

# THAT SINKING FEELING

## FOETUS INC

### SINK

#### Womb Inc

AT the end of the day, when all is said and done, it's hard to take seriously a man who operates under a series of droll variations on the word "foetus": You've Got Foetus On Your Breath, Scraping Foetus Off The Wheel, Foetus Interruptus, Foetus Uber Frisco etc etc. Clint Ruin/Jim Thirlwell is the jester in the pack of his post-hardcore peers. Foetus are something like the Madness of the noise generation. Which is to say, indefatigably *entertaining*: I might well find myself playing this "Best Of..." double more often than records I really *admire*. But, at the end of the day, we all know that humour-in-music isn't really that interesting: it's the sad, solemn or desperate, driven songs that you clasp to your bosom and would take to the proverbial Desert Island.

Like Madness, humour infects every last pore of Foetus' music, from the baroque, vaudevillian arrangements to the lyrics, which are over-ripe, but never achieve the apocalyptic, verminously visionary pitch achieved by, say, Nick Cave circa "Mutiny" and "From Her To Eternity". Thirlwell's demolition derby of puns and mixed metaphors ("Slimes of a feather grind together", "Double goddamn and carton of hells", "Supercalifragilisticsadomasochism", "Halo of flamin' lead") are chucklesome, rather than chilling, glimpses into the void.

Similarly, there are some amazing sonic forgeries ("Bedrock" is sleazy, striptease burlesque, "The Only Good Christian Is A Dead Christian" is call-and-response gospel), which only leave you wondering: why is this being done? Other tracks are

mammoth constructions that plunder such diverse genres as avant-garde classical, metal-bashing, disco, R&B, heavy metal: the kind of hardcore/pomp rock bombast that Jim Steinman might produce if he was 10 years younger and had been brought up on the wrong side of the tracks.

When the lyrics let up and the hammy voice is given a breather, Foetus can be tremendous on a purely musical level. In particular, side two is a sequence of brilliant instrumentals like "Lilith", "Shut" and "Sick Minutes". "Diabolus In Musica" is a thoroughly creepy piece based on a musical "tritone" that was banned in the Middle Ages because it was considered Satanic (users were tortured to death, often by genital mutilation); "Smut" is symphonic blitz-boogie somewhere between Glenn Branca and George Thorogood; "Rattlesnake Insurance" is ghost-town blues reminiscent of that perennial Immaculate Consumptive favourite, Lee Hazelwood. These are soundtracks looking for a film, for a reason to *exist*.

Then, it's back to the flailing, hell-for-leather pace and laid-on-with-a-trowel concatenation of sound and imagery: the electro pummel of "Catastrophe Crunch" and "Calamity Crush" (where Thirlwell's collision of drum machine and grunge guitar anticipated Def Jam, Age Of Chance, etc, by a good few years); the industrial Hi-NRG of "Wash It All Off".

At 80 minutes plus, "Sink" is exhausting, ultimately tiresome. It showcases Thirlwell's remarkable ability to build with sound, to mix'n'match/mismatch styles. But ultimately there's something hollow at the heart of these often fabulous constructions. In the end, it's *just* entertainment, a cue for laffs rather than lesions.

**SIMON REYNOLDS**

