

Beauty in Chaos

By Lori J. Kennedy

Foetus blends organic and synthetic music for *Love*.

J. G. Thirlwell has been the alternative to alternative music for 25 years. He is most commonly known as Foetus but has also worked under the names Manorexia, Steroid Maximus, DJ OTEFSU, Clint Ruin, and Wiseblood. Thirlwell's music crosses genres and defies categorization. You might think he's a jazz artist, a soundtrack composer, or a psychotic noisemaker.

Love (Self Immolation, 2005) is Thirlwell's 15th release as Foetus, offering a strangely melodic combination of frayed vocals, dramatic and haunting orchestral interludes, and grinding, hard-rock soundscapes. The album takes the listener on a journey with some jarring left turns. "For *Love*, I wanted to nurture something that developed my passion for the cinematic side of my music and its collisions with other elements," Thirlwell says. He recorded *Love* in his Brooklyn, New York loft. "The studio is below the wooden duplex area that separates my loft into open rooms," Thirlwell says.

Thirlwell refined and reedited *Love* over the course of a couple of years while working on a number of side projects. "I wanted the album to be more spacious with softer songs," says Thirlwell. "Some songs emerged fully formed, like the first song on the album ['(not adam)'], while others, like 'Don't Want Me Anymore,' took months of revisiting and refining arrangements."

As production progressed, Thirlwell's arrangements grew. He recorded *Love*'s bombastic orchestral parts by manipulating a mix of live instruments and samples. "I like to mix the organic and the electronic," says Thirlwell. "I've been doing faux-symphonic works since my album Nail [Self Immolation, 1985], which used a lot of Fairlight [the first digital sampling synthesizer, created in the late 1970s]. On *Love* I used a Mac G4 running [Apple] Logic 4.73. I tend to work on one technological plateau for a while and then make a big step up all at once.

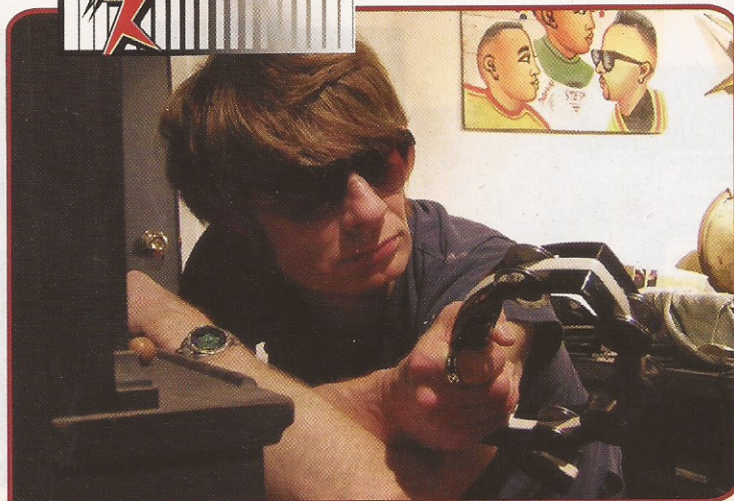
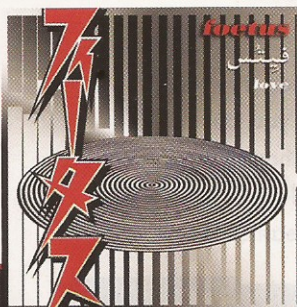
"I have two Akai S5000 samplers, and I also have [Apple Computer's] EXS24 and [Native Instruments'] Kontakt," Thirlwell says. "But I prefer the Akais and usually use soft samplers only when I'm on the road. On *Love*, the harpsichord sounds are a blend of sounds from a Kawai K1 and an old [E-mu] Proteus/1. I run everything through a Yamaha 02R digital mixer, and I mix either into a Panasonic SV-3800 DAT or into BIAS Peak.

"I also used a Novation BassStation and [E-mu] Proteus 2000, and some outboard [processors] like the Yamaha SPX900 and the Lexicon MPX 100," Thirlwell says. "I got one of my favorite sounds on *Love* using the [AudioNerdz] Delay Lama plug-in. In the song 'How to Vibrate' the Delay Lama makes a vowelization sound like [Peter] Frampton's guitar voice-box."

While Thirlwell plays almost every instrument on the album, one song, "Pareidolia," features a Theremin solo by world-renowned Theremin player Pamela Kurstin. "Pamela is the most astonishing Theremin player I have ever seen," says Thirlwell. "That song has a break in the middle, and I thought a yearning, aching Theremin solo would sound great."

Thirlwell spent a good deal of time sequencing, arranging, and mixing his work, and occasionally experimented with vocal tracks. "I used an Audio-Technica AT4033 [condenser mic] running through an ART Tube MP Studio [tube-mic preamp], and sometimes I used a Shure SM58," Thirlwell says. "Some vocals were improvised and then edited, which I had never done before. On a couple of songs, I ran my voice through a [Pro Co Sound] Rat [distortion] pedal. I also used a Logic ring modulator plug-in. I experimented with vocal deliveries a fair bit this time, leaving in croaks and vulnerabilities, which are probably offensive to today's pitch-corrected ears." **EM**

For more information, visit www.foetus.org.



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Love/Foetus