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metal reissues galore VI



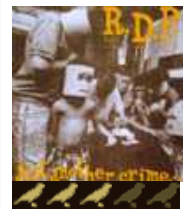
Underground Music Reissues Galore VI!

Is Metal Mind Productions the best record label in the world? Quite possibly. See below and if you don't know any of these oldies consider yourself non-worthy. A bastard. A loser. A Jackass. Or just young. Here is you last chance to redeem yourself; are you truly underground?

Poland's Metal Mind Productions is releasing four records by the South American hardcore institution Ratos de Porão. (pictured above) *Brasil* was the band's fourth album and the first to see wide release in the United States after they got a contract with Roadrunner via Sepultura's drummer Igor Cavalera who introduced the band to the American label. Unfortunately, I did not get that one. I did get *Anarkophobia* (1991), RxDxPx's fifth record, which shows the band led by the popular João Gordo (who'd go onto becoming a VJ for MTV Brasil) incorporating thrash metal to their straight forward D-Beat influenced hardcore. By the time *Anarkophobia* was released the band had been together for nearly a decade and after becoming intimate with many of the Brazilian metal bands of the time they started to incorporate some of those genre influences into their music. Though not as widely acknowledged as their definitive album (that would be *Brasil*) *Anarkophobia* is perhaps their second best known album and it expands on the same sound the band had began harvesting a few years earlier. Late 80's thrash was clearly the style they had in mind and in *Anarkophobia* technical riffs share as much space as early Bay Area influenced staccato riffs, short glowing solos and the menacing vocals of Gordo. Aided by the production job of German master Harris John, who had worked with some of the times classic metal acts (Sodom, Helloween, Tankard) and who holed up with the band at Berlin's Music Lab Studios, all quickly falls into place in this powerful release. This reissue includes three live tracks amongst which the most outstanding is their classic "Amazonia Nunca Mais" (opening track of *Brasil*), which bluntly displays the band's rootsiest hardcore style.

1994's *Just Another Crime in Massacreland* was the band's third effort released by Roadrunner and signifies a slight change in style. First thing that jumps out is the difference in the production department; this time around with Alex Newport (has done mix/production work with the likes of Sepultura, The Melvins, At The Drive In, etc) in charge what we get is a more modern sounding record, with less low sounds; read hollow drums and lighter sounding guitars. Frankly, when it comes down to this band I much prefer the more traditional metal sound achieved by Johns. Songwise, Ratos de Porão (which translates to Basement Rats) also seemed to be replacing the straight up thrash metal style they had adopted with the previous two albums and seemed to be adding variations in odd signature tempos. "Massacreland" for instance, is filled with changes and angular yet flowing breakdowns. But that's the exception rather than the rule; "Diet Paranoia" and "Breaking All the Rules" are lighter stuff with open utterly simplistic metal riffs. In some instances, Ratos de Porão sounds like many of the classic thrash metal bands started to sound at the dawn of the genre, back in the mid 90's when metal was considered passé and they all started polishing their rough edges. Other times though, the band sounds as vital as in the past, "Satanic Bullshit" is vicious as hell, but the end result is uneven at best.

Featuring a not so great looking feijoada (bean and sausage based Brazilian dish) on the cover, *Feijoada Accidente?* (1995) was the band's seventh overall release. Titled as a joke on the heels



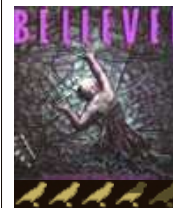
of Guns N' Roses *The Spaghetti Incident*, *Feijoada Accidente?* was a covers only 1995 release first issued as a tribute to Brazilian bands and in a second edition issued as a tribute to foreign bands. What we get in this 'international' reissue is twenty-one covers of bands as diverse and well-known worldwide as Black Flag, Poison Idea, The Saints, Circle Jerks, Stiff Little Fingers, Radio Birdman, Dead Kennedys and Minor Threat and more obscure comvers from diverse bands like Italy's Eu's Arse, Sweden's short lived (1981-82) Shitlickers, Spain's punk legends Eskorbuto, Finland's first hardcore punk band Kaaos, and Brazil's Olho Seco (I Googled these fuckers and got an image of someone coming in a girl's eye, what the fuck?). Because this is a covers album and because for the most part RXDXP has kept the arrangements untouched *Feijoada Accidente?* sounds very diverse and light. As a gateway to classic and obscure bands, this is highly recommended.

I particularly remember Pennsylvania's Believer, not only because they were one of the first extreme Christian bands but because of their cover of U2's "Like a Song". But more on that later. Formed in 1986 by drummer Joey Daub and guitarist/vocalist Kurt Bachman Believer would issue its first record *Extraction From Mortality* (1989) via Christian label R.E.X. Records. Jam packed with flourishing technical thrash metal riffs, the throaty vocals of Bachman serve as the most distinctive aspect of their sound. Akin to some of the mid-career Pestilence albums *Extraction From Mortality* is an overall impressive debut with solid songs and straight up God-shoveling lyrics; 'rise up, so you can take a stand against the scheme of evil, courage, be strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power' out of "Unite" are among the most obvious. Some of the solos are exquisite; "Vile Hypocrisy" features one that's pretty sci-fi sounding.

