FOETUS' HOME
“MY LOFT is my greatest work of art,” says Jim Thirlwell, a.k.a. Foetus, referring to the kitsch palace he has fashioned on the Brooklyn side of New York's Manhattan Bridge, across the street from a bleak cemetery of public housing projects. “It reflects my aesthetics and my life—especially one aspect that I’m not too proud of: the fact that it’s totally filthy.”

Pleasingly cluttered would be a more apt description, one that also fits the Australian industrial-rock producer's schedule. Having most recently finished his umpteenth LP plus a new EP, titled Cash and Null respectively, Foetus was in between a Times Square album cover photo shoot and remixing a stray Pulp Will Eat Itself single when we ventured into his home studio. This is where he does all of his pre-production work and even the occasional album.

“I hate people assuming that all my music issamples,” he complains, pointing out that he is conversant in jazz and classical music as well as layers of crunching guitars. “I play guitar (a Fender Squier and Ibanez Roadstar II), drums, violin and horn (namely a Dearman alto sax). Whatever I need, I learn. Sampling is just another piece in the jigsaw.” Nevertheless, the heart of his rig is a trio of samplers that are fed by a Sony DiscMan or a Shure SM-57 mike: an Akai S900 and S1000 plus an Electro-Harmonix Supere Repliy—one of the first-ever sampling devices. Other sounds are generated by a Kawai K1, Roland JX-3P and E-mu Proteus synths—sequenced using an Atari 1040ST computer running Steinberg Creator software—as well as an autoharp and a SaneVox accordion. He uses the large hollow wooden “X”—left over from a Lydia Lunch performance—for drum sounds, and he keeps his Oberheim DX drum machine around for old times' sake.

Foetus submixes the instruments through a Tascam M-208 eight-channel mixer on their way to an Akai 1214 12-track tape deck and Casio DA-2 DAT. Effects are supplied by a Yamaha SPX900 and SPX90 and a Digitech Time Machine 7.6 delay, and by a batch of ancient stomp boxes: Boss Turbo Overdrive (“I lean on it a lot,” he says, “sometimes for drums or vocals”), Boss Octavio, PreGo Rat, Ibanez Sonic Distortion, Crybaby Super Wah and Vox Super Phase. He dubs his DAT mixes to a Denon DM M10 HR cassette from which a Ramsa WP-9055 power amp pumps them through Yamaha NS-1OM monitors or AKG K141-2 headphones.

“I heard a quote once: ‘a studio grows until it dies,’” Thirlwell says philosophically. As he tries to live up to that dictum, his studio constantly vacillates between one condition and the other: “I blow things up all the time.”

BY NATHAN BRACKETT

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JUNE 1995 67