

Heard It All Before: The Metal Industry Goes Reissue Crazy, Pt. 1

Now, as someone who was born too late to fully appreciate what's commonly considered heavy metal's "Golden Age," i.e. the early and mid-'80s thrash and New Wave Of British Heavy Metal movements (I was born in '81 and, for example, feel a greater connection to death metal's '90s evolution than its more rudimentary '80s form), I am at very least interested anytime a reissue comes across my desk. Admittedly, there are cases where I could give a damn. They're not all gonna be *Reign In Blood*. But, since I, you know, make a "living"—and I use the word only in its loosest definition—off this, it's interesting for me to understand the storied history of metal and to discover the roots of the genre's many forms.

though I'm loathe to group them all together because, well, I like new stuff and I like writing about new stuff, it only seems appropriate to highlight these releases the same way the labels involved are celebrating metal's past. Next week we'll get back to new stuff. For now, let's



from the collective skull of Napalm Death; where At The Gates, specifically with *Slaughter Of The Soul*, spawned an entire league of similarly minded American and European bands. Their influence can still be seen today in each Lamb Of God riff that wasn't stolen from Pantera, and in countless other bands.

Entombed, as masters of the Sunlight Studios sound also heard in Swedish bands like Dismember, Grave and Unleashed, helped form continental Europe's answer to then-nascent American death metal. *Clandestine*, here presented with the *Monkey Puss: Live In London* DVD and career-spanning promo videos, is a time-capsule document whose intensity resonates particularly well today in light of acts like Trap Them, who, on their *Séance Prime* Deathwish Records debut, seek to modernize the classic approach—not to mention Entombed's latter-day work, which first went in a more rock-oriented direction, only to veer back toward classic death metal on 2001's *Morning Star*, 2004's *Inferno* and most recently on last year's *Serpent Saints*. To understate the fact, the album destroys. The mix is crisp and clear and the music sounds every bit as important as it wound up being.

I was curious at first why *The Haunted Made Me Do It* should be included on so illustrious a list of releases, looking at the slipcase package like a bouncer saying, "Who let you in here?" but, after revisiting the material—which now comes across like the evolutionary creative step Slayer always should have but never made—I think I understand it. Granted, the band (now on Century Media) have departed for less thrash territory, but *The Haunted Made Me Do It* was as pure a work of '90s thrash as you could ever hope to find, and thus, an integral piece of the label's history. Remember that bit in the beginning about the story of metal? Here it is.

The DVDs—the aforementioned *Monkey Puss* for Entombed, *Caught On Tape* included with *The Haunted Made Me Do It*, *Napalm Death The DVD* with *Utopia Banished* and a live set and 35-minute album documentary with *Slaughter Of The Soul*—should provide sufficient reason for anyone who doesn't already own them otherwise to check out the records. The hack/industry shill cliché in any reissue review is to say "Even if you have these records, you should buy them anyway!" and I won't say that, but I will note that each, in its own way, is a landmark release easily worth the time it takes to listen. They serve their purposes as reissues perfectly.

Winter/Into Darkness/Eternal Frost/Metal Mind

This is the perfect case of an album with which, unlike the above four, I have no prior experience or past association. As a doom obsessive, I've longed and longed for Winter records to magically appear in my collection, yet never got



around to remembering that when actually out CD shopping. Along comes *Into Darkness/Eternal Frost*, and I actually get the chance to hear what I've for so long known is a landmark band in my metal subgenre of choice.

By way of digression: I have no problem admitting that my "metal schooling" is incomplete. I didn't hear Death until I got to college, I jumped on the In Flames bandwagon in 2000 with *Clayman*, and I haven't been listening to Saint Vitus since I was three. I was, as they say and as I said before, "Born Too Late." Some you win, some you lose. I consider my education a perennial work in progress.

In light of that, the combination of the *Into Darkness* full-length and the *Eternal Frost* EP (originally issued as a compilation in 1999 by Nuclear Blast) is just the perfect antidote to my prior ignorance. At a lumbering 70+ minutes, it is monolithic early death/doom, coming off like the supergroup Trey Azaghoth (Morbid Angel) and Scott Weinrich (Vitus) never got around to forming. The songs are slow, labored and, at times, painful. I have a much easier time understanding acts like *dISEMBOWELMENT*, *Funeral* and even *Grief*, in Winter's admittedly darkened context.

But, like the best of reissues, *Into Darkness/Eternal Frost* provides more than just a better understanding of what's come since. In the too-often-neglected second part of the deal, it also rocks. The band, long since broken up, was a monster. Their music channeled all the desolation of post-Ed Koch Manhattan (their home) and formed it into crushingly heavy metal the atmosphere of which bands like the UK's Atavist still try and achieve today.

Underground in almost every aspect, Winter's appeal isn't broad and their music isn't accessible. And, for the life of me, I can't think of any higher compliments to pay the record than that.

Next week: Reissues from Testament, Today Is The Day and more. Hopefully. We'll see what comes in the mail and what I can pick up between now and then. To be honest, I might just get sick of the whole damn thing and review the new Boris instead. Could go either way. So you stay in suspense, and I'll catch you next time.

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There are your obvious reference points: Black Sabbath, Slayer, Iron Maiden, Sepultura, Motörhead, Pantera, Death, Napalm Death, Mayhem, Darkthrone, etc. (the list is endless), but metal's history is more than just who sold the most or who the most bands cite as an influence. Like anything, it is more complex than it appears on its surface. Reissues, as well as being in some cases latent cash grabs on the part of labels, bands or both, help flesh out the tale for anyone willing to dig deeper.

Previously in this space, I've covered ongoing reissue programs from Peaceville, who have paid homage to black metal's beginnings by re-releasing albums from Mayhem, Darkthrone, Katatonia, Carpathian Forest and others, Regain, who've issued Marduk, Naglfar and Gorgoroth, and Metal Mind, whose acquisition of Roadrunner and Nuclear Blast's back catalogues has put more albums back on the street in limited editions of 2,000 than anyone could ever possibly need. And there have been other reissues along the way from Relapse, Century Media (the recently issued Hellhammer demos come to mind), and just about everyone else. For today's metal climate, celebrating the past by making these out-of-print titles available again is just part of the game. Hell, I've gotten reissues of CDs that the original only came out the year before. Happens all the time.

The last couple of weeks have seen a smattering of heard-'em-befores (and nots, as we'll see) come my way, and

see what's come along lately:

At The Gates/*Slaughter Of The Soul* Bonus DVD Edition/Earache
Entombed/*Clandestine* Bonus DVD Edition/Earache
The Haunted/*The Haunted Made Me Do It* Bonus DVD Edition/Earache
Napalm Death/*Utopia Banished* Bonus DVD Edition/Earache

Though in the past I've shoveled heaps of shit Earache's way for spearheading the über-lame rethrash movement, I have a much harder time condemning them for bringing these albums back to the fore, even though *Slaughter Of The Soul* was re-released only a couple years ago. All four are, nonetheless, incredibly important albums that have—with the exception maybe of *The Haunted Made Me Do It*, which is probably that band's best work to date but hasn't had the same time to affect a generation that the other three have—been massively influential in their respective genre. To hear *Decibel Magazine's* Albert Mudrian tell it in his book, *Choosing Death: The Improbable History Of Death Metal And Grindcore*, both genres basically burst

