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REVIEW

DVD/CD Review: *Metalmania 2005*

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It was just over a year ago when I first experienced Metalmania – it was the 2004 edition of the long-running metal festival. The concert takes place in Poland each year, boasting an expansive lineup of metal from all over Europe. The festival offers great exposure to a good number of metal bands you may never otherwise hear of. This set offers a DVD covering the main stage, plus a CD giving you a sampling of the second stage acts. Like last year, I thought I would give you a rundown of the bands as they appear on the disk.

Darzamat leads the show off with "Storm," their only representation here. The song features a heavy trance-like riff with the song title repeated in succession, ad nauseum. I like the atmosphere created, but the song becomes tiresome in its repetition, and being the only song here, we are not able to witness what may have come after. The band features a male and a female lead singers, but we only really get the male lead. Interesting, if underwhelming.

Next up, for a pair of songs, is **Dies Irae**, which translates to Day of Wrath. Their performance starts with an extended introduction leading into the in-your-face blast of "Beyond all Dimensions," followed by "The Hunger." They are a death metal act playing to their home country of Poland. The songs are heavy and display some technical interaction and an interesting guttural vocal style. I loved the intensity of the performance, even if I

had no idea what the lead singer was saying.

They are followed by **ANJ**. I cannot say that I was terribly impressed by their two song offering. The lead singer/guitarist reminded me of a heavier Johnny Knoxville for some reason. The second song, "Power to Destroy," was an improvement over the initial cut, but they didn't really connect with me.

Now here is the first band to really impress me, purveyors of fine Viking metal, **Amon Amarth**. This is a band that I have very little experience with, but have heard the name for years. The disk has their performances of "Fate of Names" and the even more impressive, "Death in Fire." These guys are incredibly heavy and very tight. This is a band I would actually like to see live, and now I have to go get a CD! They have a fire and presence that just cannot be ignored.

With a four song sample, we get to see **Dark Funeral's** brand of black metal. The thing that really struck me about them was their speed and, within that speed, the existence of melody. It is an interesting combination that I have always been impressed with in the black metal genre. Watching their drummer was astounding, not the best I've heard but watching the sticks fly was crazy; I could see that he was not a hard hitter, but that allows for more speed. They were definitely solid, but not what I would call the best I have heard from the genre.

The Haunted was next with a trio of songs. We move away from the black metal, to a more thrash-inspired style. I have to say that I liked them a lot, and wish we had more than three cuts! They were truly heavy, delivering a crushing twin guitar assault and powerful vocals. I was surprised to find out they were Swedish, I would have sworn they were American, I didn't detect an accent from the singer. I guess I have another band's albums to look for now!

Slowing things down a bit and offering a more keyboard-tinged gothic sound is **Pain**. I liked the sound they had and the atmosphere they were able to generate. I would love to see a full set from this band. They reminded me of bands like Moonspell and Sentenced. The keyboards added a lot of atmosphere to the two songs. The second song, "Shut Your Mouth," was the stronger of the two, and closed their set at the festival. Very impressive.

Arcturus followed with a couple of weird experimental, medievally inspired songs. I had never heard of them, but they certainly had a unique sound. I am not quite sure who I could compare them to, and that is a good thing! The band is a departure from all of the death/black/thrash metal acts that had come before it. Their sound was heavily layered with guitars and keyboards and some excellent drumming. Definitely weird, positively interesting, very entertaining.

Turbo was next with three songs. They are the elder statesmen of this festival with over 20 years of history behind them, including being a part of the initial festival in 1986. They played a more old school style of metal than the rest of the acts. They were definitely solid and, despite the language barrier, they sounded great. It was interesting to see how they fit right in with the other, more extreme bands that appeared before them. Solos, steady riffs, and clap alongs were the order of the day.

Napalm Death added a little kick to the proceedings with their hardcore-inspired metal. Heavy and fast is what they were. I have never been a big fan of Napalm Death, but the energy and intensity they brought to the stage was undeniable. They are represented by four songs here with their wall of distortion. The sound created was nearly impenetrable. This won't win me over, but definitely adds a little crushing insanity to the mix.

