Steroid Maximus

by Martin Longley

Most of Jim Thirlwell’s aliases are variations on the Fetus theme dating back to the early 1980s, but his Steroid Maximus outfit involves the strengthening of an orchestral line begun at the end of the decade. This is big yista music, following the ever-growing trend for imaginary movie soundtracks. Even though Thirlwell doesn’t formally state that this is the case, these pieces reek of celluloid, scavenging off several eras of scoring, mangling countless genre motifs. Secluded in his Self Immolation studios in Brooklyn, Thirlwell works alone, obsessively overdubbing drums, keyboards and guitar, but giving his vocal cards a rest for the most part. When he does sing, it’s as a backing vocalist.

"The Tramble" effortlessly moves swiftly from brooding Bernard Herrmann string clouds to humming breakbeats, slipping in a 1960s noir flute line en route. This could be described as industrial loungecore, sometimes languishing in open spaces, at others compressed into a suffocating steel cube. "Seventy Cops" muscled in with an 80s electro bassline, its shaker flicking vocal chorus pitched somewhere between Ennio Morricone, Lalo Schifrin and John Carpenter. Sex Mob trumpeter Steve Bernstein makes the first of three appearances, hurling hot breath suggestiveness through his horn. Blaring horns, rattling vibes and surging guitar initiate a chase sequence, the seeth voices returning for "Bad Day in Greenpoint", bathed in a sickly aura. On "Tahiti A Gila-Gila", Hawaiian steel guitar weaves beside "Silver Machine"-style synth oscillations. "Pusher Jones" operates over a rolling piano bassline, with Bernstein returning to help build a breathless rush of excitement. With "Chiolate" rippling vibes over dense rock drum blocks, and "Enzymes" combining gong and sawwell harmonium, Thirlwell certainly polishes throwing everything into the mix. Yet his elements are always exactly arranged, bound by a sense of cinematic dynamism.