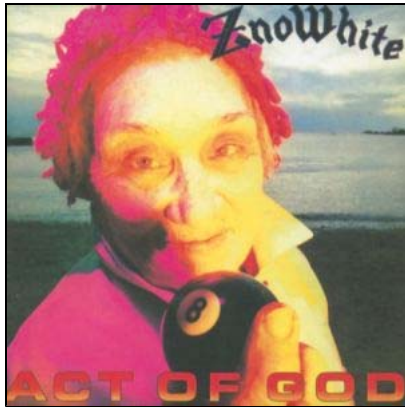


REVIEWS : ALBUMS : ZNOWHITE, "ACT OF GOD [REISSUE]"



ZNOWHITE
ACT OF GOD [REISSUE]
 METAL MIND RECORDS
 2007

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Back when I first discovered thrash metal, I voraciously read and fed upon all I could my hands on. You could chart my tutelage from listening to greats like Anthrax, Metallica, Slayer and Sepultura to unearthing such relative lesser-knowns as Sacred Reich, Ludichrist, dead horse, Prong and so on. During those first impressionable years, I came across Znowhite's name a few times. But in the early '90s, before the advent of the Internet, if your friends didn't have the album and MTV wasn't playing their video on Headbanger's Ball, you probably weren't gonna waste your hard-earned cash on a band with a suspicious-sounding name like Znowhite. I knew they'd shared billing with Slayer on the now legendary Metal Massacre compilation, which definitely helped the Slaytanic War Machine get some buzz going, but Znowhite were a band destined to fall through the cracks with me. That is, until I recently came across their promo on the DeadTide administrative server (thanks, Muxlow). Consider this review a fresh look at a nostalgic reissue as these tunes are falling on virgin ears.

First impression: this is dated. The production is tinny, with a liberal dose of gated reverb. And the average song length is about 5:00, which is just a tad long if it's not on par with, say, an "Angel of Death" or "Damage Incorporated." Which it's not. There's a reason Znowhite didn't tour with the Clash Of The Titans. While they definitely have an interesting sound that deserves its place in the thrash annals, Znowhite just couldn't hold a candle to the Big Three. They're not as evil, crushing, fast, manic, technical, (or gimmicky?) as their peers. If the Titans were all 10s, Znowhite would come in at 8.5. Still respectable, but just short of glory.

But let's dispense with the criticism for a moment, shall we? This band definitely had some plusses in their corner. They gain intrigue points not only for playing what was then at the extreme end of the musical spectrum, but also for being formed by three Afro-Americans. And having a white female singer. What were the odds that this motley bunch would be there at the dawn of the thrash movement?

Znowhite's riffing and drumming are consonantly aggressive, offering up fast beats, gallops, double bass, and grooves written with visions of a vicious pit in mind. The occasional melodic flourish gets a cameo or two. And the vocals are classic -- they have that narrative "talk, sneer, sing" style going on. Not unlike what other b-list thrash bands like Annihilator used. Before I looked inside the booklet, I had no clue this was a girl singing, as she lowers her voice to sound more gruff and warrior-like. Remarkably, she pulls this off without sounding the least bit cheesy. I dig Nicole's vocals and actually prefer them over Annihilator. All in all, she rounds out an outfit that had their shit together.

"Act Of God" is a nice nostalgic listen. It's good thrash, not great, yet it still had my ears perked on more than a few occasions. It's a shame that Znowhite didn't achieve higher status within their chosen genre, but as this release is considered their best, and it didn't come out until '88, when their peers had long surpassed this effort, it was fated that they would languish in obscurity. This one's for paying your respects to another in a long list of thrash progenitors, but ultimately you're going back to Anthrax, Metallica, Slayer and Megadeth. It's not an act of god, it's just the way things are.

KEEFE



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