

AURAL ASSAULTS

REISSUE ROW

Massappeal Nobody Likes A Thinker Relapse



A curious re-release, this. For those of you not in the know, Massappeal was an Australian band who formed in 1985 and released three albums, a handful of EPs and the *Nobody Likes A Thinker* mini-album before splitting up about ten years later. I say this is a curious endeavor on Relapse's part because, while the band had some success Down Under, their impact anywhere else was pretty negligible. Curious also because the re-release features the *Thinker* debut from 1986, which was only seven songs in length, but with all the inclusion of 7", demo and live tracks, this release totals 24 tracks without a mention of their classic *Jazz* full-length from 1990. Although, the band is apparently back together, in some form, and *Jazz* is available on Oz's Chatterbox Records with a new album in the works. This is all well, good and nitpicky, but pretty much irrelevant once you slap this on because all *Thinker* makes me want to do is dust off my skateboard and "Suicidal" hat and terrorize the neighborhood like I did with DRI, COC, Beowulf, The Accused and Excel blasting on a Sony Walkman the size of a small communications satellite. Massappeal may have had a more abrasive, raw and uncouth delivery when compared to their American counterparts — one that really rears its head on the live tracks — as they also grabbed bits and pieces from the likes of Black Flag/Sabbath, Poison Idea, Raw Power and the vibrant NYHC scene, but the rip-roaring guitar wail, catchy sixteenth-note abusing riffs, one-two drumming and node-inducing vocal hollering on simplistic ragers like "Rat In A Hole," "I.V. Me" and "Forgiving" is cut-off-jean-shorts-triple-kick-flip crossover that would have xenophobic, Yankee skate punks drawing three times as many DRI "mashpit dude" logos on their jean jackets so as to ward off the oncoming Aussie storm — a storm that was ultimately muted by poor distro and geography. [www.myspace.com/massappealhc] — Kevin Stewart-Panko

Solitude Aeternus Into The Depths Of Sorrow Beyond The Crimson Horizon Metal Mind



Some reissues come across as blatant money grabs. For example, when Band X moves from Label Y to Label Z and Label Z decides to re-release Band X's latest album that just came out four months ago. It's borderline unethical, but it happens.

Metal Mind Productions, who are quickly becoming the Rhino Records of the heavy music community, give Solitude Aeternus the full once-over on these reissues, seeing the two gems remastered and presented in limited edition digipaks, complete with bonus demos, and treating them, it would seem, with the respect they deserve.

The band's debut, *Into The Depths Of Sorrow*, is exactly the journey described in the title. Morose, melancholic and any other word you can think of that starts with "M" and means "sad," it might as well have been a protest rallying cry of, "we're here, we're miserable, get used to it!" Those who remember the days of the original Roadrunner (then RoadRacer) Records release will delight in the palpable increase in sound quality, and anyone discovering the band's catalog for the first time — perhaps after hearing and being blown away by their latest release, *Alone (Massacre)* — won't have to shell out absurd amounts of money on Amazon. Everyone wins.

Sophomore outing, *Beyond The Crimson Horizon*, took the statement its predecessor was making and expanded on it in every way, creating a more lush, dismal and depressing landscape. Could there be a more appropriate soundtrack for your melodramatic, hormone-induced, teenage despair than John Perez's guitar tone and massive riffage on "The Final Sin?" No, dearly not.

The reason it's known as "traditional doom" today is because of bands like Solitude Aeternus. In 1991, when Metallica was selling out for the first of what would be many times to come and Nirvana was getting ready to distort the popular perception of what hard rock was, Solitude Aeternus were being true to their roots, true to metal and true to their burgeoning fanbase.

Though the band's relationship with RR would come to an end after *Crimson Horizon*, Perez and the rest would continue for years, releasing underrated classic after underrated classic. They're still doing it, and if someone has the opportunity to discover them for the first time because of these limited reissues, then they were definitely worth compiling.

[www.eternalsolitude.com] — JJ Koczan

Toxik World Circus Think This Metal Mind



Digi-pak reissues of the New York area band's two late '80s platters (each now with a couple of bonuses and liner notes from drummer Tad Leger, although the same message is duplicated on both releases). In the days of stratospheric frontmen for heavier outfits (Deadly Blessing, WatchTower, Sanctuary, Flotsam And Jetsam, Helstar, even Overkill etc.) Toxik married thrash to fledgling progressive ideals. With everyone going gah-gah over the burgeoning Frisco scene (and with good reason), many of the tweener bands, those existing somewhere between bubblegum glam and full thrash/early death were bypassed, almost universally. Ask Savatage, Fates Warning (with John Arch), King Diamond, Artch, Candlemass and countless others, including the guys in Toxik, or similar-minded, Roadrunner labelmates Atrophy, Hittman and Crimson Glory. Some managed to survive through longevity, others reunited two decades later, yet most lay dormant, until someone like this Poland based company sees fit to (re)-introduce a new generation to what has come before. Since only 2000 copies are available worldwide, the likelihood of new blood hatching onto Toxik (without downloads, legal or otherwise) seems remote. Sadly.

