboration between This 'Morn Omina and Ah-Cama Sotz, two acts signed to significant rhythmic noise labels without actually practising the style much themselves. Tonight's performance was the probably the closest either musician has got to the 'pure' form of the style, though their style is best described as a form of industrial breakbeat techno. Whilst you could see the influence of both parent projects in the programming style and electronic textures, the sound on offer was by no means a straight hybrid. For me, the highlight was the Wargames-sampling, buzzsaw-led 'Your Move, a rare example of an intricately complex drum loop which somehow inspires even stompy 4-beat aficionados such as myself to put one's lack of rhythm aside and throw in some dancefloor moves.

**Fixmer/McCarthy** were headlining the opening night, having appeared regularly in Europe in 2004 but waiting a further year before performing any shows in the UK. I wasn't too impressed with their 'Between The Devil' CD, but that was largely due to a dislike of Terrence Fixmer's production style. What I really wanted to hear was Douglas McCarthy's live vocals, and in that area he did not disappoint. Despite several years away from the music scene, the training-ground bark that was so symbolic of Nitzer Ebb is still very much in evidence, and since about half of the set comprised of old Nitzer Ebb material, I didn't have to worry about not liking the album (and even those songs sounded better live than on CD).

## Day 2

With the adrenaline flowing thanks to the previous two bands, the post-performance club nights were more tempting than at any previous InFest, and I was particularly please to find a DJ playing ASP, Diary of Dreams and Tanzwut over at the bar area. Despite my previous nights consumption, I was still at the venue in plenty of time for the start of Day 2, with **Tin Omen** kicking things off, offering a combination of industrial beats, indsutriorock guitar and female vocals. It was an interesting concept in theory, but seemed to fall down a little in the execution – the songs didn't really strike me in any way and the music didn't come over as being especially dynamic either. It's possible that with more work, this project could yet achieve some kind of success. But not yet.

More impressive were **The Azoic**, arriving to make their UK debut after their incident-packed European tour. Their lead singer was nursing a hand injury following an accident the previous evening, but she'd travelled to the venue against medical advice to play the show. Thankfully, her injuries in no way affected her voice (as she really can sing) and she was able to make it though their 45-minute set without difficulty. Musically, their sound was a form of trance-infused synth-pop which we Europeans may call 'future pop' or (if you're cynical enough) 'Ibiza goth', an increasingly saturated genre, but thankfully this trio had the talent and dynamic to stand out from the crowd.

**H.I.V.+** had their own way of standing out from the crowd. Seemingly at a loss as to what attire suited such an extreme industrial noise act, they'd decided not to bother bringing any clothes and come on stage a couple of pieces of sticky tape short of naked. Once that novelty was dispensed with, I could concentrate on the music. Of of the four knob-twiddling 'rhythmic noise' acts of the weekend, they were probably the most free-form of the lot, spending the first half of their set blending various textures and samples before bringing some distorted drum loops in for the later stages. It was interesting for a while, but their set as a whole didn't make any lasting impact – it was too fragmented and indecisive to really make a mark.

Then followed a return to familiar territory for **Decoded Feedback**. Having last seen them play an over-long 60minute set in the cavernous surroundings of Invitation's velodrome, I was keen to see them play a shorter, sharper set in the more hospitable surroundings of InFest – which is more or less exactly what I got. They were helped by their status as the only 'harsh vocals and EBM-derived beats' act of the weekend (usually there's at least three at InFest!), and their combination of throbbing sequences, fierce vocals and punchy, uptempo rhythms made for an enjoyable set, though I still feel they lack the ultimate edge that really sets them apart from a very large number of similar bands.

Back then, to distorted beat country with **Punch Inc**. I was surprised to see them this high up the bill as their output to date amounts to one demo album and one CD on Hands Productions. Like Pow[d]er Pussy the night before, their hybrid of power noise and techno (with a significantly greater emphasis on the noise sider side of the mix) was aimed squarely at the dancefloor, and it wasn't long before the Bradford University Union was very much in motion. I myself was there for the bulk of their set, but I began to tire about three tracks from home, their music not having quite as much individual character as some – technically sound, powerful but lacking a true mark of greatness.

I say that only because tonight's headliners **Covenant** seem ride every criticism fired at them and still emerge as a highlight of the weekend for many of those present – including me. Their EBM/future pop sound isn't as original as it once was, Clas spends more of set dancing than pretending to play his keyboard, three of the songs were unknown to the crowd and Eskil made some mistakes with the lyrics. But it didn't seem to matter – the new material sounds promising (can't wait to hear final versions of the new ones), Eskil's voice

really carries well on stage, 'Theremin' (good to have that one back!) and 'Figurehead' got all the long-time Covenant fans bouncing around happily, whilst 'We Stand Alone' finally made another appearance, having barely been played at their major European shows of late.

### Day 3

I barely remember what happened after the bands on Saturday – staying up late to maximise enjoyment and avoid dreary Bradford mornings the tactic on this occasion. I still made it back in time for all five bands on Sunday, starting with **Deviant UK**, and my opinion of them remains the same as last year, except for the fact that the singer has thankfully dispensed with that awful hat. Numan-esque vocals, flying-V power chords and hard electronics were all enjoyable for a while, but there was little to differentiate one song from the next, barring a passable but largely redundant cover of Pitchfork's 'Timekiller'.

Next on were **Final Selection** – of all the InFest bands this year, they were the act I'd heard least of or about prior to the event. Having watched them for three songs, I'm not entirely sure I would have recognised them even if I'd picked up a couple of their tracks on a compilation and heard them in a DJ set – they were that anonymous. Two guys in 80s-style suits played common-or-garden synth-pop isn't an automatic failure in my book, but their songs sounded dreary and static, failing to spark in me even the remotest interest. I spent the rest of their set wandering away for a quick chat and then returning, hoping they might have woken up in my absence. But it never happened.

It was another synth-pop act up next, and also the only act on the billing this year that I'd seen previously this year, namely **Iris**. Now, there's going to be some of you reading expectations another damnation of a 80s-soundalike synthpop band (did any actually READ my review of Sunday at the Auensee at WGT???) . And let's be fair, they're not winning any prizes in terms of originality. They do, however, do what Final Selection and Univaque never did, that being write catchy little songs and sing them well. Reagan Jones was apologising for what he believed to be a weak vocal performance, but he sounded fine to me. I'd like the live guitar to be a bit more frontal in the mix, but otherwise Iris are proof that classic synth-pop isn't as dead as some uber-industrial heads claim it is.

They were probably standing there looking superior whilst waiting for **Kiew** to come on. Now here's a project fully capable of springing a surprise. I'd bought one of their CDs on a rather vague recommendation – having spotted the Out of Line label, I'd assumed it'd be some form of Hocico-esque terror EBM. What I actually got was one stop short of something befitting the Hands/Ant-Zen collective. Having then arrived expecting to see a couple of geeks twiddle knobs and fiddle with laptops, I was more than surprised to encounter a stage show featuring live drum pads, white coats, hypodermic needles, a slightly insane vocalist (who at one point decided to go walkabout Cruxshadows-style) and live guitar!

And we're not just talking your usual power chord noise, either – these guys could actually play! Bluesy soloing, rhythmic noise and a psycho-frontman – what will they think of next? Forget about locking him up out of harms way – the whole band clearly need a bit of the fluffy pink cloud treatment. I guess you probably could let them continue to live the community, but anyone who dares drive a tank this large through convention village needs and deserves close attention. Of course, if they start playing like this on the CDs, they could end up infecting the entire scene with whatever it is they've got.

This left **Blutengel** with the task of bringing this festival to a close. Chris Pohl's blood-obsessed electro-goth project had yet to make it to these shores prior to this evenings performance, and by the sounds of things he's not likely to come back any time soon. It

could all have been so different had they not waited so long – Seelenschmerz was a great album, a surprisingly atmospheric form of synthetic vampire porn. Then they threw it away with the gothic chewing gum of ‘Angel Dust’ and the generic, I-loaded turd of ‘Demon Kiss’ – and it was these albums that formed the bulk of this evenings set. Fortunately, with live dancers, consumes and back projections (even if the full stage set was left in Germany), there was at least a sense that live entertainment was in progress. No instruments though.

Anyway, Pohl and his lady friends worked through their one-hour set, with their usual mix of vampire metaphor, electronic ear candy and scantily clad gruffti chic. Chris Pohl’s vocals were generally strong and helped give the project a degree of stage presence – the female vocals were noticeably weaker, however. No longer in the mood to play vociferous critic, I lapped it all up for the duration and then waited for the encore. Some people were calling for one, others yelled ‘Go back to Germany!’. Since the video track was still playing, they didn’t really have a choice but to return.

Two more songs, and that was the end of InFest 2005 – my third visit to this festival and easily my favourite so far. Yes, I concede that had as much to do with more friends turning up as it did with me liking more of the bands, but nonetheless, this low-budget, no-frills alternative to the likes of Whitby, Dark City and the like finally delivered this year. I didn’t miss the multiple stages, endless market stalls and currywurst of the German festivals, which, given how much I love frantically ducking between the goths, lunch in one hand, timetable in the other, Euros in the pocket and shopping in the bag, is really saying something!

## Within Temptation – 4 Sep 2005

Symphonic metal (if that’s a valid musical term) seems to be enjoying a real boom period in the UK scene right now. It took a while, with a number of small-scale shows testing the water prior to what I personally believe to be the breakthrough point – namely the Nightwish concert at the Astoria on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004. I had some doubt that Within Temptation would be able to break through in quite the same way, but UK issues of their last two albums seem to be helping them build a fan-base, whilst their sold-out show at the Scala last year quashed any doubt that they would be able to break through as a live act.

It doesn’t seem like all that long ago, but that show was a few days short of a year ago, and with ‘The Silent Force’ seeing it’s UK release (several months after the European edition, which I naturally paid over-the-odds to lay my hands on), it seemed like a good time for a return visit. The Astoria wasn’t absolutely packed out, but it was still quite busy and (more importantly) it gave the band a chance to erect their full stage set, with pillars, vines and angel statues all very much in evidence. Most of it was hidden behind a screen before they came on stage, leaving me (a comparative veteran of WT live shows – this is my fifth!) wondering which version of their stage set had been brought along.

I really should say a few words about the support act **Cathedral**, but once again London dishes up a support act that lies so far outside of my music radar that I’m at a complete loss for words describe them. Old-skool Trev (a old metalhead mate of mine) was standing next to me when they came on, described them as ‘stoner doom’ and proceeded to shake his hair enthusiastically. I think that pretty much sums it up – delivering a form of downtempo metal, rooted in the Black Sabbath school but with enough contemporary influence to qualify as a sound in its own right. Cathedral were technically very good at what they did but really just proved that the UK ‘gothic metal’ fanbase is predominantly ‘metal’. Not that this matters to me – it’s way better than the kind of crap I had forced upon me back in my uni years.



Anyway, the orchestral introduction from 'The Silent Force' signalled the arrival of **Within Temptation** on stage. As the opening bars of 'See Who I Am' echoed across the four walls of the Astoria, the screen fell to reveal five hard-working Dutch musicians, a huge white project screen, plus the aforementioned pillars and statues, the first sign the UK crowd have had of Within Temptation's mammoth stage sets (they settled for projections only at the Scala last year). Sharon Den Adel appeared shortly after, clad in her traditionally extravagant stage attire. Female-fronted rock bands have become very popular of late, but there's no doubt that Within Temptation's sense of grandeur allow them to stand out from an increasingly large crowd.

Whilst this show was technically a one-off, it could also be regarded as the UK date on the tour for 'The Silent Force', so it came as little surprise that the early stages of their set were dominated by this particular recording, each track as strong as the one that came before it. This succession of new songs was interrupted only by a surprisingly early rendition of 'Running Up That Hill' (I thought they'd save it for the encore). Eventually, Martin Westerholt took to the microphone to deliver a couple of their older dual-vocalist tracks, though I don't think this variation of their sound is their strongest and best left behind on 'Enter' – best leave such things to Lacuna Coil.

The 'Mother Earth' material began to emerge towards the end of the show, wisely choosing to finish on the title track from the aforementioned album, their out-and-out anthem always guaranteed to bring the show to a close with a bang. The crowd response was generally positive and enthusiastic, not quite as ecstatic as the total adoration shown at recent Nightwish shows, but VERY impressive for a band that were hardly known on these shores this time last year playing in a 1000+ capacity venue. The inevitable encore saw 'Deceiver Of Fools' make an appearance, with 'Ice Queen' chosen as the very last song. Bass guitar problems forced a restart, but since the London crowd were essentially won by this point, it didn't seem to matter.

And so ended yet another example of a European band showing the Brits how to do it when it comes to extravagant stage shows and a leading lady who truly fronts her band without sacrificing power nor femininity. Exactly how long this operatic-symphonic-fantasy-paganic-folky-metallic revolution will last remains to be seen, but with this show out of the way, no-one can doubt that Within Temptation have in their own way 'made it'. And to think I didn't really like them that much when I first saw them back in 2002! Just don't accuse me of bandwagon-jumping.....

## **Nightwish – Once Tour September – 25 Sep 2005**

How much bigger can Nightwish get? Having sold out the Astoria once last year and twice this year, they now return little over half a year later and sell out the Hammersmith Apollo. I arrived at 7pm to find the queue stretching out of town and into a side road. Having never been to a show at the Apollo before (thus claiming the last 'big venue' on my list), I had no idea whether this was the usual situation, but it only goes to show that there is nothing 'small' as far as Nightwish in 2005 are concerned. Anyway, I landed next to a friendly bunch in the line, spending the queue time discussing how exactly I'd managed to see Within Temptation five times.

All thoughts of this most desirable form of ethnic cleansing were vanquished by the fact that **Paradise Lost** were supporting, and we weren't even nearly inside by the time they came on. In the end, I raced inside at the first opportunity, ignored the cloakroom, bar and merchandise stall and found a decent viewpoint, having missed only a song and a half. This was to be my second experience of Paradise Lost live (having seen their anti-climatic headline at Dark Jubilee three years ago), but my first in front of a truly appreciative crowd

– many of those present of course still able to remember the days when they were rockin' to the sound of 'Draconian Times' and 'One Second' back when Nightwish were still singing folk songs round a Finnish campfire.

It was perhaps with these high hopes that in the event, I was actually a little disappointed with their performance tonight. Maybe it was due to the soundsystem not favouring the support act, but Nick Holmes really didn't seem able to really take command of the performance. They played a mixture of new songs and old favourites ('Erased', 'One Second' and 'As I Was' all cropping up), though it was only their finale of 'Say Just Words' that really stood out and reminded me what these boys were capable of. With a catalogue the size of theirs, I still reckon I'll need to see them do a headline gig at some point (as opposed to a curtailed support or ill-advised festival slot) to really gauge how good a live band they are. But still, getting a band of this status in any form in a support was still a welcome bonus.

But despite all of their reputation, Paradise Lost had a chavs chance in Slimelight of upstaging **Nightwish**. The mysterious appearance of the 'safety curtain' between the sets (marked 'Safety Curtain' like something from a comic where everything has text on it telling the reader what it is) indicated something was going on stage. It rose again to display Nightwish's usual stage set, plus a couple of small flames in the background. Sure enough, they'd brought the pyro along. They hadn't yet played in a UK venue that allowed it, but I knew from my abortive, heat-exhausted attempt to watch them headline M'era Luna 2003 that explosives figured in their larger stage shows. Tonight, the UK crowd were going to get their first full-blown, no-compromise experience of the Nightwish live show.

The setlist followed the general pattern of their chmaltz shows, rotating some of the album tracks, but still keeping the double-barrelled opener of 'Dark Chest of Wonders' and 'Planet Hell' (a track I've got to like more and more since I first heard it) before bringing in the older stuff. 'Sleeping Sun' sounded as good as ever, whilst the more explosive tracks really benefitted from the added bands, flashes and jets of flame, keeping me interested in a band who's live set I was now increasingly familiar with, with 'Bless The Child', 'Wishmaster' and 'She Is My Sin' all making their obligatory appearances in amongst the newer material.

As usual, Tarja took a costume-change break at the midway point to let the 'four examples of Finnish manhood' (as bassist Marco put it) get a song to themselves, once again performing their Pink Floyd cover 'High Hopes', a choice which proves to be increasingly apt – Tuomas is clearly one of the most elaborate post-prog rock keyboard players out there, whilst Marco's lead vocals are easily a match for his bass guitar skills. Tarja returned the favour later in the set, performing a Finnish song from her solo repertoire, much appreciated even by a crowd who for the most part had not the slightest idea what she was singing about – there were a few Finnish flags waving, but since not even other Scandinavians truly understand the Finnish tongue, the topic of her solo songs will remain a mystery.

As ever, the calls for an encore were inevitable, as was the encore itself, which saw the audience showered in ticker tape (a rock I by now, but Nightwish can pull off I where others fail dismally), prior to their usual finale of 'Wish I Had An Angel', which must have become an anthem at least somewhere by now (I don't much frequent rock clubs, and the London goth scene was largely notable by it's absence here). With that complete, all that remained was for the band to take a bow and soak up the crowds adoration. Again. With solo projects beckoning and the likely need for new material in the next few years, this might be the last we see of Nightwish in the UK for a year or so.

Anyway, with four increasingly successful UK visits in the last two years, Nightwish can now at least be assured they have 'made it' in this most notoriously 'difficult' of territories. It's interesting, however, that Paradise Lost, legends in their own right, supported them rather than vice versa, since it's really indicative that a Finnish mezzo-soprano with a flashy stage show is a greater draw than a stage full of British rock veterans. But performance is where these big European bands make a difference. It's what broke Rammstein, it's now what broke Nightwish and it'll break quite a few other bands if only an ambitious promoter would book them in the right place at the right time.

## **Ultraviolence, Leech Woman, Knifeladder and G.N.A. – 8 Oct 2005**

I might not have been overly impressed by the Ultraviolence show at Slimelight last December, but with two support acts of at least vague interest, tonight's 'industrial special' line-up at the Garage was still impressive enough to drag me out of my North London home and down to Highbury for an evening of mechanised eardrum-bashing. I hadn't seen Leech Woman for years, whilst Knifeladder had proved to be elusive to date, having appeared on various billings over the past five years, only for either them to pull out or me to get distracted by something else.

And as ever with Flag Promotions, the evening's line-up showed its organic qualities, with **Global Noise Attack** appearing at the last minute. They're still hovering around the bottom of billings despite years in the business, and despite their singers tendency to wander into the (still sparse) crowd in an attempt to ensnare an unwilling victim with his mic lead, they still come over as a competent but rather ordinary contemporary alt-metal act. They sorely need some songs (rather than a singer) that reaches out and grabs you, and whilst they can clearly put on a show, I seriously can't see this band going anywhere right now.

The band of most interest tonight was in fact on next – namely **Knifeladder**. I had previously seen two of the three band members play in other bands in the past – Andrew Trail is Inertia's live keyboard player, whilst John Murphy is a renowned neo-folk percussionist, most notably with Death In June. Along with bassist Hunter Barr, the trio appeared on stage in their white shirt and black apron attire and set to work. Murphy's drumming provided a backbone, hammering out tribal/militant rhythms with great force. Hunter Barr proved he was no ordinary string-thumper, filling the sound out with a plethora of bottom-end trickery (who was it that told me that effects weren't suitable for bass guitars?) whilst Andrew Trail coaxed layers of noise from his electronics rack, occasionally firing a blast of shawm into the mix for a bit of Middle Eastern Flavour.

It was hard think of a simple way of describing the Knifeladder sound – it's industrial in some respect, certainly, often tribal and certainly experimental, no tracks conforming to a particularly apparent song structure. They impressed me sufficiently for me to purchase their (sole?) studio album. I hope to review this in due course, but regardless of the merits of this recording, I feel this is an act best enjoyed live, where the slightly anarchic nature of what they do really takes effect. If I had a criticism, it would be that they really need some stronger vocals to really take their sound forward and into the consciousness of the unsuspecting Ultraviolence fan – but that would be perfection. They are already impressive.

The other area of interest tonight was my first chance to see **Leech Woman** in over two years. They've undergone some fairly substantial line-up changes, with Rog and his scrapyard percussion setup now sadly absent. Fortunately, the programmed backing track that replaces him, whilst lacking the visual spectacle, was at least dynamic and a match for the awesome wall of noise blasted out from the guitar and bass wielded by the two bare-

chedsted sonic extremists on stage. Combining elements of industrial metal, grindcore and a variety of extreme dance styles, Alex B's long-running project seems at least to have survived their recent changes relatively intact, It'll be interesting to see if this direction change makes Leech Woman work better on CD than previously, but their live show retains its impact, at least for the duration of the half-hour slot allocated. I dread to think how much my ears would be ringing after a full-hour.

That was the job of **Ultraviolence** to answer. I'd seen them play Elektrowerkz in December 2004 and was frankly left unimpressed. This particular show didn't look much more promising – Johnny Violent spending a couple of minutes wandering around stage to the sound of the backing track before bringing on Mel Allezbleu and her angle grinder and getting on with this evenings set. Once the distorted 909s and showers of sparks came into play, however, it all came alive. Only there was a face like thunder standing at the side of the stage, eventually crossing over to Mel, whispering something in her ear and bringing a premature end to this evenings angle-grinding. It turns out Flag didn't give sufficient notice to the council that a girl was going to do a DIY job on her metal underwear in public, and the sparks were off.

Luckily for Mel, she was also able to contribute some vocals to the chmaltzy , so it wasn't a complete loss for her. Since neither she nor Charlie (UV's lead female vocalist) perform on every track, however, it was often Johnny Violent alone with his keyboard in the middle of the stage. Despite all of this, I still feel this show felt more committed and confident than their December show, with audience participation eventually resulting in a mosh pit breaking out by the time of the obligatory 'Hardcore Motherfucker'. There were a few surprises in store – 'Killing God' made a welcome appearance after being missed out last time, whilst an entertaining version of 'Stigmata' replaced the more usual OTT-ripoff of 'Paranoid'. It's going to be interesting to see where Ultraviolence go from here – the live show is clearly back online again, but we haven't had a new studio album for a few years now, and there were only occasional hints about what the next direction of this project will be.

Anyway, this at least proved to be a largely entertaining night, though it was let down a little by the angle grinder affair. The return of Knifeladder and Leech Woman to a Flag billing helped the disguise the 'oh, them AGAIN' feeling that's starting to arise everytime the lastest flier goes around. There's a large number of European EBM/elektro bands that simply aren't appearing on his billings the way they used to (and don't tell me the demand isn't there because I know it is) and the bands stepping into the breach just don't quite have the same appeal. Tonight proved they can of course still spring a surprise, but the thrice-yearly sojourns to far-away festivals are proving to be an expensive way of making up for the deficiencies round here.

## **Killing Joke – 14 Oct 2005**

I have to admit to being quite a late arrival to Killing Joke's fanbase. I'd only really paid them more than token attention following the release of their unexpectedly incredible self-titled 'comeback' album in 2003. It was only once I set about preparing an EOL-Audio entry on them that I realised exactly how complex their history was. The exact details are covered elsewhere on this site, but its sufficient here to say that despite everything, Killing Joke are still very much a going concern, celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary earlier this year, touring with Motley Crue (erm....right?) and then returning to London to perform an additional show tonight.

Unlike last time, we got a couple of bona-fide support acts, both of whom I'd never heard of, and both of whom I hope I never hear of again. **Tribazik** opened, one of those

downtempo stoner-metal acts that seem to have been cropping up lately. The backing track was relatively well-composed, and their instrumental tracks were technically accomplished and listenable for a while, but never anything more than that. **October File**, meanwhile, were just one of a sizeable number of modern-day, shouty 'alternative metal' acts that crop up at unwelcome moments, mainly because I don't understand what it is they're doing, which makes reviewing them the morning after a complete pain.

But all was forgotten once **Killing Joke** came on stage. The line-up has settled recently round the core of Jaz, Geordie and Raven, with their latest drummer settling in nicely and Reza Udhin (better known for his role in Inertia) now manning the live keyboards as well as providing the occasional backing vocal. As with last time, they opened with the grandiose 'Communion', followed immediately with 'Wardance', sending the main floor into the inevitable mosh pit which remained for the duration of the show. Killing Joke pits are always energetic, often savage, but never malicious. On this occasion, barring one short break, I lasted in the thick of things for the full length of the show.

As with most of their recent shows, the set was based around the band's earliest material, a smattering of the later songs plus a couple of the 'Extremities...' era songs. The only tribute to their mid-80s commercial peak was 'Darkness Before Dawn' plus a slightly insipid 'Frenzy'. This and a slightly misjudged airing of 'Butcher' were however the only low points in what was otherwise a full-throttle, adrenaline-charged set from the boys. On this occasion, the absolute highlight of the night was a suicidally fast rendition of 'Asteroid', dedicated (if that's the right term) to Maggie Thatcher (80 years old this week), a much-loathed character back in the band's formative years, whose influence (for better or worse) is still being felt today.

Other highlights included 'The Wait' and 'Complication', two songs best enjoyed in live form, their viscous side I find somewhat muted in recorded form (maybe I should be checking out the recently-released remasters?), whilst 'Requiem' resulted in perhaps the friendliest mosh I'd ever been involved in. Friday Night at the Astoria does mean an early exit to make way for the looming G.A.Y. night, but there was thankfully time for a three-song encore on this occasion, with their now customary set-closer 'Pandemonium' (complete with live violin!) dedicated to Jester, the Killing Joke web-editor who is currently suffering from cancer and (due to his location in the USA) needs money to pay for treatment.

## **KMFDM – Hau Ruck Tour – 30 Oct 2005**

Last year's KMFDM show at the Mean Fiddler was their first in the UK for several years. Clearly now very much a going concern again, 2005 saw the release of 'Hau Ruck', their third album since 'reforming' in 2002. I hadn't actually heard 'Hau Ruck' at the time of attending the show – I actually picked up my copy at the merchandise stall before heading stage-wards. I'd heard at least one good review of the thing beforehand, however (the first ever EOL-Audio review not written by me, in fact), so hopes were still high.

There were two support acts tonight. **D-Model** played a form of female-vocal aggro-industrial bitch-rock that was certainly in keeping with the occasion, but unfortunately, they looked better than they sounded. Only one song (with a very Patti Smith-style vocal) really made an impression, and even then I had no urge to place their CDs on my to-collect list.

Then came **Panic DHH**, who had supported KMFDM on their previous tour and were duly invited back for more. They brought with them the automatic following that is granted to any band who signs to Alec Empire's DHR label, but are currently failing to drag me along for the ride. Their combination of hardcore, industrial and punk may have crossover appeal

amongst fans of extreme music, but I find their songs quite monotonous. I eventually chose to hide at the bar, the classic refuge from unwanted support bands.

I returned of course for **KMFDM**. And it was here that I ran into what could only be described as a reviewer's nightmare. For those of you planning to start up independent review sites such as this one (or you could just write for EOL-Audio!) let me grant you a word of advice – if a band tours behind an album, make sure you hear it before going to the show! We don't have the press benefit of getting the new releases sent to our letterboxes.

Anyway, the performances were strong, the beats ultra-heavy as ever and the vocals committed. But the decision to play a relatively small number of dert-cert favourites in favour of new songs and catalogue obscurities meant it was much harder to get 'into it' than it might have been. There was a good mosh-pit for 'A Drug Against War', and decent renditions of 'Megalomaniac' and 'WWIII' in the encore, but no sign of 'Juke-Joint Jezebel', 'Light', 'Anarchy', 'Godlike' and...need I go on?

It was clear that opinions were varied as to the enjoyment gained from tonight's performance. Those familiar with the new album seemed to enjoy themselves more than those who were really there for the old favourites. It's clearly tricky for a band with a sizeable backcatalogue and a new album to promote to assemble a setlist to satisfy everyone, but somehow I don't think they've quite got the balance right here.

## **Black Celebration 2005 – 30 Oct 2005**

This was to be the seventh Black Celebration event to be held by Flag Promotions, and, if rumours serve to be correct, the last. It's enjoyed a chequered history to say the least, the highs of 2000 (VNV headlining) and 2002 (Apoptygma headlining) offset by the more recent lows, including the unimaginative 2003 event which I didn't even bother to attend, and the various issues that bugged the 2-day events last time.

