



Words About Music
From
Greg Burk & Friends

Rhino, “Dead Throne Monarch” (Arctic)

There’s a low-level buzz on this emerging trio from Bilbao, Spain, where los gentes seem to be tuning in on stoner rock a decade or two after the fact. Time disappears, though, when the stone rocks this rude. I wouldn’t exchange three Wolfmothers, two Zoroasters and The Sword for one Rhino.

So you say anybody can play riffs this dumb. Yeah, but few can play ‘em with the same blood, the same fire, the same evil. Few possess a drummer and a bassist like Julen Gil and Sergio Robles, who lag just enough to open up the hugeness as they thunder down way low with cymbals ever a-sizzlin’. And no insult to the genre, but a bongosucker outfit has never boasted a frontguy who f*ckin SANGS like guitarist Javier Galvez. Dude reveals his talent slowly, but by the time “Dead Throne Monarch” has abdicated, you realize he can not only barf and croak, he can virtually toast neo-Jamaican style, and unleash a tortured falsetto, and harmonize with his own doomy balladry, and even whup Layne Staley at the crushed-junkie moan game. Galvez doesn’t come off like a peacock, either, just a hellbent human with a bellyful of bile.

Take yer pick of antecedents -- Kyuss, Sleep, Black Label Society, etc. -- but the album title most strongly recalls Electric Wizard, and so do the dirty guitar tones and mucky riffs, which follow every song through several changes of mood and tempo. Savor the pug-ugly slow riff supported by tumbling toms on the title workout, or the twitching meaty one that follows the acoustic intro of “Promise of Storm” (which blew me away with guest Mikel Piris’ ox-horn sax solo). Or select from the assortment provided by the 15-minute “Funebre,” which could’ve been a third shorter but it’s still a great moment when, after eight minutes of dull-ax hacking, the butcher shakes off the gore, staggers to the door and stomps off with blade swinging, succumbing only at the end to a migraine minute of blinding feedback.

Some of this can get samey, but there’s plenty of variety when you consider the nearly all-acoustic “Wendigo” (Alice in Chains unplugged), the sludgy bolero “Pale Horses Coming,” and especially the harmony-enhanced metal tango “Bahamut,” whose Tangier-to-Shanghai world feel could go over strong with System of a Down eclectophiles.

The slab coulda stood more shred, the one rock facet where Galvez apparently does not cut. If Rhino would add a lead guitarist . . . of course Galvez must be tired of hearing that, just as Jack White is weary of dopes like me whining about no bassist in White Stripes. Shaddup, me. Okay.

The cover and the lyrics artfully conflate de rigueur Christ-bashing with a sophisticated absorption of horned pagan mythos. Wha? I mean, the whole package is righteously sick. Sick as a downtown hospital.