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Benediction - Killing Music (Nuclear Blast) Review by Chris Davison



My name is Chris Davison, and I am a fucking retard. There, I've said it. The reason for my self effacing introductory outburst? Well, for the longest time I thought Benediction were a second rate British death metal outfit that couldn't write a decent tune if they had a pistol held at the heads of their loved ones. I'm not sure why or when I formed this opinion, but I remember round about the turn of the 1990s that I was so sure that this was the case that I simply lost touch with what they were doing. Bare in mind that at that time I also had a very poor and misjudged musical affair with alternative tosh like Senser and Dog Eat Dog, which distracted me from my previous and subsequent monogamous relationship with

heavy metal. That all changed on a rainy Saturday in Derby in 2007, when I saw the revitalised Benediction (with new frontman, Anaal Nathrakh singer Dave Hunt), and "Benny Dixon" simply blew me away with their ferocity and the quality of their tunes.

For the most part, Killing Music (which is simply pun-tastic, guys), is straight ahead, old school death metal with no frills and a punky sound and attitude. This suits me right down to the ground. All the constituent ingredients for great death metal is here. We have decipherable but nether the less diabolic sounding growled vocals, grinding guitars that have a great sound, bringing to mind Napalm Death in their "Harmony Corruption" days. We have drums that sound like a belt fed .50 calibre being let loose on a sea of advancing troops, and the bass rumbles along in an extremely Bolt Thrower-esque kind of way – especially on the extremely catchy mid paced bombast of "Dripping with Disgust". Its somehow gratifying to hear veterans of the death metal scene coming back to a world which has become full of poseurs and ...well, for want of a better word, "twats", who take the trappings of extreme metal and subvert them for their own trend filled fashion -core products. "Killing Music" is not a product. It is an album made by musicians who have an apparent love for the music, and want to unleash it onto the metal buying public.

The production is at degrees both slick and yet retains that grit and spirit which is essential for good, biting aggressive extreme metal. All too often, modern death metal confuses a slick, punchy production with a decent sound. This just sounds authentically nasty and downright unpleasant in a way that I haven't heard in a very long time. From the song writing to the production, this album has death metal as a steel core. Benediction – I apologise for being wrong about you. Killing Music is unlikely to ever feel the ire of the trades description act. www.nuclearblast.de

Dolium - El Vampiro Attack (Parlour 9) Review by Steve Green



I must have a very filthy mind as I was expecting "You've Got Holes!" to be about something very different than the actual subject matter of the song. I should have looked at the title of this EP as the word Vampiro would have given the game away. You've got holes in your neck... is what I should have been thinking and this camp, gothed up to the nines romp is actually a lot of fun. Raw as hell and totally infectious, you cannot frown upon such an entertaining song. Is this musical genius? Not a chance. This is goth n roll, with a fun, punky-meets-garage attitude, and I like it.

This EP has 4 tracks, the first 2, You've Got Holes and (She Can't) Stake My Heart are

up-tempo and full of life. The latter duo are both slower in place and are nowhere near as good, with Coughin' In The Coffin being so bad that I had to stop it halfway through. So it's a shame that this release petered out as I really enjoyed the first couple of songs. www.myspace.com/dolium

Fall Of The Idols - The Séance (I Hate Records) Review by Steve Green

Fall of the Idols



I'm not a Doom aficionado like our resident merchant of Doom, Mr Chris Davison, but I know a good slab of misery when I hear it. Fall Of The Idols are free of any distractions, (ie: no keyboards or female vocals) and are just (merrily) plodding along in a world of absolute desolation. This is ponderous, utterly depressing and about as warm to the touch as this years so called summer. Yes, it's that fucking miserable and as the bell tolls for the start of The Conqueror Worm, I just know it's about to get even more depressing. To be fair though, I actually find this quite a pleasant affair as I find Doom a very therapeutic listen. If I'm unhappy and I throw on a Doom cd, it's always guaranteed to cheer me up.

No idea why, it just has that effect on me. But in the case of this album, I'm liking what I'm hearing, but I've not managed to smile once and my enjoyment has been limited to the tapping of my feet or the rare head movement in appreciation of the ghastly grooves.

