

FOETUS

"I've done my time on a million labels. I've been on every side of the music business, from owning my own label to working retail. And this is the best situation I've been in. This is the harshest record I've ever done. I have total artistic control. I can work on outside things. End of story." Foetus has spent the day giving telephone interviews, and it sounds as if this is the 30th or 40th time he's defended his signing to Sony records for the release of his new album *Gash*.

He sounds more tired than angry. It's true he's done his time. Since he started releasing records in 1981, he's put out 8 albums and a slew of singles and EP's. He's produced and performed on scores of albums with artists that make up a who's who of underground and industrial music (when I peppered him with questions about an album he made with Matt Johnson and Marc Almond, he finally had to admit that he couldn't remember it). He's an influence on just about any band that gets tagged with the "industrial" label, which these days seems to mean Nine Inch Nails, the Offspring, and whatever

else you crazy kids are listening to nowadays. Not that he wants to admit it: "People ask me how I feel about Trent Reznor selling 10 million more records than me...what am I supposed to say?"

His press kit explicitly warns that he doesn't like interviews, and he also frequently lies. When I ask him who's playing Stravinsky's *Rites Of Spring* on his "Ramrod" single, he insists earnestly that it's the "Foetus Symphony Orchestra." On his albums, Foetus (AKA Jim Thirlwell) regurgitates a lifetime of forced popular culture and puts it in a blender with grinding noise and cartoon pop hooks. At any given time, the mixture may include jazz, big-band, avant-garde classical, surf music, or whatever else he's come across lately. At the moment it's "a lot of obscure 20's blues." Early Foetus records were low budget concoctions of tape loops and cheap synthesizers being abused. *Hole*, his first album to get any distribution, was much more polished and twice as demented — a staggering collection of puns and pop culture references crammed into songs about hell and how

to get there. One song is a narrative of Hitler detailing how tedious his existence of daily torture has become — and it's a barrel of laughs! Ten years later, Foetus's musical scope has broadened considerably, though the dementia remains. *Gash*, the new album, is a convincing argument that the musical underground is dead or at least dramatically altered: 10 years ago it would have been simply inconceivable that something this blatantly uncommercial could be released by a major label. When I ask Jim who his audience is nowadays, he claims "3 year old kids and grandparents. And everything in-between." This may not be far off — when I played "Slung," a schizoid, big band epic based around a nifty Gene Krupa sample, for a roomful of 5 year olds, they instantly showed their approval by, well, jumping up and down and hitting things. "Kids love what I do — they understand me immediately" he says.

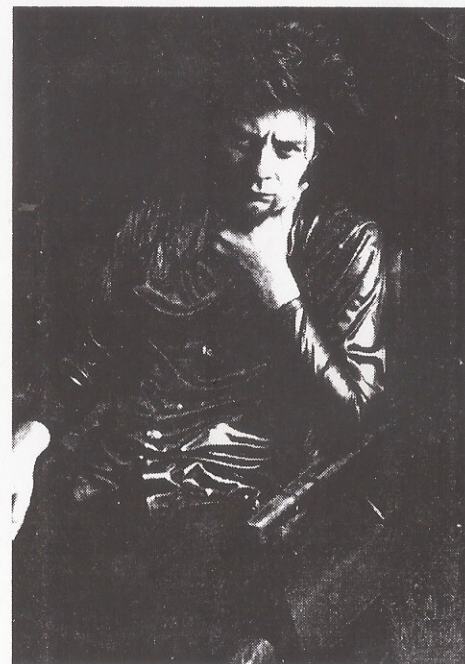
Gallery Gazette: How old are you?

Foetus: 17 going on 3. I get more juvenile as I go.

Gallery Gazette: What happens when you reach 0?

Foetus: (pause) I become a fetus.

"All Foetus records are autobiographical" says Jim. He's been living in NYC for ten years now and admits that he gets a lot of inspiration from it. The new album replaces lurid tall tales and revenge fantasies with songs about walking in bad neighborhoods at night, being yelled at by strangers, and paying the



mortgage. But the righteous angst and the humor are still there. Not to mention his workaholic approach to music. "I had about 50 songs in various stages of completion. I whittled that down to about 17." Those not on the album will appear on 2 upcoming EP's: *Null* and *Void*. Maybe even our brief conversation will inspire a new song. When he told me how valuable an early record of his that I had was, I asked him if I should sell it.

"Nah...wait until I die."

"Or kill someone?" I ask.

"Yeah...O.D. or O.J. He-he-he...that's a good song title, actually..."

Lino Marcetti