

MUSIC

SWANS – FEEL GOOD NOW (LIVE) (OUT NOW VIA WIENERWORLD)

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Those of a nervous disposition. Need not apply.

Even if you were (as I myself was) utterly entranced by last years 'Seer' record (an album of mesmeric beauty and gothic grandeur) you should approach this live record (a re-release from their 1987 tour) with severe caution. Swans were not the band then that they are now. This is primal, ugly, nightmarish music that has more in common with early Throbbing Gristle than it does with latter-day Scott Walker. Most of the songs captured here are taken from the groups 1987 'Children Of God' album, possibly one of their most brutal and uncompromising, performed live these songs are even more terrifying than

they are on record.

The churning menace of the almost 20 minute 'Blind Love' doesn't let up for a second with the echoing guitars and industrial clatter spiralling into an ever increasing chaos, underlined by frontman Michael Gira's pained bleating. Listening to it through headphones is akin to being buried alive in cement. Needless to say those of a nervous disposition need not apply. Only the piano ballad 'Blackmail', sung by the ethereal Jarboe represents any form of relief and it's presence here is like being kissed tenderly by a beautiful stranger in the midst of a gang-rape.

Elsewhere 'Like A Drug' is an oddly enchanting industrial mess that wouldn't have sounded out of place on an early Einsturzende Neubauten record, a clattering firestorm with one of the most intense vocals performances surely ever captured on tape. It's atonal and unpleasant (like much here) but it's also oddly cathartic and strangely addictive. 'Blood & Honey' meanwhile still stands as perhaps my favourite Swans song, a post-metal dirge that pre-dates the entire genre by more than a decade, it's a genuinely absorbing listen, even more so captured here so a typically harrowing Jarboe performance. It's telling that Jarboe would go on to perform with Sunn O))) as the template for much of their output can be found here in these dense, black velvet folds. 'Children Of God' meanwhile is the closest thing here to a 'conventional song' but that doesn't stop it from being a work of unbridled hatred.

It's true that over 75 minutes it might all seem too over the top but surely that's the point? I've always been fascinated by 'extreme' music and as such have always been fascinated by Swans and this albums has reminded me why. Yes Gira is capable of producing some truly beautiful music but he's also capable of producing true aural terror. Needless to say if you ever thought Rammstein or Nine Inch Nails was 'a bit much' then you have no business here.

These recordings are more than 25 years old and all the remastering in the world couldn't sort some of the more obvious problems (audience chatter in the quieter moments, a muddled mix) but that's part of the charm and music this horrid would sound ridiculous with a crystal clear mix anyway. If you're a fan I recommend this album without hesitation, if you're just starting to get into the darker side of alternative music though I'd say you're better off dipping your toes somewhere a little more forgiving before tackling this crusty, foreboding document of one of the worlds most uncompromising groups at their most confrontational.

<http://www.swans.pair.com>

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