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Arctic Music Group Releases



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Where we dissect some old releases from the Florida based label.

A bunch of old releases from the Ft. Lauderdale based label Arctic Music Group fell on my lap the other day. Some are so obscure, I had never even heard of them. Like fucking never. Some are actually from bands headquartered only minutes away from Deaf Sparrow's central offices, while others come from European countries. Regardless of their quality, which ranges from the incredibly shitty to the a-OK, they all deserve at least a paragraph.



There is nothing necessarily wrong with Burner, except that they kind of suck. This South Florida quartet actually counts a few semi experienced regional musicians that once belonged to bands you may have heard of. Burner was formed back in 1999 by Divine Empire guitarist John Paul Soars and drummer Greg Threlkel who were later joined by former Paingod/Raped Ape guitarist Mike Pucharellie. The last piece of the puzzle would come in the form of funk vocalist Cliff Denny, who truth be told is as good as anyone else in this band. The record in question, *One For the Road*, was actually released back in May 25th 2002, which, because of its style, is about seven years too late for it to have any relevance. But is not only a problem of timing. The curious thing about *One For the Road* is; if we separate each instrument, it actually sounds like a pretty decent idea, but assemble the sounds together and it sounds like a highly derivative blend of a softer Pantera and that shitty band that got some radio airplay a few years back Loudmouth. Really, Burner's music has aged worst than Michael Jackson's nose. What's good about it? Guitarist JP Soars (he's also done time in Malevolent Creation, who's very own Phil Fasciana is an A&R for the label and who actually signed the band) has some great chops and displays great taste in some of his solos. The problem is in the songs themselves; they are not that good. In countless occasions Burner makes some attempts to get out of the rock and roll mode via some brutal cookie monster growls. The results are not as awkward as one would expect, but still man. Pass.

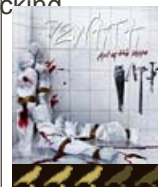


Next up are Celebratum, of whom I am surprised, I have never of before. They hail from Norway, so you wouldn't fancy yourself a mind reader just because you could tell they played black metal. The band has a little over 400 friends in their MySpace page so I would advise them to long onto the site and start hitting everyone just to spread the gospel, 'cause shit if you are from Norway, wear corpse paint, are blasphemous as fuck, have at least one full-length officially released in the States, and yet absofuckinglutely no one knows who you are, then it may just be about time to invoke the dark lord for some promotional help. Or log into MySpace. *Mirrored Revelation* is Celebratum's first official release and shows a pretty capable black metal band. All the traits of the genre are on display here; cold, shrieky, misty, vocals, along with some of the frostier kind, along with some pretty fast riffage, and blast-beat galore drumming. Not bad by any means, but is highly Norwegian, and therefore unless you are absofuckinglutely kickass, no one is going to care about your band, which happens to be the case with Celebratum.

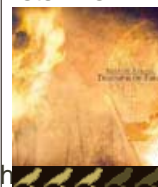


Stereochrist? I saw the band's name and twisted my body not because I am a fucking worm and wanted to move a little closer to there but because I thought it was a bit of a

pissy name. That's a bit short of shitty by the way. Actually, this Hungarian quartet used to be called Super Natural, so in all sincerity Stereochrist, sounds fucking brilliant in comparison. Stereochrist plays a pretty light on its feet take on doom, so I really wouldn't call them doom. Maybe more like stoner; really close to some of the most low-density material of Spirit Caravan and the likes. *Dead River Blues* was recorded in their native Budapest in the summer of 2003 and released back in 2004 and is a well-rounded debut filled with blues based riffs that wisely avoid sounding like fucking Pantera, and more importantly, don't recall Loudmouth at all. I would suggest guitarist to JP Soars to move to Budapest and joins these fuckers; then Stereochrist would really sound much more killer. At least the solos would be better.



Denata, like their official site proclaims it, play 'pure fucking thrash metal'. The band broke up in 2004 so I guess, that's not very important anymore. *Art of the Insane* was released back in 2003 and was the band's third full-length and fourth overall recording. It features a hardly outstanding but thoroughly competent take on old school thrash metal. In a way, Denata sounds like many of the current revivalist thrash metal bands, except they don't go into crossover territory (no Bay Area guitars, nor hardcore vocals), the band keeps the solos to the minimum and for the most part adhere to the death thrash movement of the 90's. The vocals are actually quite extreme, but their enunciation is clear. Think of Sadus and we are in the same ballpark. The song "Prophecies" actually has a pretty choppy cut in the middle which segues into an acoustic part and then clumsily heads back into regular thrash metal. Whoever produced this should have been given an enema; one of the members actually lists his occupation as 'anal inspector', so no need to outsource the task. *Art of the Insane* closes with a cover of Celtic Frost's "Morbid Tales" that's well...pretty thrash metal.



