

But the vocal arrangements are what really set this album apart and aflame. Erik Grawsiö scorches earth and spits velvet, the multi-faceted slap 'n' tinkle of "Vista Vettr" is a delightful clutter of layers, and if Vikings and longboats don't show up on the listener's doorstep during the massive choruses of "Adils Fall" and "The Wolfheart," it's because the gods are busy, not because these aren't enormous paeans to ancient Scandinavia done via today's catchy metal. —KEVIN STEWART-PANKO



MIRROR
The Day Bastard
Leaders Die
CRUZ DEL SUR

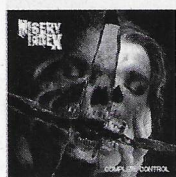
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Through the looking glass

Have you ever been to a festival of rock cover bands? There's no point being a snob about it; they're great fun. Just imagine a whole day of top-notch musicians doing note-perfect renditions of Rainbow, AC/DC and Iron Maiden. You won't get a better day out, and these festivals spring up all over European beach towns in the summer, including Cyprus. Why mention it? Well, the sheer joy of hearing your favorite heavy metal classics loud and live, inebriated on a locally brewed brain-cell-destroyer, is the perfect distillation of what Mirror sound like. Sheer joy!

Mirror may have started as an international supergroup of true metal dorks (featuring members of Electric Wizard, Repulsion and Septic Tank, plus killer operatic vocalist Jimmy Mavromatis), but they have become just a *super* group of old Cypriot men who like to get together and write shamelessly in the vein of Ritchie Blackmore, the Brothers Schenker, Iron Maiden and Riot, with a touch of the unsung, whether that be Tokyo Blade, Cloven Hoof or Ostrogoth.

Hey, everyone knows their influences since they wear them sewn onto their sleeves. And everyone knows that classic heavy metal is an utter delight. But what you need to know is, if you can't see Maiden or Rainbow, see a cover band. And if you can't do that, listen to Mirror. —LOUISE BROWN



MISERY INDEX
Complete Control
CENTURY MEDIA

6

Groundcore Day

Misery Index records have reliably sounded boss regardless of the quality of their actual content. The band was peeled from the womb as an especially capable entity—Tupperware-tight of course—but Misery Index are also one of those uncommon

outfits that has an inborn sensitivity to the sell-by date on any given riff. No passage overstays its welcome, no track puts its feet up when it's clearly time to mosey on. Hell, even though the production on their records has become way too hygienic for my primitive liking, it doesn't do much to civilize their innate ferocity or to pacify their bloodthirst. It all "works."

The problem at this point is that the band continues to ply precisely the same formula in precisely the same way again and again, and the result feels increasingly like a commodity as opposed to an actual experience. Yes, I can kinda-sorta recommend *Complete Control*—it does the proverbial job, but no more than, say, a carton of boxed wine would for a clutch of dinner party guests. The soul has gone fishin'.

All that said, there's plenty here to satiate the diehards. Misery Index's love for the occasional Phrygian-dominant clean guitar passage continues to gratify on opener "Administer the Dagger," and it's forcibly hair-raising when the band downshifts into the expected death/grind maelstrom. "The Eaters and the Eaten" fares even better with its intricately woven patterns and bouncing, sawtoothed accents; and the awesome "Reciprocal Repulsion" smokes the fucking house up, so you'll want to keep a spray bottle of vinegar handy for your upholstery when you crank it. But the pervasive familiarity is numbing. *Complete Control* is competent enough to earn a participation award, but does that sound compelling to you in a time of \$5 gas? —FORREST PITTS



NECHOCHWEN
Kanawha Black
BINDRUNE

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Lay of the land

Acclaimed releases from genre kingpins like Panopticon, Obsequiae and Falls of Rauros have certainly helped American folk metal distinguish itself from its stein-swinging European counterpart in recent years, but there's still a bit of a stink on those two words in some circles. So stinky, in fact, that you might be inclined to gloss right over Nechochwen's new album, having no practical use for braided beards, group sing-alongs or flagons of mead. What a rookie mistake that would be—*Kanawha Black*, the West Virginian folk/black-metal duo's fourth full-length, is an instant classic that should appeal to headbangers of every persuasion.

Those who have been waiting seven long years for a follow-up to the incredible *Heart of Akamon* are immediately rewarded with the devastating salvò of *Kanawha Black*'s title track, which sees guitarist/vocalist/group namesake Nechochwen and drummer/bassist Pohonasin make expert use

of distinctly melodic riffs, vicious blast beats, and passionate vocals over six and a half thrilling minutes. Everything that follows is a feast for the ears and mind alike, as the band's use of Native American artwork and lyrical themes (Nechochwen has Shawnee ancestry) infuses each musical moment with profound emotional gravity.

Of *Kanawha Black*'s many highlights, perhaps the most striking is the rich acoustic instrumentation that permeates nearly every crevice of the record. Nechochwen himself is a professional classical guitarist, so the acoustic passages he adds to standout tracks like "The Murky Deep" and "I Can Die But Once" aren't just prog fluff—they're fully realized, intricate movements that give each song a wholly singular personality.

—MATT SOLIS



PREDATORY LIGHT
Death and the
Twilight Hours

5

20 BUCK SPIN
**Stained glass
reverberations**

What's in a 5? What qualifies for such a middling, one-cheek-sneak of a score? Is it ho-hum music played competently to its maximum potential, or flashy ideas played into the ground with fumbling malaise? Nope. Neither. With this record, it's... I dunno. I just don't fucking know, man.

Obviously, I do know. I just don't want to say it.

In the shameless tradition of '90s *Street Fighter II* knockoffs, *Predatory Light* appear to lift most of their special moves, combo sets and character color palettes right out of a Negative Plane joint. Also, like some of those knockoffs, there's still enough action here that it might be worth playing, though the contrasts are damning: The rhythm section on these four long tracks rarely achieves *Stained Glass Revelations* density, and there's no subterranean warlock reverb on the vocals to deepen the profound otherworldliness of NP's bell-haunted records.

But that goddamn clean guitar tone and performance style is all over *Twilight Hours*, and the similar cascade of whickering melodies over the blackened delivery turns much of this record into an also-ran. I'm worried there's actually more to enjoy here, but I just can't hear anything but a Negative Plane smash 'n' grab. The title track sprinkles in a few moments of effectively morose doom, and the final song, "To Plead Like Angels," dirties up that lead guitar sound enough to let the overall compositional quality develop its own character. But by then, more than 80 percent of the record has already danced around in someone else's panties for far too long.