Black Celebration's spring equivalent (Elektrofest) has also seems get a rough deal more often than it should – 2003 and 2004 both seeing line-up that changed every time you looked at them, followed by this year's humiliating four-bands-in-Slimelight debacle. But in its own way, this event topped them all. Originally, Apoptygma Berzerk were supposed to headline in the event, scheduled for the London Astoria. Then they 'asked to have their date moved'.

Searching for a new headliner, Frank eventually came up with a mysterious construct known as 'Killing Joke Sound System'. A couple of months later, this evolved into 'Killing Joke'. Then they cancelled due to Jaz Coleman's illness. Those on the inside know that this was at least true (several Scandinavian dates had also been cancelled), but the double cancellation of a headliner had resulted in the event being tainted no matter what occurred next. PAL had also disappeared from the line-up, whom I'd liked to have seen, but that was a small concern in comparison.

Eventually, support act Mesh were promoted to headliner, the event was moved to the Mean Fiddler next door and Flag dug into their magic bag and pulled out This Morn'Omina and Sheep On Drugs to help fill the bill. With Rico and five other bands also billed, the line-up still had a degree of respectability, but the unstable lead-in didn't exactly inspire confidence. Neither did the rather grotty Mean Fiddler venue, whose soundsystem was making a pretty decent job of tripping up any band that didn't get a soundcheck (that's all of them barring the top three).

Despite a touch of heavy Slimelighting the night before, I still made it in for **Tracer**. I'd seen them once before and found them rather anonymous. The lead singer was clearly trying to make amends, donning a huge cloak and developing a demented stance on stage to try and develop an image for the project. Unfortunately, it failed to distract my attention from the music, dirge-like guitars and simplistic beat programming failing to spark much interest from the pockets of early arrivals dotted around the Mean Fiddler stage.

The first band of interest today was **Faetal**. Their 2004 album [sic] had impressed greatly, and their Madame JoJo's show in March had indicated an increasing confidence on stage. Poor sound quality would stifle their attempts to build on their improving live reputation, but when the Mean Fiddler set-up allowed, Faetal were still able to impress. The slow-building 'Home' could yet become an underground classic, whilst the quirky electro-indie of 'Liquid Hate' and the apocalyptic 'Divide By Zero' were the other key stand-out songs.

Wasp Factory labelmates **Deathboy** were next on stage, repeating their Whitby/Black Celebration double-header of two years ago. Their early songs might have been catchy, but neither were they especially enduring. The band (now with co-ordinated stage wear and Lee Chaos providing live keys and backing vocals) seem to have grown in the interim, with songs such as 'Slip' indicating a new songwriting maturity, even if they still like to indulge in the odd bit of foul-mouthed electro-punk once in a while ('Smile You Fuckers', indeed...).

Despite some interesting new material, this performance didn't strike me as an absolute great – it's not clear whether post-Whitby fatigue, the reduced status of this event (how much they would have loved to have supported Killing Joke, methinks?) or a desire to stop playing live long enough to finish the new album. Nonetheless, three years after their first appearance, Deathboy seem to have least shaken off their 'new boy' status – you don't last very long on the gigging circuit if it's just your mates supporting you.

**Kat5can** next, a band whose sleazy industrial electronics had initially impressed when I first heard them play back in 2002, but had proved to be less and less impressive with each successive performance. They've recently added an e-drummer to their line-up in an effort to spice up their live show, a move which I largely regard to be a success. I always thought this projects in-her-face demeanour needed more than two people to really work on stage, and some extra percussive input is more or less exactly what they needed.

Now that Kat5can had my attention, I was able to give their sound more attention than I had in the past. There's clearly influence from some of the nastier EBM and elektro acts in there, but there's still a rebellious punk influence running through their songs. Some of the dense, fuzzy synths sounded suspiciously like power chords – maybe this is just punk rock played electronically? One way or another, Kat5can seem to be nicely on track to deliver a memorable second album.

I took a quick break for dinner but still caught the bulk of **Inertia's** set. They were celebrating their 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary here, no mean feat when most of the UK scene names from the mid-90s are not only dead and buried but now utterly decomposed, even if they were further down the billing here than they were at the first Black Celebration in 1999. One might also have hoped that in the process, they might have learned how to work with less-than-ideal live set-ups. Surely they must have had their share of duff monitors, dodgy mics and sound engineers who can't handle anything beyond a 4-piece rock line-up?

Nope. Their set tonight either indicated a lack of preparation or a huge over-estimation of their live capability. Reza was surging around the stage like a man possessed, Alexys was hammering the drum pads with conviction and Andrew Trail was busy tweaking his rack of electronics. These may well be the usual ingredients of an Inertia live show, but today, it

was all too much, too soon. By the time they got to their traditional set-closer 'Retaliate', they had lost all sense of proportion. A track I usually love had descended into a mess of analogue resonance and over-enthusiastic drumming. The band seemed to be enjoying themselves, but unlike previous occasions, they didn't seem to be taking the audience along with them.

Despite this, I doubt Inertia's reputation would have suffered as a result of this performance. And why? Because you had **Sheep on Drugs** to compare them to. A shambolic 'comeback' attempt in 2002 eventually settled a year later to a passable two-piece performance with Lee Fraser taking over Duncan's old vocal parts, even if he spent half the show perched behind his keyboard rack. Here a masked stranger looked after the electronics, with Lee taking on the role of undisputed frontman, with a girl in a green wig as his barely-audible backing vocalist.

And it's only once the music started that I realised once and for all that this project really, really should be given a mercy killing before people forget that 'Motorbike' and '15 Minutes of Fame' were once popular songs. Lee's punky delivery now has the demeanour of a washed-up junkie, unable to convincingly perform his old favourites, never mind write anything new. As for his 'backing vocalist', she eventually tore off that awful wig (top tip dear – the shaved head looked way better) and, in what must have been an act of utter desperation, got her tits out. I know Flag were desperate for bands, but they can't keep on dishing up has-beens like this for much longer.

Luckily, he also secured a performance from Scotland's **Rico**. Despite their regular appearances in London in recent times, I hadn't yet heard them play live and my only experience of their studio work was the Gary Numan collaboration 'Crazier' (which had even crept into the UK charts). And I have to say that initially, I was not impressed. Loud guitars, lots of shouting – did a band such as this seriously belong at Black Celebration?

The revelation came about four tracks in with a song called 'Big Black Sea' – it was at least point that I realised that even if Rico weren't as original as some, they could at least pen a decent song – even though I'd never heard the song before, I was almost singing along by its conclusion. The aforementioned 'Crazier' (with Rico doing the vocals himself) also went down a treat, as did their viscous finale of 'Attack Me'. Rico may have benefited by being the first band of the day to get a decent sound balance, but they still justified their inclusion on the billing.

**This Morn'Omina** had mysteriously found themselves on the billing with a second-top slot. The Belgian act may have a sizeable underground following (they pulled a few thousand at WGT this year), but in the UK they still don't really register. 'One Eyed Man' is their only real club hit, and they didn't even play that particular tune. Given that many of the Ant-Zen collective were absent following PAL's exit from the billing, TMO were playing to an audience who for the most part had no idea who they were.

Even if you aren't au fait with TMO's music, their live show still has appeal, however, thanks in no small part to their use of live percussion, combining pad whacking with a selection of chma styles which meshed surprisingly well with the hard industrial pound emerging from the rack of electronics over on the far side of the stage. Their combination of industrial, goa and world music elements proved to be good to dance to, whilst still bearing more originality than the majority of the rest of the billing combined. I still think they'd work better in a club context, but they were a welcome (if slightly misplaced) late addition to the billing.

All that remained now was for **Mesh** to bring the entertainment to a close. Having bought all the albums and seen them several times before, I wasn't exactly expecting any



surprises, and neither did I get any. Just a lot of very good songs. Masters of the post-Depeche Mode contemporary synth-pop sound, Mesh succeed where others fail largely on the sheer quality of their output. Mark Hockings is a good a singer on stage as he is on CD and their music and lyrics are both stronger than many equivalent bands from Germany and Scandinavia.

The set mainly concentrated on their last two albums, opening with 'Firefly' (something of a personal favourite) and dropping in three new songs from the recorded (but not yet released) album due in 2006. Surprises included a rare airing of 'Waves' and the schmaltz of their perennial 'You Didn't Want Me'. Whilst I began to tire of their pixel-perfect angsty synth-pop about 20 minutes from home, I still found just enough energy to dance and sing along a little bit. And that was essentially it.

This was the seventh and apparently last Black Celebration festival to be run by Flag Promotions. The confused billing may not have been entirely Frank's fault, but doesn't look good no matter who was to blame. Out of the 7 festivals, only 2002 went ahead with the full original line-up as advertised.

The shortage of European EBM/future pop/hellektro acts was apparent at all stages of the promotion. These bands are seriously big news in the London club scene, but few of them have shown any signs of playing live, at least not for Flag Promotions. Five years ago we got VNV Nation, Haujobb and Project-X, making this line-up look weak in comparison. It's a pity to see Black Celebration go – I only hope someone takes the bait and improves on the formula.

## **VNV Nation – Matter + Form UK Tour – 27 Nov 2005**

The regularity of live reviews on this pages might indicate that VNV Nation have played quite regularly in my general vicinity. The reality is that they haven't – of the last five VNV live reviews, two were from M'era Luna, two were from Belgium and one from InFest 2003. They haven't played London since Dark Jubilee in June 2002. That's three-and-a-half-years. For a band with an exhaustive live schedule, who also spent some of their most productive years in the city, that's quite some wait.

This was in fact the last show of their UK tour, but the only one of five shows to take place in the southern half of the country. The Islington Academy was chosen as the venue, a location which secured the band a sell-out, something rarely experienced by scene bands away from their German hot-spots. The choice of venue may have had something to do with the fact that the show was put on in conjunction with Slimelight (just around the corner, hosting the aftershow with free admittance to all ticket holders).

The queue was long and slow-moving – by the time I'd made it in I'd already missed a substantial chunk of [SITD]'s London debut. I have to confess that for me, this was a blessing in disguise. Whilst I like [SITD]'s basic concept and a number of their songs, I found their second album, released earlier this year, to be rather tedious and overly indicative of their limitations – they're a band best enjoyed in small doses. They were clearly enjoying themselves on stage, however, Carsten and Tom both clearly overjoyed to finally play the London, and to a largely positive response, too.

As with previous shows, Carsten gave the mic to Tom for a couple of tracks with a more future-poppy feel, vocals sung rather than snarled. Whilst this gave their set a modicum of variety, Tom isn't a confident a vocalist as some, lessening the impact these songs may have had. Carsten came back to do 'Laughingstock' and 'Snuff Machinery', their two biggest hits to date. [SITD:] clearly impressed many, although I think they've hit a sonic

buffer when it comes to developing their sound – little progress seems to have been made since their 2003 shows.

As a side-point, whilst the new album has little play in EBM DJ set's around London, their remixes have gone down a storm (their version of VNV's 'Chrome' was more popular than the original even before it was released!). They'd do well to learn from the raw materials of their remix source tracks. Whilst they've clearly got the knack of producing a decent dance rhythm, their lyrics and vocals both need to improve if they're going to break out of the scene's '2<sup>nd</sup> division'. [:SITD:] have done enough to make a mark, but can they take it further? It isn't yet clear.

Anyway, the band we were all really here to see were **VNV Nation**. Whilst many were seeing VNV play for the first time, at least in a while, I had already seen them play twice this year – once in Mechelen and again at M'era Luna. The crowd went wild as the lights went down, and as the opening bars of 'Honour 2003' played, they went nigh on chmalt. It had simply been too long. The cheers at the end of this first track drowned out everything. Even if future pop had begun to fall out of favour, it's innovators were seemingly immune from the apparent rot.

As a seasoned VNV live veteran (or at least journeyman), I largely knew what to expect from tonight's show. They didn't overplay the new album – 'Arena' made an appearance as well the three 'essentials' (Chrome, Perpetual and Homeward). The remainder of the set was largely devoted to the last two albums, with 'Fearless' reappearing, having been missed out earlier this year. I'm still hoping to hear an 'Advance and Follow' song again one day, but it looks like I'm going to be left waiting a while longer (though I'm told they've played 'Cold' a few times on tour).

The quality of the live vocals was better than at some previous shows, maybe not quite as good as the CDs but not enough to spoil enjoyment of the evening. As ever with VNV shows, there was plenty of inter-song banter. Their equipment doesn't break down as much any more, but that doesn't stop them from getting to know the crowd at opportune moments. Ronan was particularly keen to point out how much venues like the VNV fanbase – no trouble, no violence and a lot of people through the door.

The calls for an encore were inevitable. There's no way VNV can squeeze all of their 'big' songs into a single set – 'Joy' and 'Kingdom' were both omitted in favour of a rare airing of 'Distant/Rubicon' (the two songs combined to form one) and the return of 'Solitary' to the set. The second encore saw the usual finale of 'Beloved' and 'Electronaut'. With that over with, it was off to Slimelight and a couple of hours more dancing and the end to a fine evenings entertainment.

Anyway, three-and-a-half years absence have clearly done nothing to dent VNV's popularity in the capital. The smallish venue might have compressed the atmosphere slightly, but there's no doubting the continued popularity of a band who have inspired too many second-rate rip-offs (a comment was made about the lack of Access Virii on stage at one point – possibly indicative of the bands recent direction?). Nonetheless, VNV remain one of the safest bets going for a night of future-popped entertainment.

## **Combichrist, Kat5can, XP8 and Trauma Pet – 4 Dec 2005**

This show came as something of a surprise to many of us. Combichrist had appeared on the billing for Black Celebration 2004, only to disappear from the line up at a very late stage, so late that not even Flag, known to have multiple local acts on speed-dial, couldn't summon a substitute in time. The stories explaining their cancellation were never clear, but somehow everyone kissed and made up ready for another try in 2005.

It's just as well, in fact. The second Combichrist album 'Everybody Hates You' had been a major factor on the Slimelight dancefloors all year, and doubtlessly saw heavy play across the country, if tonight's turnout was anything to go by. The gig was originally scheduled for Dingwalls in Camden, but was moved to the Islington Academy at the last minute when it looked like it was selling out. Whilst it wasn't quite as busy as VNV Nation the week before (the upstairs bit wasn't open), it was still an impressive showing, possibly bigger than any Icon of Coil audience seen in the past five years (Remember them? This was only thought to be a IoC side-project at one point!).

Three support bands were billed, starting off with **Trauma Pet**. Having only caught two songs of their Elektrofest performance (with no feeling barring indifference), I was keen to see what all the hype they were getting from certain quarters was really about. They've expanded their line-up recently to include Pete from Faetal on guitar, potentially a good move given his innate skill and lack of any form of genre fascism (a curse which has afflicted too many fine musicians over the years).

It's just a pity that the project seems to have trouble realising its potential. A faulty backing tracks didn't get them off to a great start, but for much of their set they seemed to be playing rather than performing – there simply wasn't anything attention-grabbing going on, with a number of the songs meandering rather than actually going anywhere. There's some nice ideas buried in their sound but it was only really the closing two songs that made any kind of impression on me, the last track of all bearing a very Diary of Dreams-like piano line, the kind of thing which is always a dead-cert to catch my attention.

On next were the Italian band **XP8**, leading lights in the genre of Italian Body Music (with the unfortunate abbreviation 'IBM'). I'd heard great things about them, although had yet to hear any of their music myself. They utilised two keyboards players and projections behind the lead singer – a fairly typical line-up for a band of this style. Unfortunately, it seems, the Italian Body Music invasion has come a few years too late. XP8 were competent enough, and most of their songs seemed dance-friendly, but no more than that. Whether you call it EBM or future pop, this style is suffering increasing saturation these days, and XP8 simply didn't have a way of taking it forward.

**Kat5can** were on next. Despite enjoying their Black Celebration set, I wasn't overly excited about a repeat performance. There are a great many acts aching for some live coverage right now, and to give the same act two high-profile slots on consecutive months strikes me as being a little unbalanced. The boys still put on a decent show with their increasingly competent 'industrial punk' sound, but I had my fill of that last month, so I suggest you check there for the full review.

So what did **Combichrist** have in store for us tonight? I had a vague idea having seen the first half of their M'era Luna set, but there I'd run off to watch Schandmaul (yes – folk rock instead of industrial beats. Must be a new low!). With three back-up men, Andy LaPlegua could take the undisputed role as frontman, the relatively sparse nature of lyrics in Combichrist songs of no concern whatsoever. They opened with 'This Shit Will Fcuk You Up' – the album version features processed female vox. Andy just shouted over the top of it. As did most of the audience.

And that more or less set the tone for the rest of the evening. The set featured the catchiest tracks from 'Everybody Hates You', including of course the likes of 'Blut Royale' (which at least had a bespoke Andy LaPlegua vocal in its original form). A couple of tracks from 'The Joy of Gunz' also made an appearance, namely 'Intruder Alert' and 'God Wrapped In Plastic'. The other notable inclusion was the title track from the Out of Line compilation 'This Is TBM'. Featuring a lot of slightly industrial techno acts that don't

actually sound all that much like Combichrist. Sorry Andy, it isn't easy inventing genre names that stick. Trust me, I've tried.

Suffice to say, Combichrist still went down a storm. The 'Everybody Hates You' album had been a staple at the scene clubs all year long, and the live show at least tried to be more than a glorified DJ set – the kind of thing most 'live' show in this genre end up as. But despite this, for me the novelty has worn off. I've had Combichrist thrown in my direction all year long, and I think it'll go down in the EOL-Archives as a '2005 thing' rather than the future direction of industrial music. Because This Shit Fucked Me Up.

And no, I didn't Enjoy The Abuse.

## **MaxDmyz (Dublin Castle) – 12 Jan 2006**

With a scant few hours warning, my 2006 gigging circuit began at the Dublin Castle on a Thursday night. There was a four-band billing, but the opening two bands (Void and Valentine Stitch) fell so far outside my musical radar than I had no urge to actually review them, whilst headliners 'Men and Gods' were missed due to a need to get home. I know I'd usually review every band that gets within earshot, but tonight was an exception.

**MaxDmyz** was the only draw.

Anyone who's been to The Dublin castle will know that the stage there is quite small. Anyone who's seen MaxDmyz will know that they've got a sizeable line-up. Put those together and the result is one very crowded stage. Two vocalists, two guitarists, bassist, keyboards and a drum-kick (complete with double kick!). Performance artist Addam wasn't present, but it wasn't clear whether he's left the band line-up or simply couldn't fit on the stage. The keyboard was balanced on top of the guitar amp, and no band member had even the slightest breathing space.

Not that many of those musicians were particularly familiar. It'd been two years since I'd actually seen MaxDmyz play, and the line-up seems to have undergone another major overhaul since I last saw them, with only Pete 'Twister' and Dazy left as the core members – a conversion with Pete before the show began indicates the band may have had around 30 members since first forming in 1999! It's admirable how he manages to keep the project on the rails, but one wonders how far they might have come with a little more stability?

Anyway, the set about their set with their usual commitment, only for the Dublin Castle soundsystem to severely struggle with a band with a sound some degree more complex than the usual guitar-bass-drums-singer combo which had formed the basis of the evening's 'entertainment' so far. It was a couple of songs before MaxDmyz could be heard in a manner which allowed me to even attempt to judge how they fare as a live act these days. In less-than-ideal circumstances, it's fair to say they were as tight as could be expected, but this was not the right venue. The anarchic feel of their Imperial College show in November 2001 (my favourite MaxDmyz show to date) just wasn't possible here.

Nonetheless, there's signs of musical progress. Despite the additional guitar, the keyboards were still more prominent in the mix than before, and this was an important step due to the way they give the MaxDmyz sound it's 'character', the flavouring in the raw mix of jagged riffs, visceral drumming and two vocalists, with a decent vibe going between them. The old favourite 'Muthablud' and 'Made In Heaven' still appeared in the set, with the remainder given over to new material which hasn't so far been recorded beyond demo stage. The newest songs, designed with two guitarists in mind, is definitely less industrial and more metal, but the core appeal of the band remains.

Hopefully they'll make it into the studio again one day, as some of this material would seriously benefit from a higher-fidelity production – as it stands, it's hard to rate their more recent output from their live shows alone as the sound systems in the venues which they play don't lend themselves well to picking out the fine details. I'm not sure if they're better off without the performance art (as it was never really related to the music so might be regarded as quite superfluous) or whether they should bring it back (as it adds to the anarchic atmosphere). Regardless, MaxDmyz is still very much a going concern, but I just hope they can hold it all together long enough to record some of their material beyond demo stage, as I still don't think I've heard this project at it's best.

## **Bauhaus – Near The Atmosphere Tour – 3 Feb 2006**

Here's another one of those ancient acts I thought I'd never get to see. Not only had Bauhaus had split as far back as 1983, but the projects of the former band members showed no intention of sitting in the shadow of their former band. Both Peter Murphy and Love & Rockets did what Bauhaus never did and break the US market (something most Brits find notoriously difficult) and the fact that Murphy in particular was able to tour successfully without performing a single Bauhaus song indicated to me that a re-union was unlikely. I know they reunited briefly in 1998, but every indication was that was a one-off.

But no, come late 2005, and Bauhaus were touring once more. It took a few months before they made it to their homeland, having first satiated America's desire to see exactly where their beloved Peter Murphy and Love & Rockets emerged from. The London show at the Brixton Academy was the last date on the UK leg of their tour, and given the bands status as cult legends of sorts, it came as no surprise to find the show sold out some months beforehand. The question remained whether this was a mere cash-in reunion, or whether there was real purpose behind this reformation. Killing Joke have kept the fire burning despite multiple upheavals, but The Mission were reasonable at best when I saw them at M'era Luna 2004, whilst The Sisters of Mercy proved to be notoriously inconsistent on the two occasions I've seen them (they never split, but one surviving member scarcely counts as continuity as far as the live show goes). How would **Bauhaus** fare?

The answer began to reveal itself once the intro tape had stopped and the band came on stage. Peter Murphy delivered 'Burning From The Inside' from the top of the amp stack, and despite a solo career that deviates far from proto-gothic post-punk, his marriage to a Turkish woman and his subsequent conversion to Islam, that huge, melodramatic voice is still very much intact, and he's still retained those gaunt, vampiric looks to boot. So that was one worry dispensed with. Bauhaus could still perform their own songs, and look pretty much like they sounded. The vocals could have been more prominent in the mix, but given some of the utterly dreadful live sound I've experience at various gigs the last few months, I'm in no mood to kick up a fuss.

With no actual new material in the offing, the setlist was for the most part fairly predictable for a reunion tour – if you're looking for an aide mémoire, the set consisted of the majority of the mid-90s compilation 'Crackle' plus a couple of album tracks, including 'A God In An Alcove' and 'Stigmaté Martyr'. They missed out 'Lagatija Nick', the track that introduced me to Bauhaus all those years ago, but otherwise everything I wanted to hear was played. From the main set, I particularly enjoyed 'She's In Parties' (who wouldn't?), 'Terror Couple Kill Colonel' although the unexpected highlight for me was 'Hollow Hills', Daniel Ash's bowed guitar proving to be especially eerie in the live arena.

Their set finished with a riotous performance of 'Dark Entries', but the encores were inevitable. What I wasn't expecting was a cover of Joy Division's 'Transmission'. I've heard a lot of Joy Division covers over the years, many of them rather lame, but this one was

different – Bauhaus were near enough contemporaries to Joy Division to be able to actual capture the spirit of the original as well as the musical elements, and Peter Murphy's impersonation of Ian Curtis was more convincing than any I've heard to date. The second encore offered the cover version everyone was really waiting for – Ziggy Stardust. Only they walked off stage a few bars from the end.

Only to walk back on again five minutes later, with Peter Murphy now clad in a vampiric cape, finish the song, and then embark on the one remaining track without which the night would not be complete. I'm referring of course to 'Bela Lugosi's Dead'. It's not actually that complex a song when you think about it – but somehow, despite it's 9-minute length, it became the band's defining song, the point where post-punk became goth. With that reminder out of the way, the foursome left the stage for the last time, leaving us with a desperate rush through the crowd to get to Brixton station become the place got unbearable packed full of goths. Or whatever the accepted term is for Bauhaus fans these days.

## **Gary Numan – 'Jagged' Launch – 18 Mar 2006**

Whilst Mr. Numan has been performing at least relatively regularly over the past few years, he hadn't actually released a new studio album to follow on from 2000's well-received 'Pure'. Various personal issues and label issues (having signed to Artful and split again before any new album had been released) had delayed this recording for longer than either Gary or any of his fans would have liked. But on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2006, 'Jagged' finally hit the shelves. Five days later came the launch party.

This wasn't intended as a 'regular' Numan show – the initial impression from Gary's own site was that only songs from the album and associated singles would be played. This plan was later refined so that three old songs would appear in the encore, if the audience called for one. Judging by the fanaticism of some Numanoids, this would initially seem to be a dead cert, but since the main part of the set would consist only of new songs, songs which we had only a few days to get to grips with, suddenly the audience reaction seemed harder to predict.

I myself had bought the album on launch day but had yet to really get into it. I only had seated tickets for the forum (the few other people I knew were all in the standing bit), so now I was sitting on my own, upstairs amongst lots of people in their own private conversations, watching a female-fronted support band called **Rubicks**. I'd seen them supporting Numan once before and was largely unconvinced. This performance sounded 'rockier' than the one I remember at the Hackney Ocean in September 2002, but I'm still not getting into them. Their new-wave rock sound was passably proficient but it lacked character. They were relevant enough to tonight's headliner to at least garner some audience interest, but personally I was unmoved by the whole experience.

Then it's time for the build-up to the main **Gary Numan** show. Numanoids are a partisan lot, and there were plenty of rallying cries of 'NOO-MAN! NOO-MAN!' during the half-hour remaining to the start. Finally the lights fell, the crowd response now hysterical as Gary's backing band came on stage (lacking, for once, Sulpher's Rob Holliday on bass, who was playing with the Prodigy). Gary himself appeared and set about his delivery of opening track 'Pressure' with the kind of conviction that only comes from a man who knows he's onto something good. The first test had been passed – despite their newness of tonight's set, the assembled band could play their material and play it well.

They continued though 'Fold' and 'Halo', the versions performed here benefitting from additional live 'oomph', which was very much welcome to my ears, as I generally thought that the album versions didn't really have the impact the likes of 'Pure' and 'Rip' had on the

previous disc. For me, the highlight of the main set was 'In A Dark Place', the 'Sometimes I Call Out For You' chorus filling every corner of the Forum's acoustic space. With Rob Holliday absent, bass guitar didn't feature much in the set, though keyboardist David Brooks provided us with a little bit of four-string action for 'Haunted' and a few other songs.

It was only towards the sets conclusion that attentions began to wander – too many new songs without a big hitter to balance things out. Sure enough, the encore came however, and with it a really intriguing version of 'Are 'Friends' Electric?', featuring stretches of piano before those distinctive overbearing synths from the original version were worked into mix. Long-time 'fan favourite' 'Down In The Park' (also the first Numan song I ever heard) appeared next, going down a storm, with the set finishing on 'Metal', which wasn't as polished as it could have been, but at the end of a challenging set, by now everyone was just having a good time and not worrying about the detail.

And so to another standing ovation, Gary Numan and his band left the stage for the last time this evening, mission very much completed. It was a brave move – I've never known an album launch gig open to the public let the new material dominate to such an extent, but the crowd went for it all the same, and it's also led to me picking the disc out of the pile once more (so many things coming out at the moment!) for a fresh re-evaluation. How exactly will the album go down over time remains to be seen – it's a complex beast, not one that can be assessed briefly, although tonight's performance certainly helps one appreciate the underlying talent at work.

## Depeche Mode 'Playing The Angel' Tour – 4 Apr 2006

Having seen a lot of different band a lot of times, my current attention is focused on the relatively few acts I have yet to see perform. With Tool arriving in June and a couple of major festival allowing me to mop up a number of those elusive European and Scandinavian acts, 2006 is looking good in terms of rounding up the remaining names on my 'to see' list. However, tonight would see the name at the very top of the list eliminated – Depeche Mode. I'd missed the Exciter tour for various reasons, and wasn't really into the band during any of their previous tours.

