

DJ TIMES

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Mixes

**FROM
THE
DARK SIDE**

**Remixer/
Producer/
Artist
Jim "Foetus"**



**Thirlwell
Throws a
Monkey
Wrench
in the
Alternative
Scene**

By Darren Ressler

There's been a name popping up on the remix front over the past year or so. To some, it's a new one: Jim Thirlwell. But to others with a broader musical knowledge, they're already aware that Thirlwell is a seasoned pro who over the past decade has crafted some of the world's most experimental and progressive music.

He's dabbled in industrial dance, as heard in Wiseblood's "Stumbo," worked with soundtracks and has helmed a countless list of productions. Since arriving in America from Melbourne, Australia, in 1984, Thirlwell has worked under his own moniker and various others (Wiseblood, Foetus, Clint Ruin, Steroid Maximus, etc.), which were crafted to depict the mood of the project. He's also collaborated and worked with a slew of avant garde artists, such as Lydia

Lunch and Richard Kern, as well as bands such as The The, Coil, Nurse with Wound, Marc Almond and many others.

But over the past year or so, Thirlwell has expanded his base into the dance realm from his present headquarters in Brooklyn, New York. Recently, he remixed Prong's "Prove You Wrong" for dancefloor appeal — no mean feat considering they're a crunching speed metal group — and he's also pumped up dance tracks for EMF, Red Hot Chili Peppers, industrial supergroup Murder Inc., Jarboe (of the Swans) and countless others. And while many involved in remixes focus on that one particular field or perhaps DJing to stay fresh, Thirlwell remains quite active as a producer of rock-oriented bands and an artist in his own right.

At the moment, Thirlwell's alter ego,

Foetus, has a double-live album out, *Male* (Big Cat), and he's also finished putting together a 15-song indie rock compilation for Big Cat, *Mesomorph Enduros*, featuring Cop Shoot Cop, Jesus Lizard, Pain Teens and others. Also forthcoming are production projects for Silverfish, The Beyond and more remixes. As Thirlwell puts it, he wants to continue working on big projects and smaller ones which will simultaneously keep his music vital on the major and indie front. Ideally, this two-pronged assault will allow him to reach a variety of people. While he slavishly works in the studio, Thirlwell is prepping for a new Foetus LP, due sometime next year and he's itching to head out on the road. But this all has to wait until he can clear his busy remix schedule.

"In the music that I'm doing now, I don't see any direct influences from anyone — I pretty much influence myself," Thirlwell says. "I've done so much stuff that I think my work continues on what I've done before and takes it to a new place with each production. When I look back to my early stuff, I definitely see some influences in there. Namely, there's some compositional styles in there from John Cage and Steve Reich."

Thirlwell's style is one which is continually in transition and his desire to meander between dance and rock seems insatiable. As he says in an exclusive *DJ Times* interview, "I would say that my style is evolutionary. Usually, whatever the past thing that I've done is my favorite thing for the moment." But don't ask Mr. Foetus for any stories about working in the studio; he says that the glamour aspect is all a facade

DJ Times: I've been following your career as Wiseblood, Clint Ruin and your numerous personae for quite some time and I think that it's interesting how people in the dance world are now beginning to know who you are. Your recent remix of Prong's "Prove You Wrong" and your EMF remixes have certainly brought you to the forefront. What's it like for you — someone who's been heavily involved in underground rock, industrial experimental music and film — to be acknowledged by this different segment of the music industry?

Jim Thirlwell: I'm not 100-percent sure that's the case that I'm now accepted, because I think that a lot of people now see "Remixed by J.G. Thirlwell" on a record, but many don't necessarily have any idea of what else I've done in the past and am doing now. Last year, I got a call from a company regarding a remix which I really wanted to do, but I told them that I was sorry [that I couldn't do it] because I was leaving for tour and the woman from the company said, "Oh, you have a band?" She had no idea of my other music and only knew me as a remixer/producer. I mean, the potential 14-year-old EMF fan probably wouldn't go out and buy my records, so I'm not so sure how many people have made the connection between all of my work.

DJ Times: Was the Prong remix the first major label project that you ever worked on?

Thirlwell: No, I did some EMF stuff, "Lies," before that. I also did some demos for White Zombie around that time for Geffen.

DJ Times: How did EMF enlist you to remix "Lies"? Was it the label who was behind that?

