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Foetus

Love

label: Birdman

rating: 4.0

by Benjamin Hill

When discussing an artist as iconoclastic, prolific and durable as J.G. Thirwell (best known as Foetus, though he's assumed more personas -- Steroid Maximus, Wiseblood -- than anyone else in music, save for Kool Keith), it's hard to know where to begin. After all, this guy's been releasing music since the Carter administration, and he will likely continue to do so until we all perish in the nuclear holocaust initiated by President Jenna Bush in 2029. And he'll probably endure beyond that, composing his brand of orchestral electronic bombast amidst the rubble, making sure the cockroaches have something to listen to.

In short, this guy's got staying power.

That often translates into long and complicated career histories, so let's get the back story out of the way so we can move on to more important things: namely, *Love*, Foetus's brilliant return to recording after a five-year hiatus. Foetus has his roots in both London and New York's no-wave scenes, where his nihilistic, confrontational blasts of tape-looped noise helped provide the template for what is now commonly known as industrial music. As he's progressed, his work has become increasingly textured and intricately composed, often taking on a cinematic grandeur in the process.

And the ten drama-laden tracks on *Love* are nothing if not cinematic. In fact, music from the movies provides some of the album's most obvious reference points. The dark, carnival-esque "Mon Agonie Douce" nods to Ennio Morricone's theme to *Rosemary's Baby*; "Paredolia" evokes the same sort of macabre whimsy that Danny Elfman has provided for many a Tim Burton film; and "Thrush" (a haunting duet with the Elysian Fields' Jennifer Charles) begins with an ominous, white-knuckle rush of synthesized tension, suggesting that the song's protagonists may soon have to decide whether the red wire or the blue wire is the one that defuses the bomb.

Despite any comparisons that can be made (be it to film composers or like-minded artists like the Swans or Einstürzende Neubauten) Foetus's music is entirely his own: anachronistic and uncompromising. Though he's just one man, many of *Love*'s tracks qualify as full-on compositions. It's been advertised that during Foetus's live performances to support *Love*, he'll be backed by an eighteen-piece orchestra.

That's an exciting prospect, considering how powerful and charged these songs already are. Notably, "Aladdin Reverse," in which a menacing harpsichord melody slowly builds into a supremely heavy buzz-saw guitar riff, and album closer "How to Vibrate," with its downright evil pitch-shifted vocals and a head-nodding horn section that sounds like it's being dragged through a pool of molasses. In concert, this is stuff that could be devastatingly good. But *Love* is plenty entertaining as it is: an immersive, emotionally charged tour de force from an underground icon who shows absolutely no signs of slowing down.

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rating legend