CD Review: Behemoth - Chaotica - The Essence of the Underworld

Posted by Cosmo Lee on April 25th, 2007 in CD Reviews Tags: Behemoth, black metal, chaotica, metal mind.

Before Behemoth became a death metal juggernaut, it played black metal. Of course, its death metal is often called "blackened," and the Polish band still plays live in corpsepaint, albeit sparingly. However, those used to its recent 7-string crunchings will be shocked to hear its early sounds - primitive, lo-fi, with high shrieks far removed from the monstrous, processed death growls of *Demigod*.

Behemoth's pre-1999 discography is quite rich. However, what was once rare and scattered has been reissued repeatedly, flooding the market with similarly-named packages. Here's the lowdown on these compilations:

> 1. *Chaotica - The Essence of the Underworld* - Metal Mind recently re-released this two-disc set from 1999 (Season of Mist seems to have also reissued it in 2003). It contains *And the Forests Dream Eternally* (EP, 1994), *Sventevith (Storming Near the Baltic)* (full-length, 1995), *Grom* (full-length, 1996), *Bewitching the Pomerania* (EP, 1997), and four previously unreleased covers and demo tracks.

> 2. *Historica* - released in 2003, the *Historica* box set is the same thing as *Chaotica*, but spreads its contents across five discs, adding *Pandemonic Incantations* (full-length, 1998), and a disc of live recordings and rarities. This is the most complete collection of Behemoth's black metal era.

> 3. *Demonica* - released in 2006, this two-disc set collects previously unreleased tracks mostly from Behemoth's black metal era, and does not overlap with *Chaotica* or *Historica*.

For whatever reason, *Chaotica* and *Historica* do not appear on the discography on Behemoth's website, and are thus "considered either bootleg or pirate." However, Nergal himself writes the liner notes to *Chaotica*, so the official status of this compilation is indefinite.

However, what's definite is its quality. Disc 1 is more of a curio than anything. Garbage can production! Witchy shrieks! Guitars that sound like bumblebees! It's quite listenable, though, as Nergal has frankly been a visionary since day one, giving the songs strong, if undistinguished shapes.

Chaotica comes alive on Disc 2, as *Grom* leaps out of the speakers with remastered oomph; Nergal's personality is better suited for large sound rather than lo-fi grit. The songs are fierce but varied, working in keyboards, acoustic guitars, clean tones, and startlingly effective female vocals. Behemoth here still sounds completely different from its present incarnation (that transition wouldn't take place until 1999's *Satanica*, its first foray into death metal), but the same focus and intensity are present.

Though *Chaotica* and *Historica* are obvious cash cows, they're worth exploring. My money is on *Historica*, as it has a lavish, photo-filled booklet, and *Pandemonic Incantations* is the first appearance of present-day drummer Inferno. However, it's pricey and can be hard to find, so *Chaotica* is a fine cut-rate option. Regardless of which compilation you choose, you'll gain insight into why Behemoth wears that funny white paint onstage.

7/10

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