

**A**LANKY BOY IN GREEN VELVET pants smoked the tires on his spray-painted Kawahonda-zukihama outside on the sidewalk, drowning out Industrial Dance Night for a moment at the shit-bag decafab bar next door to my apartment. The house electronics were juddering with *Thaw* by Foetus Interruptus. Two greasy goth slummers and a drunk hairdresser holding a pool cue were mouthing along to Jim Thirlwell, choking out the verse to "A Prayer for My Death": "The strain is showing as the veins pop outta the side of the head / They burst, bloodying the pristine driven snow / Dribbling in burning tributaries all the way down to San Antone."

A deeply unsettling record. Jim hung just enough irony in *Thaw* to make it playable in public—the big brass band fanfares and splatter-film/Bugs Bunny soundtrack dynamics. Even Chuck Eddy, and Jimmy Johnson and Byron Coley at *Forced Exposure*, just walked around their kitchens, arms flapping, going, "Fuck. Fuck. Fuck," when they got *Thaw*.

Thirlwell has, it seems, disgorged a zillion records since he left Melbourne in 1978: the ceaseless shrieking of his many personas. Clint Ruin. Wiseblood, with the Swans' Roli Mosimann. The Foetuses: *F Under Glass*, *F Uber Frisco*, *Phillip and His F Vibrations*, *Scraping F Off the Wheel*, *You've Got F on Your Breath*, *F All Nude Revue*, *F Interruptus*. Film scores for Richard Kern and others. Scores for live performances and recordings with longtime paramour Lydia Lunch and just about any other Gothamite you can think of. Lots of it you can take with six fingers of Sauza, and watch Jim's devilish visage seep out in a plasma, one enormous smirk. But the liquid tissue that makes them all kin, that bears the Thirlwell imprimatur, is the music's manifestation of psychotic rage.

The older he gets, the more readily Jim shreds those caricatures, those accents, those swaggering personas, to bare himself. And there I sit in that idiotic goth bar, wracked by a terrible sense of finality. And there you sit in your car, caught in the glare of this man's commitment to truth. To pathology. To . . . hatred.

No recording can touch what a man can say with his eyes. Which is why I bring all this up in the first place: Foetus live. The late-1990

# UNDERGROUND

Foetus appearance at San Francisco's Club DNA was the single most satisfying, disturbing show I saw all last year. Worse than watching *Jacob's Ladder* from the front row on fungal hallucinogens, which I'll address at another time. The enormity of his vision was with him, the human frustration, thrust like a prow through the leading wave of his own kind of movie soundtrack. His cover of Alex Harvey's "Faith Healer" was

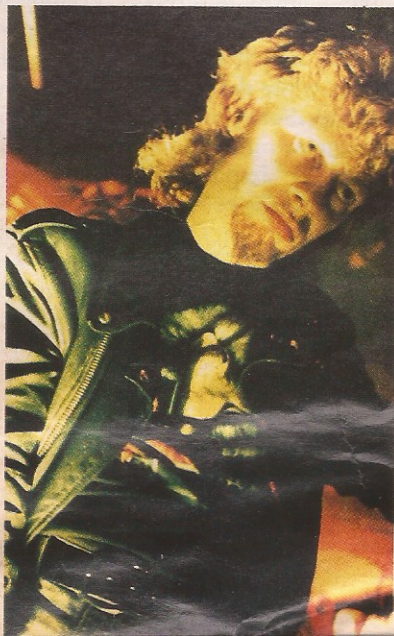
**Jim Thirlwell, better known as Foetus,**

**makes records designed to wake you up.**

**So wake up. By DEAN KUIPERS.**

sublime in its aggression. Unmatchable. Jim hunched down at the front of the stage, his eyes turned back inside his head, the gaze sweeping by slowly as his howling faded.

At his best, Thirlwell fucks with your ability to spectate. His psychicsump compositions have accomplished a feat almost unknown in the age of song/video format: They cough up more ardor, more confrontation, more tears, and more pure hysteria from his own person than from what lays as potential among the multiple instruments in his recordings, or even in a video of that same performance. The sense of finality in his music ain't a product of a bad day in the monstrous warehouse



space under the Brooklyn Bridge he used to share with Lydia—it's in *him*. And when he decides to crack it open, you end up carrying it.

You know what I'm talking about. You know how when you go see, say, Rollins, you can see that the guy is on the verge of poppin' a vein, but you feel a distance, like he's using you to get in a great workout? Foetus, live, has pushed past thick emotional barriers . . . to connect . . . at the point of frenzy. Occasionally, someone will call him out and Jim lurches off the stage, boots and knuckles clawing for satisfaction. For release. Foetus has happily discovered the secret to transforming one man's all-night 24-track onanism into an all-absorbing live physical event: Front a loud, complex band, made up mostly of ex-Swans. The last tour,

which didn't fall under any of the previously known Foetus monikers, featured guitarist Norman Westberg (Swans), bassist Algys Kizys (Swans), drummer Vinny Corso, violinist Hahn Rowe (Branca, Hugo Largo), and keyboard/guitarist Dave Ouimet. Jim himself admits "the material wasn't composed to be played live."

I've known Jim for a few years, and I suspect that he can't tolerate so much time spent clawing closer and closer to oblivion and thus backs off almost habitually, looking for relief in collaborations and stints as producer. His neurotic "ensconcement" in his home studio is telling. Who can slow this man? Slated for 1991 release are an LP and two mini-LPs under the name Gondwanaland, a series of collaborations with Raymond Watts (PIG), Away (Voivod), Mark Cunningham (Mars, Don King), Lucy Hamilton, Don Fleming (B.A.L.L.), Rowe, Mosimann, and others. A new Wiseblood LP. A Clint Ruin-Lydia Lunch remake of Blue Öyster Cult's "Don't Fear the Reaper." He's committed as well to producing NYC bands The Unsane, Swans, and White Zombie.

And then there's the next Foetus project, where the cycle of pathology begins anew. Jim either jacks it into his deck, or it consumes him. The hound of hell chases his tail. And bites us in the process.