I had a few ideas as to what to expect, but they were varied to say the least. The '101' live album had demonstrated how good they could be when they're on form, but a TV transmission of their Paris show on the 'Exciter' tour suggested that they could be pretty boring come an 'off-day'. Or (if the stories I heard were true), an 'off-tour'. I was in good company, thankfully – two friends who had both been attending Depeche Mode concerts as far back as the 'Some Great Reward' tour. Anyway, we'd arrived in time to see the last two songs of support act **The Bravery**. I don't really know what to make of these 'new wave revival' acts, but comments comparing them with 'early U2' were about as descriptive as anyone could get.

But why bother about a 'revival' when the original new wave can still put up a fight? **Depeche Mode** had seen at least a partial return to form on 'Playing The Angel', and indeed opened their set with the two raucous opening tracks from that album, namely 'A Pain That I'm Used To' and 'John The Revelator'. Reminiscent of their 'Devotional' era, these two songs demonstrate as better as any that the 'Mode are no longer a mere 'synth-pop' act. Martin Gore (clad in a bizarre black feathery construction) plays guitar for the bulk of the set, a live drummer adds a decent 'rock' element to the performance, whilst Dave Gahan still has the demeanour of a superstar rock singer, a real 'performer' as opposed to a mere 'vocalist'.

The third track was 'A Question of Time', the first of the 'oldies', but still noticeably developed from the synth-based original on 'Black Celebration', although Dave still took the opportunity to spin round the stage like a lunatic (some things never change!). Things began to settle down after that, giving me a chance to take in their stage set, featuring light-up keyboard stands that looked like they'd been taken from a 1970s sci-fi movie, though the oddest inclusion was a big light-up ball that lit up words like 'ANGEL', 'PAIN', 'LOVE' and suchlike, presumably indicating the 'theme' of each song.

In terms of the setlist, the new album obviously featured most strongly, though they didn't let it dominate. The only weak song of the night was 'Macro', a directionless album track that couldn't find any more purpose on stage. Generally, they kept to the most 'obvious' tracks, such as singles 'Precious' and 'Suffer Well', interspersed with selections from their back catalogue. I particularly enjoyed 'Walking In My Shoes', which still carries that ominous sense of foreboding despite the fact that the band have long since exorcised the demons that haunted them when they recorded the original.

'Behind The Wheel' and 'I Feel You' also cropped up, sound choices by a band who have more good songs than they could possibly squeeze onto a touring setlist. It was a little disappointing to get nothing from 'Some Great Reward', especially when you consider that they managed to squeeze in all four singles from 'Violator', three of them at the end of the set. That said, there could be many worse ways of rounding off a set that with back-to-back renditions of 'Personal Jesus' and 'Enjoy The Silence', so it wasn't a critical flaw.

The encores were of course inevitable, with Martin Gore taking to the stage first to perform a piano based solo on 'Shake The Disease', another typically 'Mode Moment' that had to occur at least once during the course of the evening. This led onto performances of perennial crowd-pleasers 'Just Can't Get Enough' and 'Everything Counts', the latter being my personal Depeche Mode favourite, so naturally I was more than happy to finally get to sing that 'Grabbing Hands, Grab All They Can' bit in the company of several thousand other like-minded individuals.

Even this left one 'must-hear' track still to play, namely 'Never Let Me Down', which duly appeared when the boys came on stage for the second encore. Even someone such as myself, who had never attended a Depeche Mode gig before, knew that hand-waving was more-or-less compulsory for everyone present who was not an amputee. Sure enough, as the song reached it's climax, it looked like the Wembley Arena had sprouted tentacles. This just left 'Goodnight Lovers', the only 'Exciter' song to appear (no bad thing if you ask me), Martin and Dave seeing us out with a brotherly duet.

So that was that – finally Depeche Mode comes off the ever-shortening 'bands to see' list. I'd waiting a number of years for this, and I have to be thankful that when I finally did see them perform, I got them when they were on form. I don't regret missing the 'Exciter' tour – far better to wait until they had some decent songs to play. Fascinating that a band credited for their influence on 'synth-pop' barely registered an identifiable 'bleepy bit' until the airing of two 'golden oldies' in the encore, but bands and influences are like that.

## **Gotham 2006 – 9 Apr 2006**

The annual Flag one-day goth fest occurred a little bit earlier than usual in 2006. The usual alternation of Clan of Xymox and Inkubus Sukkubus (broken only in 2003 when The Damned somehow made it onto the bill) gave the Inkies their guaranteed headline slot, though for once there was genuine interest as to what came beneath. Aside from UK scene perennials Manuskript, the bill was refreshingly free from 'the usual suspects', with a rare UK performance by Theatre of Tragedy and the London debut of Gothminster the main attractions.



Before any of those bands, however, were four bands that were totally new to me, starting with **Uninvited Guest**. They're a slightly trashy mix of industrial metal, glam rock and sneering, sub-gothic gloom, the kind of combo that typically invited Marilyn Manson-comparisons, though they had enough of a musical identity of their own to avoid accusations of schmaltzy .

They're still developing as songwriters – structurally a number of their songs came over as being confused, a little bit stop-start, and they might also benefit from a live drummer and backing vocalist (rather than the overly obvious use of the singers own voice on the backing tape), but they began to get into the swing of things about three songs into their set, with 'After Your Dead' my personal favourite. Their cover of Bauhaus' 'Double Dare' (never a cover-friendly band) was at least reasonable and the band were entertaining to watch. There's just a bit more work to do in terms of getting their whole sound 'finalised'.

Next on were **Moriarti and the Sith**, continuing the trend of this years Gotham in terms of heading in a more 'metal' direction. A sizeable line-up was fronted by a masked singer, clearly fancying himself in the role of frontman, egging on the crowd and delivering each song with the demeanour of the rock anti-hero he clearly styles himself after. It wasn't really very 'goth', unless you apply the term to anthem-rock-era Cult or White Zombie horror movie-afflicted groove-metal (and I know I certainly don't), but amid the unholy racket emanating from the stage (the keyboards barely audible), the least you can say is that Moriarti and the Sith put on a show.

Maybe a little bit of goth now? Nope. Instead we got the all-Italian, all-female collective known simply as **MAB**. With the exception of the drummer, they were all clad in white baby-doll dresses, and thus stood out in a sartorial sense early on. As for the music, well, their singer (who apparently uses the slightly bizarre stage-name 'Psycho Jeremy') opened up with some operatic warbling, initially leading me to suspect we'd get some kind of Nightwish-variant, but it was only after the music kicked in that I realised exactly why they were an all-girl band. Acts like this often utilise dual female/male singers in a style known as 'Beauty and the Beast'. This girl could do both styles perfectly well on her own.

Anyway, MAB duly set about their screeching Italian bitch-metal with determination, displaying a kind of feminine anger that only an all-female band could offer. As with previous bands, the association they had with 'goth' was tenuous at best, their style of metal seemingly more inspired by down-to-earth styles such as grunge and lo-fi than the more elaborate genres which have inspired the Lacuna Coil and After Forever's of the world. Nonetheless, I enjoyed their performance, but I still doubt whether their ultimate ability is as strong as their underlying concept – they didn't have a stand-out song or the 'wow!-factor' I was hoping for. Maybe I'll check back in the future and see how they've developed.

It was shortly after MAB's set that I encountered members of London's deathrock collective around the foyer. I took that as a sign that we were finally going to get something resembling bona-fide, old-school goth. I'm not entirely sure what **Screaming Banshee Aircrew** actually resembled, but there were enough drum machines and melodramatic vocals to pass as something that might very well have emerged from the Batcave. Their were echoes of an old UK band called Suspiria in their overall sound (anyone remember them?), but the female vocalist made them sound slightly 'poppier'. Sadly, they also sounded incredibly dated. Neither did any of their songs proved exceptionally memorable (as I'm fully aware even the most I band can be saved with a decent tune!), so I doubt I'll be returning for seconds anytime soon.

Anyway, time for one of the two real acts of interest today (both Norwegian, as it happens) – **Gothminister**. He'd been scheduled to play London back in 2004, but had cancelled

several months before the show. He was here tonight many due to his slot supporting Theatre of Tragedy on tour (it's not beyond Flag to insert an entire tour line-up into a one-day-fest, though here at least it proved to be a good idea). The band's line-up had shrunk since I saw them briefly at M'era Luna 2004, losing both the keyboard player and that girl with all the outrageous costumes. Mind you, with the decadently dressed Bjorn Alexander Brem ('Gothminister' himself) fronting the act, what more do you need?

Musically, the Gothminister sound has progressed from their early 'gothic electronic anthems' (although key tracks such as 'Angel' and 'Gothic Anthem' still made it in), becoming more of a riff-heavy industrial rock act, a kind of Norwegian take on 'tanzmetal' (Rammstein, for those of you not au fait with obscure genre classifications). The live guitarist and drummer were both giving it plenty, although Gothminister himself remained the star of the show, regularly climbing a podium (really a stepladder covered in one of the bands banners) to deliver a few key lines from altitude. There's not a huge amount of variety in the Gothminister sound and I doubt I would have enjoyed the show if it had gone on for more than the forty minutes scheduled, but as it stood, it was the most enjoyable show of the day so far, a successful London debut.

Back to the UK scene then for **Manuskript**, a band traditionally associated with regular performances at Whitby Gothic Weekend, where their light-hearted demeanour 'boy band for goths' always went down well. I'd never actually seen them anywhere else, and WGW memories are always hazy at best. How would they fare on the more demanding London stage? Hopes were high in the EOL camp following Mike Uwins production work on Neon Zoo's debut album (now THERE'S a band I need to see live), surely indicative of a man (and therefore a band) who knows how to get the best out of a bunch of songs.

The sad truth was that in this environment, Manuskript simply failed to deliver. Whether it was the sound system, the placement of the band between two very distinctive overseas bands or just a group of musicians that had gotten out of bed the wrong side, there just didn't seem to be much of a 'spark' in their performance. Their association with the UK goth scene now seems to hang on their Whitby connections (as few remember their trad-gothy mid-90s debut album) – beyond that, their current sound seems more in keeping with the 'slightly miserable indie rock' brigade, a style of music that has never interested me, certainly not as an interlude between two overseas bands that seldom perform in London.

The second of which being **Theatre of Tragedy**, who had last played London at Dark Jubilee in 2002 in front of an audience that really wasn't their potential fanbase. In the interim, Liv Kristine had left the band, with a new vocalist 'Nell' brought in to replace her. I hadn't heard any of their new material (I'd only bought the album at the merchandise stall a few minutes before their set). If the early tracks were anything to go by, it's seems however that Theatre of Tragedy have returned to their 'old' sound. Back to what described earlier as 'beauty and the beast', as opposed to 'beauty and the machine' as heard on their past two albums.

It took a few songs before the sound system did them any favours at all (why are so many shows here afflicted by this issue?) but once that was sorted, the 2006-version Theatre of Tragedy was really quite impressive. Nell's voice and demeanour was more oriented towards a 'pop' sound, but she integrate into the bands overall sound well enough. Alongside their new material, they also dug out some of their earlier material from their 'Aegis' and 'A Rose For The Dead' releases. There was relatively little of their more recent industrial/electronic material, although they did close their set with 'Machine', which is certainly the best song from that phase of their career.

This left **Inkubus Sukkubus** with the job of headlining. Again. Why do they keep on appearing in this slot whenever Xymox don't? There are more than two vaguely goth-related bands capable of fulfilling this role, so why doesn't Flag look a little further afield? Or for that matter, why couldn't Theatre of Tragedy have headlined? They were the ones pulling the crowds, if the thinning nature of the audience at this point was anything to go by. Still, I've enjoyed their shows in the past, so I found a vantage point and prepared myself for my periodic dose of pagan rock.

For the first time that I can remember, the band were playing without any form of live percussion with neither a bodhran nor a drum kit in sight. All the percussion was therefore on backing, which made the somewhat simplistic nature of their programming seem all the more obvious. As for the live elements, Tony McCormick provided his usual guitar wrenching whilst Candia's vocals skipped gently over the top. Whilst they're both good enough at performing their own material, neither of them seems particularly versatile, and tonight it really, really showed. Other than 'Belladonna & Aconite', I can't honestly remember what they played. With half-an-hour to go, I grabbed my things and walked out. Nothing more to see here.

So that was Gotham 2006. The usual mix of promising new acts, personal favourites and trad-goth dinosaurs. Apart from that chaotic show with The Damned in 2003, Gotham has more-or-less followed the same format since it's inception. And just like The Cruxshadows last year, Diary of Dreams in 2004 or Girls Under Glass in 2002, Theatre of Tragedy made a damn fine job at showing up the headline act. Still, it's cheaper than a Whitby ticket for about as many bands, so on that basis it was good value. Still not keen on this venue, though. Maybe finally Elektrofest will see a Flag event take place in the elusive KOKO?

## Der Blutharsch and Bain Wolfkind – 22 Apr 2006

This was the beginning of what would become one of the most unusual weekends during my years on the live music circuit. Whilst I'd dipped my toes into the whole militant/neo-folk/not-World-Serpent-any-more scene, I didn't consider myself particularly knowledgeable on the subject. Those that were chmaltzy e, however, were standing next to me in the queue. I'd listened to most of Der Blutharsch's backcatalogue over the years, had very much approved of the move from solo-project to full-band status, but had precious little knowledge of the project's background or concept barring what I heard on the albums.

The most important thing to bear in mind was that my first live experience of Der Blutharsch would also be my only one. The project was disbanding following this tour, supporting the 'When Did Wonderland End?' album. The initial signs were not good – the doors opened an hour late, whilst the word spread that Deutsch Nepal were forced to pull out due to the fact that the project was also scheduled at the CMI festival the next day. Didn't bother me too much, since I was attending that as well, and the free bottle of wine handed to me on entry was sufficient to drown any troubles. I don't actually drink wine much, but free alcohol is never a bad thing.

All this left **Bain Wolfkind** as the sole support act. I'd only encountered the name as a credit on the last Der Blutharsch album, so had little idea as to what to expect. Predictions of some dark folky reditions of traditional European tunes or half-an-hour of militant pomp were a little wide of the mark, however. What we actually got was a cabaret act of sorts, an ominous, predominantly electronic backing track and a vocalist who seemed to be an unholy incarnation of some ancient crooner.

Describing such a bizarre combination of musical elements is hard – Bain Wolfkind himself cynically mentioned a review of his last London show describing him 'a cabaret Nitzer Ebb',

which to be fair isn't really a description that really captures the 'spirit' of the project. My description? My thoughts were that had the electronics revolution of the 1970s made it beyond the big cities (producing acts like Suicide and The Residents) and actually infiltrated the small-town, C&W-afflicted mid-West, this is probably the kind of music we would have heard.

It was an entertaining precursor to tonight's main attraction, namely **Der Blutharsch**. With no prior experience of this project live, it was left to friends more closely associated with this part of the scene than myself to explain the progression. Der Blutharsch was effectively an Albin Julius solo project for many years, with a full line-up only really forming for the past few albums. This progression can be heard on the albums as a move from avant-garde reworks of old martial recordings to a more confrontational, ritualistic post-industrial affair.

The five-member (all dressed in identical white shirts and black ties) live set-up was certainly impressive – aside from the guitars and drums (both a standing drum for those explosive moments of militancy and a more conventional kit), there was also a couple of analogue synthesisers and even a theremin. The vocals, generally half-spoken or chanted mantra-like by Albin and Marthynna, were not exactly indicative of any great singing talent (one cannot expect Albin to be a supreme vocalist in addition to everything else he has achieved), but they dovetailed the music nicely.

The rhythms certainly had militant overtones (but avoided sounding like they'd been nicked from a First World War death march), the guitars ground away nicely and Albin's stack of electronic screeched and squealed in a pleasing manner. It was refreshing to see a band who have developed such a unique sound actually play their music 'live'. Of course, naming the setlist is damn near impossible when you're reviewing a band which doesn't bother itself with anything as I as song titles.

If I had to pick out highlights, the song I know as 'Time Is Thee Enemy II' stood out as my favourite performance of the night, if only because I found myself singing it to myself for the remainder of the weekend. Also welcome was a performance of 'Let Your Iron Rain Fall Down Upon Me', a limited 7" with a DVD-Video version included with the recent Der Blutharsch album. What really mattered, however, was the performance, the efficient despatch of their set an impressive experience, truly indicative of a band wishing to go out on a high. That they have certainly achieved.

## **Imminent (Starvation) – 22 Apr 2006**

Free entry to Slimelight was included in the price of the Der Blutharsch ticket, although being a Whitby Weekend, it was free for members if you turned up early enough, anyway. Despite this, I'd originally planned to go home and get some rest before the CMI festival the next day, but I'd decided to stay on having heard that **Imminent** (aka Olivier Moreau) was playing a set during the club itself. He hasn't released much since cutting the 'Starvation' off of the project name (only a few collaborations with Synapscape), to the extent that the performance was advertised as 'Imminent (Starvation)'. Just to alleviate (or compound) the confusion.

Hopes were only averagely high, however. 'Nord' may have been my favourite Ant-Zen album of all (closely followed by Converter's 'Blast Furnace', in case you were wondering), but I hadn't actually listened to much of this style of music in recent times. The appeal of Olivier's work was in how he bridged the traditional sound of power noise with a noisy, freeform, IDM-based style known as 'technoid'. The raw power of heavily distorted rhythms combined with the 'where will it go next?' mindfuck inherent with any 'intelligent' dance

music style was an interesting proposition at the best of times. How would it work in the live context?

The simple answer – it didn't. There was little visual stimulus to be had watching a lone Belgian hovering behind indeterminate electronics. The music, meanwhile, really didn't seem to know what it wanted to do. It was too 'random' to actually dance to, rhythms coming and going, often offering brief moments of promise before switching abruptly to another line of attack. Things got a little better towards the end as we heard a few ultra-fast, ultra-complex loops reminiscent of breakcore, but by now I just wanted to sit down in a quiet corner. Imminent could now be ticked off my 'live bands to see' list, but that was the extent of what was achieved by staying on so late.

Anyway, despite the thinning crowd, an encore was half-heartedly called for and got, which was really just an excuse to play 'Tentack One'. This, at least, was a track that leant itself well to late-night industrial stomping, eight minutes of kickdrum distortion and looped, atonal layers of harsh electronic texture. This was always my favourite incarnation of power noise, a style that seems to be getting slightly lost in amongst all the chmaltz, industek, drum'n'noise and other 'intelligent' but slightly self-indulgent variants that seem to be occupying recent Hymen and Ant-Zen compilations. Hard to believe I once held top Google ranking for 'power noise'!

## Cold Meat Industry Festival – 23 Apr 2006

Following Der Blutharsch the night before and Imminent at Slimelight, the final leg in an exhaustive weekend of elitist industrial came at Koko (the reworked Camden Place), where the Swedish label Cold Meat Industry was staging a one-day festival. I was at least vaguely familiar with all six of the billed acts, although I'd only seen one of them (Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio) before. One slight problem was the late opening of the doors. The ticket said 2pm, the flier 3pm and the door actually opened at 4pm.

And even then, we arrived to find The Protagonist still in the midst of soundcheck. When that was over with, someone decided it was a good idea to play metal music, which was scarcely in keeping with the atmosphere. Eventually the house lights dimmed and the music took a turn for the darker and more minimal. What we were really waiting for, however, was some live music. By the time any action was seen on stage, it was 5pm. And even when there was action, it wasn't exactly, erm, active. I'm referring to the live performance of **Raison d'être**, which live takes the form of Peter Andersson standing behind a laptop, occasionally weaving in a little bit of brushed-metal percussion but otherwise letting his computer yield most of the soundscape.

Even as one-man projects go, this was static, although the backing video, featuring a mixture of abstract imagery and decaying industrial/maritime landscapes, at least fitted in well with the music, a kind of mixture of minimal synth textures and grinding, metallic noise. The performance lasted approximately 50 minutes, during which I only heard four or five identifiable pieces of music. Technically, the project is good at what it does, but a full-length set of it and nothing else left a little to be desired. I'm not sure if Peter has ever worked in alternative film or video game soundtracks, where such eevill ambience would work a treat, but if he hasn't, that might yet be his true calling. Failing that, I might yet pick up a Raison d'être album to use as a backing track next time I hold a late-night RPG.

Next up was another solo Swede by the name of Peter Andersson, this time the one who fronts **Deutsch Nepal**. To prevent confusion, I'll refer to him by his stage name of 'Lina Baby Doll'. Exactly why he is called that would not become clear for a couple more hours. For now, he had to endure the more immediate issue of his DAT machine not working, something upon which a solo project is usually highly reliant. Nonetheless, he struggled

through admirably. The combination of low-intensity industrial noodling and disembodied vocals worked well, despite the pops and crackles infecting the sound throughout. This performance was always going to be a 'best of a bad job', though Lina obviously had a keen fan-base in attendance, which I a confidence boost of sorts.

Now it was time for the first multi-member project of the day – **The Protagonist**, who's live version take the form of a three-piece project, fronted by Magnus Sundström. I had very much enjoyed his 'A Rebours' album, with the long awaited follow-up 'Songs of Experience' acquired only the previous evening. The Protagonist, for those unfamiliar with their work, play an explosive, portentous form of neo-classical bombast – pompous, but in a good way. Live, they utilise live drumming and violin in addition to keyboards, and not being an classical music expert, all I can say is they despatched their set in a professional manner, the first act to really 'fill' the darkest corners of Koko with their performance.

But now it was time for **Brighter Death Now**, CMI founder Roger Karmanik's key project. Accompanied on stage by Lina on bass guitar, the sound of BDN is amongst the most extreme and certainly the most experimental (not to mention the most truly 'industrial') of all the acts in presence today. From his more minimal early works, Roger has since developed the project into a power electronics behemoth, seething layers of noise, head-fucking frequencies (from both ends of the spectrum) and heavily treated vocals, which were carried through to the live show.

After a few songs of witnessing Roger screeching like a maniac, the frequencies and the not-quite-recovered-from-yet night before really began to take their toll, and I duly curled up into a little ball in the corner for a while. I emerged to find Lina had changed into his 'baby doll' dress and matching pigtails wigs, whilst a third member (who had forgotten to put any trousers on) joined his mates on stage for what would become a mixture of intense noise and a gay performance show. The whole affair was so bizarre that I'm really not sure if I thought it was entertaining. I'm glad I saw BDN once, but will I ever go to see them again? I'm really not sure.

Back then, to familiar ground (or at least as familiar as anything at this festival can be). **Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio**, the only CMI band I'd seen previously, were occupying second-top slot. The 'Rosarius' (Rosemary Larsen) was absent on this occasion which meant no female vocals, though Tomas Pettersson, with his hypnotic spoken-word style, was all that was really required. His depictions of matters carnal and philosophical, ably supported by ritualistic live percussion, was enough to get me (having bagged a centre front-row spot) into the trance-like state similar to the one I experienced in Ghent two years previously. There isn't much stylistic variation between individual ORE songs, but something tells me that isn't the idea. Sometimes there is virtue in repetition.

I was now beyond tired and close to total collapse. I decided that I would stay until 11pm and then leave (due to a slightly complex tube journey home). This thus left Jouni Havukainen of **In Slaughter Natives** with the relatively simple challenge of finishing this poor, defenceless reviewer off for good. Accompanied only by Tomas from ORE on keyboards, the bare-chested Jouni wandered the Koko stage, offering vocals that varied from a inhuman drone to a deathly screech. The music, apocalyptic walls of infernal noise, was like a soundtrack from hell itself, both bringing the event to a climax whilst simultaneously dealing it the final death blow.

On my way out, I made the decision to watch one final song from the balcony – it would turn out to be the last of the evening. I thus left Koko with the complete CMI experience on board. And it WAS an experience. A one-off chance to see six of Scandinavia's most bizarre industrial bands perform in succession. The CMI style is one I feel is best enjoyed in moderation, hence the fine details of each performance were not remembered for the

purposes of this review. Some of the organisation aspects could have been better, but once it got going, it became a memorable experience.

## Elektrofest 2006 – 30 Apr 2006

This was the seventh Elektrofest in succession, and the sixth I had personally attended (missing only the first). Following the chaotic line-up shifts in recent years, it was refreshing to find relative stability this year. Beborn Beton dropped off the billing early on and the mysteriously named 'Misty Woods and the GDM' were a no-show, but the upper end of the billing remained stable. There were no real 'big names' in terms of UK popularity, but suffice to say it was a greater pull than last year, and for once, the event actually took place in Koko as originally billed. 10 bands in 9 hours was still quite a feat, so I turned up early to see if they'd actually pull it off for once.

**Trauma Pet** opened Elektrofest as they did the year before. They were missing keyboard player/bassist Tara, so were forced to perform as a two-piece with Elie on vocals and Pete on guitar. Whilst this particular act have enjoyed some good publicity from certain quarters of the UK scene, I personally have yet to be truly impressed by their output. On paper, the project should be a dead-cert success – all involved are experience musicians, and Pete Boyd is a versatile guitarist who should have no trouble adapting to what is a very different project to his work in Faetal.

In practice, they've still seemingly got a way to go. They're growing in terms of stage confidence, certainly, and they do have a few songs which indicate promise ('Puppet' a potential darkwave success), but the 'wow!' factor isn't there. Elie's vocals tend to float gently rather than soar above the mix, Pete's guitar still doesn't feel fully integrated into every song and their backing track is a little bit 'thin' and simplistic. I may still continue to check on the development of Trauma Pet periodically, as there's definitely something here worth developing. But they can't rest comfortably just yet.

**Goteki**, the band formerly known as Sneaky Bat Machine took the stage next, fronted by Ross Tregenza, the artist formerly known as Sneaky. Little did I know about it before the event, but this would be the last ever Goteki performance. In the six years since they'd formed, they'd produced two albums and a number of Eps, dropped their slightly silly 'cyber' image and endured a substantial line-up change in the process. This was the end of the line, and didn't Ross let us know, mentioning the fact about three times during each song. They might have added guitars and bass during their 2003/4 shake-up, but their impact on the live sound of the project has been minimal – the bass guitar was simplistic, the guitar barely audible, much the same as the last time I saw Goteki back in Dec 2004.

The sound system wasn't exactly friendly to them, but six years hovering in the low-to-mid ranges of billings should have taught them a thing or two about working round such problems. Tracks such as 'Piranha Advancement' and 'Ninjabrrr!' sounded much as they did on Goteki O/S (I never bothered buying their second album). The shortcomings of the project were as apparent here as ever – Goteki always seem to have skipped lightly over various electronic styles, borrowing ideas from many sources but never truly mastering any one approach. The slightly camp charisma of their frontman has allowed them to entertain on occasion, but I fully agree that it's time to lay this band to rest.

Third on the bill were **Suzerain**, totally unknown to me prior to today's performance. Considering this was billed as an electronic festival, the appearance of a full rock-line up came as something of a surprise. A few minutes had passed before I'd established that they were one of the many 'post-punk revival' acts, a radio-friendly, sing-a-long form of slightly angsty rock. They seemed to have a reasonable fan-base in attendance, predominantly female, which was understandable. There was one song that sounded so

much like U2 that I couldn't tell if it was a cover or not. At the end of the day, Suzerain were no better or worse than The Killers, The Bravery or any of those other guitar rock bands the music industry seems to be publicly wanking over these days. Since they seem to have some decent songs and enough musical proficiency, I can but wish them luck. Alas, my own interest was lost before they were halfway through their set.

The absent Misty led to a lengthy gap before **Greenhaus** came onto stage. A band that earned notoriety for playing on irrelevant bills far too often circa 2000-2002 had almost totally reworked themselves in the interim, having made the switch from techno to dream pop. The last time I saw them in 2004, they had only just begun the stylistic switch and clearly lacked confidence in the new style. Here, with a live drummer and a more confident Phoenix J fronting up the band, the band once again seemed to be comfortable with its own material.

