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## POP REVIEW

### *Rooting for the Dark Side And Shattering the Past*

By NEIL STRAUSS

"Hello and goodbye; this is the final Foetus performance ever," Jim Thirlwell, the leader of the 15-year-old industrial-rock band Foetus, roared on Friday night at Tramps. The statement shouldn't worry Foetus fans. Mr. Thirlwell probably says

that every night. He's just that kind of doomsayer, a singer for whom the end is more exciting than the beginning. In his lyrics, there is no love without violence, no ordinary house without a dead body tucked away somewhere, no automobile without blood on the fender. He is the musical equivalent of the gruesome narrators of comic books and television shows, telling tall horror tales and rooting for the dark side. Mr. Thirlwell's music is similarly apocalyptic, with the past (snippets of classical and big-band records) shattering into pieces against a callous present (military drumming and hard guitar riffs).

In addition to having released more than 30 records under various pseudonyms (most of them involving the word Foetus), Mr. Thirlwell is also an ace remixer, having added extra venom to music by Nine Inch Nails, Pantera and the Red Hot Chili Peppers in recent years. On Friday night, he concluded his first tour in three years. Dressed in a white tuxedo, looking like a big-band leader possessed by the Devil, Mr. Thirlwell strutted menacingly around the stage screaming lyrics like "Me and my mental health don't agree most times."

Mr. Thirlwell's five-person backing band explored bombast as a compositional tool, with mock-classical violin playing soaring over grinding, distorted guitars, a marching drumbeat and a panoply of keyboard sounds and scrapes. The key to the music's menace was Mr. Thirlwell's voice. He could take any phrase and with a single rolling growl turn it into a dire threat, even the sentence "Stick that apple pie into the oven."