To break the spell, there is the occasional chink of light. At The Birth Of The Human Shadow loosely reminds me of Cathedral from a decade or so ago, mixed in with more traditional, uplifting Doom, but for the most part, this album is simply a miserable beast that's determined to drag you down to its own gutter level existence.

www.ihate.se | www.myspace.com/falloftheidols

Held Under/Discovery - Anthology (Stormspell) Review by Metal Mark



This band from Preston, Washington began as Discovery as was formed by the Stevens brothers Michael (vocals) and guitarist Patrick. They formed in 1983 and plugged along recording demos and an EP, but didn't get signed. In the early 90's they changed the band name to Dorian Gray and had changed a few members as well. They were set to record, but decided to go with "Held Under" as the band name since they learned that there were other acts using the name "Dorian Gray". They recorded another demo and could still not get signed, but plugged along some more into the 1990's before disbanding. Okay, now I need to close the book on this history lesson since I have given you the background. That

will also free me up to get at the important matter, which is what is the music like? This is a two disc set with the first disc being the Held Under material which was recorded in 1991, 1995 and 1997. They follow a style of early power metal similar to Leatherwolf and Fifth Angel. They obviously were strongly influenced by classic metal acts like Iron Maiden, Judas Priest and the Scorpions, but they also have a definite touch of early progressive metal bands mixed as well. The Held Under disc has the bands more complicated and balanced songs plus the production is better. These guys were tight and knew how to manipulate their music with equal amounts of control and finesse. The vocals compliment the music with a broad enough range, but were a little low in the mix on several tracks.

The Discovery disc finds the band playing a style that's in the same ball park, but certainly more basic and little more loose in the structure. You can still certainly hear the potential and the talent even if the production isn't always spectacular. My only real complaint on this set is that I think I would have enjoyed it more if it were in chronological order with the Discovery disc coming first and Held Under second. That way you could hear the musical growth like it happened, but of course I can listen to it in that order now if I want to. I had never heard of this band before and don't know if their failure to get signed was due to the crowded market or that they just got overlooked. However the bottom line is that they were talented and they knocked out and fortunately for us they recorded these 29 tracks between 1986 and 1997 so they we can now enjoy them. www.myspace.com/heldunderseattle

Iced Earth - The Crucible Of Man: Something Wicked Part 2 (SPV) By: Joe Florez



Man oh man, there has been so much drama within this band from the Something Wicked Part 1 to now. While “Ripper” made an awesome addition to the band, things didn’t work out between him and Jon and I know a lot of fans gave him slack cause it wasn’t Barlow at the mic. Well, the fans spoke and Matt is back with his deep, dark and passionate voice that sends shivers up and down everyone’s spines. I have to admit, that I was also anxiously awaiting for his return too and hear what the final product was like. Let’s just say that everyone and everything picks up where A Tribute To The Gods left off. By that, I mean top notch musicianship and singing capabilities. All guns are blazing as Jon and the

gang barrel through your speakers with “Behold The Wicked Child.” Original drummer Brent Smedley hasn’t lost a step as he continues race through with precision. Jon’s riffing is always melodic yet catchy and dangerous. As for Matt, he hasn’t lost a step as he sounds just as good as before if not better. He hits the highs perfectly and his lows are just nuts. You can tell that everyone is vibing here cause it shows. While this one is fast, there are some chants that make their way on here just for that epic feel. The middle eastern/ethnic feel is also present as well. Despite Part 1 having a bit of experimenting, this disc is more straight forward, but done well. Jon sounds like he’s at war ‘cause his guitar work is furious and the band follows suit with no problems. However, there are some slight change-ups to keep things fresh. “A Gift Or A Curse” is an awesome ballad that has some nice percussion work and mellow guitar work, but things also get plugged in as well. Matt can sing any style without any probs and here is no exception. You can just feel it. I don’t care where you start this disc, each track is played to perfection and rocks out.

The story is now complete and left for you to interpret what it all means. I don’t know what was on Jon’s mind when he created this, but this one has everything that easily trumps part 1. It’s epic with a Hollywood soundtrack feel. It’s lean, mean, emotional and then some. I liked Ripper in the band, but welcome back Matt. All power metal fans and IE fans must grab this immediately. Zero disappointments and if you download this one illegally then you are a complete tool. www.spv.de | www.icedearth.com

Poisonblack - A Dead Heavy Day (Century Media) review by Sam Thomas



A Dead Heavy Day is Poisonblack’s third album, and has exactly the same line-up as its predecessor, “Lust Stained Despair”. Or, in other words, as Ville Laihiala has now permanently taken over from J-P Leppäluoto on vocals, it is the second Poisonblack album to sound suspiciously like Sentenced. Now before you go getting all over-excited about me slagging Poisonblack off, I’d better just point out that Sentenced are possibly my favourite Finnish band of all time. Although the minute I type those words, I can feel a large list developing: Amorphis, Charon... And I’d also better mention that I really liked “Escapexstasy”.

