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Global Music With a New York Edge

Jah Wobble and Keith Levene Revisit New Wave History with Their First Full-Length Album Together Since 1979

by delarue

The musical core of classic-era Public Image Ltd., bassist [Jah Wobble](http://www.myspace.com/jahwobble) (<http://www.myspace.com/jahwobble>) and guitarist [Keith Levene](http://www.murderglobal.com) (<http://www.murderglobal.com>), reunited memorably last year, touring and then releasing then their Metal Box in Dub ep. Today marks the release of Yin & Yang, Levene's triumphant full-length comeback album with Wobble, drummer [Marc Layton-Bennett](http://us.myspace.com/marclaytonbennett) (<http://us.myspace.com/marclaytonbennett>) trumpeter [Sean Corby](http://us.myspace.com/tomorrowswarriors) (<http://us.myspace.com/tomorrowswarriors>) and a handful of guests. As a paradigm-shifter, Levene's influence cannot be underestimated: echoes of his overtone-drenched style extend from the noiserock of the 80s through dreampop. It is impossible to imagine Sonic Youth, or for that matter, My Bloody Valentine, existing without him. This new album is a mixed bag – not all the songs stand up to repeated listening – but those that do are a fond reminder that Wobble and Levene can still conjure up the magic and menace of their corruscatingly iconic work together thirty-plus years ago.

Wobble remains one of the most brilliant, incisive, adventurous bassists around: here he leaves the Middle Eastern and Asian sounds he's become so adept at in exchange for a tersely murky pulse over brontosaurus drums. As with the songs on the iconic 1979 PiL Metal Box album, most of the new tunes are long and slow, Wobble's deep dub drive anchoring Levene's paint-peeling, incendiary, aching acidic washes of sustain, distortion and overtones. He's the rare guitar god who relies more on space than speed, minute timbral shifts more than rapidfire riffage. And yet, his sonic assault remains one of the most brutal in any style of music.

It's ironic that for all its bleeding upper midrange guitar and some wry quotes from PiL's Memories, the title track – a one-chord jam, basically – evokes the stadium-rock PiL as much as it does that band's classic new wave era incarnation. Over a dirty, distorted reggae bassline, Strut layers Levene in terse acoustic mode, adding darkly Brazilian-tinged lines, muted strings radiating feedback – this guy basically invented skronk. A long and completely unsarcastic tribute to British racing green, Jags and Staffs has the feel of a good outtake from Metal Box or Commercial Zone with swirly dub production, Levene unleashing poisonous, rising and falling waves of sound behind Wobble's geezer-rap vocals.

Until the song's almost over, you'd never know that Mississippi was these guys – the vintage soul-infused southern travelogue could be the great lost sarcastic track from White Light/White

Heat until Levene finally starts squeaking and skronking over a shuffling vamp. They brilliantly reinvent the Beatles' Within You Without You as twisted raga rock in 7/4 time, Wobble wryly referencing And Your Bird Can Sing on the bass as Levene eases his way in and then careens around with the drums. The album's most intense track is Back on the Block, a slow, tense, impatient, distantly menacing reggae groove that owes as much to Angelo Badalamenti soundtrack noir as it does early 80s Jamaican dubsters like Niney the Observer, Levene's wailing, spark-shedding riffage contrasting with swoopy synth ambience.

The heavy-handed fake funk of Fluid reaches for an electric Miles Davis vibe, unconvincingly, followed by Vampires, a brief dub interlude featuring a marvelously deadpan vocal cameo from noir cabaret legend/dub diva [Little Annie \(http://www.brainwashed.com/annie\)](http://www.brainwashed.com/annie). The album ends with the Metal Box reggae of Understand, with a lame vocal cameo from one of the guests; the dub version, which closes the album, is far more enjoyable, if closer to one of the dubs from the Clash's Sandinista than anything that ever came out of Jamaica. The album's out from [Cherry Red \(http://www.cherryred.co.uk/shopexd.asp?id=3880\)](http://www.cherryred.co.uk/shopexd.asp?id=3880) in the UK.

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