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Eerie Von

Bad Dream No. 13

Review by Bill Knispel

Most people know Eerie Von through his association with Glenn Danzig dating back to their days in Samhain, the seminal post-punk/hardcore band of the mid 1980's. Von's career predates those heady days, however, having been a founder member of the influential NJ punk group Rosemary's Babies. Since leaving Danzig following the tour for his fourth album, Von has carved out a little niche of his own musically, with a variety of releases that echo the NY/NJ classic punk/hardcore scene of the 1970's and early 1980's.

Bad Dream No. 13 is not one of those releases. In fact, I'd go so far as to say this is one of the most experimental albums I have heard anyone associated with that musical scene release. There's little here that could really be classified as a "rock" song...while the liner notes state that no computers were used in the recording of this album, there's a plethora of loops, samples, and processed elements that really make me question this. Moving away from this, however, what we have are a baker's dozen of excursions musically to the dark side, with sinners, murderers and drifters all competing for their minutes in the spotlight. The music is sparse to the point of occasionally being almost non-extant, but the backing suits the sorrowful, despairing lyrics to a T.

Track by Track Review

A Cage, Is a Cage

Take one part semi-rockabilly, Elvis-ish vocals, add in a relentless processed drum beat, and a bleak stripped down guitar riff, and you have a recipe for a pretty dark album opener. "A Cage, Is a Cage" is just that. It's unforgiving, remorseless, and far less punky than I might have expected from Eerie Von post-Danzig. In fact, I'd have been interested to see this piece worked up in that band...it might have made for an interesting album track.

The Bone Drone

Yep, the title pretty much says it all. There's a bit of delta blues feel here and there, mixed in with some decidedly 1950's sci-fi film sound effects (is that a theremin I hear?). If "A Cage, Is a Cage" was dark, this song is even darker, if that is possible.

In the Shade

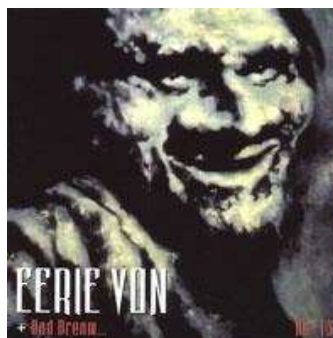
The liner notes say that no computers were used in the recording of this album. Songs like "In The Shade" really make me question this, because this is among the most techno-sounding pieces I have heard. It may be just manually created loops, in which case I am even more impressed. I could hear this being remixed into something pretty interesting, and Von's slightly Nick Cave-esque vocals here add a detachment that is, well....eerie.

Downontheslab

Four songs, four totally different vibes - "Downontheslab" is primitive country blues taken to the most extreme degree, with slide guitar, a single repeated musical motif, and sparse percussive accents to break things up.

2 Tears in a Bucket

A huge bass groove opens "2 Tears in a Bucket," and the more I hear Eerie Von on this album, the more I think his voice sounds like Nick Cave. Furthermore, the more I hear this release, the more I wonder why his material hasn't been as experimental as this. While one might find the wide disparity of track styles to be a weakness, I find it to be refreshing. Each song offers up something different,



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and "2 Years in a Bucket" is no different. Again, I could hear this being remixed easily.

Prelude to Death

Quite an eerie (pardon the pun) soundscape, this track is; stabs of synth or processed guitar, theremin sounds, a brief interlude before the intensity that follows.

Meet Death

Wow. "Meet Death" opens with subtle intensity, a pulsing, heartbeat-like bass line, sparse drumming, distant guitars all melding together to create a sound that knifes through in a cold, emotionless manner. There are slight bits of eastern/Artabig musical influence heard here and there, and again, I listen to this and wonder what might have been made of this had Von a) stayed in Danzig, b) Glenn Danzig was not solely responsible for authoring that band's songs, and c) he had been open to working on this piece. It has the same kind of dark, evil vibe that the best Danzig songs oozed, and it does so without effort.

Bad Dream

Von's vocals are processed to sound distant and detached, fitting another track with a somewhat blues-based sound. The bass groove is deep and without light, and his drumming is restrained and stripped back, befitting the basic arrangement. Pretty rock based for this album, "Bad Dream" is perhaps the least experimental piece on the release. I wish it had let go just a bit more when the song kicks into a faster beat about 3 minutes in; the restraint is admirable, but a bit more wildness would have done the piece wonders.

The Perfect Criminal

This number opens about as stripped back as possible...a single kick drum pounds out the beat, Von intones the words, and a single bass note eventually rises, developing to a three or four note figure. Finally some guitar (or is it keyboard?) is added; yet the song still sounds sparse and barren. Lyrically I hear a lot of Jim Morrison here for some reason.

The Velvet Shroud

Talk about spooky. There's something odd and disarming about music boxes and children's xylophone type toys, and opening a song on this album with that kind of sound is just asking for chills. A percussive loop follows, with buzzing, "hive of bees" guitar and pulsing bass creating the foundation for Von's waxing poetic on some vaguely sacrilegious lyrics.

Sing, Sinner, Sing!

One of the hallmarks of some of the best southern blues was the embracing of sin. Robert Johnson sang of it all the time, though his songs were tinged with fear and occasional desire to break free from sin and the devil. But at the core, there's a kind of bravado that can be heard in songs where the narrator almost gleefully lists all the things they've done...lives they've taken, hearts they've broken, things they've stolen. "Sing, Sinner, Sing!" falls into this category lyrically in many ways. Yes, there are tears, but there is also no regret for the actions taken to this point.

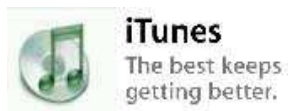
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I am not sure what to make of this piece. It opens with what sounds like a recorded tape from a doctor (psychologist? therapist?) outlining observations of his patient, who obviously suffers from a number of deep seated delusions and illusions of grandeur. A cuckoo clock follows, the cliché symbol of someone who's lost it, which is then immediately replaced by an odd sounding piano figure. Samples and recordings of laughter and other insane sounds pin the whole together, and the end result, while certainly different and almost avant garde, really doesn't fit the rest of the album at all.

Benediction #2

A title such as "Benediction" elicits certain images and sounds in one's head. Sacred, church imagery is to be expected, along with ornate, somber organ sounds. Well, organ tones are the foundation of this instrumental piece, a song that works far better in the context of this album than the preceding experimental sound collage. "Benediction #2" is incredibly effective in closing out this release from Von, and does so on a very disturbing, sorrowful note.





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