

# Steroid Maximus

GONDWANALAND (Big Cat)

'PLEASE', I hear you cry, 'not another complicated record!' But really it's very simple.

You must have read *Lord of the Flies* - try imagining there's a new film version, and that it needs a brilliant new soundtrack. The music must convey the stirring conflict of excitement and despair of thirty young boys when they crash on a deserted island. It must express the vulnerability of Piggy, the humane sympathy of Ralph, and the ferocious, primitive brutality of Jack. It must conjure up the tall mountain, the wild green forest, the burning sun and the limitless blue ocean. Above all, it must disconcert you with its range of moods and cultural influences, just as the boys in the book weaken into barbarism, through the fractiousness of their different versions of civilization. And finally, as Golding did in his famous ending through the dumb reaction of the naval officer, it must reflect an ironic disbelief in its own subject matter.

Gondwanaland, the name given to the putative landmass existing on earth prior to continental drift, brought together Asia, Africa, Europe and Australasia - and now, with the ethical anarchy of punk and a Golding-like primitivism, the same is being done by music. From the Islamic chanting of 'Radio Raheem' to the distorted crooning of 'I Will Love You Always (Wild Irish Rose)', it speaks of both the wealth and the harmonious incoherence of earth's cultural mix. Every conceivable instrument is heard on this album, every rhythm, every mode, every non-musical sound. Walking bass and jazz drums introduce the first track 'Quilombo!' whereas pipe organ, xylophone, church bell, typewriter and buzzing fly conclude the strangely moving final track 'Homeo'. In between there is a 'symphony in four movements' called 'The Bowel of Beelzebub', which moves from the epic grandeur of motion picture music to a crawling, claustrophobic dub of atonal strings onto Turkish bazaar buskers and Scottish bagpipes. Each of the fourteen tracks is a

fragment. And yet the album flows like a river, drawing you in with an exhilarating complexity. I defy you to find me another record with the diversity of 'Gondwanaland', its power to shock, and, yes, its beauty.

Are there any real musicians playing? Very few, probably. Steroid Maximus is the latest tag of J.G.Thirwell (alias Clint Ruin, Jim Foetus, and all those other bands with the word 'foetus' in the title). Collaborating here with cult hero Don Fleming amongst others, Thirwell has created 'Gondwanaland' almost entirely from samples - of film music, of harmonica breaks, of a Chinese zither... Thirwell may be standing without permission on the shoulders of hundreds of people who 'really know how to play', but that for me makes this album no less astounding. Equally superb is the sleeve: on the front, bold graphics; on the back, anatomical diagrams. Album of the year. Definitely.

'Gondwanaland' is the flowering of digital technology, and its scent is fragrant, exotic and strong.

Dr Faustus

