

CALENDAR

Saturday, October 19, 2002

POP MUSIC REVIEW

Taking a sonic romp with Steroid Maximus

By DEAN KUIPERS
Special to The Times

Lydia Lunch was in the audience at the Knitting Factory on Thursday shouting, "Just the way the devil likes it!" Pouring an 18-piece orchestra into a deep swing that eludes most rock outfits, J.G. Thirlwell performed his new album, "Ectopia," recorded under his cinematic-composition persona, Steroid Maximus, to shocking effect.

Conducting an ensemble arranged by Lounge Lizards trumpeter Steve Bernstein, Thirlwell, who over the decades has also worked under the names Foetus, Clint Ruin and Wiseblood, set aside his industrial-rock god pose. Instead, he pushed string and horn sections through complex avant-compositions. Isaac Hayes-style Motown funk romps referencing "Shaft" moved seamlessly into postmodern pastiche pieces like snatches of sound heard through the windows of a moving bus.

Proof that talent transcends hip, "Ectopia" makes spy/crime noir and neo-blaxploitation quotations seem as if they were just invented, and the ensemble, led by Charlie Hunter Trio drummer Scott Amendola (miked big and booming), presented them as pure, lean, fast and fun.

Though all manner of sonic frippery was added by two keyboardists and guitarist Nels

Cline, the vibe was more Cab Calloway than Kraftwerk, and ending the set on a muscular tune from a previous Steroid Maximus disc, "Quilombo!" made it clear that nothing is more fun than a big orchestra out to rock.