So all round then, this is a pretty satisfactory album as far as I’m concerned. And, more surprisingly, it did get a rather grudging “this is as catchy as fuck” from Steve, despite having first dismissed it as “wimpy shit”. It’s very much a continuation of “The Cold White Light” era, both in musical style and lyrical content, dripping misery and depression with every riff and chord. I’m sure I read somewhere that Finland has one of the highest suicide rates in developed European countries, a huge alcohol problem and a corresponding Monday morning absenteeism problem, and Poisonblack’s lyrics certainly reflect the darker side of the human psyche. Title track, “A Dead Heavy Day” is as full of disillusion and misery as you should have come to expect by now, but it’s not too long before the humour shows through with “Me, Myself and I”, a hymn to egocentricity which carries on the great tradition of having a laugh at the expense of the hangers-on. One day I really must count the number of references to suicide, death and unhappiness in Ville’s lyrics and see if he’s got any more cheerful since Sentenced disbanded – I rather suspect not.

In summary, then, “A Dead Heavy Day” is precisely the right title for this album. Poisonblack have morphed into a 2008 version of Sentenced and are now the rightful occupiers of the throne of Finnish misery. Catchy as it gets, dripping with melancholy, more references to death than a coroner’s court: what more could your dark heart desire? www.poisonblack.com

Reversion - King of Deceit (Kampas Records) Review by AJ Carlile



I had no idea what to expect from Reversion's first full album, King of Deceit. And after giving it a listen, I still wasn't sure what to make of it. But after a couple of playthroughs, I was finally ready to put pen to paper.

Reversion certainly aren't opposed to trying new things. The majority of the songs on the album feature a variety of unexpected segments. However, the end result of this playing around leads to a number of uncomfortable instances which rather ruin some of the earlier tracks. For instance, 'Enigma' opens with a blindingly fast synth intro, which comes to an abrupt end as the track proceeds down a much slower, vocal led route. Sudden changes

in, for instance, pace and vocal style may appeal to some, but to my mind, a number of the tracks on the album would have been so much better were they a little more consistent.

This almost experimental approach Reversion have adopted is a shame, as there are some moments of brilliance which tend to be marred by a few faults. In some of the songs, Aleksi Parviainen's vocals are quite remarkable. But he has an unfortunate tendency to scream as though he's being castrated, or otherwise tax his voice unnecessarily. The most obvious example of this is in 'Immortalized' though it can be spotted in a few other songs as well. Much in the same way, Samuli Federley's guitar is capable of producing some quality riffs, and some excellent solos, but the way they're distributed amongst some of the first six tracks seems more to their detriment at times. The same can really be said of all the members of the band.

'Hurt' and 'King of Deceit' stand out on the album, as they maintain a high standard throughout. This is probably because they're the only tracks on the album that maintain a set style. In 'Hurt', a deliberately slow, heavier pace is maintained in the entire track, with no sudden changes in pace, and no solos which would be more at home in another track. 'King of Deceit' is even more of a feat, as they manage to weave heavier verses along the lines of 'Hurt' together with more melodic choruses almost seamlessly, into something which, save for a strained scream toward the end, is really rather good. These last two tracks stand out in my mind as a portrait of what the band could have been. And hopefully, what they will be in future, because despite my reservations, I'd be quite intrigued to see what their next album offers. www.kampas.fi

Sesta Marconi - Ritual Karmasutra Kitsch (Self produced) Review by Chris Davison



It didn't start well. Sound effects of an (Italian) radio being tuned and detuned across the radio spectrum. I spent some time in Italy at the beginning of the year, and it bought back hilarious memories of the mangling of English to be found on their radio shows – for example, “Madonna – crazy disco queen – Like a Virgin”. Luckily, it gets a whole lot better as the CD wears on. This is good, catchy doom metal, which luckily is less annoying than the lengthy intro!

Falling somewhere between a traditional doomy sound that nestles somewhere near Sabbath in the Sabotage era, and the rock and roll influenced heavy metal sound of

Blizzard of Oz. Though weighing in at only four proper tracks, this is an very enjoyable listen that had me pressing the “repeat” button on the CD player to give it back-to-back listening marathons throughout the day. There are more grooves here than in a Lincolnshire potato field, and the music as earthy as the soil. If your head isn't nodding along to the infectious bass lines and rocking guitar riffs on “Skeletons Party”, chances are that you might well be dead. I would check in immediately with medical staff to assess your vital signs. Simple, effective drumming, clear warm guitar tones and dextrous bass all accompany the vocals which veer between an original, classic rock tone and an Osbourne like howl which sounds not unlike Sheavy. All in all then, just what the doctor orders when you want to return to a simpler time of metal when all that mattered was “is this a good tune”?

