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The Wake

BLACKlist

Review by Bill Knispel

The Wake is a Columbus Ohio based gothic rock band, most heavily active in the early to mid-1990's. Their extensive output on Cleopatra Records exposed them to a wide audience around the world, while live they opened for a number of popular bands, including And Also The Trees, Skinny Puppy, Red Lorry Yellow Lorry, Shadow Project and Nine Inch Nails.

12 years on from the band's last release, new material is being whispered about as the group may be arising from extended hiatus. In the interim, a CD/DVD set, BLACKlist, compiles a veritable "best-of" for the band, including concert footage, concept videos, and a selection of the band's studio material, including remixes and previously unreleased material.

The main feature on the DVD is a concert filmed at the Rockotitlan in Mexico City in 1995. While the video is grainy and a bit over saturated, it does a fine job of showing the dark, moody stage, heavy use of smoke and lighting effects, and the band's penchant for mystery. Sound quality is fairly good, and the band's sound is easy to compare to groups like Bauhaus or early Cure. "Nazarene" is a powerful opener, while "Sideshow" and "Harlot" receive pretty definitive performances as well. From a viewer standpoint, I think I'd have preferred a darker video, which might have more accurately recreated the ambience of the original performance. The Wake seems a band that likes to fade into the stage, forcing the music to be the focal point rather than the group itself. Two concept videos are included to fill out the DVD. The first, "Christine," mixes performance footage with a series of strange sepia and black and white clip montages. I'm not sure what to make of the video, but the song is infectious and addictive, with a huge hook and melody to spare. "Locomotive Age" has a decidedly more 1980's look to it, with posterized/solarized video effects and costuming right out of the rock and roll cliché book, leather biker jackets and black jeans for everyone. Still, the song is solid and enjoyable to listen to.

Track by Track Review

Harlot

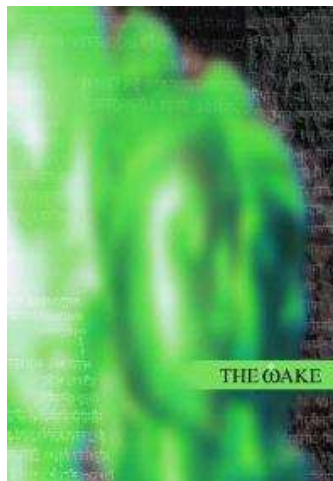
Originally released in 1990, "Harlot" opens the audio CD portion of this set. All fuzz tone guitar and throbbing bass, this track draws as much from the post-punk scene as it does from traditional gothic rock, as much Joy Division as the Cure. Still, the swirling keyboards and vocal delivery place this track solidly in the gothic rock category, and it's an excellent introduction to the Wake sound for the listener hearing them for the first time.

Christine

The video for this song was included on the DVD. The driving bass line and faux-industrial drumming make this a song almost impossible not to dance along with; I could see this piece having been a huge club hit. There's nice use of multi-tracked vocals throughout, but I think the thick groove is the dominant focal point here.

Sideshow

Things take a darker and somewhat more chilling direction on "Sideshow," which opens with layered synth/guitar and strange vocal effect loops before the band kicks in with a driving rhythm. Vocals are delivered in a slightly more monotone range, darker, baritone, heavier by far. I love these lines in particular: "You sold your soul to rock and roll/Now your only fear is growing old." "Sideshow" is an intense track, and one of the most impressive on this collection.



[Return](#)



Lightning

This piece takes the band in somewhat more industrial directions, with sheet metal guitar, martial drumming, and synth patches that take on an almost eastern horn vibe. The mix is busy and noisy. It's difficult to compare this track to the ones before, it, as it sounds so drastically different from the more traditionally gothic rock that's been heard. The song does make one wonder how much their touring with groups like Skinny Puppy and Nine Inch Nails affected or influenced their sound.

Burial (partially exhumed mix)

I'm not familiar with the original version of this song to make a comparison. I do know this mix has never before been released. The song is the oldest on the compilation, dating back to 1989, and the sound is sparser and rawer. "Burial" is a return to the post-rock influenced gothic rock that opened *BLACKlist*, and shows the band's direction pretty fully formed even at an embryonic phase.

Masked

The longest composition on this set at just over five minutes, "Masked" opens with sustained, chiming guitar chords and synth lines, while drums and bass fade in from underneath. The mix veers a bit closer to "Lightning" than to "Harlot," but the song itself is brooding, mid-tempo, and gothic rock at its most typical.

First

The Wake enters slightly brighter (for them) sonic arenas on "First," with a simple piano line and more open arrangements. That's not to say that the song is happy and poppy; in actuality, it's every bit as morose as anything else on the set. The tone shifts about one minute in, with fuzzed guitar taking over momentarily for the fragile piano line. Vocals are a bit more distant, taking on an almost dreamlike feel.

Shelia (never before released on CD)

This is the second of two never before released on CD tracks, with this one dating back to 1990. As a result, we're hearing a nascent, more embryonic The Wake here, with a track that again draws from Joy Division and Bauhaus for sonic inspiration. The drumming is simple but powerful, the bass line is throbbing and rolling around, carrying as much of the melody as it is holding down the root. Layered and multi-tracked vocals again are used to great effect, and it actually amazes that this is a song I wasn't familiar with before listening to this for the first time. It's a great piece.

Nazerene

This composition opened the DVD portion of this set, and I think it worked incredibly well as a performance opener. The studio track loses none of the power heard and felt live, with looped synth and a powerful groove that invites dancing, pogoing, or swaying along. The lyrics are somewhat...could be somewhat...blasphemous, but what's rock and roll without a dose of blasphemy to ease it going down? This is a song I could see myself having added to mix tapes as a teenager. If I had to pick one song to play for someone who had never heard The Wake before, I think it might be this one.

Deep Seventeen

The bass groove on "Deep Seventeen" is as deep as the first word of the title. As a result, the bass thrums more than takes the lead, while guitars are a bit spacier and wider open. Synths take a bit more prominent role here, while vocals are sung with a depth that rivals those on "Sideshow." The piece as a whole feels dreamier by far than anything else on the set.

Locomotive Age

A song with "locomotive" in the title better have a driving beat. Fortunately, this piece meets that criteria with aplomb. Also included on the DVD in promo video form, this piece doesn't hit me as hard as any of the other material on *BLACKlist*. It's not necessarily a bad song, it simply does not reach the same heights for me as tracks like "Nazarene" or "Harlot" or "Masked."

Suicide

Bass playing is again most prominent on this penultimate album track, and it impresses me with its fluidity and quickness. Guitars are distant, fuzzed and overdriven, while vocals are spat forth with blasé disconnection...and if that sounds like a contradiction in terms, well, you need to hear the song in order to understand.

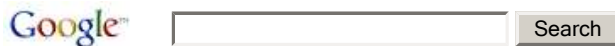
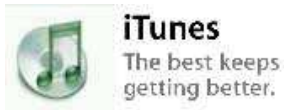


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Watchtower

BLACKlist closes with another track close to five minutes in length. Eastern vocal samples open the piece before drums come in with a slight tribal feel. The bass line is simple, three notes really, while guitars nearly chime despite the heavy use of fuzz and overdrive. The lyrics are evocative, a series of images evoking flat fields, the whispered scent of magnolia, dark sexuality and implied violence. I'm not sure if I like the studio version more than the live take on the DVD, but I'm leaning toward the studio take slightly. It's a solid composition and a great album closer for this compilation.



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