Like their label, Kult Ov Azazel also hail from sunny, jolly, happy and beautiful Lauderdale and has been together in one form or another since 1999. *Triumph of Fire* is their debut full-length and features some especially sick drumming, some of which actually sounds a bit mechanized, especially the double bass, which comes off as totally soulless and pretty much programmed. At the time of the recording Kult Ov Azazel actually had no drummer so they recruited Gus Rios who actually took lessons from Sean Reinert (Cynic, Death) and who plays in his own death metal outfit Upon Infliction. *Triumph of Fire* is fast as all hell, which is the best and the worst about the album. In small doses is bound to inspire some wows but after a while the retentive speed gets old and you wish for more of an effort to build decent songs instead of pure shredding speed.



The following record is titled *Kill My Super Ego* and if I was there, somewhere in the vicinity of the band, I would have been the first one to hand them an AK-47 or a bazooka just to make sure they get it over with. Colour Trip has been an actual band in one form or another since 1991, but along the way they've morphed into this. According to the band's bio their third release *Full Time Function* established the band among the best metalcore bands. Not sure how much of a departure the album I hold in my hands is in comparison to *Full Time Function* but judging by the flat songs of *Kill My Super Ego*



I find no traces of metalcore anywhere. Instead, what we get is chunky groove laden riffs with very simple structures, and the immensely gravelly vocals of Elmer Keineke. No guitar solos in sight, not very trippy nor colorful either. This is apparently one band that took its musical career very seriously. So seriously indeed they relocated from Germany to the States. That must have been a shitty move; as *Kill My Super Ego* was released back in 2002 and we've never heard from Colour Trip again.

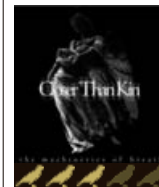


And oohhhh!!! This one sort of sounds a bit futuristic. Like this band probably once played straight up death metal, but heard Fear Factory and their collective minds were blown to smithereens. That, plus there are some nu metal traces that are plain motherfucking shitty. But on the other hand these Finns are signed to the good folks from Firebox and in this debut release, *Roadmap of Pain*, the band occasionally switches into full on death metal mode and they kind of kick ass. When at full speed, some orchestration is added and Total Devastation (pictured above) acquires this quasi

black metal vibe that's a bit evil, a bit cliché and just a tad exhilarating. Good for the few seconds it lasts. The problem is simple; for the most part, Total Devastation sounds quite derivative with plain and simple nu metal riffs, a few of which are nicked from bands like Machine Head ("Disguise" apes a song from *The More Things Change*), and most of which sound like a less expert Fear Factory. The best thing about this band is by far vocalist Jaakko Heinonen who has a brutal growl that, though also quite generic, has enough talent to front a better band. Dudes have cool beards but that's not enough.

And Closer Than Kin is no better. Too bad, because for the most part this Massachusetts hardcore band shows some skills, some nice tempo switches, some tasty solos to spice up all those hardcore excesses and err... that's about it. Let's go by parts; first of all, what the hell does the album title *The Machineries of Breath*, means? It really makes no sense, but hell, I could not care less. It's not about that, and what is about is the music, which for the most part I can imagine that way back in 2003 when this was released by both Artic Music Group and Punctuation Records it actually kicked some ass. But ever since, this kind of emo tinged rock, filled with gothic overtones, some light ghoulish make up, both rough and clean vocals, the constant breakdowns, in other words the sweet mélange of heavy metal and hardcore has been done more times than Tracy Lords. So in retrospect, Closer Than Kin are hardly outstanding. Surprisingly enough *The Machineries of Breath* was recorded by none other than Steve Austin. I say surprising because the sound itself is quite tamed and lacks bite.

You can be a Republican, he can be a democrat and I can just be a foreigner with an opinion, but I think we can all agree on one thing; Code Black is perhaps one of the worst bands I have heard in my entire life. If I could give them a quarter sparrow I would, but I'll be nice and give them half instead. Code Black's 2004 release *Penetration* is one of the most awkward displays of metal music ever recorded. That may sound like an exaggeration but the levels of suckiness this album reaches from the first track ("Sound is All That Remains") on are literally unheard of. The most unfortunate aspect of the band is vocalist Rorri Quero, who I am not sure if he was actually listening to Code Black's music while he recorded his vocals. Matter of fact, it kind of sounds like he was on his own, the band recorded the music and this dude just went on by himself placing speaking and half-assed rapping some damn awful lyrics. Sure, it also sounds like he is actually going for an old school thrash approach but it does not work, with the production of Jean Francois Dagenais (Kataklysm, Malevolent Creation) and the band lacking cohesiveness. I could go on forever detailing how bad Code Black really is, but whatever your concept of suck is Code Black represents it. Did I mention that this band's guitarist is none other than Colour Trip's Mark Wolzenburg? Did he move all the way from Germany for this?



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