But, once again, it seems once again I was watching another 'good at what they do but not my kind of thing' band. Frankly, they should have changed the name of the project a couple of years back. Revolution By Night are still trying to exorcise demons from their trad-goth era, and as far as Greenhaus are concerned, I still reckon a lot of people didn't show up thinking they'd seen it all in 2002. The best description I could come up with is 'airy', all downtempo rhythms, insubstantial vocals and textured guitars and keys. The final track was more uptempo, touted as a future single, which seems like a wise choice in many respects as it was certainly more attention-grabbing than the rest of their set. Fans of Cocteau Twins and the like may do well to check out the 'Greenhaus v2.0.' sound, but to succeed they'll have to get beyond Flag Promotions billings and onto some real indie rock stages, as if they have a potential fanbase, it's there rather than here.

**Tik and Tok** were now scheduled to make their first public appearance in 21 years. Too long ago for me to remember, of course. I'd heard the name a couple of times – mainly when reading Gary Numan's autobiography (they were one of the bands signed to 'Numa' – Gary's not-entirely-successful attempt at running a label) but also when trying to find out what happened to Geoff Pinckney from The Nine (he's producing their new material). Here Tik and Tok appeared on their own, with all the music on backing, wandering around stage wearing ugly rubber masks. They eventually pulled them off to reveal two very made-up men who schmaltz sung a very nice synth-pop duet, and then left the stage upon its conclusion, not even using the full 15 minute slot they had so generously been allocated. I might yet check them out should they do a full performance, as their dual vocals harmonised nicely and they seem to have some decent songs (if Geoff's involved, I'll be doubly sure to give them a second go). For now, we were left hungry.

Now for a band who have had a good deal of publicity of late – **The Modern**. Having been disqualified from the UK singles chart after a number of their fans bought multiple copies of their single (not, I may add, with any accusations of malpractice cast against the band themselves). All of this might have made them the best-known band on the bill, but despite all the hype (and I'd heard A LOT!), this was to be my first experience of them in any form (never pay much attention to the charts, really).

Having employed a master of ceremonies to introduce their blonde-haired, red-lipstick wearing singer (does she want to look like Debbie Harry or is it just a big coincidence?), The Modern set about their set, and everything about them said '80s pop band'. Not only the appearance of the singer, but the vocal style, drum beats, synths and everything else about them. They look and sound like something that had stepped out of a 20-year old copy of 'Smash Hits' – too polished to fall into the electroclash camp (no bad thing if you ask me), but too retro in its own way to really stand alongside the variety of synth-pop to which I'm more used. It was all pleasantly melodic, largely enjoyable (especially 'Industry'),



but following the hype, I have to admit to being slightly disappointed – I was expecting something a little more ground-breaking.

**Client** are another band who seem to have been riding on a wave of success lately, thanks in no small part to Fletch of Depeche Mode fame, who made them the first signing to his 'Toast Hawaii' label. They're another female-fronted synth-pop act, but differ from The Modern in one important respect – whilst The Modern seem to playing the pop game like the superstars they clearly want to be, Client are more evasive in their approach (their early promos were notorious for not showing the face of either member). The all-girl line-up were clad in identical black military-look dresses (a substantial improvement on the air-hostess image they started out with) and so scored highly on an aesthetic front, but would their music match their looks?

Erm....no. Their music was rather simplistic analogue pop, bordering on electroclash during the spoken-word moments and early Human League minus Phil Oakey when they were singing (had the girls joined in their 'Reproduction' era, this wouldn't be far off what I think they might have sounded like). A small proportion of the audience were really into it, singing along and cheering their beloved threesome. The majority of the remainder were looking rather unenthusiastic. I found a couple of their songs at least vaguely interesting, but if The Modern fell slightly short of what I was expecting, Client weren't even close. Despite all the promise, the good looks and intriguing influences, Client's songs just left me cold and disinterested.

Having experienced three straight bands with a 'retro' take on synth-pop, it was time for **Iris** to show everyone how 21<sup>st</sup> century synth-pop should sound. This was to be the London debut of the American three-piece, with a mere 35 minutes to convince a crowd who, for the most part, had never seen them before (why they didn't readjust the timings and give some bands longer sets once Misty Woods pulled out is beyond me). Opening up with the ballsy 'Hell's Coming With Me', Iris set about making the most of their too-short set. Their live sound left a little to be desired – it was rather beat-heavy, with the live guitar barely audible for the length of the set – hard to say whether this was intentional or due to soundsystem issues.

However, Reagan Jones seemed able to ride the storm – despite seeming rather humbled by his first trip to London, he remains a highly competent synth-pop vocalist, something many European acts need to learn from. Unfortunately, whilst I appreciate the technical merits of what they do, few Iris songs really touch me personally. They simply aren't a band I'm really 'in tune' with. If Texas-born synth-pop is your kind of thing, you'd do far worse than checking out Iris, either on CD or on stage. Interestingly, they didn't play 'Annie Would I Lie To You' – it may be their best known song, at least in London, but it's also a relic of their older, more retro- sound. Whether it would of made it in if they had ten extra minutes to play with will remain unknown.

**[:SITD:]** were next, playing their second London show following their debut supporting VNV Nation last November. When I first heard them three years ago, I became a more-or-less instant fan, only for them to fall out of favour following their disappointing second album as well as me growing tired of their live show. Here and now, however – they were exactly what I needed. Enough of the pop music – let's have some nice cheesy Germanic stomp! Opening with 'Lebensborn', the threesome duly set the lower level of Koko in motion. Shouty vocals, mid-tempo chmalt-beat and lots of opportunities to put your hands in the air. Anyone who knows [:SITD:]'s live show will know the drill by now.

As usual, Tom Lesczenski took the mic for a couple of the more 'melodic' songs – despite my initial reservations about these tracks, he's actually grown into a better vocalist than Carsten, whose Teutonic snarl is beginning to sound quite tired. Notably Carsten does not

take Tom keyboard during these songs (the usual procedure for electronic bands utilising this tactic), but instead leaves the stage, which doesn't look all that impressive in terms of 'live' performance. There was an amusing moment during 'Wegwiser' when the computer failed, even resulting in a Windows XP shutdown sample leaking through the soundsystem. They bounced back in style with an excellent rendition of 'Snuff Machinery', so this performance was at least saved.

**De/Vision** were given headline status tonight, despite their relatively small UK fanbase. The crowd was noticeably thinner than during [:SITD:]'s set, and in only got thinner as their set progressed. De/Vision's set was especially disappointing considering the lengths they had gone to in terms of actually playing live. Bringing along a live guitarist and drummer should at least have given some of their more turgid album tracks a little 'edge', whilst lead singer Steffen Keth seems a good deal more energetic on stage than at previous De/Vision shows that I have attended. And the final result? Bored after half an hour.

There were some promising moments – I enjoyed 'Subtronic' and 'The End' from their recent album 'Subuktan', both of which benefited from their live treatment. The rest just drifted past without making a mark. We didn't get 'Try To Forget', a very old De/Vision track which I happen to think is also one of their few really memorable songs. By the conclusion of their set, I was frankly glad the whole thing was over. Out into the rain, and the fistful of irrelevant fliers that got thrust into our hands as we all headed for home.

My final verdict? Mostly disappointing. There were no dead-cert favourites in the bill, but usually these festivals yield at least one surprise package – here the nearest we got was [:SITD:] not boring me after a couple of songs like they did last year. It's ironic as this was one of the most stable Elektrofest line-ups for several years, and the line-up, whilst lacking a top-end big-hitter, was at least better than last years 'Visage MkII' fiasco.

However, that event did, if I remember correctly, also offer a class performance from Girls Under Glass, virtually unknown in the UK, appearing at an event highly inappropriate to their sound and likely to need more effort from the likes of yours truly to popularise them. And their performance in the confines of Elektrowerkz's upstairs stage was more to my tastes than anything on offer here today. Maybe no-one was to blame, but I needed a real highlight somewhere in the bill, and for once I didn't get it.

## **Killing Joke – 2006 Tour – 4 May 2006**

A last-minute decision, not least due to the fact that I'm in the middle of a glut of live performances, with a weeknight show by a band I'd seen little over six months previous. On the other hand, the 'Hosannas' album had been impressive, and Killing Joke had never disappointed live, so I secured a ticket on the day of the show and moseyed on down. Interestingly, have not been there since 2003, this was my third consecutive gig in Koko, all within two weeks of each other.

The first of two support acts came in the form of **Inertia**, presumably securing the slot thanks to Reza's moonlighting as the 'Joke's live keyboard player. I've really lost count of the number of time's I've seen this particular electro-industrial band play live, but they usually manage to put on a decent show (last years Black Celebration excepted), so I thought I'd turn up and offer my support to what a rare sighting of an all-electronic band on a 'rock' billing.

The trio of Andrew Trail, Alexys B and Reza Udihn were giving it the usual energized performance. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few followers, they weren't attracting much interest from the (rather thin) early arrivals. It's a pity, as this performance was actually one of their stronger ones, picking a decent selection from their backcatalogue,

not overplaying like the last time I saw them, and generally justifying their continued existence in the scene. I've never been an Inertia fanatic, but I enjoyed what I saw. Just don't think this show worked out for them the way they were hoping.

**Tribazik** were back following their earlier Killing Joke support slots. They had failed to impress last time, but tonight was at least a noticeable improvement, with less of the turgid stoner influence and more forceful aggression in their sound, though that did mean a couple of songs did sound a little TOO close to Killing Joke for comfort (complete with the philosophical preamble). Nonetheless, they now seemed a more fitting support than last time, even if I doubt I'll be checking out their recordings.

And so then to **Killing Joke**. As is traditional, they opened with 'Communion' before setting the mosh pit in motion with 'Wardance'. 'Primitive' next, then 'Total Invasion'. All great songs, but surely such a ground-breaking band could be a little more inventive with the setlist. It wasn't until the other side of 'Requiem' that we got a new song, the new albums closing number 'Gratitude' – which I happened to think was one of that collections weaker songs.

Luckily, we also got 'Majestic' and the title track, two vintage Joke cuts that slotted neatly into the set. Barring 'Frenzy', their 'new wave' era was ignored once again, in favour of oldies such as 'Bloodsport' and 'The Wait', interspersed with likes of 'Whiteout' 'Money Is Not Our God' and 'Asteroid', their most violent moments of their later output, all sparking plenty of enthusiastic moshing down front. I of course was very much part of proceedings, pulling out only for closing number 'Psyche'. A two-song encore was called for and got, featuring 'Unspeakable' and the usual farewell of 'Pandemonium', though sadly lacking a guest violinist on this occasion.

With that, it was time to head for home. I have to admit to having mixed feelings about this show. A band with such a large backcatalogue could really do well to rotate their live setlist a little more. I'm hoping later shows will see more songs from the new album played live – there were a number of songs from their 2003 album that I never heard live (including 'Implant' and 'You'll Never Get To Me') and I'm worried the same thing may occur here. Nonetheless, even the ancient tracks from their debut album still bear a deal of relevance in these troubled times, so there will always be a reason to follow the Jester and his companions to any live venue in reach. But there's still more for them to do in terms of justifying repeat visits.

## **Covenant – UK Tour 2006 – 7 May 2006**

It had been over three years since Covenant last visited London, their only UK since then being last years slightly odd InFest performance last year. Their latest album 'Skyshaper' had met with a mixed but (for the want of a better term) 'cautiously positive' response, and the continued popularity of their back catalogue meant that the scheduled 4-date UK tour seemed like a sensible proposition. Extra crowd-pulling power was provided by Norway's 'Pride and Fall' along with the long awaited return to stage of Revolution By Night.

I attended the fourth and final leg of the tour at the Islington Academy. A sizeable queue had formed prior to the doors opening, resulting in a relatively large crowd for opening act Revolution By Night (**RBN** from here on in). Despite being based locally, it had been almost three years since they had played London, and almost two since they had played any live shows at all. The appearance of demo versions of a couple of new songs on the band's MySpace page (as well as in Steve Weeks' DJ sets) was the only clues the outside world had of where RBN were going post-Faithless.

It was certainly going to be interesting to see how their live show had developed. A band who had severely lacked confidence in the early part of their electronic phase were beginning to look promising prior to their extended absence from the stage. How would the lengthy lay-off have affected them? By the looks of things, it had only renewed their enthusiasm to really, really make a go of it. Boosted by a relatively positive response in Sheffield and Birmingham (they didn't play the Edinburgh date), on 'home turf' (a few minutes walk from Steve's DJ residency at Slimelight), RBN took themselves to a new level.

Bryon Adamson was attacking his keyboard rack with more enthusiasm than ever before, whilst Penny Humphries (replacing Kevin King) has slotted into the line-up nicely within a few months of joining. Steve Weeks, meanwhile, had found his touch as the RBN frontman, really working the crowd, finally 'performing' rather than merely 'singing'. Highlights included the TBM-contender 'Machine Code', an amusing Kraftwerk tribute during 'City Lights' and for an encore, a revised version of 'Faithless', featuring an extended outro assembled from the highly regarded VNV remix. This version of the song is particularly popular in London – a live version was well I.

Next up were **Pride & Fall**, the only one of tonight's three bands to have seen any live action in London in the recent past, having supported Seabound at the Highbury Garage last year. Here they were supporting their second album 'Elements of Silence'. The album didn't really impress me that much, a feeling that continued through to their live show. Sigve Monsen is a reasonable enough singer, but he didn't really take command of his band in the style of tonight's two other frontmen, and on this occasion it really showed.

The live guitar was also quite low in the mix, which was a pity considering it doesn't really feature on their studio albums and could thus provide the 'value added' element their live show needs. I still enjoyed 'Construct' and 'December', the two choice cuts from their debut 'Nephesh' but the new songs didn't really have all that much to distinguish them from each other. There certainly is some merit in the quality of Pride & Fall's output, but there's something lacking here.

And so then to **Covenant**, bringing their first UK tour to a close. Whilst I've always personally enjoyed this particular band's live performances, I'd heard some not-entirely encouraging stories about earlier shows on the 'Skyshaper' tour. Luckily, none of those stories bore much relation to the band we saw tonight. Opening with '20Hz' from the new album, the Helsingborg Three seemed at the very least to be in good voice. 'Spindrift' seemed slightly flat, but they then pushed things up a gear with 'Bullet' and 'Like Tears In Rain'.

Whilst they obviously concentrated on the new album, they paid the occasional tribute to their early days with fine renditions of 'Theremin', 'Figurehead' and 'Stalker', and also threw in their usual oddity with 'Helicopter'. The new tracks all went down relatively well, with 'Ritual Noise' and an extended version of 'The Men' highlights. 'We Stand Alone' seems finally to have made it back into the set, having been absent during their 2004 shows (despite selling T-shirts with the lyrics on!) – as one of London's most popular Covenant songs, it got a particularly good response.

My only gripe is the behaviour of Clas – technically meant to be on live keys and backing vocals, but actually spending relatively little time at his machine in favour of dancing round the stage. With Joachim holding station and Eskil clearly putting a lot of effort into his vocals (not really needing a second singer except for heavily effected parts), Clas' role in the Covenant live show seems a little superfluous. This didn't let things down too much, and by the end of their performance, the audience were enthusiastically crying for the inevitable encore.

The first encore saw 'Brave New World' (due to be Skyshaper's second single) followed by 'Call The Ships To Port'. The second encore (there just had to be two on a night like this, right?), meanwhile, offered 'Happy Man', the overly-twee Moog tribute that saw at least a few people behind me make an early exit. Luckily, they still had one more dead-cert hit up their sleeves in 'Dead Stars', featuring a stage invasion by members of RBN and Pride & Fall.

It was a light hearted way to see the tour to a close, a tour that would hopefully improve not only the reputation of all three bands present (even if I personally wasn't over-the-moon with Pride & Fall's show), but also the UK as a touring spot for scene bands. Other than the VNV tour last year and a couple of small festivals, the major European bands have been giving our country a surprisingly wide berth of late. Let's hope the VNV tour followed by this is the sign of an improving trend.

## **Apoptygma Berzerk – 2006 Tour – 22 May 2006**

My attendance at this show was very much a last-minute thing. Six years ago, Apoptygma Berzerk arrived in London for the first time, and I'd bought my ticket months in advance, for what was then only my fourth ever gig (and my first for over a year!). How much has changed in that time – a series of increasingly patchy albums had led to Apop more or less disappearing from my personal playlist, with only the predictable oldies still getting any kind of club play.

Some things never change of course, such as Frank Flag's support billing. On this occasion, I didn't make it in time for Seize or Mechanical Cabaret (who, to be fair, are both reasonable live acts, both amply covered in previous live reviews here). I did have the misfortune to see the still-ubiquitous **Greenhaus** however. On a Monday night with adrenaline hard to come by, their vaporous dream-pop sound seemed even more misplaced than usual.

Phoenix J, whilst more confident a singer than previously, doesn't really have what it takes to take this band forward. Greenhaus, having developed their sound since their early 00s techno days, are once again treading water. If they want to go anywhere, they need to get off billings like this and into a scene which their sound is actually suited. Unless Flag are planning a move into the indie pop scene, they need to stop relying on him for live dates, just as Frank needs to stop relying on them to fill holes in his line-ups.

Anyway, enough about them. What would **Apoptygma Berzerk** dish up for us tonight? Their 2005 album, 'You And Me Against The World', had flopped quite severely in the UK (and probably elsewhere, too). It was therefore interesting to note that they didn't open with a track from the new album in favour of their 1999 single 'Eclipse'. Having fielded two live guitarists at WGT last year, they were back down to one tonight, although only occasionally could you actually hear what he was playing. The songs still sounded OK regardless, which makes me wonder how much contribution those six strings really make to the Apop live show.

As for the set, I was left in the curious situation of finding each song's enjoyment level directly proportional to it's age. With the exception of 'In This Together' (which I thought was at least a reasonable song, if nothing musically sensational), I found the remainder of the new tracks a good excuse to go for a toilet break or catch up with friends. 'Harmonizer' and 'Welcome to Earth' era stuff went down OK, whilst I enjoyed '7' era songs as much as ever.

The highlight for me, however, was hearing 'Spiritual Reality' for the first time in six Apop gigs. As for the rest of the audience, it was clear that they were there for the hits, and the best crowd responses came for those songs that were biggest in London (most of the old stuff, none of the new stuff, basically). Their performance of their material was acceptable, but you still got the feeling that some of live band members seem quite superfluous. The guitarist only seems to have a relevant role when the original song had guitar in, whilst their drummer doesn't add as much as he could to their live sound.

Which meant the overall show went more or less as it expected. Despite running late, a two-song encore of 'Non-Stop Violence' and 'Love Never Dies' (both damn near essential) was possible, but the traditional closing number 'Bitch' never made it. It was therefore a reasonable gig at best, indicative of a band with a great history who's star has nonetheless fallen. No-one seemed to mind hearing lots of new Covenant songs at this venue two weeks ago, but the same cannot be said for Apop tonight. There's something a little bit sad about that.

## Dark City 2006 – 26-28 May 2006

### Day 1

Despite being one of the few festivals of it's kind in my home country, I had yet to make it to the Dark City Festival prior to this year. Edinburgh isn't exactly easy to reach from my native North London (ironically, you only have to drive up one road – the A1 – to get there!), and it's always been too close to other events to justify me going. This year, however, I found myself able to go, and duly did so.

The venue was an old student union building, with all the live action taking place in the upper hall, with Djing on various levels downstairs. First on stage were **Trauma Pet**, a band who have I a good deal of positive press in recent times, yet I personally am yet to truly see what all the fuss is about. Back up to their regular three-piece line-up since their recent hiccup at Elektrofest (where bass player Tara failed to show), they did no more to impress me here than they did there.

The real pity is that I really feel they could be something more impressive than they are now. Their electronic backing track pulses away innocuously, occasionally showing melodic promise but ultimately coming over as rather thin compared to some of their European equivalents. Elie seems to have a good enough singing voice, but the insubstantial nature of much of their material means she never really gets to excel.

Next up were **Glis** from the USA. Originally I had little interest in watching them on account of having purchased a rather dull future-poppy album by them some years ago. I did manage to pick up their 'Disappear EP' a week ago, however, which I found to be significantly more impressive, so I decided they must be worth a go on stage. Sadly, the soundsystem was not with them, lead vocalist Shaun Frandsen shouting over his musical accompaniment, the songs never really gelling.

A couple of the songs sounded reasonable – 'No Pulse' and 'October Skies' for instance, but they seemed to be struggling throughout the remainder of their set – 'Disappear', for instance, lost everything that made the recorded version good. Their move from a pop EBM sound to a harsher industrial concept was certainly a valid one (if slightly predictable), but it didn't work for them tonight.

The key point of interest tonight was the live debut on **Panzer AG**, Andy LaPlegua's 'other' project alongside Combichrist (whatever happened to Icon of Coil?). The live line-up included at least one other familiar face, with Ross Tregenza (ex-Goteki) on guitar. This

along with a live drummer and keyboardist made it Andy's most 'live project' to date. An additional level of curiosity was raised once I heard their second album 'Your World Is Burning', a very different affair to 'This Is My Battlefield', indicating a move towards an electronics-heavy industrial rock sound – echoes of early NIN or a synthed-up Marilyn Manson?

The assembled foursome opened up with 'Aenimal' from the new CD, complete with the cheesy cheerleader spelling of 'F-U-C-K-H-E-A-D'. Unfortunately, the second song was interrupted by a fire alarm. Everyone had to evacuate to the courtyard in front of the venue, but despite the appearance of a fire engine, it was only a false alarm. It was originally believed to be a smoker (now illegal in public places in Scotland), but was later traced to a detector disagreeing with a smoke machine.

Once back inside, the Panzer collective tried their best to get the momentum going again with 'Tip The Dancer'. As the show progressed, with members occasionally upping the industrial quotient of particular songs by bashing some oil drums that had been brought along. Despite the now-late running, they were able to continue through to the end of their set, combining the better tracks from the new album with a selection from the first, though it was these older tracks that actually seemed strongest in live form, with the violent 'Behind a Gas Mask' and a finale of 'Battlefield' and 'Filth God' the most memorable moments.

## Day 2

Day 2 offered a five-band line-up, though I was unable to make it in time for 'Jetlag' or 'Immaculata'. My first taste of live action thus came from **Soman**. Some may question exactly how 'live' a shaven-headed man dancing behind a laptop and control keyboard really is, but Kolja Trelle soon proved his critics wrong, firing out distorted rhythm loops laced with enough synthetic ear candy to appeal to a wide cross-section of the scene's fan-base. Neither as gimmicky as Combichrist or as esoteric as an Ant-Zen signee, Soman proved to be an unexpected highlight of the weekend. This style of music is proving to be particularly popular in the UK right now, and the bouncy Kolja must have been very happy to drag most of the audience along with him.

The key band of interest today was **XPQ-21**, following the release of an interesting new album 'Alive' earlier this year. The bands line-up has grown to a four-piece in recent times, though the ever-decadent frontman Jeyênne remains the undisputed frontman, even if some were more attracted to the uber-pretty Swedish guitarist Annelie. With these two plus live drums and keys and lots of interesting material in their catalogue to choose from, the potential was there to deliver a top-notch performance.

However, for various reason, tonight show would prove to be something of a significant disappointment. I couldn't hear much of Annelie's guitar, and when the band played their most guitar-heavy song 'Dead Body', what I heard through the PA didn't match with what I saw her playing. Hearing riffs though the soundsystem when she wasn't even touching the strings brought my suspension of belief to a close. There was also one new song (whose name escapes me), that seemed to go on forever without ever achieving much, killing off what little adrenaline I had flowing at the time.

There were moments of promise (an extended 'White and Alive' aroused at least some interest), but from my point of view, this was a poor performance by a band who had been very impressive in the past. The move towards an 'electronic punk' sound didn't carry over comfortably on stage, so the new-look live show still needs some work. There WAS a one-song encore 'Rock It', though Jeyênne speaker-stack-climbing antic were foolish at best –

being a temporary set-up, they weren't secured for such frivolity and had they come down, the whole event may have come to a premature close.

Headlining tonight were **Fixmer/McCarthy**, with Mr McCarthy probably keen for some kind of warm-up before his return to stage as Nitzer Ebb in five days time in Leipzig (by the time you read this, a review of this performance will also be on the site). Here, the duo performed a number of their own compositions along with a few choice Ebb cuts, following much the same pattern as their InFest performance last year.

A minimalistic project such as this is very dependent on the quality of the live vocals, but luckily, Douglas is very much on form these days. Whilst I'll always enjoy the early Nitzer Ebb material (especially 'Join In The Chant'), the newer songs are now beginning to grow on me – 'Splitter' sounded better than ever and a number of the other songs sounded significantly more powerful performed live than on their 2004 album (A disc I found to be less than the sum of its parts, in general disagreement to most other critics).

### Day 3

Sunday offered us five more bands, beginning with **RBN**. Having been forced to miss the Edinburgh date on the Covenant tour due to strict curfew limits, they instead took this chance to play the city. The rather thin early-hours crowd must have made the show seem like an anti-climax after their incredible London show earlier in the month, but somehow they managed to rise to the challenge of 'playing away' and put on an impressive show.

The setlist was much the same as the one they played on the Covenant tour, dropping only 'Schadenfreude'. They hadn't lost their sense of humour either – on this occasion, Steve took every opportunity to remind the audience that it was Kylie Minogue's birthday, even celebrating the fact with a cover of.....Visions in Blue. Not a Kylie song of course, but a good enough reason to play it (the incredibly catchy synth solo they inserted is a better reason, of course). It's hard to say how much of a mark RBN made given the sparse crowd, but suffice to say they entertained those present, and generally did exactly what they had to do.

Next on stage were a band unknown to almost all present – Poland's **Controlled Collapse**. As it transpired, they practised a scathing electro-industrial sound, much reminiscent of Suicide Commando (particularly) :Wumpscut: or The Retrosic. Whilst their take on the sound didn't strike me as hugely innovative in the industrial climate of 2006, the project sound was impressive on a technical level, the distorted beats cutting the air nicely and the vocals distorted but not excessively so.

A guest vocal from Darrin Huss from Psyche helped inject a little variety into their show, but for the most part they kept to the sound they knew they did best. A couple of years back I would have fallen for a project like this almost instantly – nowadays, this music no longer holds the same attraction as it once did, but those of who still go for this distorted-beat variant of EBM would do well to pick up their debut album when it comes out later this year.

The band I most wanted to see of the festival's final day was **Insekt**, another piece of Belgium's illustrious industrial history that I'd been keen to see live. They're a two piece act, consisting of ex-Vomito Negro vocalist Mario Varewijck, with Eric Van Wonterghem manning the electronics. Their sound, whilst heavily rooted in early European EBM, had a dynamism all of its own. If Controlled Collapse were EBM newborns, Insekt were something approximating to a slightly distant but still influential great-grandparent.

Mario took brief pauses from his throaty vocal delivery to throw some live drumming into the mix, adding some additional percussive force to their already hammering rhythm loops.



With a punky attitude and an occasional semblance of melody (a cover of 'Personal Jesus' summing up both these aspects in one), they didn't sound as dated as some of their early recordings may have suggested. Having happily danced for the duration, I took the chance to pick up their newly-released CD 'Teenmachine' – time will tell whether the comeback worked as well in the studio as it did on stage.

Back to familiar live ground with **Psyche**, Darrin Huss' long-running synth-pop project. As with his 2005 shows, the Psyche performance consisted of select cuts from their most recent album (The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour) followed by a number of older tracks. I've always enjoyed Darrin's take on synth-pop, which spreads from his simple-but-effective early efforts right through to the darker tones apparent on his most recent album, so there was plenty in tonight's set for me to enjoy.

It wasn't a note-perfect performance, with the vocals sounding slightly strained on some of the slower songs. The latter part of the set was strong however, with the covers of 'Sex Dwarf' and 'Goodbye Horses' both very well received. One trait that was particularly apparent was Darrin's taste for inserted 'guest lyrics' from other artist's songs into his performances. Having inserted, tributes to Icon of Coil and Combichrist (was Andy listening?) earlier on, the finale of 'Unveiling The Secret' saw what could only be described as a Nitzer Ebb medley!

With Suicide Commando have withdrawn from the event due to the death of Johan Van Roy's father, it was left to last-minute substitutes **Combichrist** to bring things to a close with a bang. Having had my fill of 'Everybody Hates You' in 2005, I was at least relieved to hear some new material in the set, taken from the upcoming 'Get Your Body Beat' EP. Predictably however, it was the material from last years album that got the best response, with all the favourite appearing at some stage of the evening, with only 'Intruder Alert' representing the projects embryonic era.

