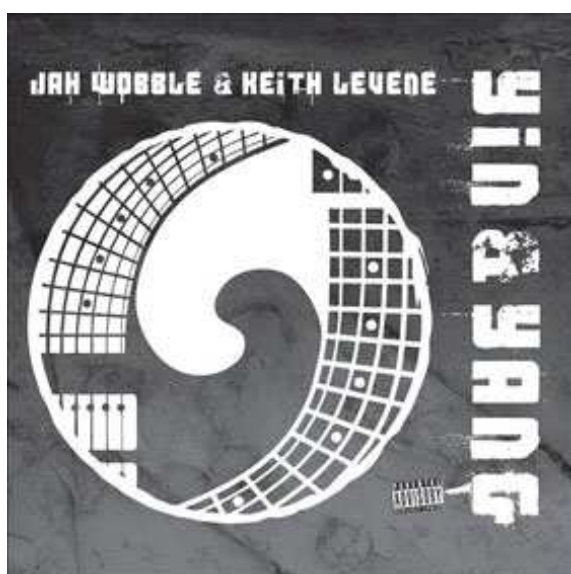


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Album Review: Jah Wobble and Keith Levene – Yin & Yang



Not that anyone asked, but we now have an answer to the musical question: what might a [Public Image Ltd](#) album sound like without the involvement of **John Lydon**? The new album *Yin & Yang* is credited to **Jah Wobble** and **Keith Levene**, two prime movers of PiL during its most creatively fruitful period. And not to take away from Lydon's considerable (no, really) talents, but these guys are *players*: Wobble is a thunderous, dub-influenced bassist (and lyricist), and Levene is an imaginative guitarist. As the liners tell us, all basses and guitars on *Yin & Yang* are by the duo, otherwise assisted by a very short list of musicians; Wobble handled production, "editing" and mastering.

The songs are rooted in arresting riffs and hooks – often built around Wobble's snaky bass lines, as on the instrumental "Strut" – and Levene's varied guitar work conjures all sorts of textures out of his axes: jagged, atonal skronk, lovely acoustic picking, and sexy circular riffage...sometimes all in the same song.

Sometimes, Wobble declaims his lyrics like a street corner poet: this approach forms the centerpiece of the title track and "Jags & Staffs," the latter featuring some noisy guitar and beats slowed to near the stopping point. Wobble's bass lines on many of *Yin & Yang*'s tracks will test your system to its limits; listening to this album on stock computer speakers is not recommended.

It wouldn't be accurate to call this album punk, but it doesn't easily allow classification into any other box, either. Dub-metal-trance, maybe? And then just when you think you've pegged the album's style, "Mississippi" comes on: it's nothing if not a pop song, sort of a [Rolling Stones](#) or [T. Rex](#) from another dimension, filtered through a cassette deck with serious oxidation problems. Its so catchy, it's completely unnerving. Then there's the matter of a

ghostly, warped cover of [The Beatles](#) ‘ “Within You Without You.” In the hands of Wobble and Levene, the [George Harrison](#) composition is transformed into some sort of dub extravaganza built around *Revolver*-esque bass lines and featuring some vaguely psychedelic guitar work from Levene. Key pieces of the song are broken down and reassembled, in a way that recalls the methods – if certainly not the sounds – of modern jazz.

The instrumental tracks on *Yin & Yang* are often built upon a hypnotic bass figure from Wobble, and some heavy-but-simple drum work, leaving plenty of space for Levene to layer his guitar work; this approach is the hallmark of “Back on the Block” and “Fluid,” though the latter features some atmospheric horn section (trumpet and flugelhorn) work as well. “Understand” sounds like it would have been the ideal place for Lydon to make a guest appearance; instead it’s one **Nathan Maverick** on vocals. The production style throughout is dry and intimate, suggesting that the duo could reproduce this stuff in a live setting quite well.

A strange and alluring “psychedelic dub” album, *Yin & Yang* shows that thirty-five years after they were half off the team that made the postpunk classic *Metal Box*, Jah Wobble and Keith Levene have plenty of jagged ideas left in ‘em.

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