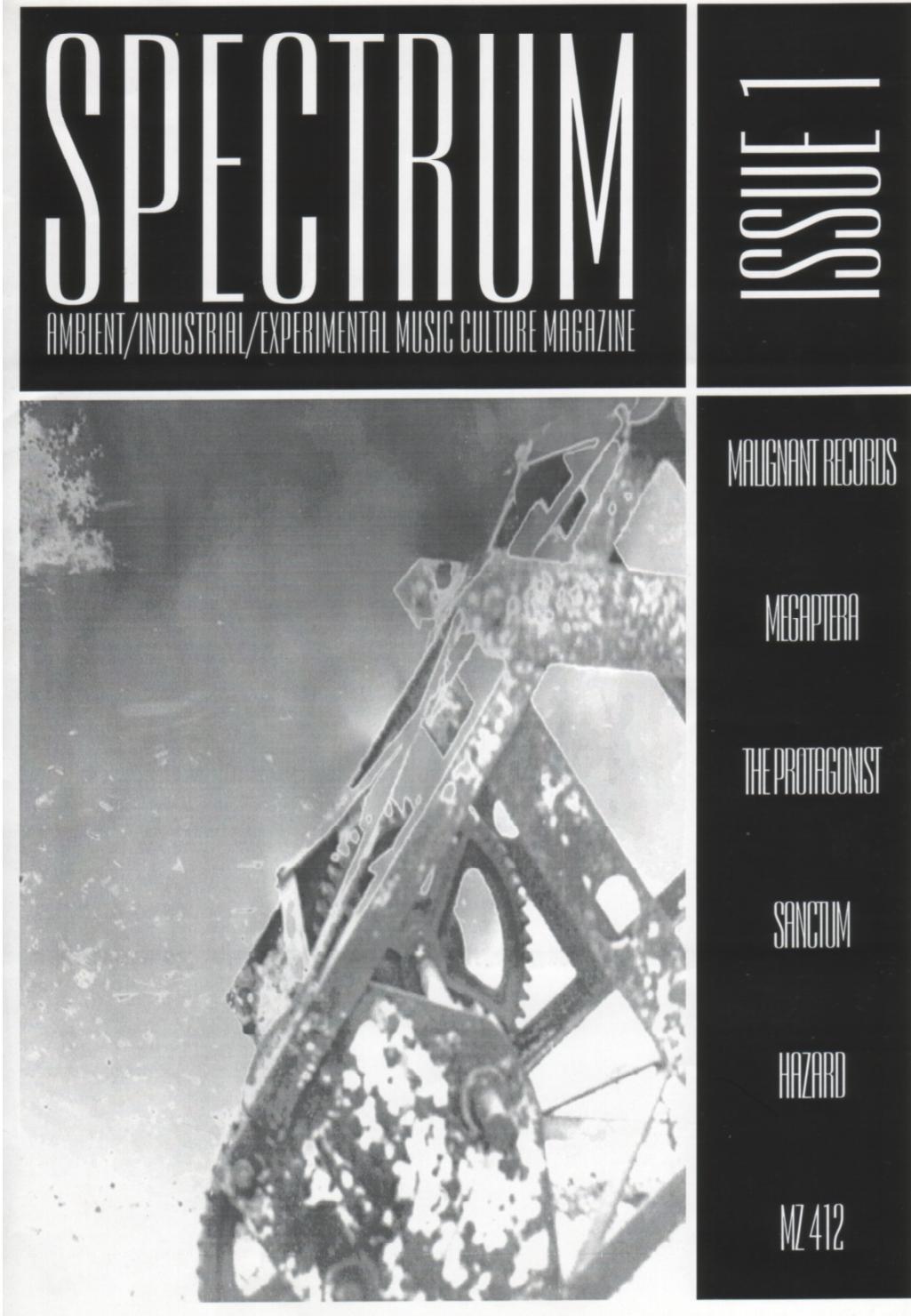


Spectrum Magazine

(ambient / industrial / experimental music culture)

Issue 1# review archive

All reviews originally published in Issue 1#, released September, 1998



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Allegory Chapel Ltd. (USA) "When Angels Fall" 1995 Charnel Music

