

Rhino - *Dead Throne Monarch*

Review by JJ Koczan (StonerRock.com)

Arctic Music Group

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Reading about Spanish trio Rhino before I ever heard them, their sound was described, more or less, as “thrash-meets-doom.” I sat for a second and speculated, “So it sounds like High on Fire.”

It’s true, parts of *Dead Throne Monarch* – Rhino’s second album in as many years – show a resemblance to or influence from the increasingly seminal San Francisco speedlords, but there’s more to their sound than mere Pikerries. Guitarist/vocalist/main songwriter Javier Gálvez has been in sundry thrash and death metal bands for two decades, and he certainly brings that sense of brutality and urgency - if not always the speed – to this project.

The brutal groove that pervades throughout could be measured as a more diverse take on Birds of Prey’s visceral attack, and though Rhino does change things up with shades of raw doom and sludge, grunge and even acoustics, the jump from one to the other is rarely so outlandish as to interrupt the solid head-nod/bang the previous part spawned. That is, where every time Soilent Green locks in a decent groove they only keep it for two measures before going onto the next thing, Rhino isn’t afraid to ride it out for a while. Chalk it up to the differences between doom and grind.

*Dead Throne Monarch* opens with the title track and some nasty, mostly-indecipherable slurred snarling from Gálvez, while bassist Sergio “Rambo” Robles and drummer Julen Gil march in thunderously metallic lock step. As much as Gálvez proves over the next several tracks to be the star of the band – mostly because of his varied vocal approach – Robles and Gil also show themselves as essential from the outset. Every member of the trio performs strongly, and as the more blatantly High on Fire-derived “Reins of the Warlord” shows, they’re all needed.

Gálvez employs a gruff, throaty voice on “Reins,” which sits well atop the sludgy groove, but as the song crash lands into the nine-minute highlight “Earth Reclaims the Usurper,” the atmosphere takes a trench-bound nosedive into doomed riffer madness. Shades of Down crop up at 7:23 with a guitar-led charge similar in mindset to “Bury Me in Smoke” – not the only time this happens on *Dead Throne Monarch* – and the culmination of the song shows just how massive and unrelenting Rhino can be. Though the opening of “Bahamüt” sounds so much like Nile I had to check and make sure it wasn’t a cover (it’s not), even that isn’t out of place as it transitions into start-stop aggression and another vocal change as Gálvez works some drawn out Alice in Chains harmony in with his shouts.

By this time, it’s clear that despite the Bilbao residents’ superficial simplicity – the name, the thrash/doom des c r i p t i o n s, etc. – there’s more to *Dead Throne Monarch* than just one influence or sound. They offer a shorter, thrashier cut with the drum-launched “Pale Horses Coming,” which serves as a suitable lead-in for the 15-minute epic “Funebre,” a song that would close many records. Skies darken with clouds drawn in by slow, lumbering guitars and insistent tom-work from Gil, and the track reveals itself as not only the longest on the record, but the deepest foray into doomed recesses. A soulful, Soundgarden-esque, oft-unhinged multi-tracked clean vocal from Gálvez provides another album highlight, and I can only imagine the smiles that came across Robles’ and Gil’s faces the first time they heard the riff that propels the second half of the song forward at 7:52. If the one that came across mine is any measure, they would have been considerable.

Inevitably, even as the song runs at full-speed, “Wolf Among Black Sheep” was destined to be anti-climactic. There’s a reason records end with the long-ass, killer doom cuts – because following them is hard as hell. In a different place, the *Surrounded by Thieves*-ism likely wouldn’t suffer such a fate, but as all of the 3:57 run time is needed to recover from the 15:02 preceding, the song is too easily overlooked. The melodic vocals (more AIC, and well done at that, especially considering it’s only one dude doing them) reappear on the slower, acoustically-introduced “Promise of Storm,” and by the time the Yob “The Mental Tyrant” esque triplet riff arrives following an imposable