The main stage headliner was a quartet of cellists – it was none other than **Apocalyptica**. They first came to my attention back in the 1990s with their album of Metallica covers, a unique concept to be sure, and one that worked exceedingly well. They have since gone on

to do more and more original work. It is a strange sight seeing them on the stage that had just played host to insanely heavy, guitar-driven acts. They have three songs here, each one better than the previous, culminating in their cover of Metallica's "Seek & Destroy." They capture the metal attitude, add a dose of emotion, and deliver it in a fashion that is unlike any metal band. They have to be seen to be believed. The sound grows and builds to epic proportions as the songs progress. These guys are truly impressive. Never did I ever think I would see a quartet of head banging cellists!

Overall, this is an excellent collection. It is a good way to get introduced to a whole bunch of new bands, and see some old favorites. I have enjoyed both of the shows that I have seen as I am always up to being introduced to something new. I realize for as much music as I listen to, there is much more I am not familiar with.

The concert runs nearly two hours and is presented in a widescreen ratio of 1.78:1. It looks good, and the colors are sharp and separated. Concerts can be very tough to shoot and they did a fine job with this one. The editing is also very good; all of the bands and their members get their share of screen time. The audio is also very strong. It comes in two flavors, Dolby Digital 5.1 and 2.0. The 5.1 track is really the only way to go.

Extras include a photo gallery set to some electronically styled music, which runs about fourteen minutes. There is also a Metalmania history which gives you listings of all the bands that have played each festival. It was here that I learned that two main stage acts were not represented on the disk, Katatonia and Cradle of Filth. Why they were not included, I do not know.

If you go to the Select Stage section, you'll find one of the coolest features on the disk, insightful interviews with the main stage acts. The interviews run about five to ten minutes each. In addition to that, all of the bands, main and side stage, have text histories.

Perhaps the best extra that really completes the set is the included CD, which features studio tracks from all of the side stage bands. Here is a rundown of the CD:

1. **Thunderbolt:** "Ashes to Ashes... Death to All" This song has a generic black metal feel to it, not terribly impressive, but not bad.
2. **Hermh:** "Fear of Blood" I like this song a lot. Evil vocals, heavy clipped riff, and nice use of atmosphere adding keyboards.
3. **Hedfirst:** "Time for Fight" This song reminded me a lot of Hatebreed style hardcore. Not bad, kind of catchy, but not really original.
4. **Hell-Born:** "Legacy of the Nephilim" Eh, nothing all that special outside of the cool evil vocals.
5. **Quo Vadis:** "Siodmy Krag" Very eerie opening, this was a cool song. It has a Tiamat like vibe to it.
6. **Pyorrhoea:** "Suicidal Masturbation" Straight up Six Feet Under style death metal. The vocals sound a lot like Chris Barnes.
7. **Supreme Lord:** "Death Metal Beast" Very fast and brief death metal track. I can't say there was much original about the song, but I liked the galloping riff.
8. **Mess Age:** "Everyday Paranoia" This is a very good cut, one of the stronger on the disk. It seems to blend black and goth metal with intriguing results.
9. **Abused Majesty:** "A Burning Army" Opens with a picked progression leading to the addition of a galloping background rhythm before the raw vocals kick in. Another good cut.
10. **Naumachia:** "Muertos" Interesting sound, unlike the others presented here, sort of Moonspell like, but with a heavier and more raw lean.
11. **Dead By Dawn:** "A Blind is Leading a Blind" Grinding and relentless. This song is heavy and doesn't let up.
12. **Valinor:** "In the Mist... Part III" This leads a bit more to the melodic/progressive side. Very good and a nice change of pace to close out the CD.

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Bottomline. This is a very good collection for any metal fan, particularly if you like these bands, but also for those looking for something new to listen to. You really can't beat the sheer volume of bands you can sample here. This is a festival that I would love to attend, but doubt I will get the chance; these sets will be my venue.

Recommended.



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