Not being a huge fan of the overall noise scene I found this CD quite refreshing in its stylistic approach. While less intense and harsh than the previous cassette 'Demimonde Voices' this still owes a lot to its noise roots. On the opening track waves of mid range white noise swirls and evolves while composed keys are interjected giving a solemn feel. Track two "Trajectory Calculations" steps up a notch in harshness however retaining the swirling noise structure which is then continued into the next track (after a brief interlude provided by a short spoken intro). A highly processed voice makes an appearance through the waves and layers of sound with a young girl screaming "please let me out" which is quite unnerving in its pitch and intensity. Deeper noise elements in mid to low range embody track five "Escalate the Violence!" that is incessant in its more straight forward noise attack. The final track "Requiem for Thee Possessed" takes a more death industrial guise in it's low rumbling vibe and sampled female vocals. It then converts back to low harsh noise late in the piece, only for haunting female vocals to sweep the CD into a numbing conclusion. The width of sound has been well presented and the pieces of the total structure omitted from opposing speakers has been extremely well produced for an all encompassing effect. The contrasts present (via the use of both noise structure and composition) gives this a unique feel that works surprisingly well. Even without the more composed moments this release tends to hold more of a more listenable middle line that avoids the 'head fuck' scenario generally associated with noise.

Arcana (Swe) "Cantar De Procella" CD 1997 Cold Meat Industry

What can one say about Arcana that hasn't already been said?... like Dead Can Dance circa "In the Realm of a Dying Sun" most anticipated debut album ever on CMI etc, etc.... Besides all this, everyone within this scene should know of or at the very least heard of Arcana's epic and sorrowful gothic classical music. Here we have the second CD from the duo and while it is a progression in overall sound from the debut it is again somewhat of a let down as was the case with the first album. I don't know if it is just me, but I have held this group in such high regard since their first few compilation tracks that I think I have come to just expect too much. Anyone thinking I am speaking poorly of this is clearly getting the wrong idea as this is truly a superb release. The dynamics of the songs gradually build as does the intensity of the male and female choral vocals which rise to soaring heights. Some tracks are based on the sounds and motion of the voice alone while others use the full epic structure of an orchestra especially focusing on the brass, wind and string sections. Two tracks here were also featured on the preceding 3 track MCD, but I guess that was always intended to be a taster for this full length (too bad I got stung the price of a full length for a 3 track single CD). All of the 12 tracks presented tend to focus on the one theme and expand on it slightly over an average track length of 5 to 6 minutes. Maybe this is where the problem lies in that the tracks do not evolve and change enough to take the listener on the epic medieval journey that they so often promise, but somehow fail to fully deliver. I'm sure if the musical ideas and themes were merged over fewer songs Arcana would deliver an absolute masterpiece. Stand

out tracks include the title track, the medieval folk tinged “the Chant of Awakening”, “The Dreams Made of Sand” All that is left to be said, is that one must wonder why the more talented an artist is, the more critical the fans are..... As the reader you know the answer to if this should be included in your collection.

Archon Satani (Swe) “The righteous way to completion” CD 1997 Cold Spring

Archon Satani (Swe) “The final way to completion” 10” Pic disc 1997 Cold Spring

I have chosen to review these two releases in one, given that the tracks were recorded at the same time. These works essential form the final ever recordings from this notorious group (although older works are scheduled to be re-released in the future). Since the early compositions of Archon Satani as a duo, through to the split and solo continuation of the project, it has become more minimalist oriented. (note: Tomas Peterson left to later form Ordo Equilibrio and Mikael Stavostrand formed Inanna and also continued with Archon Satani). Treated waves of flowing sound rise and fall in a subtle rhythmic style (ala Thomas Koner) however these releases see the introduction of repetitive looping beats (not dance beats of course) at various points in the tracks. These tend to break up the monotony, as there is not a hell of a lot happening over the combined 70 odd minutes of music. The passages where the beats are not utilized is somewhat like being trapped in a deep subterranean location where the only audible sound is the bedrock of the earth slowly being warped and cracked by tectonic forces. Overall I tend to prefer the earlier works of Archon Satani as a duo which were more varied and had a much more engulfing dark atmosphere. This point is further substantiated by the quality of the Archon Satani track featured on the new CMI compilation ‘the Absolute Supper’. This track saw the reformation of Archon Satani as a duo to record one final (and great!) song as a tribute to the ultimate completion of the group. The members will now lay the Archon Satani legend to rest and to continue with their respective projects. Although I would not consider these to be the releases to be introduced to Archon Satani by, they would be a worthy addition to a music collection for anyone who has prior knowledge of the groups music. (note: the 10” is almost in certainty sold out by now as it was limited to 500 copies).

