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Avian - Ashes And Madness (Nightmare Records) Review by Mat Willcocks



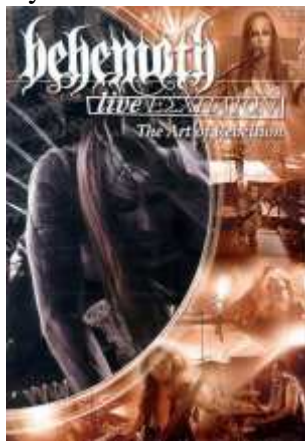
Those not already familiar with Avian will form an opinion the second that the term ‘power metal’ is brought up. Though rather than falling into the Helloween and Stratovarius camp, Avian have the tendency to fall into the ‘true’ bracket occupied by such stalwarts as Iced Earth and Savatage. Now boosted by the guitar heroics of Bill Hudson (of Cellador), this is a better produced effort than the debut *From The Depths Of Time*, with a much needed depth added. The aforementioned first album was far from consistent, but featured a number of genuinely good songs. Though this new CD doesn’t possess a track as awe-inspiring as ‘As The World Burns’, it is a passionate and much more balanced effort.

Master of the voice Lance King again croons and soars like only he knows how to. Opener ‘Ashes and Madness’ is brave, nearly 8 minutes long. ‘Into The Other Side’ is a comparatively short affair, but is the most memorable track with flashes of Hammerfall-style riffing. ‘Time And Space Part II: Unlock The Mystery’ is, just when one was perhaps finding Avian’s tendency to stick to one beat a little tedious, a welcome ending to the album, in so much that time changes and melody are plentiful and full of hooks that reign you in for the whole 10 minutes that it lasts.

Again, this is sadly not a release which will attract anyone other than already-established Avian fans, but with this progress, some well-deserved recognition may be round the corner. www.nightmare-records.com

Behemoth- Live Esxhaton: The Art of Rebellion DVD (MVD Video/ Metal Mind Productions)

By: Dave Schalek



Here’s a re-issue of an early video release from Behemoth. “Live Esxhaton: The Art of Rebellion” was originally released in 2000 by Metal Mind Productions on VHS, and is an officially sanctioned release from the band. However, the DVD version has never been sanctioned by Behemoth, and will not be found in official discography listings. At any rate, “Live Esxhaton...” is now re-issued in DVD format by MVD Video.

Regardless of the release’s status in the eyes of Behemoth, and any arguments over rights that may exist, those of you mostly familiar with Behemoth’s later releases may want to track down this DVD, as the concert presented here is a good showcase of the band’s early material. Filmed in Poland in front of a small crowd in Krakow, the concert features the usual production values from Metal Mind Productions.

Excellent video quality with multiple camera angles including the familiar sweepin boom shots common with Metal Mind Productions releases. However, the audio mix isn’t the best, as the drums sound a

bit muddled. Minimal focus is given to the crowd, as well, which seems to be mostly standing around. Focusing mostly on material from the just released “Satanica” and “Pandemic Incantations”, the concert already showcases a band on top of their game, although they had yet to gain wide exposure. In addition to the main concert feature, there are a lot of extras included. Official videos for “Decade of Oeption” and “Chant For Eschaton 2000” (which is filmed on the same stage as the concert, but without an audience) are included. Incidentally, the sound for “Chant...” is noticeably better than the concert, and is probably an overdub of some sort.

Rounding out the rest of the DVD’s features, there’s a rather long interview with Nergal in different

segments, in street clothes and entirely in Polish (no subtitles) that I skipped over, some rare audio tracks of early material from early demos and EPs, and various galleries.

In short, "Live Esxhaton..." is a great package of early material from Behemoth, and is an excellent addition to your DVD collection. I would have hoped that the interview had included subtitles, but, that's a minor complaint. Buy or die. <http://mvdb2b.com>

