

The bottle of vodka now empty; Jim began to gracefully weave toward the door. "Dom, have you ever seen me live?" I had to confess I hadn't. "Well," Jim grimaced slapping me heavily on the back, "then welcome to hell motherfucker!" With that, he slowly and awkwardly mounted the few stairs to the fog shrouded stage.

And proceeded to perform as if the Abyss was slowly opening beneath him. One thing that had always drawn me to Thirtwell's music was it's strong undercurrent of humor. There was, however, nothing funny about what was going on onstage. Shamed, naked, miserable. Of the wonted ornaments now soiled and stained. In damned solitude savage and obscured. *That deceit that I feel. Makes Me cross myself and kneel. I don't pray to the lord. Just self flagellate some more.* This guy did this every night in total seriousness? My God, my God, look not so fierce on him. Ugly Hell gape not. I must away and soul be quickly changed to the little water drops plying about my bourbon and soda.

The show was controlled pandemo-

Thirtwell greeted me like a long lost brother and asked me what I was drinking. "Do you want some Stolli's?" he inquired holding aloft a half empty bottle. "Mark," he motioned to his tour manager, "this is Dom, who publishes *Brutarian*. It's one of the best magazines out there. And one of my favorites." Mark came over. Then Jim left to salute another friend. Two minutes later he came back over. "Did you see Halcion? Weren't they great? Did you get your drink?" Then off again. Semaphoring the bottle of vodka as a means of capturing another entrant's attention. Then back, "I know this is madness right now. But we'll talk, really talk, later. Have you met Olga? She's, well, talk to her." And so it went.

Until it got dangerously close to showtime. Then Jim put his game face on and everybody started to clear the room. Leaving Thirtwell alone to walk. Back and forth. Back and forth. Occasionally punching the air. He was working himself up to something. And it wasn't good. Maybe that was the point. *Friend or foe. You drink you know me. But you don't want to. Ever feel. The way I do.* No I had little doubt that I did.

So imagine my surprise when Mr. himself.

Hell, there were times when he became so angry he would even bear up in as look twice at you.

Had little use for critics. A mean-spirited genius who would as soon kick your teeth mad. A raging alcoholic. A manic-depressive who brooked no argument and had little use for critics. A mean-spirited genius who would as soon kick your teeth in as look twice at you.

I'd heard all the stories. Thirtwell was a rib of the rock underground was charming and considerate this infant terrible of the rock underground was.

What surprised me, however, was how eight hours, never stops. Never shuts down. Thirtwell wasn't pacing then. But he never stopped moving. Even when he learn over the course of the next forty-learn over the course of the next forty-eight hours, never stops. Never shuts down. Thirtwell wasn't pacing then. But he never stopped moving. Even when he stopped moving since I arrived some seventy-five minutes earlier.

It's close to midnight, the witching hour, and Jim Thirtwell aka Foetus is pacing the sweetening confines of his basement dressing room like a caged animal. Dressed in a powder blue tux and ruffled shirt open at the collar, he's barely pro-ken a sweat. Even though it's about one hundred and twenty degrees in the cramped airless den and Jim hasn't

By: Dom Salemi

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nium and passed quickly like a feverish dream. The crowd in a dionysian frenzy is stomping and screaming for more more more. Thirlwell has given them a fifteen minute encore and he's clearly spent. The suburban black garbed twenty-somethings crowding the tiny stage could care less. They smell blood. They sniff breakdown. And they want to see it. Jim ain't gonna give it to them. "They got it last night in Philly," he later confides to me as we're walking back to the bus.

"I was in the middle of 'They Are Not So True' and the tears just started to fall." *The jangling of chains is ringing in my ears. Their ignorance ain't gonna wash away my fears.* "And it just wouldn't stop. I had to turn my back on the crowd and put my hands to my face. Then I turned around to start again and I started to convulse. Big racking sobs. A combination of tension, fear, horror and anger. It was unbearable." *But if that presence coming. Makes you feel too tense. Don't let the anger boil. Keep keepin up your fence.* "I finished the show. Somehow it's all a kind of distant memory."