They weren't harmed by the best sound quality enjoyed by any band across the course of the weekend, but it was clear from the crowd (the only band of the last day that came close to filling the hall) that Combichrist are still a major draw in the UK. With no critic power left by this stage, I just lapped it all up and danced along. A one-song encore brought us 'This Shit Will Fcuk You Up', and with that it was all over barring the aftershow Djing.

So how did I find my first experience of Dark City? I have congratulate all those involved on a fine effort, with some decent bands, a mixture of dead-cert favourites interlaced with a surprise or two. It's a well-known fact that the UK scene can't hold a candle to the Germans as far as putting on massive multi-stage festivals – our scene simply isn't big enough. At least we still have a few respectable events to call our own, Dark City being one.

## **Wave-Gotik Treffen 2006 – 2-5 Jun 2006**

The annual Whitsun pilferage to Leipzig has become an essential part of the lifestyles of many goths, both in Germany and across the globe. We Brits have been comparatively slow on the uptake, though with the decline of our own Whitby Gothic Weekend (I'll explain why elsewhere) and a falling number of European scene bands making trips to our shores, many UK scene goths have got the message are making the trip over to the world's biggest gothic gathering.

The great things about WGT is that there really is something there for everyone. You want all night clubbing? Fine – strongly recommend the bier, by the way. Sipping mead in the medieval village? Why not if it's the only chance you'll get all year? Catching up with

friends from around the world? If you all meet anywhere, it'll probably be here! Chasing autographs? Enjoying a drink with bands in the Renaissance hotel bar? They're all viable ways of spending the weekend. But I took the opportunity to see lots and lots of live music.

With many stages spread across town, each with a limited capacity and a significant journey time between them, there was no way of watching everything. Some tough decisions were made, hence you will not find reviews of VNV Nation, Combichrist, Mesh, [SITD:] or for that matter several other bands already adequately covered on this site. I did get to see some old favourites of course, mainly due to being in the right places at the right times, but my key focus was on seeing bands never seen before.

Whilst the festival does not technically start until Friday, there are a number of club events on the Thursday, with many of them featuring at least a few live acts on this occasion. The 10<sup>th</sup> chmaltzy Jubilee ball was initially attractive, but given that the venue was some way out of town, I decided instead for the Morizbastei, when Ronan Harris was debuting his latest project **Modcom**. A huge modular synth was installed on the stage, consistent with the 'in with the old, out with the new' policy of 'Matter and Form'.

Ronan eventually arrived on stage and began the live manipulation of sequences mooted on VNV's official site prior to the festival. The first piece had a mid-70s Tangerine Dream feel to it, before the project was thrown back into the present with what sounded like hard analogue remixes of the instrumental tracks from the last VNV album (though a few vocals from 'Chrome' leaked in). It was a OK set to dance to, a reasonable warm-up for the nights ahead, even if I've always preferred Ronan's music with the vocals intact.

I wandered back in a little later to watch **Architect**, one of the more highly regarded of Daniel Myer's myriad projects. Two guys with laptops isn't my favoured configuration for any band, though the abstract beat patterns and icy electronics they produced were interesting enough and at least avoided the obvious. I still think Herr Myer gets a little TOO clever for his own good on occasion – the recent 'Destroid' album proves he can do straight-ahead industrial dance music, and it's getting a little tiring poring through all his projects looking for the gems amongst the dust. With that out of the way, it was time to indulge in the Pilsner (or Weissbier, Schwarzbier, or whatever takes your fancy) and have some fun.

## Day 2

The following day saw various adventures, including a shopping trip around the Agra market (the biggest gothic market you'll ever see), though I eventually cut away from the retail therapy in order to catch the early bands at WerkII, an old industrial facility that reminded me a bit of a gigantic version of Slimelight with a better sound system. Seems the Germans even do 'industrial facility converted into music venue' better than us!

First on stage tonight was **Hatesex**, a project formed by ex-Diva Destruction guitarist Benn Ra, with Krisanna Marie on vocals. The line-up was completed with a live drummer and an absurdly tall bassist. The resultant sound proved initially interesting but would ultimately disappoint. Krisanna occasionally verged on a Siouxsie-esque goth-queen sound, but she and her guitarist seemed to be at odds with a forceful rhythm section that wouldn't have gone amiss in a Ministry-style industrial metal band. It's early days for them, but this project sounded a bit messy first time out. Hopefully they'll smooth the rough edges once they're back in LA, but at this moment, they remain one of my least remembered bands of the entire weekend.

The real reason for my early excursion to the Werk was a chance to see **Accessory**, having been on the other side of town when they played last year. Their 2005 album had

proved to be something of a disappointment, though as had often been the case, it didn't really matter come the live show. The 242-esque usage of dual vocalists doubling as crowd-workers makes for a decent live show, strangely enhanced by the lack of over-the-top vocal effects. Many contemporary EBM acts have over-done vocal effect in recent time, and Accessory have at least avoided that trap, even on songs like 'Deadline' (a personal favourite) that at first seemed heavily dependent on it.

Much as I wanted to wait around to see Joachim Witt play following a surprisingly impressive album earlier this year, I instead got word of an even scarcer live band and duly took the Gruftibahn down to the Agra to see the debut live performance of **Soko Friedhof**, the electronic project featuring members of horror-goth act Untoten. I wasn't familiar with their music beforehand, but the mixture of dual male/female vocals, electronic rhythms and evil synth texture, with occasional melodic elements.

The Agra sound quality, whilst improve on last year, wasn't sufficient to allow me to rate them precise alongside similar acts, but there was sufficient variety and dynamism in what they did to inspire me to pick up their 'Best Of' collection at the CD stalls. It would be easy to compare likes of Blutengel, who also do dual vocal electro-goth with vampiric/horror movie overtones, though such comparisons are in terms of concept only – Soko Friedhof aren't as technically polished, nor as song focused (perhaps Die Form would be a more appropriate point of comparison?), but this almost counts in their favour as they seem to have more musical individuality as a result.

Another electro-gothic 'side-project' now, namely **Dracul**, featuring Mozart from Umbra Et Imago. Anything featuring Mozart is usually worth a watch, if only to see what outrageous stage set they'd come up with. There's was less of the fetishy extremes for which the Imago project is best known, instead choosing simply to set fire to most of the stage, with a flaming arch centre-stage burning away for the duration of their set. This plus the fire dancers and other related pyro helped draw attention away from what was a rather 2<sup>nd</sup>-rate electronic gothic project. Despite being a style I'd normally enjoy, to my ears the drum beats grated, the songs lacked direction and the general feeling was of a project that had spent more time working on it's image than the music – the substance didn't come close to equalling the style. The growly vocals reminded me a little of an old UK band called Midnight Configuration – Dracul at least have a decent stage show as salvation, but musically something just isn't right.

With that out of the way, we now got the Swedish 'death glam' troupe **Deathstars**, a collective I had heard many good things about in recent months, despite not getting any chance to actually listening to them. I'm told that their members originated from a couple of death metal bands, found a mutual appreciation for KISS and duly produced a modern-day from of industrial glam metal. And if you think that sounds like we're dealing with another Marilyn Manson/White Zombie wannabe, well, you're not far off.

Not to say that that there's anything wrong with that. Plenty of fun can be had with some huge riffs and chmaltz excesses. And that's pretty much what the Deathstars delivered. The electronic side of their sound was fairly low down in the mix (though the Agra being what it is, it may have had something to do with where I was standing), so it was all loud guitars and doomy vocals. I have to admit to tiring of their sound after a few songs – a good concept was hurt by too little adaptation between each individual song, but maybe repeated listens will yield something my first impressions did not. In others worlds, I'll give them another go at M'era Luna. Providing they don't clash with In Extremo!

No German festival would be complete without a few dead-cert Grufti-pleasers, and tonight yielded one such band, namely **Lacrimosa**. This Swiss/Finnish project are purveyors of the most outrageously over-the-top gothic rock, laden with orchestrations which

sometimes extend to full classical adaptations. Live, such excesses are confined to Anne Nurmi's keyboard (have they ever played live with orchestra?), but their shows are still extravagant affairs, with the elegant-as-ever Tilo Wolff leading things from the front, and a crowd of highly excitable (predominantly German) goths cheering them on.

With a setlist drawn from both their most recent album (Lichtgestalt) plus a decent selection from their backcatalogue (alas not including my personal favourite 'Durch Nacht Und Flut'), Lacrimosa seemingly stopped at nothing in terms of showmanship. A vocal from Anne Nurmi, some balladic moments, a brief blast of growly gothic metal backed onto period of guitar virtuosity. The euphoric crowd response resulted in two encores, with the band finishing three-quarters of an hour after their scheduled finishing time, not that anyone minded except for early arrivals for tonight's 'midnight special'.

Namely the first show for the briefly-reunited **Nitzer Ebb**. I thought Lacrimosa had received a good response, but Nitzer Ebb out-did them. Half-an-hour before stagetime and we were already getting chants of 'NIT-ZER EBB! NIT-ZER EBB!;. Not that they pronounced it correctly, but since I seem to end up speaking German with an Essex accent, I can scarcely complain. Nitzer Ebb are seriously big news in Germany – the crowd that greeted Ebb-soundalikes Spetsnaz last year (third-top in the Agra after one album?) indicates what a hotbed this country is for any kind of Nitzer Ebb Produkt..

Anyway, at 1:30am, the lights went down and a roar of approval met Douglas McCarthy, Bon Harris and guest drummer Kourtney Klein. It was known well before the show that this would strictly be a 'old favourites' tour, with all of Douglas' new material used for the Fixmer/McCarthy project. The opening song 'Getting Closer' saw both him and Bon on vocals, with the synchronisation slightly less than perfect. Bon then took to his drum kit for 'Let Your Body Learn' and from then on they pretty much had it sorted. McCarthy's vocals are as strong as ever, and in many respects if that works, the remainder of any Nitzer Ebb comeback was always likely to succeed.

Not only did they not play anything new, but they also avoided their ill-fated final album 'Big Hit', instead keeping to their electronic material, with 'Godhead' and 'Ascend' the most recent songs to make it in. The best responses of the night were of course saved for the all-time favourites, particularly 'Murderous' and the closing song 'Join In The Chant', which is exactly what the audience did. I've never sussed out whether massed cries of 'FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!' have resulted in the appearance of the emergency services, but after Edinburgh's Panzer AG evacuation last week, I'm not sure if I want to know. But never mind – Douglas left the audience with the comment 'Good To Be Back' – and everyone with an ounce of Produkt in their blood seemed to agree.

## Day 3

Saturday dawned and this time there were difficult choices to be made in terms of stages. I made the decision to skip the EBM day in the Agra in favour of the Parkbuhne, where the line-up offered six bands I had never previously seen, of which three I knew to be some interest. There was the issue of rain to contend with, but it wasn't as severe as last year, nor was it as bad as when I stood in a swamp last August watching Lacuna Coil at M'era Luna. Simply put, Jonny EOL wanted to watch the bands playing here, and no raincloud or guilt-trip-about-not-watching-EBM was going to stop him.

With everyone else I knew heading off elsewhere, there was no reason not to turn up early. I therefore saw the first band, a act by the name of **Devil's Kiss**, who played a German-language form of riff-heavy gothic rock with backing electronic, not unlike the last Girls

Under Glass album. Given the proliferation of such bands at this festival, I struggle to remember anything else distinctive about their set, though they were competent enough at what they did and were at least not hopelessly stuck in the past like certain guitar-based goth bands I've heard in recent times (there's a deathrock stage a few tram stops away, if you'd prefer that, however).

The only non-German band of the day came next in the form of **Fanoë** from Switzerland. They were also the least 'gothic' of the six bands playing here today, instead playing a form of industrialised aggro-rock. Whilst their sound wasn't as electronics-heavy and deeply cutting as the NINs and KMFDM's of the world, they pulled the style off with a degree of proficiency and deserved the enthusiastic crowd response they eventually provoked. Their demeanour reminded me of the Glasgow-based act Rico, who pull reasonable-sized audiences in the UK. Maybe, just maybe, Fanoë might try a visit to these shores one day?

A third consecutive band unknown to me prior to today were **End of Green**. 'Depressed Subcore' is their self-defined style, so I'm told, which isn't far off the mark, to be honest. Their forceful, downtempo metal sound might appeal to certain portions of the gothic chmaltzy (I'm talking 69 Eyes/Paradise Lost territory here), but from what I heard today, I think they'd be better off appealing to the mainstream metal scene – there were just as many references to the Ozzy school of rock as there were to anything traditionally associated with WGT. With that in mind, I wish them luck, as even if they weren't really 'my kind of thing', they at least seemed to be able to pen a decent song or two.

Having been surprisingly impressed by three bands I'd never heard of, I guess it was inevitable in an ironic sort of way that the band I'd actually come this early to see would be something of a disappointment. I'm referring to **Illuminate**, a band who had previously impressed me with their romantic, uber-gothic tone of their studio records, combining melancholic keyboard compositions with added power chord reinforcement. Standing outside in the Parkbühne, however, they were unable to carry it all over onto the live stage.

There was a lack of real stage presence (the only band of the day not to use any kind of banner), some weak vocals from both Johanne Berthold and Conny Schindler, whilst some of their lyrics seemed embarrassingly trite even with my rather basic command of German ('Du liebst mich nicht!' indeed.....and that's a song title!). I was always willing to overlook their lyrical deficiencies as long as their music remained strong enough to compensate, but today it just didn't come together. There were hints of their capabilities littered across their set, but no more than that. I should have listened to the warnings (yes, I've read similar reviews of Illuminate live shows in the past!).

The rain thankfully stopped in time for **Samsas Traum**. I'd only heard brief snippet of their work, but they were sufficiently interesting to arouse my curiosity and inspire me to check out their live show. They turned out to be a band laden with little idiosyncrasies – the live saxophone, the impromptu appearance of a live dancer, not to mention some enthusiastic fan throwing the band some personalised T-shirts. Pink personalised T-shirts. Thankfully, the Samsas Traumers got into the spirit of the occasion and actually wore the things for the remainder of their set.

Stylistically, the band were hard to pin down beyond the umbrella definition of 'gothic'. Despite their heavy focus on guitar, they still made extensive use of an electronic backing track (something seemingly common to most German gothic rock acts), though even here they surprise, primitive little synth melodies conjuring images of some cheesy horror flick. There was a song called 'Einer Gegen Alles' which stood out as their most likely anthem – only later did I find it was an exclusive track on a recently-released limited double CD/DVD set. I guess that's in keeping with their unpredictable nature.

But finally it was time for the band I'd stayed around this long to see – those masters of German-language electronic rock – **Unheilig**. I'd missed my only previous chance to see them play at M'era Luna 2003, and whilst he was scheduled to play again this year, I simply couldn't wait that long. An impressive candle-laden stage set provided the visual stimulus, whilst lead singer and sole 'official' member Der Graf was accompanied live by a keyboard player and guitarist.

Smartly dressed in his black suit, white shirt and black tie, Der Graf duly delivered his set with a decadent professionalism that was the mark of a true entertainer. A varied selection was pulled from the recent album 'Moderne Zeiten', varying from some of the tanzmetal-esque rock numbers to heartfelt ballads like fan favourite 'Astronaut', before the appearance of the two early hits 'Maschine' and 'Sag Ja!', the latter inviting a good deal of crowd interaction (as you may well imagine with a song title like that).

With no space on the trams heading Agra-wards for VNV (never mind in the venue itself), I briefly held hopes of an excursion to Die Anker for Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio, only to take a wrong turning on the amusingly-named 'Martin-Luther-Ring' and leaving it too late to get anywhere where bands were still playing. I thus chose to quit for the day, as I had an exhaustive schedule planned for the next day.

## Day 4

Sunday was a very busy day for me – only five bands, but for the first time, I was going to attempt to visit three venues in one day. I started with more shopping in the Agra market, followed by an excursion to my first live venue of the day, the Kohlrabizirkus, a huge domed venue out in the middle of what looked like an East German industrial estate. Less-than-reliable sources suggested the name translated as 'Cabbage Circus'.

Never mind the name, though – who did I come here to see? I had in fact made the trip for one band only – **Dupont**. Keen to get at least a little more EBM on board during the weekend, I decided this Swedish trio had a fair chance of fulfilling my desire for a few hard beats before returning to the esoterica. And that they certainly did – a brief half-hour set offered both classic EBM moments combined with surprisingly catchy melodic synthpop. Sitting somewhere between the And One and Melotron schools of 'electronic body pop', DuPont justified my brief excursion to this bizarre venue, a nice warm up to today's big event.

Did I mention 'big event'? For that matter, did I mention 'esoterica'? It was time to head towards the Schauspielhaus, a theatre on the north-west corner of the town centre, ready for my first chance to see the French act **Rosa Crux** play live. This is the kind of band where even seeing photos of their stage set is sufficient to attract me to their live show. Whilst they were using the smallest of their three live-set ups, what they brought was impressive enough, a stage set featuring electric guitar, drums, piano, church bells, a choir plus some ingenious automatic drums, played by bespoke electromagnetic devices in time to a MIDI sequence, a system official known as BAM.

Lead vocalist and guitarist Olivier Tarabo introduced the project, explaining the origins of the text that they would sing for us. BAM was then set in motion and from that point there was little to do but sit back and become entranced. The mechanised drum beats and massed voices generated a mantra-like, ritualistic feel to the whole performance, with added visual stimulus from both video backdrop and the occasional on-stage performance, the most memorable moment of which being the dance of naked male and female figures in a raised pit of dust (Danse de la Terre). A standing ovation was the least we could offer after such a performance – they certainly entranced me, if my dash to the merchandise stall to purchase their entire backcatalogue was anything to go by.

Though to be fair, it also had something to do with an urge to dash right back across town again to the Agra in time for **Garden of Delight**. Such is the spirit of WGT! This particular decision proved to be a good one – whilst Garden of Delight essentially sound like a mix of two parts Nephilim to one part Sisters, their obsession with mythical connection to the number 7 give Carl McCoy a run for his money in terms of obscure subject matters. That said, in the vast, boxy expanse of Agra Halle, such high-brow thematics count for little – it whether you can play or not that counts!

Anyway, the mysterious vocalist (who, due to the lighting and costume was barely visible except in silhouette) and his two backup men played a forceful, growly variant of gothic rock. Garden of Delight had touched on other styles in the past, but maybe they were simply sticking to the material that worked best on stage. A reasonable if not-exactly-surprising of 'Alice' cropped up in amongst their own material, a generally successful but rather generic set. GoD's influences are perhaps a little too obvious, but as a live band they at least made the most of them.

Now time for the band smoke machines were made for – **Clan of Xymox**! I say this as I saw them play without one for the first time in London last year and suddenly they looked like the bunch of worn-out old Dutch goths many accuse them of being. With the CO2 thankfully restored, the Xymox collective went some way to mending that reputation tonight. They had a new album out, but elected not to make it the focus of tonight's set, instead opting to do the greatest hits.

And let's face it, that's what the thousands-strong collection of grufti in the increasingly full Agra wanted to hear. 'Jasmine and Rose', 'Farewell' and a welcome return of 'This World' (haven't heard them play that since 2001), climaxing on their 1985 signature tune 'A Day'. Ronny Moorings doesn't interact with the crowd much when he plays, so the few comments he did provide were particularly welcome. Let's not mince any more words – that was the best Clan of Xymox show I've seen to date. Let's hope this run of form spreads to the new CD, purchased shortly after their performance.

Impressive as the day had been so far, there was still one band left who had the capability of trumping the lot of 'em and still have time for an encore. I'm referring to those perennials of the German 'schwarze szene', **Deine Lakaien**. Highlights of a soggy and overcast M'era Luna last year, the Horn und Veljanov show were once again playing one of their live hot spots, a high-profile festival slot in front of their most rabid fans. The string section, live guitar and Ernst's piano and stack of vintage analogues were in presence once more, even if they've been known to do acoustic sets on piano alone (must catch one of those some day!).

Early performances of 'Over and Done' and 'Secret Hideaway' set the stage nicely for a trawl through their sizeable backcatalogue – not content with revisiting 'Forest Enter Exit' and 'Dark Star', they even exhumed 'Color-ize' from their 1986 debut album! There were also a number of songs from 'White Lies' (an album not featured in last years M'era Luna set), including a rendition of 'Generators' that simultaneously avoided a straight repeat of the recorded version whilst still leaving the song fully recognisable.

Once again, however, it was 'Return' that touched all the heartstrings in exactly the right way. Based on piano rather than the synth-led 'Kasmodiah' version, the song builds from delicate beginnings into a gigantic wall of sound, yet Veljanov's sonorous tones still float imperiously over everything his bandmate can muster. A two-song encore delivered an acoustic take of 'Where You Are' (to hell with the VNV remix – this is how it SHOULD be played!), followed by the essential set closer 'Love Me To The End'.

An previously-unknown Japanese band **Moi Dix Mois** were playing an hour later, but my venue-hopping had taken it's toll and I decided to head back into town, fairly certain that nobody and nothing could top **Lakaïen** at their best. On a quieter day or with a lesser gap I would have stayed to check them out, but there and then, the energy had gone. A magnificent day of live music thus came to a triumphant close.

## Day 5

Monday saw a two-venue strategy in operation, beginning with a return to the Parkbühne. The bands I'd gone to see were on third and fourth, but I made it in time for opening band **Eminence of Darkness**. I'd never heard of them, but let's be fair – they caught my by surprise. A band that originally sounded like they were a riff-heavy version of The Cure (their lead singer looked and sounded a bit like Robert Smith at times) then handed the mic to the female bass player, let the electronic rhythms come to the forefront, and suddenly we're in electrogoth mode. The collective varied the proportions of their varying influences throughout the set whilst still keeping a degree of cohesion.

This is a problem which **The House of Usher** seem either unable or unwilling to solve. I last saw them play in London, five years ago, where the singer seemed more occupied with wrapping himself in mic cable than interacting with the audience. Here he was a little more dynamic, but the band as a whole still sounded like something that had crawled out of the Batcave after 25 years in hibernation. Some insipid female vocals didn't help their cause, either, and therefore my opinion of The House of Usher remains the same as before – a passable but highly generic form of trad-goth that seemed particularly dated when viewed alongside the bands around them on the bill.

Take **Bloodflowerz** for instance. Like The House of Usher, I'd seen them play some years ago and thus had at least some idea what to expect. Unlike The House of Usher, however, I'd actually enjoyed what I'd seen and was thus looking forward to more. Sitting in between the 'sweet kitten' and 'scathing vixen' demeanour, the Bloodflowerz delivered an accessible form of electronically-enhanced alt-rock, but whilst their performance seemed competent, it lacked a certain intangible something. Somehow I wanted them to be more confrontational, more confident in their own abilities – it just didn't grab me the way I was initially hoping.

The next band certainly did grab me, however. By the throat. And wouldn't let go until I'd succumbed to giving them a decent write-up. I'm referring to a bunch of Italian nutcases who operate under the name of **Dope Stars Inc.**. They're an explosive industrial metal collective big on the synths. And the guitars. And the vocals. And the stage presence. In fact, Dope Stars Inc. were an awful lot of everything, distilled into a bunch of ass-kicking rock anthems fired out at the assembled audience.

It's been a while since I've seen a band that instantly struck me as being something potentially massive, but Dope Stars Inc. might just make it to the very peak of the scene given the right backing. Four cyber-punky young Italian boys would be enough to get a hefty proportion of the world's alt-rock girlies wetting their knickers, whilst those jagged riffs and hammering rhythms are the thing the finest mosh-pits are made of (so plenty for the boys then, too!). There's no guarantee they'll make it (I was saying the same things about Sulpher and Earth Loop Recall once, remember!), but I sure as hell hope they do. The world needs larger-than-life bands like this.

Larger-than-life, eh? Sounds like it's time to leave the park and head down to the Agra for medieval day! I arrived in time to see **Schelmish**, boasting a hefty line-up of mitteralter instruments plus guitars and keyboards. Their variant of 'mittelalterrock' was more biased towards the traditional elements than some (I think the guitars are a relatively recent



addition), but they did pay tribute to one modern-day hero with a rollicking cover of Johnny Cash's 'Ring of Fire', endearing themselves to the audience in the process. It'll take time before I decide how they compare to their contemporaries, but don't get me wrong – that was fun!

A no-show from Naio Ssaion meant a long gap prior to the appearance of **Cultus Ferox**. Like Schelmish, they combined medieval music with modern rock instruments, though in a slightly less ostentatious manner this time. They still kept the surprises coming, however, bringing on first a couple of guest musicians followed by a couple of pretty young dancers, who concluded their set with a touch of pyro-dancing. Medieval rock and extravagant showmanship are never far apart, are they?!

**Saltatio Mortis** were the third consecutive medieval rock band to hit the Agra stage this evening. By this time, I'd realised that I wouldn't be able to figure out the fine differences between each group until I'd bought and listened to a few CDs by each group. So I instead decided to stand back and take in the mix of pyro, power chords and the increasingly familiar medieval musicology – trying to pick out the details would have only lessened my enjoyment.

It was the acoustic section in the middle part of their set that stood out – having begun to chmalt Germanic standard 'Palästinalied', the members of Schelmish and Cultus Ferox joined them on stage for a spot of mass dudelsacking! It does still remain to be seen how much medieval rock a man (even a man like me) can take. Whilst In Extremo have been a solid favourite for years, I don't deny that it's possible to do this style badly like any other. All of these three bands were entertaining in the festival atmosphere, but would I enjoy them all away from the stage from the comfort of my CD player? It's not a dead-cert, but I still hope to have a lot of fun finding out!

There was still one performance left on the schedule, something bigger, grander and more extravagant than anything else this year's WGT line-up had to offer – **Cantus Buranus**, a performance of the Corvus Corax adaptation of Carmina Burana. The stage set alone was something to behold – besides from the bands already-sizable percussion set up, the performance featured an orchestral section with a conductor, a choir with a lead soprano plus plenty of space for the Corvus Corax house pipers to do their thing.

This particular version of Carmina Burana was a fresh classio-medieval interpretation of the original 13<sup>th</sup> century texts, as opposed to a straight rendition of an existing adaptation (Carl Orff's 1937 version is the one most often copied). What really counted, however, was the spectacle. From the opening string tremolos, the full scale of the composition gradually began to unfold. It wasn't until four of the Corvus Corax boys began their trademark piping that the scope of the project really became clear – if you must adapt a frequently-utilised historic text, do it bigger and grander than anyone else.

And so it continued for the next hour, moments of orchestration alternating with bursts of medieval extravagance. Wave-Gotik Treffen 2006 needed something to bring itself to a memorable close, and that they certainly managed. Stories of excellent performances by And One, Kirlian Camera and Killing Miranda at others would normally have made me feel as though I'd really missed something. But someone, all along, I knew I was right finishing my WGT in the Agra, which, despite it's boxy exterior, has always proved to be the safest bet for the biggest show in town.

All that remained was the final pilgrimage to the Moritzbastei, where Steve Weeks was doing his epic 9-hour DJ set in the Ratsonne, whilst those too tired to dance had plenty of dark corners in which to hide. Tuesday morning and the circus had left town. Luckily, with

an early flight there was no reason to wait around and let the comedown sink in. Back to England for me – well, at least until M'era Luna!

And that's it for another year. The longest review ever seen on EOL-Audio could only have arisen from festival on this scale. And a festival on this scale can only be put on by a country that has a scene big enough to support it and a city that actually supports it's visitors rather than making life difficult (I've now found out how awkward it is to put on live music in London, for instance). Leipzig just seems to get everything 'right'. Even the tri-lingual trams run on time.

Some may have complained about venue time clashes and the very large number of previously-unknown bands on the billing. But one persons lack of interest is another's chance to discover something new. Leipzig is after all the only scene festival that can now schedule a line-up where I know of less than half the bands listed. The fact that many of them seemed to be German gothic rock acts that might never break out of their homeland mattered not, as I rather enjoyed trying to work out which of them WILL make a mark internationally.

