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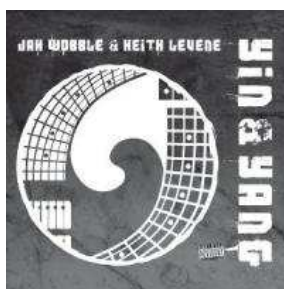
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Jah Wobble & Keith Levene: Yin & Yang

By **John Bergstrom** 1 April 2013
PopMatters Associate Music Editor



Jah Wobble & Keith Levene

Yin & Yang
(MVD; US: 11 Dec 2012; UK: 11 Dec 2012 (Cherry Red))

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When John Lydon re-formed Public Image Ltd in 2009, some folks were surprised and even disappointed that the lineup was absent two of its original core members. Bassist Jah Wobble and guitarist Keith Levene were, along with Lydon, co-founders of the band and played on its seminal early material. Wobble was invited to return to the fold but declined, and Lydon convened a latter-day version of PiL instead. Wobble and Levene toured as Metal Box in Dub, with a singer from a Sex Pistols tribute band standing in for Lydon. Apparently, Wobble and Levene got enough out of that experience to decide to record new material. Hence, *Yin & Yang*, which was released in December 2012 in the UK.

The album explores the heavy dub the duo were playing with Metal Box in Dub. A few different twists are added, and a few different styles are explored. Basically, though, *Yin & Yang* sounds reminiscent of a Bill Laswell or Adrian Sherwood production from the 1980s or 1990s. Largely an instrumental affair, it appropriately highlights Wobble's deep, circular bass grooves and Levene's unique, trailblazing style of metallic-sounding guitar. One fact you can be sure of is Wobble and Levene have not gone soft. There is plenty of clanging and ranting here, musically and vocally. Still, with a couple exceptions, the overall effect is that of listening in on a jam session rather than experiencing an album as such.

This impression is strongest on the album's all-out instrumentals. On "Strut", Wobble gets a nice, fuzzed-out groove going while Levene strums an acoustic. But the effect is slight, and almost too pleasant for guys with pedigrees like theirs. Levene spills shards of guitar throughout "Back on the Block", but it may not be enough to coax a second listen out of you. "Fluid", with its almost jazzy breakbeat, works better.

The vocal tracks feature Wobble delivering bilious non-sequiturs in his thick Cockney patois. Not an entirely unappealing prospect, but Wobble is no Lydon. Can't this middle-ager come up with a better object of rage than a late-model Jaguar? Wobble does conjure up an actual chorus on the title track. As for those twists, Wobble, clearly *Yin & Yang's* primary arranger, dabbles in dubstep on "Vampire". And "Mississippi" might just be the world's first and only "dub-rockabilly" track. It's suitably irreverent of both styles.

And is that Levene providing vocals on "Understand"? The lyrics don't get any more insightful than "You've got to try...", but at least his sneer conjures up a bit of punk attitude. Actually, "Understand" could pass as a better-than-average Gorillaz track. The easy highlight of the album, though, is a perfectly trippy, scorching yet reverent version of the Beatles' "Within You Without You". Maybe Wobble and Levene should have stuck to covers all the way through.

No, *Yin & Yang* does not come close to re-conjuring the knife-edge tension of *Metal Box*. It is a pretty good document of Wobble's and Levene's still-sharp chops on their respective instruments, but not really a whole lot more than that.

Rating:



John Bergstrom has been writing various reviews and features for *PopMatters* since 2004. He has been a music fanatic at least since he and a couple friends put together *The Rock Group Dictionary* in third grade (although he now admits that giving Pat Benatar the title of "first good female rocker" was probably a mistake). He has done freelance writing for *Trouser Press* online, Milwaukee's *Shepherd Express*, and the late *Milk* magazine and website. He currently resides in Madison, Wisconsin with his wife and two kids, both of whom are very good dancers.

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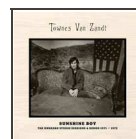
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