

REFLEX

ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

April 1992

FOETUS, INC.

Limelight
New York, NY

For nearly a decade, Jim Thirlwell (a.k.a. Foetus) has been spewing vinyl with the urgency of a Ravensbruck lampmaker. Laboriously executed, abrasively designed, his records (the latest, on Big Cat: Wiseblood's *Pedal to the Metal* and Steroid Maximus's *Quilombo* mini-LPs) bedizen the conveyor belt of new music like crematorium artifacts. Certain critics have called them "immaculately produced," or even "anal," but this assessment is wrong. Sonically, a Thirlwell-produced track is all calculated splatter—Jackson Pollock discharge in a Mondrian square. The guitar sounds, samples, and vocal processing can only be called epicurean grunge.

In the studio, Thirlwell's production techniques are very appropriate. But in performances, the splatter aesthetic which textures his albums becomes problematic. Early shows consisted of Foetus à la carte—a boy and his tape recorder. The music was exact, but spontaneity was missing. The cure, according to Thirlwell, was control's antithesis: After gazing at groups like Tad—a triumvirate of paunchy garage vets whom Thirlwell loudly admires—he cast a cold glance at his stage show and formed a real band. But, in embracing spontaneity, he temporarily sacrificed aural depth. This show was a case in point: more grunge and less texture.

Foetus's set began with a loop of what sounded like David Berkowitz saying "ecto-death," followed by a

medley from previous releases, including "Bedrock," "Butterfly Potion," and "Hatefeeler," with samples triggered sparingly by keyboardist David Oulmet (interrupted twice when Oulmet accidentally jostled his controller off the keyboard stand).

Throughout the night, Thirlwell swallowed and licked the capsule of his mike in a suspiciously realistic impersonation of a frontman on acid. As for ex-Swans bassist Al Kizys, his excesses were probably a matter of style: He repeatedly fell on his ass, punctuating each landing with an ebullient flourish that looked *deliberate*. Only former Swans guitarist Norman Westberg played with such restraint that his subtleties were flagrantly unobtrusive. Drummer Vinnie Signorelli (yet another Swans alumnus) gunned the engine impressively with raucous beats and long, talkative fills.

At the end of the night, the crowd was screaming, "MORE!" when Jim looked down and growled, "Shut up and say *please!*" After a moment of astonishment, the crowd responded by pleading urgently for five full minutes, but Signorelli had already gone out for beers. He came back later for an elliptical rendition of "I Am the Walrus"—in his hat and coat, a six-pack on his riser. ®

—Rob Hardin