There are a couple of curveballs in here mind you, it's not all brain off good rocking. “LSWD” is a damn deal heavier than most other traditional doom tracks you might have heard, with an absolutely pulverising opening riff that gives way to slower, dirge like sections, before again morphing into a psychedelic kaleidoscopic doom-laden main refrain. It's certainly the stand out of the album and proof that Sesta Marconi don't just think in rigidly expressed genre conventions. It's a good disc, this, and great fodder for accompanying a pint or two. Bang that head. Just not too quickly. www.myspace.com/sestamarconi

Spread Eagle - Self Titled (**Lovember**) Review by Metal Mark



The debut from New York's Spread Eagle was originally released back in 1990, then it was re-issued in 2006 and when I saw it being distributed again in September I decided to get a copy to check it out. I remember seeing a few half-page ads for it in the metal magazines back in 1990. I don't know if I read negative reviews or if I just couldn't find it at my local record stores back, but for whatever reason I never got around to hearing it back then. In more recent years I began to see a lot of very positive reviews on it so I decided to check it out and see what all of the fuss was about.

"Broken City" comes bursting on with more guitar changes in the first thirty seconds than

many of their peers had in a whole four minute song. The groove is undeniable as they just ride this one out of the gate and hang on as it bucks and kicks all the way. Tracks like "Back on the bitch" and "Switchblade Serenade" are a bit more typical of the times, but just active enough to rise up and stand out. My two biggest complaints about hard rock back then and in general would be that they settle for bland rhythm sections and that the guitarists either can't or won't just rip loose on the rhythms enough. The rhythm section of Rob Deluca on bass and Tommi Gallo on drums are certainly well above the average and not afraid to step up and be heard. Guitarist Paul Di Bartolo is a monster just peeling off riff after riff with plenty of skill and precision with everything focused towards making the songs stronger as a whole. Vocalist Ray West is right in there screaming all the way and leading the charge. As a whole they remind me some of Skid Row, but more groove oriented and maybe a bit more versatile.

Should Spread Eagle have been big? I wouldn't say that necessarily, but they probably should have gotten more notice than they did. Yet it was a crowded time with so many acts being signed at one point, it was inevitable that not everyone was going to emerge successful and sometimes it was just luck of the draw or having your single or video hit at the right time. However Spread Eagle debut stands out as an example of enjoyable hard rock of the time and it has aged rather well to boot.

Thundertale - Milžinai (**Atra Musica Records**) Review by Nathan Ward



It isn't everyday you hear metal from our eastern European cousins, well not for me anyway. So when I was handed 'Milžinai' (Giants) I didn't know what to expect, all I was told is that ThunderTale are from Lithuania.

The album is power metal infused with tradition Lithuanian music, with all but 4 songs sung in Lithuanian, which is something different. The 4 songs in English are: 'Knights of the Burning Hill', 'Thunder Take Me Away', 'Is It Worth' and 'Dance in the Wind'. The sound of the album is similar to that of Hammerfall or Blind Guardian, with traditional Lithuanian instruments, such as the hornpipe, which adds a feeling of folk to the album. All

of these elements work really well together and create a great album to listen to. As I mentioned most of the album is sung in Lithuanian, which makes the album enjoyable to listen to. It's nice to see a band that chose to sing in their own language and another language; it adds uniqueness to the music.

All in all 'Milžinai' is a really enjoyable album, memorable melodies and lyrics, even if you don't understand the lyrics. I'd have to say that my favourite songs from the album are: 'Milžinai', 'Vienybės Dvasia' and 'Thunder Take Me Away'. So if you want to listen to something new and like bands like Blind Guardian, give ThunderTale a try.

www.thundertale.com | www.myspace.com/thundertale

Trees - Lights Bane (**Crucial Blast/ 20 Buck Spin**) By: Dave Schalek



Don't let the rather sunny, light sounding band name fool you. Trees, a quartet from Portland, Oregon, are bone shattering doom with nary an acoustical passage in sight. The not quite a full-length debut "Lights Bane", released jointly on Crucial Blast (CD) and 20 Buck Spin (vinyl), consists of two songs and clocks in at a mercifully short 28 minutes, unusual for the genre.

Take the glacially slow, dripping riffs and horrific feedback of bands such as Burning Witch, Khanate, and Boris' forays into blackened doom, and combine that with percussion that just serves to punctuate the madness as well as tortured rasps, and you end

up with a release that is definitely not going to be for everyone, even if you consider Sunn O))) to be high concept art. "Lights Bane" is at its best when the harmonics drone on for long periods between hits of the cymbals and snare, and the vocals approach a certain low level, muted hum. Other moments consist of the tortured rasps interspersed with percussion devoid of structure, resulting in rancid, cellar dwelling, blackened noise that is hard to stomach. That is, of course, the whole point of this exercise, and kudos to Trees for doing so in an efficient 28 minutes split evenly, more or less, over two tracks. Anything longer than that would be pointless.

"Lights Bane" is not for everyone, but those of you with a penchant, and tolerance, for this sort of blackened doom may want to seek out this release. Recommended within limits. www.crucialblast.net | www.myspace.com/trees00