Foetus + Frenchies = Fun

REVIEWED: Thirlwell's mania, Swords Project's obsessions, Air's whimper, Plug's predictability.

**ALBUM REVIEWS**

**FOETUS: FLOW**

*Hairy Fun*

The industrial legend plays ringleader in a manic and murderous schizooid cabaret.

To say that Jim "Foetus" Thirlwell constitutes a one-man cult of personality would be a mild understatement, on par with saying Hitler had "issues." Foetus—the acidic expectation of a solo Thirlwell and his overworked recording studio—encapsulates so many personalities; it's practically a nation-state all by itself. A nation populated by the pathologically insane, maybe. But Thirlwell's manic and murderous schizooid cabaret is as menially entertaining as a call-log party in Times Square, and the delirious genre-hopping of Flow makes it an ideal test for schoolboy rebellion in your youth in Flow, 101.

"Quick Fix" kicks off the album with an urban-nihilist nightmare of sampled Ministry drum loops, silicon-straddled guitars, and Thirlwell trademark growl inviting listeners to "barbwire the buildings and burn the presents down...you better lose your...this is civil war. The sudden downfall to the awkward cocktail shisha of "Uranus of the Heart" grinds mental gears into scrap; the multitracked gleam-like vocals (like everything on Flow, it's all Thirlwell, all the time) could slip into a Pizzicato Five disc if they weren't chipping lyrics like "charcoal of the heart will burn soul apart." "Mandely" then slams into an epic spaghetti Western as imagined by Einsturzende Neubauten, jackhammer percussion and factory noise pummeling under sweeping strings, slowly bloated horns and music box chimes. That's just the beginning. The next seven songs swerve with sickening speed through brassy bad-attitude swing, frenzied mechanical-industrial rush, Bernard Hermann psycho-killer soundtrack, and brain-damaged-and-drunk blends of blues, funk and theatrical rawk. By the time we reach the 13-minute closer "Krebeba," its dumfounded chunk, dizzy percussion crescendos and spine-creeping orchestral coda seem positively logical.

All this is not to say Flow is Thirlwell's best record—that would be 1985's Immense Angst-Opera Nuit. But it does give another glimpse into the side how mind of one of the most insane, deranged and driven geniuses in rock history. For that alone, Flow is easily worth the admission price. Step right up. (36) Foetus plays 9-30 pm Friday at Cobalt Lounge, 32 NW 3rd Ave., 264-8499; $12.50 advance (Pasties). See story, page 61.

**JECT**

*Absolutely Kosher*

The Portland eight-piece reinvents the Jesus-bang with zeal and precision.

Of the several experimental mini-orchestras that have bravely opened their frontiers in Portland's music scene in the last year or so, the Swords Project may be the most delicate and rigorous. Though this album stretches and wanders over great sprawling distances, you could count on one hand the basic sound-shapes at the root of the four songs.

In the obsessive zeal with which it repeats, labors over and elaborates on these few simple themes, the Project manages to bring an almost monastic discipline to rock's most undisciplined form, the instrumental jam.

"Shaman's Wedding Song" essays the album (Absolutely Kosher) open, a low Hairy gar- rup of bracing, churning guitar. This is early-morning music, evocative of the clarified light and cautious human pace of 7 am on a weekday. Carefully, carefully—the song gathers steam at the hypnotic tick-tack pace of a metronome. Then drums erupt into this placid landscape, to simultaneously jarring and liberating effect.

Quickly, though, the band finds its way back to the lulling theme. This precision hairpin turn is emblematic of the whole album. Its moments of free-flowing noise almost always feel like guilty pleasures the band allows itself as a reward for its restraint. Even when Swords Project is at its lowest and most rock-and-roll—as in its clangorous escape from "Squawking Level," this disc's third track—the stormy lashings never stray from the study architecture that sustained the song's gentler moments. If this is jam rock, it has little in common with the red-eyed self-indulgence usually pumiced under that title. Instead, this is music that finds freedom in devotion to a very meticulous battleplan. (22)