Thirlwell: It was actually their manager who thought we would be an effective combination. And it turned out that they were really into it and they were the ones who pushed me to do "Lies," and from there things began to snowball. I've had a lot of offers from different labels since doing those remixes for EMF, but it's all about making that connection for me. I really don't like it when people don't make the connection of where I'm coming from when they send me O'Jays CDs in the mail (laughs), and that bothers me.

DJ Times: Since most remixers earned their chops as DJs or producers, you come at remixing from an entirely different direction in lieu of your extensive rock and industrial work. I guess that you could essentially be called something of an outsider. I'm curious to know your impressions on the whole remix scene.

Thirlwell: Well, I think that a lot of remixes are totally redundant and people tend to remix things to death so that they can milk as many formats out of a single as possible. What I do with a remix, I put the emphasis back on the remix and I try to push parameters even further and try to add my own elements. That might mean putting in whole new musical sections or taking out parts completely. I try and create something that's creative and I try to give the group something very extreme and very divorced from the original version. I often add new grooves to tracks. I try to have as much fun with [the remix] as possible.

DJ Times: I think that the whole definition of the remix has changed considerably. In the disco days, a remix was simply an extended version, or a version with a new drum track. Now, everything can be remixed for alternative, house, techno, freestyle, Latin and pop markets. What's your feeling about how labels target remixes to these markets with the sole intent of selling more records? From what I can tell, when a label does a mix for every format, they sort of put the music aside and only care about the bottom line.

Thirlwell: I think that doing all of those remixes is a fucking waste of time really. I usually end up with three mixes, one for 7-inch and one for 12-inch, and then do a very extreme mix incorporating elements of the two plus other parts. I think that the attitude now is that the people are desperate to try to channel things. Look at the 7-inch, 12-inch, limited-edition sets, CD5s, and look at how they all have different versions so that the hardcore fan has to buy every fucking format to get every version of the single. This way, the label gets to sell more singles and chart the record higher. I think that there's a lot of greed behind that.

DJ Times: I think what's also dis-

gusting is the promo-only releases that labels do for club DJs on remixes. I feel bad for the people who may really like a remix and then can't buy it or are suckered into buying the LP only to be disappointed by the boring album version.

Thirlwell: Yeah! That's also ridiculous. I think that labels make no sense at all when they do promo-only. I've had some of my remixes end up as promo-only and it's totally frustrating. I don't like it at all.

DJ Times: In my own record collection, I have a lot of your records, such as Wiseblood's "Stumbo" and *Stink Fist*. What's it like now working with majors after working on a much smaller scale for quite some time? Do you feel any creative restrictions ever?

Thirlwell: I feel like I have the same freedom. Totally. When I do a remix, there's no one from the label in the studio and there aren't any band members present. All I do is put it on tape and send it back to them. The only difference working with a major as compared to an independent is that with a major you usually get paid on time.

DJ Times: And it's probably a lot more, too!

Thirlwell: (Laughs). Whatever, but I'm worth it! But there haven't been any limitations on my work and most people say, "Fuck up the mix as much as you like." And the more that I fuck it up, the more they like it. But when I say "fuck it up," I'm talking about taking the music to extremes.

DJ Times: In the midst of doing all of these remixes, I understand that you still haven't strayed too far from rock. I understand that you just produced the new Silverfish album on Columbia.

Thirlwell: Yeah, that was great. It was a pretty fast project and they came in and were open to my ideas and did the whole thing really fast. They're a good band with a lot of ideas and I'm going to do more mixes for an EP of theirs.

DJ Times: As an artist yourself, how do you balance the different mediums of performing and remixing/producing?



Michael Lavine

Thirlwell managed to create a dance mix for "Prove You Wrong," a single by New York metal group Prong.

Thirlwell: Well, production is a complex thing, where you have to draw the best performance out of a band and it's a struggle to work within your own conceptions. A lot of producing has to do with psychology and getting the best sounds from a band. When Silverfish came into the studio, some of their songs were unfinished, so we managed to try out different ideas by adding breaks here and working on the songs piece by piece. With remixing, which I actually prefer, the group has already made their statement and I can take it somewhere else. The band isn't there and I feel that I can add some more of my creative input. They've already made their definitive version and I'm there to stretch boundaries a bit more. I really enjoy that more.

DJ Times: I really like the Murder Inc. remixes you recently did.

Thirlwell: Oh, thanks a lot. I also just did a couple for Red Hot Chili Peppers which turned out really good.

