



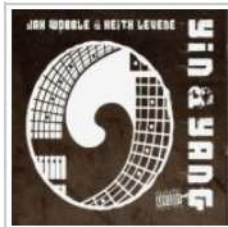
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**Jah Wobble & Keith Levene**

Yin & Yang

Cherry Red Records/MVD Entertainment Group

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Jah Wobble has literally circled the globe with bass in hand over the years, bulldozing through multiple musical boundaries in his quest to turn the planet into one big ol' groove. For his latest project, however, he's touched down on some familiar turf (the late '60s/early '70s British psychedelic music he listened to as a young Wobble) with an old bandmate from his Public Image Ltd. years, guitarist Keith Levene. The result is *Yin & Yang* – jarring, unsettling, and weirdly beautiful.

The tone of the outing is established quickly with the title track: the opening seconds are full of Jonas Persson's massive, distorted-sounding drums, lurching and yawing like something that's just lumbered up out of a cleft in the earth. Levene strikes a chord full of harmonics and wheeze a millisecond before Wobble arrives on the scene, exploding in a barrage of low-end rumblewomp and an F-bomb-laced rap on ... well ... *yin and yang*, oddly enough. Levene fires off abstract, chiming chords (he broke the sound ground that U2's Edge grew from) that fold neatly into the intensifying bass and drums; a bit of mad laughter glides through and recedes into the shadows; you can almost hear the spittle on the mic as Wobble rants; a bad end to it all seems imminent – and suddenly the vocal morphs into a multi-layered hippieglide that could be a distant cousin to the Dead's "Golden Road To Unlimited Devotion":

*What do you say? I'm out of the way ...**What do you say? Come and play ...**What do you say? I'm out of the way ...**What do you say? Come and play ...*

... as the bass continues to thud away and the drums roll and tumble beneath it all. It's a break in the tension (albeit an unsettled one), a chance to take in the song's deep mix and complex rhythms. When Wobble comes slamming back on another tear, the point of it all hits you right in the forehead: *yin. And yang. Ahhhh* ...

Things see-saw between Crazyland and Happy-smileyville again before vaporizing into another movement – the song's bridge, if you will – a plateau where Levene's guitar takes the wheel with breezy bits and burbling runs that end in a lovely harmonic. The Wobble/Persson rhythm stew returns to a full, rumbling boil; there's another flash of that mad laughter; Levene's guitar begins snapping and biting; Wobble raves – everything stops. A moment of silence, followed by a swirl of sound that begins from a pinpoint and quickly funnels out into a wallop final *slam* before going off into the ether:

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What do you say? Come and play ...
What do you say? I'm out of the way ...
What do you say? Come and play ...
What do you say?

Easy listening? Oh, God – no. Infectious listening? Oh, yes ...

Wobble can't help sounding like the man you'd avoid making eye contact with on the sidewalk: his reading of "Jags & Staffs" gives the impression of turning the air blue, but there's not a curse word in sight:

Jags and staffs and sods and epilogues
Mugs and thugs and monologues
Curves and power and grace and verve
Steel and sinew, lots of nerve
X-type, S-type, Tyson-Tel
As straight as a die, as clear as a bell

Think elder punk Shakespeare and get on with it: this album is not about the vocals – "Jags & Staffs" being a prime example. Marc Layton-Bennett begins easing some synth in behind Wobble's opening remarks; he follows that with a cautious, slow crawl through the jungle on the drums. Wobble drops his words and picks up his bass; Levene weighs in with angular appliques of sonic six-string; layers shift; colors blossom and retreat. There are no lead instruments here – just mesmerizing sound shapes.

Elsewhere, *Yin & Yang* offers all sorts of adventures: a cool hipster ride down South ("Mississippi" features some jim-dandy hallelujah organ by Persson); classic Wobble bass grooves ("Strut" and "Vampires" – the latter featuring apropos vocals by Little Annie); and a way-cool cover (Wobble's opening warble of the lyrics to "Within You Without You" provide one of those "Wait – isn't that ...?" moments; it's Levene's sinewy guitar that eventually verifies your suspicions).

Two stand-out guests are hornman Sean Corby, who drives the funky "Fluid" way over the top and vocalist Nathan Maverick, whose performance on "Understand" recalls another old mate of Wobble and Levene, John Lydon. (The dub version of "Understand" closes out the album – a final chance to wallow in thick bass goo.)

Survivors of their own selves and masters of their instruments (who go virtually unrecognized for the influence they've had on so many players who have emerged in their wake), Wobble and Levene have crafted an album that is entirely theirs – in the best of ways.

Madmen? Perhaps. Talented madmen? For sure.

Brian Robbins hangs his hat (a neat red, gold, and green one that his wife knit for him) at "www.brian-robbins.com": <http://brian-robbins.com/>

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