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Behemoth - Sventevith (Storming Near the Baltic) Review


by Mark Hensch


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Behemoth is (alongside Vader of course) amongst Poland's best metallic exports and an album like 1995's full-length debut in *Sventevith (Storming Near the Baltic)* shows why. In fact, I'd argue that Behemoth might be one of the most criminally unrecognized bands in both the black and death metal universes to date; few have captured the band's mix of symphonic flourishes, abrasive blasphemy, wicked death metal, brilliant shredding, and Slavonic folk touches. Still a potent, bloody, and erratic affair after all these years, *Sventevith* is exactly the unbound fury of the storm it claims to be. Wild, furious, and unrestrained, there is a chaotic undertone here that is primal and natural; such vibrantly *inhuman* fire was severely lacking in the Western European BM scene, and in my mind the almost absurd levels of passion apparent on *Sventevith* give it an unbeatable atmosphere bands still struggle in vain to capture once again nowadays. Sadly, it isn't to be...this is an once-in-a-lifetime séance of sound and a must have for metalheads in general everywhere.

The esoteric "Chant of the Eastern Lands" is enough to convince new listeners of this fact. A blistering symphonic BM attack (far outstripping early Dimmu Borgir for example) zips by as demonic choirs howl and a woven-tapestry of Eastern folk notes pluck themselves grimly in the gale-force winds. The moody "Touch of Nya" is a brief interlude humming a chord progression of Slavic melody; it isn't long before the classic "From the Pagan Wastelands" explodes from one's speakers with its mix of epic folk strumming and blasting, frost-bitten BM assaults. "Wastelands" is a veritable holocaust of sound, its slamming freakouts and fiery leads being both mystical and violent at the same time. The atmospheric "Hidden in Fog" is one of my top-ten all time favorite BM songs. Everything about it is essential; the hazy, choking riffs, their graceful transitions into delicate, fingerpicked melodies, and of course the fantastic keyboard work. This is plain and simple a must-hear. "Ancient" is an unusual interlude of Baroque-influenced piano keys and not much else---strange, but nothing that makes or breaks the disc. At least it is memorable, right? "Entering the Faustian Soul" melds Slavic stomp to dynamic, mind-spinning DM. For an added bonus, Nergal's blackened shrieks and filthy howls stand in stark contrast to his work now, and the man's deranged laughter is a highlight of the entire album. "Forgotten Cult of Aldaron" is a blasting monster firing out shards of sharp, biting, and blackened ice. Through the chilled guitar tones and grim synth notes there emerges a sense of epic grandeur, the likes of which is soon destroyed entirely by a ripping tornado of dirty blackened thrash. The end result is another killer track, and one well worth checking out. "Wolves Guard My Coffin," meanwhile, is an eviscerating piece of dark, morbid metal, the kind of nocturnal lightning that burns simply due to the immense cold it emanates. Speaking of frozen, "Hell Dwells in Ice" supplies even more chills with a very gothic piano introduction that reveals a somber, dirge-like elegy that Behemoth has never again explored. Fans not familiar with Behemoth's earlier work will thus want to check this out just for the surprise of hearing something so soft and delicate,

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and the powerful swells of chilling keys will definitely shock many. The keen of crows starts off another classic in "Transylvanian Forest," the likes of which buffets one's ears with sickening riffs and demented howls. The low-fi, hurricane-force bile is both acidic and open-ended, the perfect mix of dirty BM and more organic folk. It closes the disc perfectly and leaves naught but a smoldering crater where the speakers had been.

Storming near the Baltic captures a younger, fiercer Behemoth. While the band's current work is every bit as vital, it is more the kind of authoritarian beatdown laid out by kings of the kingdom rather than what is captured here. At the end of the day, Sventevith freezes Behemoth as a pack of young, starving wolves, ready to rip and tear into everything holding their dominance back. It shows, and this classic disc, now reissued, shows an absolutely animalistic hunger the band has rarely captured since.

Behemoth's Sventevith (Storming Near the Baltic)

1. Chant of the Eastern Lands
2. The Touch of Nya
3. From the Pagan Wastelands
4. Hidden in Fog
5. Ancient
6. Entering the Faustian Soul
7. Forgotten Cult of Aldaron
8. Wolves Guard My Coffin
9. Hell Dwells in Ice
10. Transylvanian Forest

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Behemoth - Sventevith (Storming Near the Baltic)

Rating:9.0

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