Archon Satani (Swe) “Memento Mori” CD & limited picture LP (399 copies) 1997 Memento Mori

Well, here we have a historic release from when Archon Satani were still a duo with the music being taken from a live performance on the 25th of May 1991. The music itself differs to the groups other studio outputs as the recording in essence is quite harsh. When I first obtained this on LP I figured some of the rawness of the sound was due to the vinyl format, however when I also picked this up on CD the harsh rawness was still present. Mid range harsh frequencies hum along with cavernous factory sounds, rhythms and noises reverberating underneath. Distorted vocals sporadically make appearances while each tracks flows forth merging into the next composition. Tracks “Insane with fear”, “Ritual

"Murder" & "Hymn of Despair" make up the first three tracks which are all worthy live performances of material from the Virgin Birth (Born Again) CD. To my knowledge the remaining three track have not been included on other albums (however I could be proven wrong!). Track four "Pater Miles" (when it gets going) has bludgeoningly heavy rhythms with vocals and sounds buried underneath. "Lost Souls of Eden" (track 5) gradually builds with the echoed drum sound, vocals and vocal samples to a passage with sampled choirs to then fall back to the repetitive drum loop and sampled classical radio tune and mid range frequencies. The final tracks begins with a sparse sound that again build to a harsh rhythms/ tune with what appears like radio static introduced into the mix. At 35 minutes this a reasonable short, disc however it remains as a document to the early death industrial scene giving those of us who will never get to experience such groups live a chance to at least hear what it would be like.

Blood Box (USA) "A World of Hurt" CD 1998 Malignant Records/ Katyn Records

If the name of this group sounds slightly familiar it may be that you are thinking of 'Yen Pox', and not without good reason. Jason Hensley the name behind this project is actually half of the ambient/ drone group 'Yen Pox'. Whist being on a solo mission Jason treads on familiar ground covered by 'Yen Pox' but also tries to ensure that 'Blood Box' has its own character and quality. The opening track 'Paradise' is stylistically 'Yen Pox' all the way, except for its focus on slightly more electronic/ keyboard feel. Track 2 gets even more electronic with its make up of sampled and treated sounds meandering and evolving over a 10 minute span. 'Mother of Dust' includes a sampled spoken passage, whilst track 5 'Dawn of the Hunter' sees a composed keyboard passage and sampled acoustic guitar used to good effect which then employs a minimalist neo-classical passage to round out the song. Both themes of electronic and organic styled dark ambience are further explored over the remainder of the album. The final track 'inhale' is a short and strange piece of distorted factory noise/sound which actually sounds more akin to the latest Vond CD. As has been said previously this CD is less organic and more electronic than 'Yen Pox' having an overall more disturbing undercurrent that can aptly be aquatinted with the release. Highly recommended dark ambient passages with other influences thrown in for good measure. The only other thing I can say about this CD is regarding the strange image that was chosen for the cover.... make up your own mind.

