Unsung cult hero Jim Thirlwell

**BEST OF MUSIC**

Cracking The Whip

Meet the metal mind behind J.G. Thirlwell, Clint Ruin, Foetus, et al. By Carlo McCormick
Jim Thirlwell — aka J.G. Thirlwell, Clint Ruin, Foetus — is a musician's musician who has influenced almost as many rock groups as he's invented in an ever-expanding inventory of assumed aliases, assorted collaborative projects, and constantly changing guises that collectively construct only a partial picture of the epic Foetus mythos. His discography is as prolific as it is profound, and includes a host of collaborative projects with the likes of ex-Swans producer-extraordinaire Rolги Mosimann (Wiseblood), Soft Cell frontman Marc Almond (Flesh Volcano), Lydia Lunch, Nick Cave, Thurston Moore (of Sonic Youth fame), Arto Lindsay, The Tha and Coil, as well as an impressive list of re-mixing and production studio credits with Sonic Youth, Mars, Bewitched, Prong, White Zombie, EMF, Swans, Bass Hog, Unsane, Cop Shoot Cop, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Silverfish, Nine Inch Nails and Mothhead Bug. However significant such a superficial list may be, the real importance of Thirlwell's contribution to our musical history is his far more obscure status as an unsung cult hero known for his pioneering studio work under a constantly changing facade of fabricated band projects. Thirlwell began churning out his own peculiar, outsider-band of private, personal and brutally mutant sonic manipulations in the early 80's. At first putting out his own limited editions and his subsequent unselfishly arranged arrangements with a slew of indie/rock labels, it is his oeuvre as Foetus — which included seminal recordings made under such unforgettable offensive titles as You've Got Foetus on Your Breath, Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel, Foetus in Your Bed and Foetus Inc. — that Thirlwell has charted an individual universe of psychosexual violence taken to cartoonish extremes. These blistering assaults on the senses have preceded and ultimately procreated much of the techno, industrial and hard rock genres that have come to dominate contemporary sensibilities and have launched the fame, and fortunes, of everyone but this original master.

With a slate of recent releases available on Big Cat Records, including his latest project, Steroid Maximus' Gondwanaland, it's now up to you: accept no imitators, Foetus is the real thing.

Carlo McCormick: When you came to New York in '83, it seemed that there couldn't be a worse place to end up if one wanted to be a rock star. A few bands had made it out of this town, but statistically it's been something like the kiss of death, career-wise. Jim Thirlwell: You're presupposing that I'm trying to be a rock star, and I didn't come here for the scene. I lived in London for five years and I'd done my time. I came here with Lydia [Lunch], Nick [Cave] and Marc [Almond] to do the Immaculate Consumptive tour, and I just loved the place. It was perfect for me, especially after London, which had become pretty torturous for me by then.

CM: But your timeline has proven impeccable. You were in England during the late 70's and early 80's, which was an amazing time, musically speaking. Subsequently, in New York, you entered in what may historically prove to be a truly seminal rock scene.

JT: Again, that assumes that I'm having a good time bonding with what's going on musically around me, which just isn't so. I exist in a vacuum as far as what I create. Do I give a shit? I'm making what I make. London, when I moved there, was right for what I wanted to do. I couldn't have created what I did, in terms of the mechanisms, if I had stayed in Australia. London is the most drab, gray, inconvenient place to be, so eventually the time was right for me to come here.

CM: Your live shows, at places like the old Danceteria and the Ritz, were awesome as grotesque spectacles, but performing to backing tapes was a bit problematic for the New York rock crowd, who generally prefers a real band.

JT: I never really intended to do the tape thing for that long, if at all. It just sort of happened that way. There's so far you can go with it, and I took it as far as I could. I could never do that again, but it was a good money-maker — blow into town with a couple of quarter-inch tapes. But now, with a lot of these supposed live shows, everybody's doing it, so what's the point?

CM: There's something very personal, idiosyncratic and introspective about your solitary creative process.

JT: I just want to hone it down to a purity so that I have no one else to blame — in terms of my fault or theirs. It's a solitary vision with its own linear quality. It's like a personal diary that collectively delineates certain periods of my life and what I was going