We're in the bus now and it must be about forty degrees. Jim likes it cold. Very cold. The band and all involved are already on board and are either heavily dressed or wrapped in blankets. Tour manager Mark always on the alert for my discomfort, winks and hands me a Heineken, "Drink up my friend. You'll warm up soon enough. Jim will see to it if this doesn't."

Thirlwell sprawls in a bench seat to the left of me. Another bottle of Stoli has miraculously appeared in his hand and he's moving it slowly to the slightly allegroish big band noir someone has popped into the stereo system. The band is in a good mood and everyone is talking at once. Jim grins slyly and turns on my mini-recorder. "Hey, we're going to make you work for your interview. All of us. And all of us have something to say."

"Great," I interject amidst the laughter, "because I'm gonna make it all up anyway."

More laughs. Wine is poured and bottles are opened. The music is turned

up. Four or five conversations are going on at once and I'm trying to soak it all up. Jim has a knife out and he's aimlessly cutting up limes for the beer. But he's not stopping. As I've already mentioned, Jim never stops. The green fruit is cut in half. Halves become quarters. Quarters become what might charitably be described as eighths. And suddenly there's Thirlwell desultory slashing at this mess of rind and pulp.

"What I have trouble with is having my music called industrial. What did the press releases have me called? The godfather of industrial? Ridiculous. I make "Foetus" music. And I don't even listen to what most people would call industrial. It's a paint by numbers genre now with so many bands following each other's lead. The irony is it all comes out sounding the same."

Someone puts on some industrial thrash. Thirlwell perks up. "I started that whole industrial remix scene. The idea of adding abrasive elements and what have you to a track. The stuff that's being done in that style I take as a parody of what I do. That's okay. To each his own. What I have trouble with is having my music called industrial. What did the press releases have me called? The godfather of industrial? Ridiculous. I make "Foetus" music. And I don't even listen to what most people would call industrial. It's a paint by numbers genre now with so many bands following each other's lead. The irony is it all comes out sounding the same."

Trying to make myself heard over the

din I lean in. But surely he would have to admit he's profoundly influenced combos like Nine Inch Nails and Ministry?

Jim waves his hand dismissively, "That's the critics talking. The same ones who would have me be a godfather. It's easier for so many of them to pigeon-hole things so they can write more quickly. Laziness. The most extreme example I can remember had a guy from *Your Flesh* reviewing a record of mine a

few years ago. This is exactly what he said: 'The last time I saw Jim Thirlwell he was coming out of the bathroom at a club where he was playing and he had a piece of toilet paper stuck to the bottom of one of his shoes.' Irresponsible just like saying I "founded" industrial. What about Neubauten, Throbbing Gristle and SPK? Now if you talk to Trent or Al [NIN & Ministry] I'm sure they would admit to listening to me.

"But 'profoundly influenced'? I would never make that claim."

The bottle of vodka done, Jim moves on to wine. Or is that beer? The critical faculties may be damaged beyond repair after all this imbibing. It's very late now and the members of the band begin to drift to the back of the bus. To sleep. Perchance to dream. Thirlwell shows no signs of flagging. Although he is slightly reclining. "Also I'm always asked what my formula is for writing songs. But of course there's no formula. Musical inspiration, you can't put a finger on it. I sit down and it comes. There's so much floating around in my head. Sometimes it starts with a rhythm. Or me just banging on the table. Would it surprise you to find that I listen to classical music? Probably not. But that's the reason for the diversity in my compositions. That and the fact that I'm not tied to a band. I also don't try to repeat myself. I focus on, let's say a big band thing like "Slung" and that done, I'm free for the next inspiration."

The wine drained to the dregs, Jim opens a beer for me and takes one himself. "But when I sit down to write, to compose, I'm alone. I'm not listening to