Brighter Death Now (Swe) "Innerwar" LP 1996 Cold Meat Industry (CD on Release)

Mr R. Karmanik the brain behind CMI returns with his project to torture us with themes of moral decay and decadence. On this album we find Roger in a very angry and aggressive mood. For those who are unaware of the music of BDN it is generally termed 'death industrial' using horrific low ambient noise and percussion periodically being punctured by unworldly voices and chants. "Innerwar" is quite a departure from previous recordings, much more into the realms of noise music and power electronics but still retaining a structured industrial edge through repetition and looping drones. In this respect I feel it is

one of his strongest releases to date. Overloaded looping drones grind on incessantly some at a high pitched velocity others at lower levels but no means less powerful. Sampled voices make periodic appearances throughout the record, some audible others indistinguishable. The track entitled "Sex or Violence?" in brief seems to sum up the themes behind BDN quite well. Further more side two opens with the track "little baby" which includes a sickening intro of a teenage girl recounted sexual abuse as a young child. This track brings to mind the picture on the back sleeve which has a young girl lying on a bed, staring at the camera with deadpan eyes (for those who prefer gore images the CD version is definitely for you, having select napalm and autopsy slab photos). The finally of the album comes with a track entitled "WAR" with an extreme and distorted voice chanting the word over and over accompanied by the trademark overloading looping noise. As I have the LP version I have been told that it does not pick up much of the high end noise present on the original recording. If this is true all I can say for anyone who chooses gets the CD version prepare for your ears to bleed!

Brighter Death Now (Swe) "Pain in Progress" CD 1998 Cold Meat Industry

The master of death industrial returns with a re-release of his first tape (CMI 03) ten years on as a tribute to the legacy of BDN, and what a release it is! Seven of the fourteen tracks made up the original "Pain in Progress" tape while the remaining seven are included for our pleasure/ torture taken from various compilation contributions from the late 80's to early 90's. Although being a decade old the tracks here still sounds fresh and undated and at its time "Pain in Progress" would have been milestone release. Although the current workings of BDN are moving towards power electronics/ industrial, the sound of this disc encompasses a more slow death ambient/ industrial style. Much here is in common with an earlier tape/ CD release entitled "The Slaughterhouse" with slow distorted noise rumbling along with the trademark sparse sound and grinding metallic rhythm. Some distorted and ghastly vocals are interjected through a number of tracks as though announcing some unspeakable horror while other dialogue samples outline some of BDN's themes. The only complaint I have is regarding a track entitled 'meat processing' which has a heavy yet tinny mid paced percussive rhythm that is too up front and runs in contrast with the overall BDN sounds and themes. This track is repeated at the end of the disc with a slightly heavier mix but my main point of complaint remains. The minimal black packaging is stylish and simplistic as an obvious homage to the original artwork which compliments the obscure nature of the project. Now all there is to do for the BDN complete-ists is to look forward to the final completion with the release of "Greatest Death" CD. (This is essentially a compilation of tracks from the "Great Death" trilogy of which those owning all three parts were able to vote for their favorite tracks).

Caul (USA) "Crucible" CD 1996 Malignant Records

Well "Malignant Records" have done it again proving that there is much more to the ambient scene than what CMI has to offer by releasing the debut CD of the dark ambient artist Caul. The works of Caul delve into minimalistic ambience as

well as more structured compositions. The 70+ minute CD is quite filmic in nature and could almost be described as background music to the haunting elements of motion pictures. Subtle melodies, low droning percussion and haunting chants flow effortlessly throughout the length of the disc. The opening track 'Aurora' is a short dark ambient piece which flows into the next track which has slow rumbling percussion with floating noises and vocals sitting in the mid range. 'Behold' contains again sparse noises but this time with violins holding the feel and flow of the track. This concept of using strings is used in the following track 'Reduviid' and other subsequent tracks. The heavier mid paced percussion of 'Cluster' breaks the predominant feel of the proceeding tracks while the music stays stylistically the same. Comparisons can be made to the more minimalistic works of Raison D'être while the dark ambient elements lean towards Lustmord. Once again another great album to create dark atmospheres for those appropriate times.