WGT as a whole, however HAS made mark internationally, and is continuing to do so. A RyanAir check-in queue full of goths at Stansted was indication that the Brit Pack have got the message, which is possibly bad news for our own events (I can't afford to do Whitby as well after this, and I can't be the only one). I met people from the USA, Australia, South Africa, Sweden and several other countries throughout the weekend. WGT is a pilgrimage for goths, a pilgrimage that must be undertaken once during your lifespan, though more and more find it such an enlightening experience that they flock back year after year.

## **Tool – 10,000 Days Tour – 14 Jun 2006**

I've seen many live bands over the years, including many I'd never thought I'd get to see. Last years NIN tour allowed me to scratch the biggest itch in terms of 'want to see'. Depeche Mode was captured earlier this year, with Tool taking over top spot on the 'must see' list following that show. I've never actually been their most devoted fan, but their technical ability is astounding and I'd heard many interesting things about their live show. This was their first tour in several years, and one way or the other, I was going to be there to watch.

I do at this point need to raise some objections to the way I and the rest of the 'Tool Army' were treated. This is the kind of thing the magazine journalists rarely tell you, but as a 'man in the crowd' critic, I feel it is my duty to warn you of some particularly unpleasant exploitation of a captive market. Firstly, Ticketmaster's booking fees and dispatch fees seemed particularly extortionate (I ended up paying nearly £10 over the face price!). Then there was the mysterious telephone auto-call the morning before the gig, instructing people not to bring bags or rucksacks to the venue (in reality, you just got an exhaustive bag check – given the Apollo's £3 cloakroom fee, probably best if you left it behind).

The merchandise and drinks were as extortionate as ever, and the limited choice of drinks in London's live venues is beginning to cause headaches (literal ones!). Then there was the cameras issue. The exhaustive body searching was largely to be expected. But then they sent security round the audience before the show telling people to not take photos. And the crowning moment? Security actually trying to stop people taking photos DURING the show. With the pit in motion. What's worse is I hear Tool personally had a part in this policy. Guys – I know you're perfectionists, but this is taking things too far! Drop the control freak thing already.

Ok, rant over (for now). At around 8:40pm, the lights dropped and the black screen dropped to reveal **Tool** in the midst 'Stinkfist', the bands most instantly recognisable anthem, and a fine way to set the assembled front rows into motion, before giving the new album it's first outing of the night with 'The Post'. Not that a mosh pit is the optimum method of enjoying a Tool gig – any band who thinks switching time signatures mid-song is a sound musical concept is best watched with interest rather than fought through.

Their stage set was impressive, after all, in their own idiosyncratic way. Projection screens formed a crescent around the band, with vocalist Maynard James Keenan delivering his oratory from the riser towards the rear of the stage, next to Danny Carey's huge drum kit – this at least being more conventional than stories I've heard of previous tours, where he played entire shows with his back to the audience, or even delivered vocals from BEHIND the drum kit. But then again, the Tool dynamic is such that Maynard is not a 'lead' vocalist as such, but rather one of four musicians, each contributing their own elements to Tool's highly technical sound.

The set featured those tracks from '10,000 Days' that were probably best suited for live play – 'Jambi' featured some live vocals effects (frequently used in the industrial scene but often considered taboo in rock), along with the likes of 'Right In Two' and 'Rosetta Stoned'. Of the older songs, I especially enjoyed 'Schism', a song I feel really showcases the talents and versatility of bassist Justin Chancellor – seeing him in action was one of the key draws to tonight's show. I was also impressed with drummer Danny Carey's virtuosity throughout the show – as a tribute to Tool's prog-rock influences, a few fleeting moments hinting towards a drum solo not seemingly in the slightest bit self-indulgent.

The only pre-Aenima track to make it in was 'Sober', popular amongst long-time fans though never a personal favourite of my own. The main part their set concluded with a thunderous 'Lateralus'. Mocking the 'fake encore' ritual most bands put their fans through, the four members then duly sat on the riser and soaked up the crowd adoration. The eventually returned to their positions for the 10,000 Days opener 'Vicarious' (with Maynard and Adam Jones on keyboards during an extended intro), before the show-stopping 'Aenima' finally brought the evening to a close.

Talk of a return in November were met with a predictably rapturous response. Who present wouldn't want to sit though it all again in five months time? I was certainly impressed with Tool show. I was pleased to see that they could actually transfer music as complex as that to the live stage. The live project were set up as an integral part of the show rather than as an anonymous backdrop. And despite all the key, tempo and time signature switches, all the odd effects and esoteric structures, when they have to, Tool can rock as hard as anyone.

But despite all this, I may very well not be there myself. I was still none to happy with the aforementioned problems with extortionate booking fees, awkward door policies and the over-zealous security. I may have to submit myself to such treatment a few more times to see the few remaining bands on my must-see list that are likely to play shows on this scale (such problems are usually significantly less of an issue at the club-scale gigs I attend, BTW). But I certainly won't do it to see bands multiple times (with a few exceptions that could be counted on the fingers of one hand), and if that has to include Tool, so be it.

## **Mesh – UK Tour 2006 – 18 Jun 2006**

Due to my familiarity with all three of the bands on tonight's billing, it really was a last-minute decision that brought me here. An exhaustive schedule of Dark City, WGT and Tool had given me a live-band fatigue of sorts and I had no real urge to worsen the feeling. That said, I'd missed Mesh's WGT performance (and it's looking increasingly likely that

timetable clashes will lead to me not seeing them at M'era Luna either), and I hadn't seen one of the other bands on the bill perform for some time, so I eventually decided that I should attend.

Namely Flag Promotions perennials **Mechanical Cabaret**. As it happened, the last time I saw them, it was also in the form of a Mesh support slot at this very venue. They have recently recorded and released their second album, so there was at least some incentive to watch them once more and see what they'd been doing the last few years – as it happened, the bulk of their set was taken from the new CD with their older material largely dropped, so at least it wasn't a case of 'same old band, same old songs'.

But somehow this project seems to have lost some of its shine. Early Mechanical Cabaret might have borne the feeling of being somewhat simplistic in its gratuitous use of shock tactics, but it was entertaining while it lasted. Here they seem to have found a degree of maturity in their songwriting and delivery (though I'm not too keen on that unsubtle drum programming), but I didn't find their sleazy analogue pop as engaging as I once did – the electroclash fad of the early 00s (which these boys pretty much managed to pre-empt) and a more general 'old-school electronics revival' has ironically led to their sound becoming less distinctive than it once was. The ever-camp frontman Roi still seems the right kind of person to front such a project, but my interest was waned.

If you believe certain portions of the music press, you might expect **Client** to have all the answers. As an all-female act, they certainly look the part in their identical black tube dresses. It's a pity, therefore, that they don't sound as good as they look. Dull electronic sequences and half-sung, half-spoken vocals did little to excite. All of their songs just sound pedestrian, rolling past without doing anything to excite. Yet they still have a following big enough to have kept them going long enough to record a second album. I still can't see what all the fuss is about. They impressed me no more here than they did at Elektrofest, and that's all I've really got to say about them.

So it was left to **Mesh** to rescue my evening. Having seen them once a year from 2001 onwards, I wasn't expecting any great development, though I wasn't surprised to hear more prominent live guitars given the slightly rockier feel of their recent album 'We Collide'. They also brought along a live drummer, though to be honest I don't think he really added much to their live sound. Mesh's backing tracks are usually very carefully produced, such that the unsubtle, mechanised throb of programmed beats (something particularly obvious in Mechanical Cabaret's set) seldom features in their work. A live drummer just didn't have the potential to add much to their performance musically.

Anyway, the woolly-capped Mark Hockings is all a Mesh show really needs, and luckily he was on song as ever. He's not the most exciting frontman to watch, but at least he hits the right notes, a factor upon which a project like this lives or dies on the stage. The backing vocals from the two keyboard players weren't quite as proficient, but neither did they really upset things. The video backdrops worked as well as ever, though they weren't present on every song, even on songs like 'People Like Me', where they would typically form an integral part of the performance.

Tonight's set was largely drawn from their recent album 'We Collide', an impressive collection of songs, and therefore nobody seemed to mind the relative lack of old favourites. That said the essentials from 'Who Watches Over Me?' like 'Friends Like These' and 'Leave You Nothing' still interspersed the new songs, whilst 'People Like Me' got a particularly impressive crowd sing-a-long going (even with the lack of the usual karaoke-style backing video – odd considering most of the songs featured their usual backdrops). The old EP track 'Fragile' got a rare performance, but Mesh stalwarts 'Trust You' and 'You Didn't Want Me' were conspicuous by their absence.

The venue wasn't as packed as one might have expected from past performances, but since this date was part of a UK tour rather than their more usual stand-alone performance, it may well have been that some of the regulars went to the Sheffield or Bristol shows instead of this one. They can pull a few thousand at the German festivals, but one wonders why they haven't become more popular here than they currently are. Their 'casual' image is scene-neutral (as were much of tonight's audience) and there's always been a market for slightly angsty pop music in the UK, which Mesh do as well as anyone. Why haven't the big venues and the big promoters gone for them?

Anyway, their set was still delivered in fine style, with the encores inevitable as ever. The first saw a performance of 'Open Up The Ground', a personal favourite from the new CD. The second, meanwhile, saw an extended version of 'From This Height'. Mark Hockings left the stage after delivering the vocals, leaving his bandmates to complete a hard, rave-style outro, an unexpected finale to their set. Despite this, the new drummer and the proliferation of new songs in the set, I didn't really learn anything new about any of the three bands on tonight's bill – at least Mesh were able to provide a good evening's entertainment as compensation.

## The Birthday Massacre UK Debut – 20 Jul 2006

I had no idea prior to tonight's show exactly how crowded the Underworld would be tonight. Whilst I could see The Birthday Massacre have an appeal to a wide variety of alternative sub-cultures, as far as reputation was concerned, I don't remember them ever so much as registering beyond those of us to trek off to European festivals where this kind of band forms much of the line-ups on offer. It was the first UK show for this Canadian collective, so the queue tailing right round the back of the World's End prior to door opening must have been some encouragement.

One must first accept the limitations of the evening. Firstly, the Underworld has never had the best soundsystem (either monitoring or FoH) and this hurts pretty much any band who ends up playing here – it's therefore something a reviewer needs to allow for. Secondly, the UK was in the midst of a heatwave. The temperature readings might not look impressive to most foreigners, but the humidity, pollution and the lack of an infrastructure that can cope with such temperatures is a severe issue. Luckily, the Underworld saw fit to lay on free drinking water, a welcome touch.

There were two support acts, admittedly both of them acts which had largely failed to impress me in the past. The first of these to hit the stage was the freshly reformed **D.U.S.T.**. Those of you who remember the slatings I gave them circa 2002-3 might expect more of the same here, but they had a triumph card up their sleeve, namely a new guitarist in the form of Ben McLees from SonVer, formerly of Earth Loop Recall. That said, it was still the same songs they were playing and still the wannabe megastar Mikey fronting the ensemble, so could I have really expected that much change?

No, but what I did see was a substantial step forward from their earlier incarnations. Ben is a more accomplished and more versatile guitarist than his predecessor, playing with a degree of virtuosity that sat more comfortably with Mikey's 'over-the-top rock star' demeanour. Whilst I still don't rate their songwriting abilities over and above other industrial rock contemporaries, the chemistry of the whole band seems to have improved following the reformation. For the first time, I watched their entire set without wandering off to the bar or toilet at least once. For a band that I once viewed as an abomination, this isn't bad going at all!

The other support act tonight were **Screaming Banshee Aircrew**. My first impressions at Gotham this year were not positive, and I still hold the opinion that they're worryingly

reminiscent of the synth-heavy trad-goth released on the Nightbreed label during the late 90s. Tonight's performances was a slight improvement, with a good balance of horror-show melodrama and rockin' energy, but maybe it was just the heat making me delirious. The live female vocals were weak, but the remainder was at least tolerable. I guess if you like your goth old-school, you could do worse than try the Aircrew out one, but personally I like my goth to sound a little less dated.

So then to **The Birthday Massacre**. With an impressive turn-out for their UK debut, the Canadian six-piece took the the stage, the boys all dressed in shirts, ties and waistcoats (this despite the heat), with lead singer Chibi in a cute little polka dot number. The vocals were inaudible for the first few minutes, but once all the faders were in position, the bands distinctive surprisingly complex sound was very much in evidence. And oddly enough, that's pretty much all that was needed. Chibi's baby-doll vocals and the melodic nursery-rhyme keyboards were able to rise above the guitars and characterise the band as a whole, despite any attempt the notorious Underworld sound system made at tripping them up.

With only two albums to date, the second effectively a 'definitive version' of the first, their set was never going to last very long (given the heat, this was probably a blessing in disguise). The setlist was drawn from the 'Violet' album, with the majority of it's contents making it in. None of this was any surprise of course. The Birthday Massacre did exactly what a band trying to break a new territory has to do – play all the best songs, enjoy a bit of banter with the crowd and hopefully come back to play a bigger venue next time.

## Ministry – MasabaTour 2006 – 2 Aug 2006

It had been three years since Ministry last made it to these shores. They never toured 'Houses of the Molé' here, so there were two albums worth of songs that hadn't been played here yet. The show took place at The Forum in Kentish Town, a switch from their usual haunt at the London Astoria. Indication are that this could be one of the last Ministry tours – Al Jourgensen has openly stated that he'll do one more album before switching to other projects. Whether that final tour will make it to the UK remains to be seen.

There was the issue of support acts. The US leg of the tour got Revolting Cocks as support. I met someone at the show who'd actually attended one of these shows, with tales of a utterly wasted Luc Van Acker the most striking image. At least that would be more memorable than **October File** and **President Evil**, two bands who hit something of a blind spot in my metal radar, the former dishing up a form of hardcore-punk-metal, the latter a touch on the thrashier side. Whilst way better than the execrable Raging Shithorn who filled this slot three years ago, neither did anything more than a workmanlike job. I know how I like my metal, and this isn't quite it.

Anyway, I was only really here to watch **Ministry**. With Paul Barker having departed in unclear circumstance a few years back, Al initially continued with a selection of his 'usual suspect' session men. For this tour, however, he has assembled a 'supergroup' line-up of sorts, featuring Tommy Victor (Prong) on guitar, Paul Raven (Killing Joke) on bass and Joey Jordison (Slipknot!) on drums. A nice mix of the influencing and the influenced, then. But can they actually play Ministry songs?

It took a while for it to become clear. Curiously opening with the crawling stomp of 'Fear (Is Big Business)' from the new album 'Rio Grande Blood', it took a few songs before the obligatory mosh pit really kicked into motion. Something wasn't quite right – we needed an anthem to really set things things off and we weren't quite getting it. Just quite-good-but-not-the-original remakes. Indeed, the majority of the main set was given over to songs from the last two Ministry albums. Good as it was to hear these songs in London for the first time, it was too much new stuff too soon.

Eventually things got moving, the likes of 'Waiting' and 'Wrong' working nicely enough, even if the 'Rio Grande Blood' material received only a moderately positive response. It was clear that this super-line-up wasn't quite the sum of it's parts. Eventually, Al asked the audience if they minded if they played an 'old one'. Of course we didn't! 'N.W.O.' still rings true no matter which Bush is in the White House. My memories of 'Just One Fix' are somewhat foggier, however. The pit was getting particularly vicious at this point, and I wasn't about to chicken out during my favourite Ministry song, was I?

After this I had to give best and crawl for sanctuary as they rolled off 'Thieves', before bringing the show to a close with the ponderous 'Khyber Pass'. There were of course encores – 'So What' and 'Stigmata' first time out, followed by 'Psalm 69' to see us home, though they skipped 'Jesus Built My Hotrod' (known to be played at other shows on tour). Nothing from 'Filth Pig' and 'Dark Side of the Spoon' (no bad thing for the most part, but even these album had their moments), and nothing from 'Animositisomina', either – a pity considering this album marked Ministry's return to form back in 2003.

But as for the show, it may well have been enjoyable with sufficient quantities of alcohol and sufficient appreciation of the last two Ministry albums. But somehow I left slightly disappointed – alongside my first experience of Ministry live in 2003, it felt somewhat hollow, despite three strong (but often somewhat similar sounding) albums in a row. Stories are rife that the next Ministry album may well be the last. On the balance of tonight, that may actually prove to be a sensible decision.

## M'era Luna 2006 – 12-13 Aug 2006

### Day 1

M'era Luna was the first foreign festival I visited back in 2002. Whilst WGT beats it for variety and experience, in terms of a classic, open-air, camp-out music festival, M'era Luna trumps every other fest this scene has to offer. Not that I camp myself, instead operating out of a nearby guesthouse. My typically exhaustive live schedule had also meant that I'd seen most of this years line-up in some form in the recent past already – indeed only 6 of the 40 bands, all footing the billing, were completely unknown to me (and for various reasons, I didn't get to see any of them).

Anyway, we made it to the site in time for **Gothminister**'s set on main stage on day one. Bjorn Alexander Brem's combination of explosive electronic goth, outrageous stage outfits and Rammstein-school riffology is certainly attention-grabbing, if not indicative of any great imagination. Their larger-than-life presence was certainly capable of filling the sizable Hildesheim Flugplatz outdoor stage (utilising two more members than their London show earlier this year), a good way to kick off the weekend. I doubt if they'd keep my attention if they played for more than the 30-40 minutes they usually get allocated at such events, but the basic concept is strong.

The first key point of interest this weekend was next the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary show of **Girls Under Glass**. It's hard to know whether to refer to them as industrial goth or gothic industrial, but either way I've always enjoyed what they do and that especially applies to their live performances. From darkwave atmospherics to forceful industrial rock, this band has achieved a great deal in it's career and were set for a memorable celebration of two decades work, even though they had a mere 40 minute set to play with. The key personnel of vocalist Zaphor, keyboard player Hauke Harms and bassist Axel Ermes (as well as live guitarist Lars Baumgardt) were all present and working hard, but on this occasion they decided to bring along some back-up.

The first portion of their set featured a female backing vocalist, just the job for their cover of Madonna's 'Frozen'. She left the stage afterwards, giving way to a succession of guest vocalists. Eric Burton (Catastrophe Ballet) and Oswald Henke (Goethes Erben) both made fine contributions, though the band also played a few songs on their own, a slightly confused opening to 'Feuerengel' their only slip-up. The finale was 'Ohne Dich' from the Zyklus album, with a guest appearance from Peter Spilles of Project Pitchfork (who had also sung on the studio version). Pitchy actually formed at a Girls Under Glass concert many years ago, and the significance of the occasion wasn't lost on the crowd. Or me!

My first visit to the Hangar allowed me to take in another performance from those crazy Italians at **Dope Stars Inc.** I remembered their WGT show fondly. Here their impact was lessened by a slightly muddy sound quality, but they were giving it everything as ever. Their energetic, melodic form of industrial rock is incredibly catchy, and they've got the rock star demeanour to carry it off, too. They were a little optimistic in terms of holding the mic to the audience and letting them share the singing (not many of them knew how the songs went yet) but a few more years and they could well have the crowd at their mercy.

Skipping Mesh on this occasion, my next port of call was **Liv Kristine's** set. I remember her days in Theatre of Tragedy, but had been largely unimpressed so far with the Leaves Eyes material she had recorded with members of Atrocity. Her solo set was that much different again, largely steering away from out-and-out 'metal' influence, instead producing a form of folky/atmospheric pop/rock, utilising acoustic as well as electric guitars, along with a lute-style instrument. There were a couple of doomy stomps hinting at her roots ('Deus Ex Machina') but also a few ballad-style and folk-pop songs balancing things out. This is clearly a very 'personal' project, with more scope for variation than a conventional band. It won't appeal to all, but those of you who have enjoyed at least one of Liv's projects over the years might do well to check out her solo material in addition.

I popped out to watch **Funker Vogt** play a couple of songs, delivering 'Gunman' and 'Tragic Hero' in their usual accomplished style, but was back inside to watch **Unheilig.** Der Graf is a consummate frontman, and whilst this set was similar to his WGT one (with a few songs less due to time constraints), no-body seemed to mind much. The new album occupied most of the setlist, but 'Aus Zum Mond', 'Maschine' and 'Sag Ja!' all went down a treat too. Peter Spilles made another guest appearance, this time during 'Helden' (one of the heavier tracks from the last album), and again the crowd appreciated his cameo.

I had to skip the end of their set, however, as I wanted to catch at least most of **Die Krupps** outside. A band which had started out as EBM pioneers and had later switched to industrial metal along with everyone else in the mid-90s was due at least some of my time. The current incarnation is still guitar-heavy, although Jurgen Engler bashed his stahlophone during 'Metal Machine Music' (the most recognisable song in this set, and my personal highlight). Die Krupps are still a good live band, they put on an energetic live show, but somehow this performance was lacking for some intangible reason.

But at least they could play live. Someone should tell that to **Blutengel.** These purveyors of synthetic vampiric ear candy usually specialise in late-night hangar slots. On this occasion, however, they played main stage in the daylight. The fact that they didn't crumble to dust upon emerging was the first surprise, but in retrospect, that would have been a blessed relief. Utilising more people on stage than ever before, and even a little bit of pyro, Blutengel were clearly set on putting on their biggest show to date. And they failed dismally.

Blutengel don't actually play live instruments, so all the music is on backing barring the vocals. Chris Pohl's singing was passable, but the female vocals were weak, often out-of-time or out-of-tune. The performance art accompaniment, meanwhile, quickly descended



into farce. Multiple costume changes, half-hearted dancing, including some really naff ribbon-waving and blood-smearing and generic electro-goth lyrics (how many times can you mention darkness, angels and blood?). Every time I see Blutengel, they're weaker than the time before. If anything, on this occasion they were so bad they were actually rather good. I haven't laughed so much at a live band in ages. That's how awful they really were.

Thankfully, the next band on was **Front Line Assembly**, an important moment for me personally, as it was the Mindphaser single (first heard by me in February 1998 after a visit to a 2<sup>nd</sup>-hand shop in Kensington Market) that introduced me to the electronic side of the industrial scene in the first place. They haven't toured Europe much in recent years, either, but finally I was to get a chance to see them. Unfortunately, Rhys Fulber wasn't present, but Bill Leeb has at least got a decent backing group together, with live drums and guitars (the latter also providing additional percussion on some of the older material) in addition to the keyboards.

They opened up with 'Buried Alive' from the new album, but otherwise generally kept to a 'greatest hits' setlist – despite the quality of the new album, this was probably a wise idea from the point of view of crowd reaction. I particularly enjoyed 'Dead Planet' from the 'Epitaph' album (a disc I may yet revisit as I never thought much of it otherwise), but the best reactions came from 'Plasticity' and the 'Tactical Neural Implant' songs (of which there were several), with 'Mindphaser' closing the set. Some felt they had seen FLA play better shows, but I wasn't complaining – the live vocals effects worked well, they band performed well and there was even a mosh pit in the later stages (hardly ever seen at M'era Luna!). That was good. More please!

Indeed, another classic industrial kingpin was up next – **Nitzer Ebb**. Unlike FLA, they were doing a one-off tour comprised purely of backcatalogue material. Not that the Germans seemed to mind – old-school EBM beats and commanding barks of 'Getting Closer!' and 'FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!' was all that was really necessary to put on a decent show. And that's exactly what Nitzer Ebb did. Of course, I'd seen it all before in Leipzig so didn't get as worked up here as I did during FLA, but there's no doubting the 'Ebb still have what it takes. And that's all I have to say on the matter.

I left during the 'Ebb's encore to get position in the Hangar to watch **The Gathering**, having missed them four years previously and at every opportunity since then. I was introduced to their work via their gothic metal opus 'Mandylion' dating back to 1995. Let's just say that they've moved on since then. Clad in blue denim (always indicative of a lack of scene affiliation), The Gathering instead played a form of atmospheric indie rock, often hovering around the trip-hop/shoegazer regions rather than anything genuinely gothic. It was an interesting set, certainly one that might inspire me to check out their latest CD, but at this late hour I really needed something more confrontational, so I left the hangar fifteen minutes from time and returned to watch tonight's headliners.

Namely **Bauhaus**. Like Nitzer Ebb, these boys are on a reformation tour, a very long one which is clearly making certain people an awful lot of money (since their minimal stage set can't exactly be regarded as a drain on resources). Luckily, they can still play their own songs to back up the name. Anyone wanting a full-length review of the Bauhaus set should check my review of their February show at Brixton, as more or less the same things happened here as there, though they had to drop a few songs from the set (like the Ziggy and Transmission covers), though a raucous 'Dark Entries' followed by a finale of 'Bela Lugosi's Dead' saw the day to close in style.

## Day 2

Sunday saw an early rush to get back to the site in time for the ridiculously early 11:20am start for **Solitary Experiments**. As creators of one of the better EBM/future-pop style albums of 2005, I was rather hoping for a longer set, but 5 songs would have to suffice. To make matters worse, they were suffering the sound quality issues that often afflict early-hours bands in the hangar. Given all that, the Solitary trio did the best job they could in the circumstances. Opening with 'Delight' (a minor hit in the London scene), they performed what I believe to be the strongest tracks from 'Mind Over Matter' ('Still Alive' and 'Pale Candle Light' included) and also sneaked in 'Watching Over You' from their previous disc.

Another band that seemed abnormally low on the bill was **XPQ-21**, the kind of band that usually sits near the top of UK billings. It seems they aren't all that popular in these parts. A decent show here might have helped their cause, but I really don't think they did the job on this occasion. They seem to have changed their live keyboardist and drummer since Edinburgh, the guitars weren't all that audible, whilst their actual performance seemed confused and directionless. Much as I enjoyed the 'Alive' CD, Jeyenne is losing it when it comes to the live show, the once decadent frontman seemingly increasingly desperate. Once 'Jesus Was Gay' kicked in, I'd decided I'd seen enough and went in search of a band that could still play.

I found them in the form of **Clan of Xymox** – third-top in the Agra at WGT but mysterious hovering near the bottom of the bill here (and this is a band who actually RELOCATED to Germany from their native Amsterdam). A bunch of very old goths they may be, but they've got a decent set of songs to build a set-list from, and as long as they use a smoke machine, a decent performance is largely assured. Two tracks from 'Breaking Point' (a rather fine album, I might add) and a small selection of oldies, with the usual climax of 'A Day'. Nothing new learned, but certainly a more controlled performance than the one I'd just seen in the hangar.

I decided to stay outside for **Epica**, a mezzo-soprano fronted symphonic metal band from the Netherlands, last seen here two years ago. Their 2005 album 'Consign To Oblivion' was only moderately impressive for the genre, but this show was at least enjoyable, if not quite as 'explosive' (metaphorically AND literally) as the Nightwish/Within Temptations of the world. Despite the short set, they saw it fit to perform their 10-minute long 'Consign To Oblivion' as a set closer (bands like these often record extended-length opii but rarely perform them). Epica are certainly worthy of attention if this is a genre that appeals to you, but they haven't quite achieved greatness yet. It may yet come.

Next up on main stage was **Letzte Instanz** – the last band on either stage which I was for the most part unfamiliar with. A German language metal band with a violin and cello might have initially suggested the presence of a mittelalter-rock band, but it later transpired that they left this style behind some time ago. What I heard, therefore, was a hard, contemporary German-language metal band, bearing most similarities to 'Engelkrieger' era Subway To Sally, though to be honest, their sound had sufficient quirks so that they couldn't be accused of copying anyone. It wasn't a truly engaging live set, though the strings and bass interlude was highly entertaining! Certainly analysis of their lyrical content will be necessary to truly appreciate what they do.

Back into the hangar, then, and right down the front for **Rotersand**. Whilst I wasn't as blown away as some with 'Welcome To Goodbye', I was certainly impressed by the manner in which they managed to break free of the 'future pop trap' and develop their own electronic music style. It just seemed a bit 'technical'. Not so here. This was a 40-minute dance-a-thon like no other. Rascal has a great singing voice and he's also developing into

a fine crowd work, backed ably by Gun and Krischan. Right from the opening lines of 'Almost Violent', we knew we in for a treat.

And it got better. Having then set the entire hangar in motion during 'Last Ship', Rascal then announced the debut performance of 'Storm', with Mark Jackson of VNV fame guesting as live drummer. This was exactly what a track as percussive this needed, Mark thrashing away at the assembled drum pads like a man possessed. The band's electronics rack fell to the floor at one point, and there was also a malfunctioning mic, but after Rotersand's hitch-laden M'era Luna show of 2004, nobody and nothing was going to spoil this return visit. By the time of 'Exterminate Annihilate Destroy', there were a group of us doing our very best Dalek impersonations down the front. Just for the hell of it. I really hope they play London again soon, and play a full-length set into the bargain. Even their curtailed support and festival slots are dazzling.