Black Math Horseman - Wylt (Tee Pee) Review by Metal Mark



If I were judging music solely by band titles, then prior to cracking open the case I figured this LA based act was to be heavy and the songs would be lengthy. Low and behold they turned out to be both, yet a whole lot more as well. If I had to describe the Black Math Horseman in one word then the first one that pops into my mind is deceptive. In their music at first seems very basic as they focus on very simple and often singular sounds. Yet like some sort of sonic quicksand their music pulls you in and before you know it you are enveloped by sound. There is so much more to this band than there appears to be. They rely greatly on tones and repetition. That sound easy, but the tones are rich and thick as

molasses. The band uses repetition on numerous riffs on every song yet it never gets old because they how t serve it up. They know how to milk the nuances from every tiny part. Like the band name, they ride through dark, shadow passages hitting a gallop when needed and slowing the motion down when called for as well. there is one thing that sets this band apart it's that they don't push too hard. They are content to let the music flow and eventually it takes on a life of its own. Now this kind of subtle drone isn't for everyone, it can be tedious at first and some songs do blend together a little. Yet in the proper mood, this is an album where the band really pulled as much as possible out of everything they did. www.myspace.com/blackmathhorseman

Daath - The Concealers (Century Media) Review by Chris Davison



Well, it seems as if Daath is a religious state mentioned in the Kabbalah, and not someone from Somerset trying to summon Lord Vader from his meditation pod. It also seems as if Daath are an up and coming modern metal band, and this is their fourth album. In a time where bands seem keen to be labelled within a single genre, and lazy fat reviewers seem keener to pigeon hole them there too, it's a pleasure to hear an extreme metal band that won't be constrained by any one simple genre convention.

"The Concealers" is an accomplished, sprawling – at times epic- piece of work.

Within the eleven tracks here, there are shades of death metal, thrash, progressive influences, middle

eastern guitar flourishes and sounds most associated with the industrial movement. The problem with these ambitious ventures can be that the music becomes some kind of amorphous, muddy mess without direction or any sense of a cohesive whole. The music can become, if you will, the audio equivalent of the colour that all plasticine will become after a weeks play in the hands of a toddler. It's perhaps a testament to the boys in Daath then that this is never anything other than an incisive, cutting edge record that brings to mind the best of several genres. In the overall brutality and simple technical ability of the musicians, the death metal influence is undoubtedly here, but in the scope and scale of the soundscapes, this has much more to do with the progressive giants of heavy metal. For every clickety, impossible feat of drumming and throat-shredding vocal scream, there's also a vast sweep and landscapes being conjured in the head. This is not an album to be merely placed on in the background, as it demands your attention – and in doing so ensures that you fully engage with and appreciate the artisanship on display.

I have avoided Daath for the longest time based on their shit name and a nagging suspicion that they would sound something like the terminally uninspired Lamb of God. Now, thanks to this wonderful piece of art, I

must eat humble pie and go and hunt down their back catalogue, the dogs. Vast, ambitious and perfectly composed, played and produced, "The Concealers" is a must buy for any metal head that looks for more in their music than Satan, beer and hookers. Most of the time, that's me. Most of the time. To be honest, this sounds as much as a soundtrack to the most amazing science fiction dystopian film never made than any simple heavy metal album. Track down cut number 4, "The Unbinding Truth" and tell me that isn't true...I dare you. www.centurymedia.com

Far From Horizon / Cult Of Gaia - Split cd (Self release) Review by Steve Green



I've always enjoyed the concept of the split cd as it's a chance to hear more than the single track you'd expect to hear on a compilation, and with only two bands to listen to, it's a lot easier to absorb than 15 new bands vying for your attention all at once. Here we have 2 bands from Germany, namely Far From Horizon, from the Northern town of Bielefeld and Cult Of Gaia, who are from Aschaffenburg in the South. The heavier of the two bands is Far From Horizon, who treat us to 5 songs, and an outro, of in-your-face Deathcore and thankfully, there's not a hint of wimpy clean vocals to be heard, although there is a clever use of female vocals towards the end of track two,

Ophelia. For the most part, this is brutal, guttural and downright heavy as hell and Far From Horizon are a band I'd definitely like to hear more from.

With the vocals coming in a few octaves higher, kind of like a modern hardcore-ish bark, and with a rather unique blend of melodic Death guitar lines, Cult Of Gaia certainly make an impact, mainly because I've not heard the two styles used in this way before. Breaking this cacophony up is the obligatory guttural growled vocals and a few squealing guitars. I'm not sure if they've absolutely nailed what they are trying to achieve, but at least they are trying something a little different.