Caul (USA) "The Sound of Faith" CD 1996 Katyn Records

Hot on the heals of 'Crucible', Brett Smith is back with his second CD release under the 'Caul' moniker. Opening with a very 'Lustmord'ish brooding passage, the CD crawls out of the depths of the void with desolate organic sounds and processed synth atmospheres over a seven + minute span. Track two launches into a short composed piece with plucked strings, chimes and marching rhythm. Track three 'Nature and Grace' takes the same string sounds to continue the themes of semi-composed and minimalist compositions over the CD's length. An overall religious type aura surrounds the music with space and distance being a common aesthetic between the dark ambient tracks and more composed ones. The tunes where present in certain passages remain sparse in delivery, conveying a somewhat dreamlike state. For want of a better comparison (or due to sheer laziness) Lustmord's name invariably comes up with the 'deeper' elements of the disc. (To be fair this release does have a character of it's own, I just guess that minimalist and dark ambient music always tends to have that common thread normally associated with the long time standing works of Lustmord/ Brian Williams). For me this disc slips up and lets me down with track eleven "Ankou" which is a full on "new age" style piece complete with sampled doves in the background. Apart from this "The Sound of Faith" is a strong body of work but has a little way to go before I would class this classic.

Caul (USA) "Reliquary" CD 1997 Eibon Records

Continuing the trilogy of reviews this is Caul's third CD, and I must say it has finally reached the level that this project has hinted on over the first two CD's. Overall the vision here is more focused which has resulted in a more composed body of work. This is not to say that the dark minimalist passages have been totally forsaken of course. Textured and layered synth passages act as the undercurrent while slow melodies are accentuated by piano keys and other sampled string and wind instruments. All in all this has a less "new age" feel than the last disc overall being darker and bleaker. Some of the passages here are quite reminiscent of some of Graeme Revell's Hollywood soundtrack offerings, with the works from the movie "the Craft" partially coming to mind. Track four 'A

sigh is the sword of an Angel' focuses on a deep percussive rhythm with a haunting oboe tune and waves of atmosphere rising in the background. Track five 'the soul rising out of the vanity of time' is more in the dark ambient vein but also quite a bit more active than the standard type track in the genre. The pinnacle of the album is reached in track seven 'lights in the firmament of heaven' where the slow plucked tune bursts into crescendos of soaring angelic voices. The themes of dark ambience and minimalistic classical music are explored throughout the remainder of the disc with even some slight middle eastern influences fused into a few of the melodies. The packaging in itself is quite different with a get black slipcase that folds out into a fiery picture of cloud landscape. Caul are one group to keep an eye on as the prolific individual behind this project already has another couple of discs in the pipeline for upcoming release. I look forward to them.

**Cernunnos Woods (USA) "Awakened: the Empire of Dark Wood" 1998
Cruel Moon International**

This disc was meant to have seen the light of day all of 2 to 3 years ago but has only surfaced at the beginning of 1998 for unknown reasons (This was meant to be first off the mark for Cruel Moon International but ended up being their third product).

This CD takes guise under the form of medieval/ folk styled ambience that seems to be forever increasing in popularity since the rise of the Mortiis empire (and I mean both concept & business!). Although this lacks extensively in the realms of full compositions and well executed instrumentation (incidentally this is all produced on the keyboard) it most certainly makes up for these areas in atmosphere. Horns, flutes and drums trudge forward with Bard Algol narrating stories through a number of tracks. For an American the spoken vocals come off especially well with flair and without a hint of a cheesy accent. Some tracks (ie: track four) don't work well at all as playing seems out of time and all over the place, however other hit the mark perfectly with mildly stirring and majestic pieces.

I must also fully complement the digi-pack cover which suits the music perfectly in its portal of a medieval atmosphere via photos and drawings.

As I hear the entity behind Cernunnos Woods is now unhappy with this release in light of when it was recorded and in reference to current compositions. If this is the case all I can say is I look forward to future recordings.

Coma Virus (USA) "Hidden" CD 1996 Side Effects

What can one say when it comes to the dark ambient genre? At the moment there are some truly great artists working in this field as is shown by some of the other reviews in these pages, with Coma Virus being no exception. As Lustmord is primarily Brian William's brainchild, he however does gain input from other people - one being Paul Haslinger. On the same note Coma Virus is primarily Paul Haslinger who also gains input from Brian (not to mention both Coma Virus and Lustmord are signed to the same label). Confused yet? Well for another interesting fact Mr Haslinger was once a member of Tangerine Dream, so it certainly shows he has been in the ambient game for some time now.