DJ Times: Yeah, I read about that one in the trades. Which songs did you remix for the Peppers?

Thirlwell: I did "If You Want Me To Stay" and "Higher Ground." There's a 7-inch, 12-inch and wacky versions for their greatest hits album which I believe is coming out in October.

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DJ Times: I've noticed that on many of your remixes, you've used engineer Martin Bisi quite a bit.

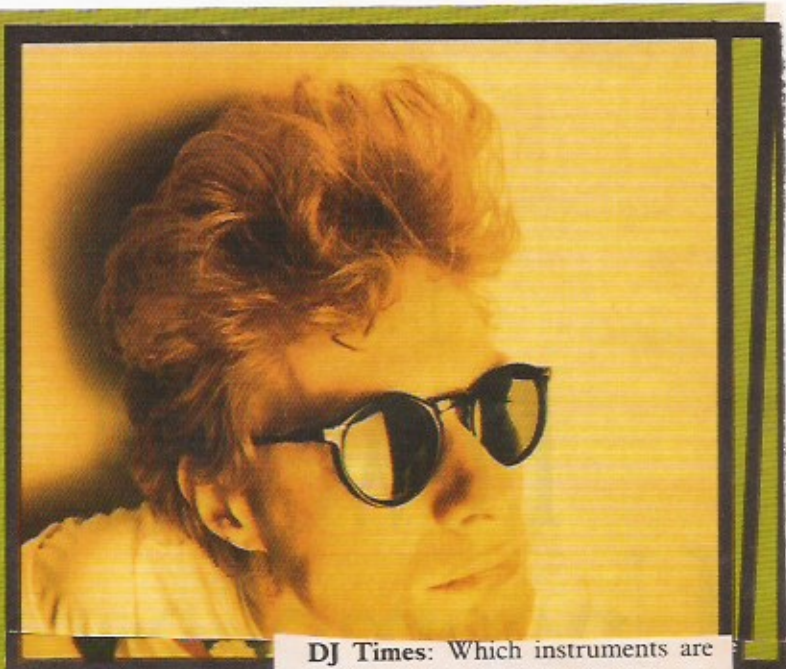
Thirlwell: Yeah, I've worked with Martin Bisi for quite a long time and we work really well together and have a good rapport. At times, we almost have a sort of telepathy. I'll say something and he'll be thinking that exact same thing about a track we're working on. I guess that he knows my process so well and he's familiar with a lot of technical aspects, such as frequency response and where we should set up mikes in the room for the best sound. Monitoring can sometimes be a problem, but he's great to work with and he's a very underrated engineer and producer in his own right.

DJ Times: Do you actually work the board when you're producing?

Thirlwell: Well, I [adjust the] EQ and outboard and stuff like that, but patching things in is rough. I've always worked with engineers and I like to sit back and work with them.

DJ Times: Which instruments do you play?

Thirlwell: Anything I pick up, really. I play everything inadequately. That's how the Foetus came about — it's just me and I sort of taught myself instruments when I thought that a song needed a part. Gradually, I picked up a lot of instruments, so I play a lot of things badly (laughs).



DJ Times: Which instruments are you the most proficient on?

Thirlwell: Oh, that's the studio. If I'm looking for sounds, I can find them and I can make myself appear as though I can play.

DJ Times: It's no secret that a lot of artists, as well as remixers and producers, sometimes stagnate creatively. What keeps your work as an artist or in the studio fresh?

Thirlwell: I think what keeps my work fresh is that I don't have any limitations or boundaries and I don't have any preconceptions about anything. I'm not trying to please the band or the record company — I'm just trying to please myself. I think the fact that I'm that way makes me strive more or have more of a working mind. That's where a lot of freshness comes in and why a lot of the bands and record companies like what I do so much. I like dance music and I think that I create really good dance music.

DJ Times: Was dance music always something you wanted to get into while you were working in more experimental settings?

Thirlwell: I never tried to get into it — I kind of fell into it. It wasn't a goal of mine around '84 or something like that. Now I have the record-company wolves pawing at the door and I take great pleasure in turning them down. It's good!

DJ Times: How many inquiries do you receive a month to remix songs now?

Thirlwell: It fluctuates. I might get a few a day or I won't get any for a week or two. It varies and it's a good position that I'm in because if I need to hustle, I can. Right now, I really don't have to and I like this position.