Check out both bands via their Myspace pages: www.myspace.com/farfromhorizon | www.myspace.com/cultofgaia

Hex Machine - Omen Mas (Minimum Underdrive) Review by Luke Goaman-Dodson



Hex Machine play a particularly angular brand of noise-rock/metal, most reminiscent of Unsane, with a bit of Jesus Lizard thrown in. Opening with a bit of harsh feedback and static, "Nurse Me Back to Hell" features a nice, heavy riff at a bone-crushing tempo, setting the tone for the rest of the album superbly. Vocals are largely distorted screams, sort of like David Yow, or perhaps a more dynamic Chris Spencer. "Lunatic Sun" is a bit more metallic, opening with an almost doomy riff and monotone singing that vaguely recalls ritualistic doomsters Om. My personal favourite track on this album, "Black Skeleton", is a more up-tempo piece, that at one point reminds me of "A Minute" by Shellac. "Pink

Whisky" almost treads on Boris territory, while closing number "Vivisection" channels the best of the likes of Steve Albini without slipping into the sincerest form of flattery. All in all, a fucking excellent release from a fucking excellent band. www.myspace.com/hexmachine

Hunted - Alone (demo) Review by Dave Baynham



This is a three track demo EP by a band based in Cardiff. I'd describe them as technical metal, with thrash and progressive elements. However, boundary pushing seems a good way to put it. This means that while I didn't always enjoy the material I really like their ambition in trying to do something different. It also means the bits I didn't like others will. There are parts of the tracks, such as 'Impaled' that are too thrash for my taste, but if you like the Duracell bunny style of beats per second drumming then it will rock for you. There is a lot to like in this EP. The vocals are impressive, Chris G is a screamer whose style often reminded me of a young Geoff Tate, Midnight of Crimson Glory or Jon Oliva. The vocal inflections are very much that kind of late 80's / early 90's American metal. Guitarist

and songwriter Steve Barberini knows how to solo effectively without hijacking the tracks. At times the moves between all out riffing and acoustic picking sound very Opeth influenced, which is no bad thing. There were a number of times when I was reminded of the first Pagan's Mind album, probably as both bands share influences from Dream Theater to Megadeth. So you get complex riffing, tracks that bodyswerve from one style of metal to another and give you neck ache too. In all a promising start from a band worth keeping track of.

www.myspace.com/huntedrock

Nightvision - As The Lights Go Down (**Rockstar Records**) Review By Strawb



And in the beginning God created... The Big Bang Theory... Evolution ... and for those I haven't mentioned, forgive me. Whichever one is the one which you happen to have as a tenet of your reason for being, I think we all agree that there had to be a start point, and following it there has to be significant events. And so it is with Nightvision.

The formation of this four-piece band was in 2003, in the city of Lincoln, where they are still based. Now, Lincolnshire has been my adopted home for over half of my life, and I must say that in that time, it has not shone as a fertile breeding ground for musical talent. Potatoes and other crops is where the ground part comes in, and the breeding is mainly of

the 'inter-' kind in some of the rural areas, and it is a large county of many, many rural areas. Duelling Banjos would have a legitimate claim for the county anthem and here, a guitar has six strings so there is one for each finger. Luckily, [even in a band containing two brothers], these boys are from the big city, so I cast no aspersions in their direction, and the standard of this offering would indicate that they as band members have put all of their available time in a musical direction. The current line up was formed in 2006, since when they have put in the hard yards in touring and gigging countrywide.

In the life of any band, the release of their first album is a cataclysmic event, and so it is with this release that Nightvision have their own personal Krakatoa [circa 1883] moment. And this release is a noisy arrival on the seismograph. The twelve tracks are all of, as the band describe it, 'High energy Hard Rock music', and although the quality does vary, I would state that none of them threaten the 50% or-less area as I assess it. After Dark opens the album well, a good riff followed by screaming vocals form the intro. The vocals are clear throughout the album, whether it is Dave's lead or the harmonious efforts of all. Sick And Tired is the first of a number of the tracks that show serious changes of pace within the song, but whatever the speed is, find myself headbanging along, even as I write this. I particularly like the ending riff. Something Better is the first of the tracks that are over five minutes in length and has a slower start. I am reminded of some of the early Def Leppard as I listen to it. Not at all keen on the chorus; however, once again impressed with the sustained vocal late on in this one. As this microcosm of the first three songs is repeated throughout the disc a variation of styles, pace and personal appeal are ever present. And today, the track I find myself most drawn to is Demons, or is it the cleverly constructed cliché-ridden Carnival? However, tomorrow it will almost certainly be one of the others, it really is that sort of an album.