Coma Virus sits in the same realms as Lustmord frequents but does have a charm of its own. When I first heard this I actually thought it was a Lustmord release using a different name. But with close concentration on the music, it tends to be more rhythmic and composed. The standard dark ambient elements are included, being sparse spacious sound, deep evolving rumbling noise and subtle melodies. Amongst the rumbling ambience keyboards have been mixed in (disguised very well) akin to a half remembered tune being played in the dark recesses of the mind. Dynamics are also important with the levels rising and falling in volume throughout the metamorphosis of the disc. Only four tracks are present but with a play time of fifty minutes the tracks range in length from seven to fifteen minutes which directly points to the slow evolving style that it encompasses. Vocals make an appearance on a few occasions but are used in a low chanting manor or have been electronically distorted so no actual words can be deciphered.

Concept wise the release uses the theme that any creation of the mind can be considered a virus as it can only exist solely within the host. The theme is elaborated on in the cover with a very thought provoking passage. While other dark ambient artists use ideas of 'deep space' Coma Virus uses the ideas of the inner spaces of the mind and when viewed from this perspective while listening, it is truly fascinating.

As always I am truly in awe of how this dark ambience is created as it is so far removed from other forms of 'music'. Both Coma Virus and the label Side Effects will be of great interest for any fans of this genre.

C17H19NO3 (USA) "Terra Damnata" CD 1996 Fifth Colvnm Records

For anyone who is fanatical about In Slaughter Natives yet is frustrated by the slow progress of J. Havukainen in recording I.S.N CD's, I urge you to get a copy of this. What we have here is foreboding compositions that span electronic and orchestral realms which have mutated into a supreme blend of apocalyptic industrial. The themes and sounds presented on this release are quite foreign to what is normally associated with its country of origin, being much more akin to a European release. Sampled voices and processed vocals interjected throughout, outline the concepts of the merging of man and machine, via a macabre evolution of the human species. Gothically influenced the orchestral compositions and atmospheres are presented in an eerie and at times a quite romantic guise. Owing a great deal to the paths previously forged by I.S.N, all comparisons are easily forgiven when apocalyptic industrial is done this well. Watch out for the upcoming CD scheduled for a late '98 release on Malignant Records.

Darrin Verhagen (Aus) "Soft Ash – Seven treatments of lethal atmospheric inversions (with a drifting narrative sense)" CD1997 Dorobo

Now the title of this CD says it all...only to an extent. Darrin Verhagen, better known for his works as Shinjuku Thief has produced this concept CD under a solo guise. The actual concept of the disc is the common thread here, as the music contained over 48minutes/ 7 tracks has more the feel of a compilation. Darrin has taken inspiration from six historical points in time where humans have

suffered death from airborne pollutants – from the killer fogs of 19th Century London through to Chernobyl. Further each track has been composed in a specific style, from isolationist, electro - acoustic, organic to romantic. Each track also has a recommendation for a listening volume depending on which style it was produced in. The opening track stylistically comes across like Tomas Korner while tracks two and three resemble more radio static in low frequency tones. Track four (composed under ‘romantic’) comes across somewhat like Shinjuku Thief’s “The Scribbler” CD with a poetic spoken interlude included. ‘Chernobyl’ (track five) is highly active with its techno/ tribal beats, while things calm down on the final two tracks. Track six is a low fi atmospheric piece that has utilized a basis of field recordings of thunder. The final track is filed under ‘organic’ with an anti-structure of simple and repetitive tapping sounds that are gradually overlayed to create a more complex beat pattern. This CD commands close concentration from the listener and does not work particularly well as background music, given its changes in direction from track to track. It is good to note the growing interest in experimental forms of music as two of the tracks were actually commissioned by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Government based TV/ Radio) for a program called “The Listening Room”. A highly interesting concept CD with the cover living up to the look and presentation of the label.