I stuck around afterwards for veteran darkwavers **In Strict Confidence**. Their recent album 'Exile Paradise' had been impressive as ever and I was keen to see how it would work on the live stage. It had been three years since I'd seen ISC live, and they've added a female vocalist to the live shows, reflecting the direction taken on their last two albums. They were suffering a rather muddy sound quality throughout their set which obscured all the fine details, but the band themselves did nothing wrong barring a confused version of 'Herzattacke' that failed to capture the dynamic of the original. It's a bit hard to rate their performance otherwise, but I'll certainly be back for more when they play London next month.

There was time to pop outside and watch **Apoptygma Berzerk** play a few songs. With only 50 minutes to play with and a poorly-received new album, they couldn't really play anything other than a crowd-pleasing 'greatest hits' set. I might have missed the opening portion of their set, but I at least heard 'Kathy's Song', 'Until The End Of The World', 'Unicorn', 'Love Never Dies' and 'Non-Stop Violence' along with their recent cover of 'Shine On'. Stephan Groth's backing band didn't actually seem to be contributing much to proceedings (at one point all three of them were separated from their instruments), but these are still quality songs. Just seems a little sad in terms of how they've declined.

I returned to the hangar in time for **Terminal Choice**, the second Chris Pohl project to play this weekend. Luckily, there were plenty of instruments and no rubbish dancers on this occasion. Terminal Choice has an interesting history, starting out as a dark electro-goth project before adding guitars and becoming a kind of EBM/industrial rock hybrid. This sort of combination is appealing to me in theory, though in practice I tend to enjoy Terminal Choice only in short doses. Their industrialised murdering of Yazoo's 'Don't Go' was initially amusing but ultimately quite predictable, whilst their own songs tend to blur into one another after a while. With fifteen minutes to go, I'd got the idea and went back outside.

I made it out just as **Ministry** were reaching the end of their opening tune 'Psalm 69'. I'd never seriously believed that Ministry would work as an open-air festival band, fears that more or less came true. The band's performance today was noticeably weaker than the one I witness a few days ago in London, which in turn was weaker than their 2003 shows. There were a few decent tracks (Lies Lies Lies, Just One Fix and Thieves sounded reasonable enough), but the majority of their set sounded unfocused and messy. They finished with drawn-own performances of 'Khyber Pass' and 'So What', killing off any remaining enthusiasm I may have had for their set tonight. This line-up clearly still has work to do.

Luckily, salvation was near. I'm referring of course to the mighty **In Extremo**. Now HERE'S a band who know how to play the open-air festivals. In keeping with the nautical theme of

their last album 'Mein Rasend Herz', they'd replaced the usual kilt clobber with some pirate costumes, but in their larger-than-life style, also brought along a ship to use as their stage set! Taking a while to arrive on stage, the In Ex boys finally appeared about ten minutes after the scheduled starting time, opening to the sound of 'Raue See', with the ships wheel promptly spinning around and shooting sparks everywhere. They are nothing if not showmen.

Their set tonight was broadly based around their most recent album, not that I was complaining as it was certainly one of their most consistent works. Naturally, these songs were interspersed with crowd-pleasers such as 'Der Wind', 'Kuss Mich' and the 10,000-strong sing-a-long 'Vollmond'. They've had to drop some of their older standards like 'Ai Vis Lo Lop' and 'Herr Mannelig' to make space, but sacrifices had to be made. More or less every song featured some form of pyrotechnics, including a couple of flame throwers that shot jets of fire over the heads of the audience. Simply put, the master of medieval rock did it again. It's bands like this that make festivals like this so special!

Unable to squeeze into the hangar to watch ASP, I settled for one final trip round the market stalls before finding a decent vantage point for M'era Luna regulars **Within Temptation**. Four years ago, I saw this band play a brief slot low on the Sunday afternoon billing. Returning in 2003 and 2004 with increasingly higher billing, they now finally get to headline main stage. The relevance of this placing must not be understated – with Nightwish having stalled whilst they took for a replacement Tarja, Within Temptation now find themselves shooting at an open goal. The symphonic metal crown is there for the taking. And what better way to claim it that to put on their most extravagant show to date. Utilising angel statues, podiums, a video screen and even more pyro than In Ex, Within Temptation were dead-set on seeing M'era Luna 2006 out with a bang.

Drawing a setlist from their last two albums, along with their Kate Bush cover and a new song in the form of 'The Howling', tonight's set was a feast of rock extravagance, symphonic wonders and explosive showmanship, with Sharon Van Adel's voice soaring high above everything. Their closing number 'Mother Earth' was dedicated to the very personification of nature named in the title – as despite many negative weather forecasts, for once M'era Luna was not blighted with either a heatwave nor heavy rain. A two-song encore of 'See Who I Am' and 'Ice Queen' and it was all over.

That was my fifth M'era Luna, and in many respects my favourite so far. The difficulties with travel only increased my resolve to make it there and have a good time in the process, a middle-finger to terrorist groups who seem to think they have the world at their fingertips. The only issue I had was that there was relatively little 'special' about this year's line-up, few bands that weren't either playing WGT or touring Europe at the time. But, given all the circumstances, this was exactly what I needed. Stories of £10 programs, extortionate food and drink and excessive queues and crowds at the V-Festival the following week (the nearest open-air festival to my house) made me all the more satisfied with my decision.

## **Front Line Assembly – 2006 Tour – 28 Aug 2006**

I'm not sure how long it's been since Front Line Assembly last played London, but I discovered their music in 1998 and they certainly haven't played in the locality since then. Several new albums, of course, but no live action anywhere in the UK. Such was the nature of my live schedule that I had managed to see them at M'era Luna two weeks prior to this event, but there was no way I was missing this show, either. They'd played InFest the previous evening (a festival I elected not to attend this year, for various complicated reasons), and initial reports were good. Hopes were high

FLA's European tour support were **Stromkern**. Now here's a band that have achieved something I otherwise thought impossible – fusion of industrial and hip-hop (anyone know how much I REALLY hate Consolidated?). Stromkern's instrumentation similar to other electro-industrial acts of the time (though they do use a guitarist), but Ned Kirby's vocal style is clearly more inspired by rap than your usual dehumanised industrial drone. This approach works best when they really go for it ('Stand Up' is a real genre-crossing anthem), but I found a few of the other tracks came over as a bit half-hearted (it's clear why Ned raps, as he really can't sing!). Stromkern were an interesting opener, but somehow I was slightly disappointed with what I saw.

Anyway, enough about them – how did **Front Line Assembly** get on? Their stage set included two keyboard racks draped in camo, a couple of banners and a video screen (not seen at M'era Luna). The live band does not feature Rhys Fulber these days (he's touring as Conjure One soon, anyway) but Bill Leeb has still pieced together a respectable 5-man crew, including a live drummer and guitarist (who also contributes additional percussion when needed). They opened with 'Buried Alive' from the new album, complete with some complex and highly impressive live drumming (just when you thought industrial was all stompy four-beats – that bit comes later...).

Once that was completed, they brought out the live guitarist and went straight into 'Vigilante' from the Millennium album, making it clear from the outset that this was indeed to be a 'greatest hits' setlist. Even at this early stage, the crowd response was impressive, the embryonic mosh-pit taking shape. Other early highlights were 'Dead Planet', a song which I never really got into on CD but seemed to really work on the live stage and also 'Bio-Mechanical', the first appearance of the Tactical Neural Implant material. Most of the band's recent albums were represented in tonight's set, though both 'Hard Wired' and 'FLA Flavour of the Weak' were chmalt, as was anything pre-TNI. With a band this old, there's only so much you can fit in.

There was one more new song to come – 'Unleashed'. Bill's reference to the new album was revealing – 'Maybe you bought it, Maybe you burnt it. Who fucking cares?'. Their rendition of the song itself was blinding nonetheless, necessary proof that they can still write dehumanised electro-industrial as well as perform it. By now, I'd found my way into the mosh-pit down the front. I'd seen them sober at M'era Luna and quite frankly, it was time to have some fun.

They finished their set on 'Plasticity'. With their guitarist now switching to the role of second drummer, the rhythmic assault of the original really came across, with the seething pit down the front reaching a level of fury equalling the likes I've seen (and felt) and Ministry and Killing Joke gigs. I didn't know electronic bands could DO that! Naturally, there were calls for an encore, and the boys duly returned to perform two more TNI tracks, with Bill joining in the live drumming on 'Gun' before seeing us home with 'Mindphaser', perhaps the most highly regarded FLA creation of them all, and the song that really took this project to stardom in the first place.

And that was it. The first FLA London show in recent memory, very much enjoyed by the assembled audience. It's interesting to note that this particular style of industrial has been marginalised in the club scene of late, pushed aside by the more straightforward future pop and aggro-tech styles. But on the other hand, didn't FLA help inspire these styles in the first place (listen to the first Covenant album if you're searching for the link!). One way or another, this show reminded all present that FLA are far from a spent force. That was a good one.

## Being Boiled – 12 Sep 2006

This was my first experience of the club run bi-weekly by the Client threesome in the Notting Hill Arts club. Whilst the venue isn't the nicest on the London circuit, it's an interesting change and the £2-per-bottle German beers soon warmed me to the place. Five bands were billed, though headliner Robert Görl (of DAF game) was so late on stage that I was unable to watch his set. I'd liked to have heard what he's up to these days, but last tube trains wait for no man.

This left three bands to review, starting with **Capital-X**, a two-member (all female) electroclash project. Armed with a drum machines, a mini-Korg and an 80s-vintage Yamaha, the duo delivered a set built from fuzzy blasts of synth, primitive drum loops and half-spoken, half-sung vocals. Whilst they were clearly performing an impressive quotient of their music live, I have to admit to being for the most part unimpressed. A few urgent drums loops and the odd interesting melody helped keep my attention, but music such as this still sounds overly 'easy', not sufficiently advanced 'Futurism' in it's original, early 00s incarnation.

Next on were the late-arriving **Luxxury** (spelt with two 'x', as they kept reminding us), an electronic rock act from San Francisco. They were only band of the night to utilise 'conventional' rock instruments alongside the electronics, and thus proved to be an interesting combination of low-fi electroclash and West Coast rock star antics. Decent vocals from a cheerful singer, a few decent songs and enough variation to string together a interesting show. Despite this, they're a little lo-fi for my own tastes, but with a sizeable UK tour planned, they may yet build a following in these parts.

And now for the band I'd come all this way to see – **RBN**, the first time I'd seen them on anything other than an EBM/darkwave line-up. Their glowingly new Virus TI synth was indicative of a more technologically advanced electronic sound than either of the other two acts seen tonight, whilst the addition of a light and smoke machine to the Arts Club's woefully under-equipped stage help provide some visual enhancement to their show. Even though all three members were seen sitting at the side of stage whilst their intro track was played. After their recent Covenant support and festival slots, this must have seemed to be a touch anti-climatic

Anyway, following an amusing intro from Steve (claiming to come from Scunthorpe when I know perfectly well that they're based in North London), they set about performing 'Closure'. Tonight's set essentially replicated their Dark City show, though they found time to squeeze in a remix of 'City Lights', where we were introduced to a dance called 'The Lawnmower', a tribute to a piece of gardening equipment that starts by pulling a string. Or rather does not. Their set was otherwise comprised of the top-notch wave/EBM sound ('oontz pop'?) that they're becoming renowned for, complete with their dark dance hits 'Faithless' and 'Machine Code' and that rather tasty Ultravox tribute 'Visions In Blue'.

With their set completed, the stage was cleared, but there seemed to be very little energy in terms of setting up Görl's equipment. The time was approaching midnight when I decided to give best and head for the last tube home. An entertaining night's music thus came to a close. I'm still not sure if I'll be back – the band that drew me here (RBN), whilst still electronic and clearly 80s influenced, seemed stylistically at odds with the other bands and the Djing (featuring such pioneers as Cabaret Voltaire, A Split Second and Fad Gadget). Much as I like the component parts conceptually, something doesn't add up for me. It's still a valid club venture and I wish them well for the future.

## In Strict Confidence – 22 Sep 2006

By my reckoning, it had been over three years since In Strict Confidence last played London, and that slot was a curtailed and highly misplaced six-song support for The Damned. Whilst 'Promised Land' from their decent album has seen a bit of airplay in the UK, the reality is that they're just not that popular over here. They were headlining upstairs at Elektrowerkz, a venue with a capacity of around 300. Nonetheless, they've made it this far when many of their countrymen have failed to do so, so despite having seen them play M'era Luna a month ago, I decided to show my face and offer my support.

Promoters Cryonica had booked two support bands, though the first, **Anti-Valium** wasn't really a 'band' has such. Neither, for that matter, did they 'support' the evenings proceedings. They're a two piece (Andrew Trail and Hunter Barr from Knifeladder) who subscribe to the traditional, highly experimental school of industrial – layers of electronic noise and disembodied vocals. Unlike Knifeladder, however, they didn't have John Murphy hammering out the tribal rhythms, and it was on that point that the project failed. The individual compositions simply didn't progress or develop sufficiently – the noises just sort of floated there before they would twiddle a few knobs and cut to another line of attack. Maybe this sort of thing is an acquired taste, but having spent a day at the CMI festival earlier this year, I'm pretty sure I know how I like my avant-garde electronics, and this isn't it!

The other support tonight were the ever-present **Katscan**. My opinion of this foul-mouthed collective has waxed and waned over the years. Sometimes I've found their electronic industrial with punk attitude entertaining – on others, I've found myself standing there wondering what was so special. Unfortunately, tonight's performance fell into the latter category. Martin Katscan was giving the mic it's usual abuse, but through the rather underwhelming Elektrowerkz live rig, any vitality the music may have had was lost.

And so **In Strict Confidence** came on to headline. They seemed to be lacking their live guitarist, whilst the keyboard player was clearly working with borrowed kit (or to put it simply, his keyboard had a big 'Kat5can' sticker over the back). Still, at least both of the band's vocalists were present. ISC's recent recordings have utilised increasing proportions of female vocals and it simply made sense to incorporate them into the live show. Pity they didn't have the guitar to incorporate as well.

Anyway, the assembled four-piece arrived on stage without much of a build-up and immediately set about performing 'Promised Land'. Dennis' vocals sounded OK, but it took a while before Nadine's were audible in the mix, and even then they were never loud enough at any stage of the show. The early part of the set saw them dispatch the majority of their 'dual vocal' songs, with 'Seven Lives' being the strongest of these. Dennis was then left to perform three 'classics' on his own – 'Kiss Your Shadow' and 'Zauberschloss' both working well, but the version of 'Herzattacke' they're playing these days is not as good as the album cut – the crucial 'Angriff! Herzattacke!' seems to be lost somewhere on the backing track when it should be belted out over and above the lyrics that follow.

They eventually finished on 'Fading Light'. By now there was a little more cohesion to things, though this was still always going to be a 'best of a bad job' performance (exactly like ISC's last London show, for that matter). There was enough of an audience to call for a couple of encores, with 'Emergency' from 2004's 'Holy' making a surprise appearance (it also being the first time I've seen ISC perform a song without Dennis Ostermann on stage). They eventually closed on 'Engelstaub', which sounded as good as it could have done under the circumstances.

I still felt a little disappointed by what I saw. Whilst the band I came to see have a decent basic set and seemed at least able to perform their own songs with proficiency ('Herzattacke' aside), the Elektrowerkz soundsystem just wasn't up to the job tonight. I happen to think In Strict Confidence are sorely underrated in the UK, but it's been years since they've had a decent chance to show us what they can do. There was a Noisex show at around 1am, but I was fading fast and decided to skip Raoul's beat frenzy on this occasion.

## Tinnitus Festival 2006 – 28 Oct 2006

Despite all the reviews you read on this site, it may surprise you to find that I'm no great traveller. Living in London means most of the bands I want to see are a tube ride away from my house, and yearly visits to WGT and M'era Luna (Germany being the foreign country I feel most at home in) wrap up the remainder. So my decision to visit Stockholm for the Tinnitus festival was not taken lightly. Sweden was to be only the seventh country I had visited, and it was also my first visit to Scandinavia and the furthest I'd ever been from home (though in the jet age, this just means an extra hour on the plane).

The festival was to be held on one night only, though there was a pre-party in a nearby club the night before, featuring a DJ set loaded with early 80s synthpop (how many songs off 'Speak and Spell' did they play?) and old-school EBM, the latter frequently starting mosh-pits. I'd been warned about Sweden's high prices for alcoholic drinks, but given the state of London as the capital of 'rip-off' Britain, it didn't seem too extortionate (apparently, it's even worse in Norway). So the highly enthusiastic Swedes drank their 'Tuborg' (actually Danish but sold everywhere— not a bad beer, as it happens), dancing to a lot of synthetic beats and generally got warmed up for the night to come.

The festival line-up consisted of a mere six bands, though since two of them were the kingpins of electronic body music (Nitzer Ebb and Front 242), no-one was really complaining. Add the reformation of Absolute Body Control (an early project of Dirk Ivens and Eric Van Wonterghem) and the appearance of local favourites Dupont, and the theme for this year's festival was set – EBM goes back to basics. The only deviants from this concept were The Hacker and Unter Null.

And it was **Unter Null**, project of American musician Erica Dunham, who got things started. Their stage set-up was minimal – Erica's mic and a lone keyboard (played by XP8's Marco) was the only visual stimulus. I'd heard not-entirely-positive things about her InFest set, but it seems as though she's calmed things down a little since then. Unter Null play a distorted-vocal form on electronic-industrial, a concept that in many respects is getting quite tired, but at least the vocal wasn't effected to the point that she lost that distinctive feminine screech. Female-fronted bands are rare in this genre, but she at least seems to be taking advantage of the creative opportunities that brings, rather than relying on looks alone.

And let it be said that she did a fairly good job of filling the largely empty stage, despite her short stature. The blend of savagery and temperament were well balanced (something I hear has upset earlier shows on this tour) and the early-hours crowd were dancing (and moshing!) enthusiastically. Naturally, the best response was earned by 'Sick Fuck' (probably the project's biggest hit to date), though there wasn't a really weak song in the set. Acts like this need to do a lot to impress me these days, but this project clearly had a 'voice' of its own. Apparently, she's going to make another attempt to break into the UK scene soon – should be worth looking out for!

Next up were **Absolute Body Control**, the early project of Belgian duo Dirk Ivens and Eric Van Wonterghem, who between them have formed or been members of The Klinik, Dive,



Insekt, Sonar and Monolith – one by one, I’ve seen them all play live, and now I was to get an unexpected chance to see the act that started it all off. A compilation of their works ‘Lost/Found’ was issued last year. Not realising it was a limited edition, it sold out before I’d got round to buying it. Luckily, a few copies were on sale here and I grabbed one early in the night. This did mean that I only had a vague idea what they sounded like.

The appearance of that vintage look-alike controller from the Korg Legacy collection as the centrepiece of Eric’s synth-rack gave some clue as to the overall sound of this project, a proto-EBM form of old-school analogue synth-pop with an undeniable darker side. Think Fad Gadget, Suicide and the first 242 album. The other effect of this reformation was Dirk Ivens having to actually sing for his supper for the first time in around 25 years. His singing voice was passable if not brilliant (never hurt Alan Vega, though!) and meshed well with the simple-but-effective arpeggios, melodies and drum loops. Whilst obviously dated, it was at least clearer than before where the sound of all the aforementioned projects originated from, so on that front it was a worthwhile re-union. Even if they ran out of songs and had to repeat one for the encore.

Time for a Swedish band now – **Dupont**. Sweden have produced a number of bands who are essentially Nitzer Ebb wannabes (hi, Spetsnaz!), but this little collective seem better than most at developing their own sound. They opened with ‘Solid Life’, probably their best known tune, but still a curious choice given that it was originally sung by their now-departed vocalist Juan. With Riccardo at the helm, they set about a set drawing from both the *Ukrainia* and *Intermezzo* albums. Their roots in EBM mixed with subsequent synth-pop influence has enough quirks from keeping it though many would argue that the two style are inextricably linked anyway.

Their set allowed a greater trawl through their backcatalogue than their all-to-brief WGT set, though they’ve at least worked out that Dannuci’s backing vocals didn’t look to impressively delivered standing next to a laptop and have duly given the poor man a Nord Lead to play. The highlight of the set for me was their performance of *Planless Exhibition*, a song featuring a bizarre but supremely catchy turn of phrase, with Johan Kinde (who used to be something big in the Swedish equivalent of the early 80s New Romantic movement) coming on stage to reprise his vocal cameo from the album.

Now chaos descended – nearly an hour passed without any signs of action on stage. Front 242 were due on next but their equipment had been sent to the wrong city! It later emerged that Nitzer Ebb had been asked to go on beforehand, declined and the decision was eventually taken to set up Front 242’s stuff (including a borrowed drum kit) behind a screen, whilst French techno artist **The Hacker** (real name Michel Amato), originally scheduled to play a 2am nightclub-hours slot, played up front. His presence on tonight’s bill was probably due to his recent Nitzer Ebb remix work. I was originally half expecting to be on my way back to the hotel by this time, but now I was going to see him whether I liked or not!

My only experience of his prior work was the electroclash he recorded with Miss Kittin (a style I once enjoyed but now regard as SO 2002!). His solo work was instrumental and more techno-oriented, however, and this is a style of music I’ve never found adapts particularly well to this live stage. Nonetheless, he mixed together a continuous set, applying live filtering and other effect tweaks to the pre-sequenced tracks, which kept a hefty proportion of the crowd that had not wandered off to the bar dancing. In the circumstances, The Hacker did as well as he could in the circumstances, given that he was forced onto stage unexpectedly early to plug a gap in the schedule.

And now, finally, **Front 242**! My honest expectations were that they would perform a ‘greatest hits’ set, similar to the one played in London in November 2000 and the one on

the 'Catch The Men' DVD. I was wrong. Eschewing their usual opener 'Happiness' (which didn't even feature!), they instead kicked off with 'Moldavia' before launching into 'U-Men' from their very first album. That wasn't the only ancient relic exhumed for this performance – 'Don't Crash', 'Lovely Day' and 'No Shuffle' were all given an airing.

The more recent hits were there – 'Together' the best of three tracks from the largely-ignored 2003 recordings (the others being 'Loud' and '7Rain'), whilst 'Religion' was the only representative from the 1993 album pair. 'Welcome To Paradise' and 'Until Death' both appeared, with 'Headhunter' rounding off the main set in inevitably anthemic style. As for the quality of their performance, it was always going to be compromised by the delayed set-up – the sound quality was quite muddy in places and the vocal/music balance wasn't always right.

However, Jean-Luc De Meyer and Richard 23 are both born crowdworkers, not that the Swedish crowd NEEDED much incitement. Asides from the pit, there were lots of over-enthusiastic collisions even round the rear part of the crowd. I was fully aware about how rabid the Swedish were about their favourite live bands, but now I've seen and felt it for myself. Of course, a well-built 6-foot tall Essex-born male such as myself isn't really bothered by such excess, but some of my fellow Brits didn't take too kindly to it all, and therefore made an exit at the conclusion of their set.

So to Nitzer Ebb. Or rather, an early journey home. By now, it was 2am, and I'd spent the early part of the day seeing the sights of Gamla Stan (the 'old town'). I'd been on my feet for too long, and having got a glimpse of the setlist, I realised that I wasn't going to learn anything new about the 'Ebb and having seen them play twice this year, there was no real reason to stay and see it all again for the third time, no matter how good their performance might have been – and I later found they suffered technical hitches than would have put paid to any hopes of a killer finale to the night.

So ended my first experience of live music in Sweden (or rather my first experience of Sweden or any part of Scandinavia, period). The problems relating to Front 242's missing equipment were ultimately unavoidable, but one wonders if they could have been dealt with better (had the 'Ebb shown a little flexibility, the big gap in the middle of the event wouldn't have been so long). The Swedish crowd certainly seemed to be enjoying themselves, a little too enthusiastically, one might say. But Stockholm is a fine city, and this event formed only one part of my 3-night stay. Will I be back next year? Maybe – there's a lot of other countries gunning for my attention, and, as stated as the top, there's only so much travelling this EOL wants to do!

## **Black Celebration 2006 – 5 Nov 2006**

There was talk of last years Black Celebration being the last, but somehow Flag Promotions managed to put together another 9-band line-up and (for once) keep the billing intact from the start of promotion to the big day. Not that the line-up really offered much originality – for Psyche and XPQ-21, this was just one of many UK shows they would perform this year. Deathboy and I Am Immune had both performed at this event at the same point in the billing as in 2005 (the latter under a different name) and even the concept of a 'farewell show' from The Chaos Engine (the UK scene's answer to Frank Sinatra in terms of long goodbyes) seems quite tired now.

Nonetheless, there were enough bands I liked playing to justify attendance, even though only the first of them, **Modulate** was completely new to me. And, as it happens, they caught me by surprise. Harsh industrial rhythms, augmented by addition live pad-whacking and a touch of analog squeal, and a notable absence of any prominent vocals – isn't this sort of thing supposed to be the exclusive preserve of the Germans? Instant comparisons

with Soman, Xotox and Feindflug were inevitable, but given the current popularity of bands of this ilk, such similarities are no bad thing.

It'll be interesting to see if they can make a mark in Europe, where this sort of thing draws massive crowds – a half-hour mid-afternoon set in front of a few early arrivals is scarcely the best environment in which to judge their capabilities. The live drumming took a while to really mesh with the recorded parts, but I'll forgive them as this act are very much newcomers to live performance. I made a point of picking up their 8-track EP (review to follow!), limited as it was to 100 copies. Will it become as treasured as the early editions of Feindflug's debut? It'll be interesting finding out.

Next on were **I Am Immune**, the band formerly known as Faetal, now joined on stage by Ben McLees (of SonVer, ex-all sorts of bands) on bass. Their half-hour set was neatly split into two – three new songs followed by three from the [Sic] album. That was the only thing about today's set that could be accurately described as 'neat', as otherwise this was I Am Immune at their most anarchic. Pete Boyd was lurching around stage like a man with the angst of Robert Smith and the mania of Ian Curtis, whilst the contributions from Tim and Ben only reinforced the harrowing onslaught of noise emerging from the soundsystem.

Even if the new songs were a touch too quirky to truly appreciate first time out, they're certainly indicative that the band's eccentricities have not only survived the name change but have, somewhere along the line, been enhanced. In the later stages of the set, they took the opportunity to play the seldom-heard 'Bad Orb', a kind of drum'n'bass-meet-indie rock construct which seemed to show it's teeth moreso on stage than on CD. I've still got my eye on this band – wonder when the second album is coming out?

Time for the return to stage of **Deathboy** – despite their reputation as London scene regulars, they haven't actually graced the live stage for almost a year. This HAS allowed them to complete their second studio album, 'End of an Error', which was apparently for sale somewhere in the venue, even though I couldn't find it myself. Anyway, with their older material now dropped, this seemed as much an opportunity for Deathboy to prove their increased maturity as a functioning unit as it was as chance to promote their new CD. 'We Will Destroy' and 'Decimate' were always enjoyable, but ultimately they were quite simple songs at their heart.

As with last year, however, it seemed there were a number of complications (not all immediately apparent to the audience) that prevented them from performing that killer set that would elevate once and for all from 'promising local band' status. Good as 'Cheap Shot' and 'Black Morning' are, their set lacked a certain spark. They did provide at least one surprise – a cover of PWEI's 'Wise Up Sucker' (presumably, Scott Lamb was keen to get in touch with his schmaltzy roots!). Their customary set-closed 'Smile You Fuckers' (even if they've matured substantially in the last few years, they're not beyond the odd blatant profanity here and there) was dispatched with the usual gusto, but somehow I was hoping for more. Maybe when I lay my hands on the album, I'll truly appreciate what this 2006-era Deathboy are really all about.