I was around for the NWOBHM, and we cannot use that mnemonic again, but I feel a new one needs to be found soon because there is an excess of riches out there at the moment. And with the release of *As The Lights Go Down* I feel that Nightvision have made a bid for top of the premiership, just behind *Crowning Glory* and *Fury UK*. A nine on the Richter Scale. www.nightvision1000.co.uk to learn more.

Synesthesia - Feeniks (Kampas Records) review by Sam Thomas



Times were, you knew what to expect from a band based on their geographical location. Norway = black, Sweden = death, Finland = dark, gothic. Not any more! Synesthesia are from the west coast of Finland, but they play what I used to describe as Swedish death metal, albeit with lyrics in Finnish. Which led to my first misunderstanding with this album – I was mildly irritated that the title Feeniks, was misspelt, in much the same way as most (text) communications from my son are... did, eventually, get round to checking and discovered that this is the correct way to spell "phoenix". If you're Finnish, that is.

Having cleared that up, I could settle down to enjoy the music. This is a young band (activity was forcibly suspended whilst band members completed their military service) who are now producing their debut album, after the usual few forays into demos and self-releases. As you might expect, it's a very polished, perfectly-produced affair, which, whilst it doesn't always break new ground (but does that really matter? How much virgin territory is there left that could still be described as metal?) is nonetheless an extremely enjoyable aural experience. In particular, Kalle Aaltonen has the ability to make his guitar both sing and shred (calling to mind both Alexi Laiho and Mikael Åkerfeldt) and Eero Kuusisto performs great distorted vocals. There's even a hint of (wordless) female vocal which is the perfect foil for the brutality of Eero's growls.

There's enough here to be slightly out of the ordinary as well – sixth track "Merituuli" is a lovely little instrumental, featuring that well-known metal instrument, the cello – but it all fits together very nicely, without that awful feeling of some ghastly experiment which has got out of control. In summary, then, this is a very accomplished release from a band that are well worth looking out for in future. Meantime, I'm off to (legally) download their first couple of offerings from their myspace page.... www.synesthesia.net | www.kampas.fi

The Burning - Rewakening (Massacre Records) Review by Marco Gaminara



The cool thing about listening to a band you've never heard of before, is finding out that they're really good, but the coolest thing is finding out that you actually really enjoy their stuff. Such is the case with The Burning. This Danish quartet reminds me of a hell of a lot of Facedown in their brashness and no mucking about approach to song writing. Johnny Haven's vocals are gruff raspy shouts interspersed with the odd growl for good measure. There's no twin guitar attack, therefore Rasmus Vinding has so much more to do on his guitar to keep things heavy, but that's definitely aided by Thue Moeller, and can you really go wrong with an ST fan playing bass?

Toby Hoest throws in all manner of intricate drum fills while seriously pounding the shit out of them. Simple guitar squeals and growls are the intro to "It Came From The North", but the fury it's played with, is far from simple, and is even intensified on "Cloven Hoof". I really enjoyed the choppy changes in "Carnivora", with its catchy chorus. There's a video for "Eight Legged Omen" on their website, and it adds a visual element to the song, well duh, and shows how well these guys work together with their syncopated beats and quick changes. "Repentance (Burned At The Stake)" is just as fast, if not faster. While there are bits where the vocals are a little whiney on "He Who Whispers In The Back Of Us All", they are used with great effect and contrast to the resonating growls. Owing to the fact that I love the title, I have to mention "Evangelical Cannibal", if for no other reason. Title track "Rewakening" has things start a little slower and reminds me o

something, but I just can't remember what it is, so I just have a nagging feeling in the back of my head for it duration. Final track "My Apostasy" follows in a similar vein, and while not frantic, has a heavier feel to it, and is full of sustains and false harmonics to give it plenty of squealing guitars. Good stuff, and if you enjoy simple straight forward metal without too many digressions or frills, then you'll love this.
www.theburning.dk | www.Massacre-Records.com