Decree (USA) “Wake of Devastation” CD 1997 Decibel/ Off Beat

This is another gem of a release that I probably would have never been made aware of if it wasn’t for the strength of recommendation that came from Malignant Records. This CD walks a fine line between harsh noise, death industrial, dirty techno and industrial (in the industrial ‘band’ type definition). Spanning 45 minutes over 10 tracks & consisting of both live and studio recordings, this is an immensely strong release that is varied yet relentless in its approach and delivery. Starting with a track “Delusion” this is quite apt in misrepresenting what the CD is like in its entirety. A strong mid paced dirty beat surges onward with sampled noise flowing throughout the mix. Track two continues in much the same vein however the mix begins to get slightly harsher with the integration of aggressive processed vocals. The noise element becomes much more evident in track three “Who Dares?” in the form of a live instrumental recording where the noise flows in a mid ranged region with a reasonable depth of sound. The cavernous sounds of the beginning of “Madness Unveiled” gradually increase in intensity (that when played at high volume) surely threatens to destroy the undeserving sound system which the CD is being playing on. The driving machinelike rhythms, processed into a barrage of sound (while being kept coherent by the undercurrent of bludgeoning beats) draws certain comparisons to the likes of Stratov Terror & Mental Destruction yet not being derivative of any group in particular. Ultimately heavy in all aspects of the delivery (related to the genre’s covered), this comes as highly recommended release.

Desiderii Marginis (Swe) “Songs over Ruins” CD 1997 Cold Meat Industry

Sometimes I really don’t understand the rational behind the release schedules of CMI. I had been waiting for this since 1995 when first hearing the track of “...and even wolves” CMI compilation CD, however this disc did not see its release until

mid to late 1997. Even CMI made a statement to the effect that "it had taken them ages to release this and that it should have been out much earlier considering the great response it got". I can only hope that the wait for the second disc is not as long! Of the music herein, much harks back to the CMI sounds of the early 90's, which in itself is quite refreshing. Of anyone familiar with the CMI sound will recognize the trademark Swedish industrial/ ambient sounds. When I first heard this I knew next to nothing of the individual behind this project and still know relatively little (not that this should affect the music of course!). To put it simply this CD reminds me of a mix of raison d'être's early CD's mixed with the darker sounds of Archon Satani's 'Virgin Birth' CD. All of the necessary elements are present, dark flowing rhythms, choirs, bells and undercurrents of minimal orchestral compositions. Apart from the obvious influences this is a very strong disc with multitudes of its own character. This would have to rate as one of my favorite ambient/industrial disc's of '97 and originally I even felt that it was bounds ahead of the new raison d'être CD (I now consider both albums to be on the same pedestal). All I can say is that I am getting a little sick of CMI doing it once again!

Drape Excrement (Ger) "Born Dead" LP 1995 Art Konkret

Taking a leaf out of the Brighter Death Now camp this is 'death industrial' at its darkest presented here. Deathly heavy and dense noise drones slowly on with tortured and distorted vocals buried under many layers of sonic sludge. Some tracks utilize sampled voices (which don't really make reference to anything in particular), while each track tends to sustain a certain style over their short lengths. Again the comparisons to Brighter Death Now are to be made with this sounding somewhat similar to the "Great Death" sound (however I might ass that at times this makes B.D.N sound sonically 'clean'). 'The Lost Age' being the first track on side two is quite impressive with its overall depth of sound being more akin to the Lustmord style of ambience.

The simple styled black and white LP cover compliments the obscure music with scattered images of religious decadence and decay. I will say that this is not overly a highly original release due to the obvious sources of inspiration but in this circumstance I won't hold this against the project when it is done this good.

Each Dawn I Die (Swe) "Notes From A Holy War" CD 1997 Dark Vinyl Records

Have you ever brought a CD simply on the strength of the members works in other groups? Well this was the case with this CD. The two members making up this project had previous workings in or are currently part of Megaptera, and with a title such as this one I thought I could not go wrong. All I can say is that this disc is so far from what I expected! The closest description I can come up with would be 'weird European electro/ ambient music' if that is anything to go by! At first I really disliked this, as it was not what I had expected but as I accepted it for what it was its true potential was realised.

