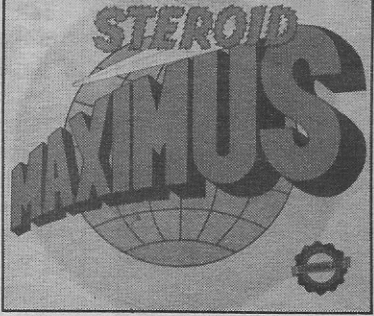


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Steroid Maximus "Gondwanaland" (Big Cat)

Variously described as "ethnic music from a civilization yet to be invented," "ancient music from the future" and "irresistible aural LSD," Steroid Maximus' "Gondwanaland" is the second instrumental collage of crafty chaos from Jim Thirlwell, Foetus, Inc.'s one-man butcher of big-band industrial mayhem.

Dating back to 1991, when he realized his Foetus projects were becoming increasingly more soundtrack-oriented, Thirlwell concocted the classically orchestrated, cyber-scored 10-track LP "Quilombo," collaborating with the all-star underground cast of Roli Mosimann (Wiseblood, Young Gods), Don Fleming (B.A.L.L., Gumball), AWAY (Voivoid) and a number of other performers hell-bent on aural abstraction.

"Gondwanaland" picks up where that record left off, meshing the sounds of bag pipes with shamanistic chants ("The Auctioneer of Souls"), orgasmic breathing with computer tones ("Crawling Goliath") and metallic beats with frenzied Loony Tunes rhythms ("Powerhouse"). In essence, it's a bombastically brilliant trek through preposterous paradox and joking juxtaposition, which often seems an artistic impossibility, even as one hears the 14 tracks emanating from the stereo speakers.

That said, Steroid Maximus certainly isn't for everyone. In fact, its manic texture is quite demanding of even the most patient music aficionado. But given the chance, meaning a thoroughly undivided and uninterrupted listening experience — preferably with the eyes closed and the ears open — Thirlwell's "Gondwanaland" just might change one's perception of what music is, isn't and should be.

Rob Winfield