



FOETUS LOVE

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The 2001 album "Flow" was a masterly return back to form for Jim Thirlwell's Foetus alias. Having explored the outer limits of abrasive hatecore with 1988's "Thaw" and 1995's "Gash" albums, as well as his demented onstage persona, a demonic caricature/embodiment of rock'n'roll's most macho clichés, Thirlwell seemed to have his creative peak behind him, and the joke was starting to wear thin. By no means bad albums, they still only hinted at the heights of genius that had brought sinister life to his early to mid 80's productions, with the 1985 album "Nail" being the crowning achievement. "Flow" once again focused on incorporating kitschy brass, perverted swing, strangely catchy hooks, cinematic orchestrals, bombastic rock, punishing assaults of percussion - elements that made it if not equal to, then at least Thirlwell's best outing since "Nail".

The new album "Love" distances itself even further from the years spent in the rock'n'roll wilderness. Expanding upon the orchestral arrangements, it delivers the most subdued and tender Foetal music to date. That doesn't mean that everything's sunny and bright, though. The album as a whole may feel like a far less dissonant and troublesome offspring than previous Foetus outings, which in some ways brings it closer to the spirit of the cinematic, orchestrated sound orgies of Steroid Maximus or the creeping electronic tension of Manorexia, Thirlwell's two major para-Foetus projects. But Thirlwell has kept his morbid sense of humour intact as well as his penchant for combining musical elements that few other artists would be able to manage to fuse together in the same song. Thus "Love" collides the sensual with the brute, the minimalistic with the baroque, harpsichord en masse with brutal guitars.

What truly astonishes me is the way Thirlwell manages to push his skills as a producer and arranger as well as songwriter. The songs bristle with nuances, and the orchestral elements appear more fully fleshed out and realised than ever. "(not adam)" and "Blessed Evening" are perfected cinematic scenarios, with Thirlwell's voice taking center stage supported by back projected orchestras going through the moves in a noir soundscape. "Mon agonie douce" sees him adopting a perverted Jaques Brel persona, but everything mutates into a blurry scenario where harpsichords are strangled in backalleys while Thirlwell's sampler gets blackmailed into committing indescribable acts of perversions. "Aladdin Reverse" isn't just a pun on David Bowie's already punning "Aladdin Sane", but also the most conventionally Foetus-sounding track - if there even is such a thing - in its anguished aggression. Over crashing guitars and roaring strings, a tormented Thirlwell lets us know that he's not just "a lad in reverse", but also "Dorian Gray in reverse". It might be ironic, but it's the most intense moment of an album that impresses with its ability to alter the Foetus DNA even further, bringing Thirlwell's most persistent project farther into the evolutionary maze he's been strolling through since 1980.

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