

Brainwashed - Foetus, "Soak"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 02 February 2014 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 03 February 2014 00:14



Well, I can honestly say that I have never heard another album quite like this one and I presumably never will again, as *Soak* is an extremely deranged and over-the-top effort—even by Foetus' inflated standards. That does not necessarily mean that I like it, but I cannot help but admire its complexity, variety, epic scope, and sheer operatic bombast. In fact, I am quite sure that potential likability was the furthest thing from Thirlwell's mind during these recordings, as *Soak*

resembles nothing less than a mad genius with seemingly unlimited imagination, time, and resources concocting the most kaleidoscopic lunacy possible simply because he can. We get to hear it, but this is clearly an album that Thirlwell made with himself as the target audience.

[Ectopic Ents](#)

Soak is billed as both a successor and a companion album to 2010's *Hide*, as several pieces were either begun around the same time or expand upon similar themes (like opera, for example). It is also a bit of a bizarre grab bag, however, as it takes some very unexpected detours after its absolutely apocalyptic opening. That opening is more than enough to make this an album worth hearing though, as the one-two punch of "Red And Black And Gray And White" and "Pratheism" is hard to top as far as sheer, overwhelming "what the hell is happening?!?" bewilderment is concerned. "Red and Black" for example, sounds like a red-hot jazz combo with a crazily virtuosic drummer absolutely tearing it up at strip club...mingled with a military march chant...and lyrics like "don't mess with my copyright!"

"Pratheism," on the other hand, brings back Thirlwell's recent opera fascination in the most epic, garish way possible. While it is only about five minutes long, it basically manages to sound like the whole world is ending. Also, it features some very non-opera touches like rock drumming and recognizable synth textures. I have absolutely no idea what to make of it at all, as it is just too crazy and head-explodingly over-the-top to even process. Anything resembling taste or

Brainwashed - Foetus, "Soak"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 02 February 2014 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 03 February 2014 00:14

subtlety is absolutely out the window. In fact, it is so brazen and unapologetic in its excess that it would probably make even Andrew Lloyd Webber or the most clueless of prog rockers blanch and look uncomfortable ("Uh, great job, Jim...but don't you think it might be a little...um...too much?").

The cavalcade of jaw-dropping excess slackens a bit after that (how could it not?), but returns with a vengeance later with a deranged horror-movie-soundtrack-meets-rock-opera cover of The Normal's classic "Warm Leatherette" and a Secret Chiefs 3 remix of *Hide's* "Cosmetics." Again, any sort of qualitative assessment is rendered impossible by my sheer, stunned disbelief. "Cosmetics" basically reprises the "ear-melting supernova" approach of "Pratheism" in even more extreme fashion, while Daniel Miller's minimalist, robotic synth gem is almost unrecognizably transformed into something that sounds like it belongs in a battle scene from *Lord of the Rings*.

The madness continues elsewhere in different form, as this already complicated, schizophrenic album is complicated still further by the glaringly aberrant McCartney-esque pop of "Kamikaze," which is made still stranger by the slight sneer of the vocals; the lush, classic Hollywood film strings; and the hard rock stomp of the crescendo. Yet another odd moment is a cover of Nino Ferrer's suave "La Rua Madureira," which starts off fairly faithful to the original, but becomes increasingly hallucinatory and carnivalesque before ultimately sounding like a fake John Williams score for an imaginary Middle Eastern epic.

In keeping with the dual themes of "film scores" and "mad eclecticism," Thirlwell also covers John Carpenter's theme to *Halloween* in a predictably insane techno-damaged maximalist way (and throws in a vocoder and some operatic vocals to boot). Yet again, I am left both blown away and scratching my head. As for the remaining songs, they basically offer more of same bizarre high-brow/low-brow/cartoonish excess collisions already described, though they are a bit less memorable. Thirlwell *does* let up the onslaught just long enough, however, for one delicate, creepy ballad ("Alabaster") to sneak in.

When all is said and done, I am left with exactly two thoughts about *Soak*. The first is this: Jim Thirlwell is at the absolute height of his powers as both a composer and a producer right now and can seemingly do anything...and chooses to do exactly that... then chooses to do it in the most extreme possible way. In fact, the fractured, jarring eclecticism of it all calls to mind a grotesque, demonic caricature of the loopy, anything-goes LAMFS scene. Secondly, this is about as difficult and uncompromising as music can get, which is kind of amazing: Jim is a successful, established composer at this point, yet he continues to make music every bit as

Brainwashed - Foetus, "Soak"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

Sunday, 02 February 2014 00:00 - Last Updated Monday, 03 February 2014 00:14

"outsider" as someone like Jandek. In any case, whatever the hell it is that Thirlwell did here is legitimately amazing. It definitely is not for me (at all), but it is undeniably a work of stunning force and originality nonetheless.

Samples:

- [Pratheism](#)
- [Warm Leatherette](#)
- [Kamikaze](#)