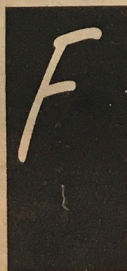


# FOETUS, INC.



For ten years, Jim Thirlwell a.k.a. Clint Ruin a.k.a. Foetus has been (de)constructing the soundtrack for the slow demise of our society as we know it. Sound cryptic? Well it ain't. It's music realized in the mind of a single man explicating his personal insight. Generally, it is a reflec-

tion of violence with a sharp satirical edge. Some have called him a visionary, others see him as a maniac, and a few have found the middle ground where his music can be accepted and understood.

A step toward breaking down the artist/audience barrier was the release of *SINK* by Foetus, Inc., a collection of single sides and compiled tracks spanning the entire career of Thirlwell, a record he describes as his "lost album"

because it links pieces that never would have seemed to fit together but do. The second step was a recent U.S. tour for which Thirlwell assembled a full band for the first time in America. Guitarist Norman Westerberg, bassist Algis Kizys, keyboardist Dave Ouimet, violinist Hahn Rowe, and drummer Vinni Signorelli backed Thirlwell, who previously had only performed to backing tapes.

"I thought I'd gone as far as I



**OUT OF THE DARKNESS** COMES THE FLASH OF STROBE LIGHTS AND A SAMPLED VOICE: "IT'S GONNA RAIN," PLAYS OVER AND OVER AS A CLOUD OF **DENSE SMOKE** SURROUNDS THE ON-LOOKERS, CAUSING TEMPORARY BLINDNESS. "IT'S GONNA RAIN" SHIFTS TEMPO AND BEGINS TO SOUND LIKE A **DISORIENTING** "DISCO LANE." NEARLY TEN MINUTES PASS, AND THE CROWD BECOMES RESTLESS, PUSHING FORWARD. AS THE **SMOKE** SETTLES, FIVE MEN TAKE THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE ON STAGE. THE SIXTH, A MAN WITH FLAME COLORED HAIR AND A **PIERCING** STARE LURCHES TO THE LIP OF THE STAGE. THE BAND RELEASES AN **EMPIRE OF SONIC FURY** AS JIM THIRLWELL SCREAMS, "FREE JAMES BROWN SO HE CAN RUN ME DOWN!" THIS IS FOETUS, INC. LIVE, AN EXPERIENCE IN **POWER, ANGER, AND FEAR.**

NOT BAD FOR A WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

■ Story by **William Jed Holt**  
■ Photos by **Michele Taylor**





could with the tape thing," he says, "and I really didn't want to go back to that. To work with a band gives that extra sledgehammer of power. Plus, it gives me a chance to re-interpret the material more and more. It's just a lot more visceral."

Thirlwell has consistently distanced himself from his audience with each name change on his records (i.e. *Scraping Foetus Off the Wheel*, *Foetus Uber Frisco*, *You've Got Foetus on Your Breath*, etc.). Though *Foetus* remains a constant, people are never sure if it is the same person making the records, especially considering the different styles each disc encompasses. "In terms of ruining the closeness with the audience," he explains, "a lot of that has been done through poor distribution and poor promotion especially because people don't know that [the records] are out there. But I like there to be a mystique about Foetus. I like the element of confusion."

"Anything I do, as soon as it's a different name, it's a new process whereby I have to educate people as to what that new project is. It's like cutting my throat everytime I start with something new. But, I wouldn't have it any other way because that's what I want to do artistically, and I'm not about to

compromise the artistic merit of my work. I felt [working on my own] was the most honest way of doing it despite the fact that I didn't know what the hell I was doing. I knew that I would have the pure expression of myself, and have no one to blame for my mistakes."

Thirlwell has always managed to bring his trademark elements to each and every recording so that *Foetus* is etched somehow on the project's spine. Though his earliest work may seem tame or primitive compared to latter efforts, his off-kilter odd sense of humor was always present. By the third *Foetus* album, *HOLE*, the niche was carved. When the British music paper *New Musical Express* listed the top 100 albums of all time, they listed *HOLE* as a record that just missed (#101 actually). It warrants the upper '70s at least. The two follow-up full length albums *NAIL* and *THAW* showed a greater involvement with violence and anger. The various singles and EPs released over the years (many appear on *SINK*) may seem less challenging or more commercial on the surface, but are actually some of the most gut-wrenching of his catalogue.

The anger found in Thirlwell's records is born from within, a

---

**"TO WORK WITH A BAND GIVES THAT EXTRA SLEDGEHAMMER OF POWER. "**

---



tion to external and internal forces. Rather than just act on impulses, Thirlwell creates music. "I would feel a lot more frustrated if I didn't have an outlet like I do. I'd go crazy if I didn't have that pressure of being able to create bearing down. I have that pressure to create, but it isn't to say that I don't love doing it. A lot of it is guilt; I feel guilty if I am not being creative," he says.

Aside from the Foetus work, Thirlwell has collaborated in the past with others like Marc Almond, Matt Johnson, Nick Cave, Lydia Lunch, as well as Roli Mosimann with whom he formed Wiseblood and released the album *DIRTDISH* in 1987. Once again, Thirlwell is now on the verge of releasing an onslaught of material over the next year. "I have two twelve inches and an LP under the name Steroid Maximus which is all instrumental work. It is myself in collaboration with a bunch of other people [Hahn Rowe, Roli Mosimann, Lucy Hamilton, and Away, the drummer of Voivod, among others]. Then there is a new Wiseblood EP called *PEDAL TO THE METAL*, a Clint Ruin/Lydia Lunch 12" cover of "Don't Fear the Reaper," and then a double live album of this band." If that isn't enough, there's more Foetus material due late next year.

"This is the music I've always made. It's what I want to hear," he insists. Thirlwell brings together various forms of music to create a

new form that barely resembles its influences. From big band, world beat, industrial, classical, etc. he draws inspiration and ideas and fuses them together in anti-rock fashion. His sound and style has attracted enough attention to spark imitators, but their results always fall flat of the original. Thirlwell says he realizes this, and though these mimics tend to irritate him, inside he knows he still hasn't reached the limit of his own talent.

■