Got to love the *World Circus* cover art: A clown with his finger on "the button," in front of a nuclear big top, as a western army fights decidedly Middle Eastern figures in the foreground (on the reissue, this artwork is superimposed in the lyric booklet). My how times have changed, huh? The heavier of the two outings, the lyrical themes are much more global, including anti-coke/crack rant "Pain And Misery," the condemnation of war ("Social Overload") or more specifically, the Vietnam aftermath ("Door To Hell"), warning of the war mongering Ron Reagan ("False Prophets") and the title track, which dealt with the prevalent hysteria of the day — how America and the USSR, as nuclear superpowers, would eventually slip up, with tragic consequences. See, the '80s (despite what VH1 tries to propagate) wasn't all day-glo colors, Madonna and fun loving parties! The first disc ends with Mike Sanders' take on "Machine Dream" (the final output with Sanders' falsetto), a track that ultimately appeared on *Think This*, with newly recruited Charles Sabin (high pitched, but not as off kilter). There's also a 3:46 college radio "interview" (AKA goofing around and introducing the second record, on air) with the *Think This* lineup.

Like night and day is the progression from the debut to follow-up, in terms of production, playing and maturity of subject matter. Just witness the 12-string acoustic intro. Far too adventurous for most metalheads of the day (as the band and I agreed upon in a vintage interview), Toxik are forerunners of today's prog-metal, without being wimpy. Some might not appreciate the vocals (reined in from the debut, but still lofty, by even today's power metal standards), *Think This* is a concept album (of sorts), similar to Riot's *The Privilege Of Power* (which came out a year later), in that between each song is a soundbite: Be it Michael Douglas from *Wall Street*, excerpts from a Reagan speech, a parody of evangelist Jimmy Swaggart's adulterous confession or some mock commercial advertisements. It decries the ability of mass media, particularly television, to pollute our brains. "Black And White" takes on the politics of race relations (skewering Al Sharpton, even back then). An instrumental/intro adapted from Bach ("Wir Njn 8") and a cover of Zep's "Out On The Tiles" are amongst the original eleven cuts. The proper album concluded with the title track, a 27-second compilation of multi-tracked bites, all speaking simultaneously. The bonus cuts are just demo versions of "Shotgun Logic" and "Black And White," both lacking vocals/guitar solos and as such sounding very jazzy. Worth revisiting. [www.metalmind.com.pl] — Mark Gromen

Disincarnate Dreams Of The Carrion Kind Displeased



My first exposure to Disincarnate was on the *At Death's Door II* [Roadrunner] compilation, a collection of tunes that stands up there with *Grindcrusher* [Earache] as being an undisputed classic. Ever since, Disincarnate have been very important to me. *Dreams Of The Carrion Kind* was in constant rotation in my CD player from '93 - '95 and changed the way I thought about death metal. The early '90s were a truly magical time for death metal, and Disincarnate stood shoulder to shoulder with the best the genre had to offer. Fourteen years later, *Dreams Of The Carrion Kind* is as strong today as it was when it was originally released. Disincarnate mastermind James Murphy (Death, Obituary, Cancer, Testament) is revered as one of metal's most interesting guitarists and judging from his work on *Dreams*, it's no wonder. As far as composition, skill and sheer musical dexterity, everything here is top notch. In fact, "The Stench Of Paradise Burning" could very well be one of the greatest death metal songs ever, and tracks such as "Monarch Of The Sleeping Marches" parallel and even pre-date the melodious Gothenburg style.

This reissue offers updated liner notes concentrating on Murphy's battle with cancer, and his even longer battle to record another Disincarnate album, as well as two demo tracks. Essential. [www.disincarnate.com] — JWW

Incantation Onward To Golgotha Relapse



Death metal pioneers Incantation get the re-release treatment of their cult classic *Onward To Golgotha* courtesy of Relapse Records with a bonus DVD to boot. Originally released in 1992, the diabolic diatribes and syrupy yet overtly Satanic breakdowns heard on tracks like "Deliverance Of Horrific Prophecies" still convincingly holds up to what gets considered evil today, as the sonic thickness heard on cuts like "Devoured Death" maintains its footing amongst today's death metal upper echelon. Incantation made its mark for both their blasphemous point of view and the innate knack for churning out murky, mid-paced malevolence like "Unholy Massacre." In fact, this New Jersey-based band was one of the first that combined demonic devastation and sludge-ridden heaviness, assisting in creating the ominous din that many of today's bands have emulated. And despite the low quality of the DVD in both sound and vision (remember folks, a lot of this stuff was shot when video cameras weighed 50 pounds and steady cams were non-existent), the overall package pays a proper homage to a trailblazing band whose refusal to compromise helped spawn the extreme scene we know today. [www.relapse.com] — Mike SOS