Snapped by Roadrunner Believer would quickly head to Morning Star Studio in Pennsylvania to record their sophomore effort *Sanity Obscure*. The technicality stayed but some aspects of their music is exaggerated to greater effect; vocalist Kurt Bachman pushed his throat even more coming up with vocals that sound a bit forced, so much so that he sounds almost like a constipated man pushing it out hard at the throne. Some of the arrangements reveal that Believer were struggling for a more personal and progressive sound. The odd tempo opening drums of "Wisdom's Call", the brief string passage of the title track, the ethereal ballad-like opening of "Nonpoint" and its convoluted stop start riffs, the operatic and orchestrated drama of "Dies Irae", the symphonic riffs of the impressive "Dust to Dust", and their successful metalized version of U2's classic "Like a Song" shape up one of underground's best hidden gems.

Two changes in the line up and three years later came *Dimensions*, an album that lyrically dealt with religious questions and philosophical paradoxes such as the existence of god. More experimental than the two previous Believer records, *Dimensions* starts off with "Gone", a song that lacks focus, a song of vague and extensive riffs, a blast beat here and there, and an out of focus progressive bent. "Future Mind" reiterates the same blurry ideas; broken riffs, melodic passages with clean bass lines and mechanized drumming bring about the band's big ambitions but do little to rock or thrash about. "Dementia" goes back and forth between heavy and clear, between rough throaty vocals and spoken lyrics; it goes in an out focus with the frequency of an eye test. *Dimensions* closes with "Trilogy of Knowledge", an ambitious metal/orchestra/opera three-part 20-minute long composition that's as long, tedious, pretentious and indulgent as it is boring. After the release of *Dimensions* Believer would go on an extended hiatus that's lasted to this day. Post-Believer Daub and Bachman managed a studio called Trauma and worked with bands like Earth Crisis and Living Sacrifice. In 2005, Joey Daub informed that Bachman and him were composing material. No new songs have surfaced yet.

It's been a little over a decade but I clearly remember when *Penalty*, Floodgate's debut and sole album, was released by Roadrunner in 1996. I think I bought it at a Sam Goody store and played the shit out of it for a couple of months. About four years ago I got sick of it and gave it to a couple of Nepali friends. Anyway, much of the hype came because Floodgate counted former Exhorder guitarist/vocalist Kyle Thomas in its ranks and, as it has been well-publicized, Exhorder shaped up that blues sludge groovy New Orleans sound that would be vastly influential to a small cock rock Texas band called Pantera. The band initially went by the Penalty moniker and counted in its ranks no other than Jimmy Bower from Eyehategod and Down. However, it wasn't until the band attained its final Bower-less line up and switched names because of legal issues, that they quickly signed to Roadrunner and recorded this album. *Penalty* is being marketed as a doom sludge album, though my idea of doom is far less dynamic than this, *Penalty* has a ton of



sludge heavy riffs with a thick blues backbone that can account for anything from stoner to doom without necessarily falling into a lie. Floodgate had a solid and sure sound that was perfected by Thomas' strong soulful vocals, the man was not only responsible for Exhorder but for a brief post-Exhorder period rehearsed with Corrosion of Conformity and currently handles the mike duties for Alabama Thunderpussy. Times were not blowing their way; 1996 was a very important year for the nu metal plague, and lost in the shuffle Floodgate got dropped by the record company and subsequently broke up. This reissue has four bonus tracks; two demo versions from songs included in the album and two unreleased songs.

1987's *Malevolent Assault of Tomorrow* was the only album unleashed (a recorded follow-up has never been released) by German thrashers Violent Force, and though I'd never heard them before it brings back so many memories. Especially these days with this new wave of old school thrash revivalists trying to play it exactly like these Germans did back in the day. Anyway, the opening track "Dead City" is the type of rock and roll based raunchy cut that owes a big share of its power and beat to Motorhead, but once we get into "Soulbursting" and the rest, other more contemporary (for the time) influences come to mind; especially Slayer and Kreator. Particularly outstanding are the guitars of Stachel, who not only plays lead like two people, but riffs like two too. "M.A.O.T" has about four different solos, all pasted together and different in texture. Meanwhile the voice of Lemmy is, like those of the times, very raw but not green, crude and punky, almost hardcore in its hurried delivery.

Last Crack were supposed to be craaaazy; very experimental, ahead of their time, a total surprise and super odd for the times, but frankly, their funkified heaviness just never got to me. Though well-played, mellow and almost entertaining *Burning Time*, the band's second effort after *Sinister Funkhouse #17*, is one of those heavy records by a heavy band that surprisingly is not heavy at all. Basically, all the members had long hair and they got snapped by Roadrunner and that's about it. But is not a problem of heaviness *Burning Time* is weird in a very early 90's way and in parts sounds way out of focus. It swims in its delicacy (the production of Dave Jerden is good everywhere but in the drums), is almost totally void of power and stacked up with clean and clear guitars, lots of melodic solos, drums that sound kinda electric (remember those that the guy from Kajagogo used to play) and the versatile and quality deliver of frontman Buddo; it sounds better in theory. Regardless, kudos for trying something different, I guess. After tours that saw the band sharing the stage with the likes of Kings X and Armored Saint Last Crack split. In 2002 the band reunited.



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