Now for **V2A**, a band I'd last seen play at Dark Jubilee in June 2002. Back then, I was waxing lyrical about harsh EBM and actually really got into their set and had high hopes for their future. Then I purchased their 'EBM' album (yep, that was what they called it) and the illusion was shattered – they'd overdone the distortion and made it one stop short of unlistenable. Now it seems that's they're back for another try. Only the bar is set higher now – distortion-heavy EBM is a saturated genre these days, and anyone who wants attention had better be pretty damn good at what they do.

And V2A? Well, they, erm...weren't! The dual male/female vocalist idea might have had some potential, but Kevin Stewart's snarls aren't anything I haven't heard in umpteen other bands, whilst the vocal contributions of Ines Lehmann were weak. Nice hair-do, shame about the voice! Their seven-song set contained two cover versions – whilst I'm OK with their take on 'Fade To Grey', I really don't get what they've done to 'Living On Video'. It's a pity I have to turn on a band that I once gave a good review to, but such is the reviewers lot. If I keep up with the times, so must the bands I listen to.

**Knifeladder** didn't strike me as the most obvious band for a billing like this, but it seems that they seem to be openly fighting against being pigeon-holed into the UK's small and highly elitist 'extreme industrial and neo-folk' scene. Opinions were always going to be polarised about this trio – they don't have identifiable songs, instead creating free-form audio onslaughts, with Andrew Trail on keyboards and occasional shawm and Hunter Barr on bass guitar (not that it SOUNDS like a bass guitar much of the time), unpinned by John Murphy's primeval drumming, a hypnotic, tribalistic fury which either draws you in or send you reeling from the room. Luckily, I fall into the former category.

The length of their compositions combined with the length of their set (a mere half-hour) meant that they had their work cut out in terms of making an impression, building a setlist consisting of a few new songs (such as 'The Spectacle') as well as some of their older material ('Red Drum' and a finale of 'Dervish'). The vocals were stronger than last years Ultraviolence support (my only complaint on that occasion). Nonetheless, it's a style of music best enjoyed in moderation (could I have taken much more than thirty minutes worth?). But as a means of adding some real variety to the billing, Knifeladder most definitely serve their purpose.

Those very slightly explosive industrial rockers **The Chaos Engine** had reformed especially for Black Celebration. They're a band I've enjoyed live in the past, even if their recorded works have never impressed. The Chaos Engine and indeed the whole Wasp Factory saga hit a high point around late 2003 – Deathboy were on the up, ELR and Faetal were close behind (and would later provide the label with their two greatest releases of all) and The Chaos Engine themselves had been the unexpected highlight of Whitby X. With Lee Chaos's day job taking up much of his time and energy and the labels bands for the most part either disbanding (ELR, Goteki) or moving elsewhere (Psychophile, Deathboy), this performance ultimately marked a 'farewell to all that'.

Anyway, following an intro inspired by 'V For Vendetta' (it was the 5<sup>th</sup> of November, after all), the breakbeat-fuelled backing track kicked in and Lee and friends duly set about belting out 'Me And My Army'. This band never put technical complexities or esoteric concepts ahead of their raw enthusiasm, a policy that worked best in the party atmospheres such as Whitby. Luckily, many of their long-time fans put in an appearance, giving these falling heroes one last cheer and providing the best crowd response of the day so far. Songs like 'Employee of the Year' seemed somewhat ironic considering the events of recent years that have (seemingly successfully) conspired against the Wasp Factory dream, but let there be no doubt – they went down fighting.

The first international band of the day was Canadian synth-pop veterans **Psyche** (though they're based in Germany these days). Darrin Huss seems pretty keen on breaking into the UK scene – this is only one of several shows he's performing on these shores of late. With only a keyboard player as back-up, there was a big stage to fill and Darrin did his level best to fill the space provided to him, dancing around and ever rolling on the floor for 'Brain Collapse'.

This didn't detract from the quality of the vocals – Darrin was easily the best singer performing at this event. The material from 'The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour' mixed nicely with the older stuff,

a new version of 'Unveiling the Secret' was, erm, unveiled, more rhythmically robust than the original, and the 'Goodbye Horses' cover sounded as good as ever. But given their history, Psyche must have been hoping for a bigger audience – what they really need is club play, as of all their recent songs, I've only heard 'Sanctuary' in a club, and that only rarely. Maybe some DJs were watching? It's via such means that bands earn their reputation in the UK, it seems..

Second-top tonight were **XPQ-21**, another band who have played a number of UK dates this year. I'd seen him twice myself (Dark City and M'era Luna) and despite finding the album interesting, was really not impressed with Jeyênne's unpredictable demeanour on stage. Things didn't look too good to start with, the backing track starting with the band members then rushing on stage to grab their instruments, but once 'Rockin' Silver Knight' got underway, I at least felt there was a degree of focus that was lacking from shows earlier this year.

Whilst the obvious favourites ('Beautiful', 'White and Alive' and 'A Gothic Novel') punctuated the set, the majority of tonight's set was given over to the 'Alive' album, with it's bizarre hybrid of techno, EBM and punk rock taken to the live stage. I'm still not convinced that the live guitars and drums are really contributing to the XPQ-21 live sound as much as they could. How 'live' are they really? Was the guitarist really playing the main riff on 'Dead Body' or just a supplementary part? I got suspicious when I got a closer look at Dark City and such thoughts don't die easily, especially when the live band keeps changing members. XPQ-21 seem to have got their show pointing in the right direction again, but how good a show is it after all? Or am I just being cynical – everyone else seems to be giving them good reviews!

Headlining this event was **Suicide Commando**. Johan Van Roy's project had played a few one-off UK dates, but hadn't played in London for five years – not since Black Celebration 2001. I'd seen him play M'era Luna a couple of times in the interim, but to be honest, I wasn't really looking forward to this. Despite his status as an innovator of the harsher forms of EBM, his 'Bind, Torture, Kill' album had failed to impress and his style is more copied now that it was then. Could they prove me wrong?

Not really. A stage image consisting of shirts and red ties at least gave the band an image of sorts, but despite the addition of a live drummer, their set was more or less as predicted. A hefty chunk of the new album, a couple from 'Axis of Evil' (though 'Evildoer' and 'Cause of Death' were skipped) and the old favourites 'Love Breeds Suicide' and finale 'Hellraiser'. Lots of hard rhythms, distorted vocals and chilling melodies. How else am I to describe such a show? Good for a few songs, but a 70-minute set is simply too much Van Roy for me. As the final bars of 'Hellraiser' played out, I was already making my exit at the rear of the venue.

It did seem like an anti-climatic end to the event. There were good performances by a number of bands, but the event as a whole seemed quite flat. The Islington Academy never looked like filling up – the lack of an obvious 'big draw' was simply too apparent. For example, both Laibach and Rotersand are playing at different venues on the same night at the end of the month. Two very different bands, but either had the status to have headlined here. VNV Nation played a tiny show in Slimelight (I never went) in favour of this. Even if some of the bands here clearly have promising futures, these one-day specials are getting rather tired.

## Conjure One – 11 Nov 2006

The recent Front Line Assembly tour had impressed greatly, but Bill's current live band still lacked one key person – Rhys Fulber, his creative colleague for the majority of his post-Skinny Puppy career (except for a brief period in the late 90s/early 00s where Chris Peterson stood in). His touring efforts were clearly been put into Conjure One. The project's London show took place in Elektrowerkz as a pre-Slimelight show promoted by Cryonica, presumably a result of Rhys's industrial-scene connections.

I say this as the queue outside a gig saw the usual PVC-and-hair-extensions collective standing alongside people in normal, everyday streetwear. The kind of people who rarely make it inside the disused warehouse that double as the London's most notorious goth hangout. And let's get this straight – Conjure One does NOT sound like Front Line Assembly. Connections to Delerium? Most probably. But FLA? Not a chance.

Given this clash of cultures, Cryonica at least made a relatively sensible choice of support. Opening up tonight were **Devotion** – an act I had never previously heard of. Having pressed Cryonica main man Reza Udhin for details, I was informed that this is because they have no internet presence (the name isn't exactly Google-friendly either). Were they making a statement? Whatever the reason, this is not a wise move in networked, MySpaced 2006. Even if they don't WANT attention, people will go home wanting to know more.

And the reason I say this? It's because Devotion weren't at all bad! Their live set-up were two female singers up front, with some violin very much in the background (both in terms of the stage and the mix), with the remainder on backing. The dual vocalists proved to be surprisingly adaptable – from folky chanting that echoed of Qntal and Helium Vola, through a e-piano loungey number, right through to a slow-building, screeching climax that sounded like a hybrid of Diamanda Galas and Rose McDowalls more esoteric contributions to the neo-folk collective.

Next on were **Swarf**, a threesome whose 'female vocals plus electronics' sound is traditionally associated with the UK 'goth scene' (whatever THAT is!) but seemingly keen to make a break for a more (dare I say) mainstream audience. Since I last saw them play in 2004, they've played in (amongst other places) the Whirl-y-Gig club, clearly aiming for the wider dance crowd that otherwise exists in mutual exclusivity to the black eyeliner brigade. This is no bad thing – loyal as UK Goths are to their favoured 'home' bands, the reality is that there isn't really that many of us. Unless you fancy chatting up the more influential Continental promoters and label bosses or run a highly effective MySpace spamming operation, you need to look beyond the scene if you want your band to go anywhere

It's been two years since their last (and only) album, so they were clearly intent on showcasing some new material, and I have to say I was impressed with what I heard. If I've ever had a complaint about Swarf, it's that some of their material was a little 'lightweight' and insubstantial. Not so now – the newer compositions came over as being more dynamic, with Liz Green clearly pushing herself on the vocal front moreso than ever before. Their earlier material was still in evidence – 'Fall' seems to have been dropped as I haven't heard it for a while, but 'Drown' (their anthem to drunkenness) still goes down nicely, highlighting as it does the band's friendly, down-to-earth demeanour. Swarf don't do elitism.

This left **Conjure One** to headline. Whilst their recordings had made frequent use of guest vocalists, their live set-up consisted of simply Rhys Fulber with a keyboard and laptop and Leah Randi providing the live vocals. Backing projections of pastoral images provided a

suitable backdrop in the otherwise industrialised surroundings of the venue. With a decent crowd now forming, the duo set about their performance, drawing tracks from both of their albums, their combination of delicate vocals, understated drum loops and atmospheric electronics (with a slight Middle Eastern/world music influence in places) was particularly easy on the ear.

Yet despite the undoubted competence of the project, I felt somewhat underwhelmed by the whole experience. Leah made a decent job of performing a number of songs not originally performed by her, whilst Rhys Fulber is a synth maestro par excellence. The Slimelight sound system wasn't helping (though it must be said that it didn't trip Swarf up this time!), but I also felt that whilst a good basic concept, Conjure One seemed to be repeating itself too much. Their set wasn't even an hour long (though bits of paper I saw around the entrance indicated they were scheduled for longer), but already I was tiring by the end.

A one-song encore was called for and got, but I really didn't feel that much connection between the band and audience, something that stood in stark contrast to Swarf, who seemed to be revelling in the experience of a show where everything went their way. On that basis, it was worth attending, but ultimately all I've concluded from the night is that Conjure One isn't QUITE my favourite FLA offshoot.

## **Killing Miranda at Bar Monsta – 19 Nov 2006**

Killing Miranda have been rather quiet of late, and anyone familiar with their reputation in the UK scene will know that's not their style. Despite a couple of successful international shows (including a WGT slot which I was sadly unable to attend), they do not seem to be building on their excellent 2004 album 'Consummate'. Two years on and there doesn't seem to be much progress – I myself am vaguely aware of some of the reasons, but I won't bore you with the details here. They were playing Bar Monsta in Camden and I, eager to make up for missing their shows earlier this year, was going to be there.

Bar Monsta is a relatively new venue, seemingly aiming to give Camden a second 'alternative bar' alongside the ubiquitous Devonshire Arms. They're not quite there yet – the stage can barely hold more than a drum kit and there's no beer on tap available (The Dev, to their credit, have made substantial improvements to the quality of their drinks of late – competition usually benefits the consumer after all). The toilets were marked 'Cocks' and 'Pink Bits' – presumably the sense of humour was intended to distract one from the poor quality of the facilities. It's good to get another venue, but Bar Monsta doesn't given the impression of being a 'finished' venue. But since I was here to listen to live music rather than drink beer (and presumably piss it all out again), I'll stop complaining about the venue and start reviewing the bands.

First on were **Bordel**. What little blurb I'd read indicated industrial, gothic and darkwave influences – despite this, Bordel, at least in the live sense, were a metal band first and foremost. Dressed in rubber and sporting fancy hair extensions, sure, but still riffastic axemen nonetheless. Running late, the nonetheless got time to get changed and still perform their full nine-song set (given the subsequent sudden end to the headliners set, they really should have had to have cut a song or two).

With a style that echoed of Pantera's prime era of thrash groove and Ministry's synapse-crushing sonic assaults, the least I could say was that Bordel had hit upon a style that suited them and were able to make it work – the songs were anthemic enough and well-executed, even if I found myself getting rather impatient as their set wound towards its close. I'd be interested to find out if the circumstances of tonight's show resulted in them sounding like more of straightforward metal act than they really were – as it stood, any

reference to 'darkwave' was pretty wide of the mark, even if you use my broad (and constantly changing) definition.

**Dinner With Captain Howdy** were not a band at all but a performance art project. Such things only attract my curiosity for brief periods, and the perverted restaurant scene delivered to us just seemed like an unwelcome distraction. A mixture of extreme piercing, eating fire and barefoot walking over glass were probably impressive to the kind of people into that kind of thing, but being relatively difficult to shock, the whole thing left me unmoved.

So finally it was time for **Killing Miranda**. A band that had released three album, earned not a little notoriety along the way, played WGT and for what? A curtailed set in a small bar in Camden. With the stage area fully occupied by Belle's drumkit, Rikky and the two Daves had to perform at floor level, with only the monitor blocks marking the boundary between band and audience. A boundary they broke several times throughout the evening.

They opened with 'Pray', and already it was clear something was wrong. Of all the elements of KM's sound, only the drumming was really audible and good as Belle is, I'd rather like to hear the rest of the songs. It soon became clear to the band (and the audience) that this was a show best played for laughs. Nothing of great artistic merit was to be achieved, so they might as well have some fun, knock out some tunes and not worry too much about the details. They'd been in similar situations before and this was clearly the only way forward.

The sound quality did improve after a few songs, however, and there were a few surprises in store. A rather dramatic song called 'Times Arrow', quite unlike anything else they've written before, and a rare appearance of 'Does This Mean Anything?' from their debut EP. As with most of their exhumed backcatalogue, they've substantially reinforced the 90s Nightbreed-school electronics with their more aggressive style of late, and in this case also saw it fit to squeeze in a 'Headhunter' outro! Now, if only a band would play the whole song that way.....

Their biggest hits were still there of course, although most of the 'Consummate' material had to be dropped due to the fast approaching curfew. They had time for 'Embrace' (which doesn't sound like Paradise Lost, honest!) and 'I Know What You Want' (but given Rikky's behaviour during this song, I'm not sure if he knows what I want!), but a whisper in the ear said it all. Out of time. Well, not QUITE out of time. They still had time for a rendition of 'Discotheque Necronomicon', that goth clubbing tribute that has actually lent it's name to a couple of dark-side club nights around the world, but that was to be it.

It'll be interesting to see where Killing Miranda head from here. A band that seemed to be on everyone's lips (for good reasons or bad) for several years seemed to have gone quiet of late. The much touted 'Consummate' might have been everything I personally had hoped for, but the breakthrough into the higher echelons of the UK rock scene never quite happened. As I left, a CD-R by the project 'Uberbyte' was passed to me. Who knows – maybe THEY'RE the future.

## **Rotersand and RBN – 25 Nov 2006**

The Slimelight seems to have been a regular location for scene gigs of late. Their live facilities are rather basic, but they're able to undercut most of the other venues cost-wise (especially when they put the shows on themselves) and have the benefit of hosting the after-party in the same place, inclusive of ticket price. This package was particularly attractive when you consider tonight's line-up featured Rotersand, a band that had been



filling the clubs floors for the last few years, supported by RBN, a project fronted by the DJ that had helped popularise them around here in the first place.

And so it was that **RBN** finally played the Slimelight – despite Steve Weeks' lengthy tenure as a DJ there, he and Bryon Adamson hadn't played the venue since they became an synth-only band, despite the view of some outsiders that this was only of the most obvious place for them to play. The exact reasons why this didn't happen are beyond the scope of this review, but when a band like that gets a chance to support Rotersand, they weren't exactly going to turn it down.

With live member Penny Humphries having relocated to Norway, the second keyboardist slot was occupied by Phil Eaton, who had also played RBN's recent shows in Holland and Italy but was playing his first UK show tonight. Another change was the re-introduction of a backdrop video, not seen since Kevin King left the band. This was a fairly basic loop of RBN logos and photographs of various Continental scenery, but it served its purpose in terms of adding a little visual spectacle to the rather dingy surroundings. It's certainly something they should (and are indeed planning to) build on.

Despite any fears the band may have had, they didn't sound all that bad through the Slimelight PA, even if fine details like the elaborate synth programming of 'City Lights' or the secondary rhythm loop of 'Machine Code' weren't as clear as they were at the Islington Academy some months ago. It became clear early on that with a friendly audience in a less-than-ideal venue, this was to be a show best played 'for fun', and Steve, now a confident lead singer of a purely electronic band, had plenty of quips and comments to help keep the atmosphere light hearted, even if the low ceiling meant that he couldn't dance much (like a German or otherwise!).

Their set tonight followed the pattern of their other shows this year, though 'Schadenfreude' seems to have been dropped in favour of a couple of new songs, namely 'Radio Angels' and 'Someone Else', the latter so new that Steve had to read the lyrics off a bit of paper, Wolfsheim-style. The crowd response was good, not unexpected given the popularity of tracks such as 'Machine Code' and 'Faithless'. The latter was referred to as 'an old goth song' – it may date back to 1999, but I thought RBN were pretty keen to avoid use of the 'g' word, these days. That's Loki's job.....

And now time for **Rotersand**. Whilst 'Merging Oceans' had been popular round these parts from the off, the German threesome's real UK breakthrough came at Black Celebration 2004, a much touted two-day event that featured a last-minute Combichrist withdrawal, a straight run through the chmalt by Funker Vogt and Assemblage 23, the original ELR line-up in its death throes and a general feeling of anti-climax. Only for Rotersand to single-handedly save the event with an astounding mix of songwriting, stage presence and Teutonic beat science.

Their subsequent 'Welcome To Goodbye' album yielded a number of further hits (Rotersand tunes have since become amongst the most reliable floorfillers in Slimelight), so their return to the city was much anticipated. The show wasn't actually promoted all that heavily outside the club, but the venue was packed nonetheless. At 10pm, Rasc, Gun and Krischan duly took to the stage to an ecstatic response and immediately set the floor in motion with 'Truth Is Fanatic'.

Tonight's set was split between the two albums more-or-less equally, and no-one was complaining as both are quality recordings. Early performances of 'Last Ship' and the SITD mix of 'Electronic World Transmission' got the adrenaline pumping, aided massively by Rascal's inspiring stage presence, regularly stepping over the monitors and reaching out to the crowd in a physical as well as musical sense. This genre currently lacks performers

that have hit upon an appropriate mix of professionalism and on-stage exuberance. These boys have now set the benchmark in that respect.

A change of pace came when the time came for 'One Level Down'. Rasc had a new (hollow-body) guitar and keen to show it off. I'm rather partial to the sound of such instruments, whilst the song is proof that Rotersand can do the 'bleep band ballad' thing without sounding schmaltzy or vacuous (in fact, is there anything they CAN'T do?). With that breather out of the way, it was back to the dancey stuff, with performances of 'Merging Oceans', 'Storm' and a very well received 'Exterminate Annihilate Destroy'.

The main set finished with 'Undone', utilising the piano-based intro leading into the full version. Naturally, there were calls for encores, and we eventually got two of them. As well as 'Lastlight' and 'Almost Wasted', this final phase of the evening also saw the first airing of a new Rotersand song. Unlike Steve, however, Rascal didn't need a bit of paper to remind him what the lyrics were. By this time, of course, the audience were worked up to such an extent that they would have danced to anything with a tech-beat, but suffice to say the experiment worked. There's still more to come from Rotersand.

And so the night finally came to a close. Well, unless you count Slimelighting until the early hours of the morning, now having been joined by a bunch of people who'd been to see Laibach, a show that was at one stage very tempting alternative option for the evening. However, their less-than-overwhelming new album and my experiences here convinced me that I had made the right decision. The much-maligned Slimelight live stage finally came good, along with two of the clubs most popular bands.

## **Sol Invictus – A Mythological Prospect of The Citie of Londinium – 2 Dec 2006**

In recent years, I have endeavoured to see as many bands as possible in the twisted family tree of neo-folk. Unlike other genres, I found virtually all of them have some unique feature that sets them apart, whilst neo-folk events themselves often feel like special occasions rather than 'just another gig'. I hadn't to date seen Sol Invictus – I'd had one chance at WGT 2005, but was on the wrong side of town with heavy rain outside and little chance of getting in the venue. So I had to wait for this – the first London show for Tony Wakeford's project in 7 years.

And what better venue to hold it at than The Water Rats? A mere 200 capacity, but no shortage of atmosphere and a soundsystem as good as at any other venue of this size. My own previous live experiences in the venue had either come from industrial death metal or electro-rock bands, back in the early days of 2004, but I knew all along that short of hiring a theatre, no central London venue was better suited to hosting such an event. To commemorate the occasion, Cold Spring had pressed a special CD with 3 tracks from each of this evening's acts and gave a free copy to everyone with a ticket. Free food at Di6, free wine at Der Blutharsch and now a free CD here. Good scene for freebies, this!

I eventually found my way down to the front to watch **Andrew King**. Despite the proliferation of military-type regalia in the audience and a newspaper ad describing this event as 'post-industrial' (wish I knew what that meant!), Andrew himself bore more resemblance to a traditional English folk singer, with his pastel green suit and rather dramatic, almost bardic style of vocal delivery. That is until you take account of his backing band, namely all three members of Knifeladder, who seemed set on putting the 'neo' into 'neo-folk'. With Hunter Barr on keys, John Murphy on percussion and Andrew Trail

alternating the two, Andrew's grandiose hollering was given an appropriately explosive musical accompaniment.

Traditional texts mixed with avant-garde electronics and the kind of rhythmic assault that is something of a Murphy speciality (how many bands has he played for?). The hour-long set featured songs from the free CD, including inspired renditions of William Blake's 'London' and an A.E.Housman adaptation referred to 'As The Bells Jostle Inside The Tower', alongside standards such as 'Worcester City' and 'Gethsemane'. It was a mightily impressive performance – a performer who's style harks back to times past, thrown into the present by three men who specialise in creating an unholy racket that I might have referred to as 'ritual noise' had the futurepop scene not already nicked the term. Bad, bad Covenant!

Next on stage were an Italian act **Rose Rovine A Amanti**, making what I believe was their UK debut. Their live set-up included acoustic guitar, percussion, bass and violin – all the usual neo-folk trappings. Their lead singer wasn't the best English speaker out there, but he seemed genuinely pleased to be here, happily chatting to the audience between songs. Songs which I have to admit failed to leave much of a mark on me. For all their charms and musical competence, the music of Rose Rovine A Amanti simply lacked a certain 'character'. Late in the set they brought on Josef K (Von Thronstahl) to inject a little variety into proceedings, but between two bands whom both made real attempts at audience 'connection', this performance just seemed a little one-dimensional in comparison.

And so finally to **Sol Invictus**. I made the mistake of discovering this project just as World Serpent were going under. I managed to grab a few CDs before their remaining stock disappeared, and whilst some material is still available through Tursa and Cold Spring, the reality was that I didn't really know what to expect from tonight's performance, only that it'd be historic in some manner. Whilst projects such as this often undergo frequent line-up changes throughout their history, current Sol Invictus are a 5-piece project (featuring Andrew King amongst others playing a mixture of keys, drums, violins and bass), with the rather portly Tony Wakeford taking centre-stage with his acoustic guitar.

By now the sold-out Water Rats was very crowded but I managed to find a vantage point on the stairs leading down to the main stage. The band, meanwhile, were keen to show off at least a little new material, Tony Wakeford mooted a forthcoming solo album, with the undoubted highlight being 'Old Londinium Weeps', featured on the free CD. Also of interest was 'Down The Road Slowly' – the chorus 'England is Funny, But Sometimes She Scares Me' may come over as just a little quirky, but given the 'folk noir' treatment, it somehow succeeded despite itself.

Older tracks still made it in, with Andrew King taking over lead vocals for an adaption of traditional verse 'Long Lankin' (announced cheerfully as 'Another song about Killing Children'). What mattered however, was the quality of the performance – I'd heard rumours from those more experienced than me that Tony Wakeford wasn't the best live vocalist, but he hit the right notes often enough for me, whilst his band showed impressive cohesion for a project that doesn't play live all that often.

And so ended another fine night of entertainment courtesy of a music scene that seems elitist and rather exclusive to many, but often just boils down to a bunch of slightly-scary looking people enjoying a bit of folk music. Finally escaping the dingy surroundings of 'upstairs at Elektrowerkz' (which has hosted many a neo-folk gig in the past) was a welcome bonus. But I'm just glad that this particular evening was about a whole lot more than ticking 'Sol Invictus' off my ever-shrinking 'to see' list. 7 years away and they could still do the business.

## Frozen Plasma and Reaper – 9 Dec 2006

Not content with providing members with free entry before midnight and a third dancefloor once inside, this evening's Slimelight also saw the London debut of both of Vasi Valis' current musical projects. Having had other priorities at Leipzig and having missed InFest entirely, it was also my first chance to see him play in any form other than as a VNV live keyboardist. I never saw NamNamBulu, not that I was ever a particularly big fan, but more recent works have been of slightly greater interest, so I definitely up for catching this double bill.

On first were **Frozen Plasma**, Vasi's collaboration with Diorama member Felix Marc, and the most obvious successor to NNB in term of creating that trance-infused synth-pop variant that some refer to as 'future pop' (yes, including me). With Vasi keyboarding nonchalantly at the rear part of the stage, it was left to Felix to front the project and build some kind of connection with the crowd. It's not the easiest venue to play, and it took only a few songs for me to work out that they weren't really up to the task.

Despite his friendly demeanour, Felix isn't much of a dancer and his live vocals weren't particularly outstanding either. Still, they ploughed through their set in workmanlike style and eventually took things up a gear when 'Warmongers' came along (the only Frozen Plasma track to have really caught on in London). My own personal favourite, 'Irony' closed the set and was probably their strongest performance of the night. But despite a few good songs, I'd ultimately class Frozen Plasma as just another part of an increasingly saturated genre, better than some (are you listening, Les Anges De La Nuit?) but nothing special either.

Fast forward to 2:30am and it was time for **Reaper** to take to the stage. With two mysteriously cloaked figures manning a keyboard each, it was now Vasi's turn to take on the role of frontman, having donned a ominous-looking mask for the occasion (though he often returned to the keys himself during the more vocally sparse tracks). With no full-length album to date, this was never going to be an exceptionally long set, though for projects like this in club venues like Slimelight, short sets are often a blessing in disguise. Come on stage, make your mark, and get off again before anyone gets bored (Hocico's drawn-outs sets in here are testimony as to how NOT to do it).

And so came a half-hour set of harsh rhythms, supersaw synths and the occasional vocal blast. The majority of Reaper's recorded output to date made it in, as well as his version of Suicide Commando's 'Cause of Death'. As with the Frozen Plasma set, the best crowd response was saved for the one song that had really caught on locally, namely the title track from the 'Angst' EP, although the dancefloor was never exactly still. This particular subgenre – focusing primarily on distorted rhythm loops and forceful synth leads rather than cookie-monster vocals, is very popular in London right now, so Reaper's appearance here tonight was at least timely.

And so ended Vasi's brief sojourn to London. It was a small-scale event by any stretch of the imagination, being as it was a club-level slot utilising borrowed equipment (the RBN stickers on the keyboards were a bit of a giveaway!), but it was still good to see such projects play here. Neither act seems to be breaking much new ground, but a few decent pop songs followed by some crushing dance rhythms made for a welcome bonus to the evening's Slimelighting.

# THE END

(the fuck it is!)