The concept of the album is based around the Spanish inquisitions and the witch trials of the 14th Century with the original inspiration being taken from the book "The Talisman of Death". The first track begins with a 'dub' style tune but a

heavy bass kick keeps the beat dark and heavy. The vocal are done in a surreal talking manor describing a fantasy type world while the electro rhythms/ sounds float forward at a mid pace.

Track two starts with an ominous and bombastic orchestration which could be compared to In Slaughter Natives however about 3 minutes into the song the music changes direction to a mid paced keyboard acoustic tune with deep/ clean male vocals. After another few minutes the track changes direction again where the music stops for two & a half minutes of text sampled from directly movies detailing the above themes. The tune floats in again for a short time only to return to the sampled spoken pieces. Once the music returns again a dark and brooding orchestral piece finishes off the track.

Electro beats and rhythms return for track three to the point of if the music was slightly sped up it would constitute quite a dark dance track!. Sampled text/vocals and again the electro beats make up the lengthy 10 minute track four where the music fades in an out through stages of text and music.

The finally of the album is embodied in the 22 minute track 'Trader of Life' where the overall feel is more ambient although background looping and beats give it a 'driving' feel as it gets into a 10 minute groove. Low fi ambience filters in for the middle section before the electro elements return to complete the disc.

This release is definitely not for everyone and no doubt by reading this review you will have a good idea of if you would like this sort of thing. Although 'Notes from a Holy War' is not half as dark as I expected and does contain many non standard ambient elements, for me it is one obscure release I am glad I found.

Endvra (Eng) "Great God Pan" CD 1997 Elfenbut

As you would realize by now by reading my reviews, for me the aesthetics of a release are just as important as the strength of the music (there is nothing worse than a great release with cheesy packaging). Well this CD packaging is no exception. Encased in a black gold embossed cardboard box, the jewel case CD comes with 11 tarot cards whose graphics are truly dark to behold. And after all of this the music also measures up - what more could you ask for!?

Endvra have certainly been busy over the last few years but the funny thing is 'Great God Pan' was their first CD to be recorded but was released as their fifth CD in 1997, some four years late. The infamous individual behind Candlelight Records delayed the CD by two years before Endvra severed all ties to find a more suitable label. Misanthropy Records came to the party but due to the rearranging of that label and the setting up of the side label 'Elfenblut' the disc was further delayed.

As the CD represented the groups first major effort I initially was expecting a release which would show a group in their formative stages of composition arrangement but after hearing it, I feel that this is their strongest release yet. Some remixing and reworking did occur but ultimately the songs have remained the same.

By far it is there most orchestrated release with dark totalitarian compositions mixed with dark brooding ambient moments. There is a definite archaic, mysterious element to Endva's sound which could be put down to the groups

interest and involvement in magick. This element is emphasized with the track 'Hymn to Pan' being adapted from a Aleister Crowley poem. The disc open with a dark orchestral marching type track with a large emphasis on the heavy beat. Track two slows down slightly but continues in essentially the same feel. Track three 'Dark Face of Eve' has angelic soaring female vocals together with low male vocals and a dark undercurrent flowing through the song. Continuing on minimalist ambience with vocal chanting constitute track four 'the sickening skies'. The spoken piece which constitutes the vocals for 'The truth is a sharp knife' are made even more convincing as the liner notes states that they were recorded on Holy ground - within Durham Cathedral. An almost 'baroque' feel is embodied 'Saturn's Tree' with the light overture and deep string sections. The finally of the fifty five minute disc comes with bombastic 'The Battle Song or Endvra' with a deep type vocal chanting words in the background. This release has certainly found the middle ground for the mixing of orchestrated industrial and minimalistic ambience. Endvra are definitely one group that all CMI fanatics should be taking notice of.

Hagalaz' Runedance (Nor) "When the trees were silenced" 7"ep 1997

Elfenblut

Here we have an essentially a solo project of Andea Myer Haugen aka Nebelhexe of the now defunct Aghast. Anyone expecting a rehash of the ghostly atmospheres of Aghast will be rather taken aback by this 7". Taking on Viking folk aspect two slow marching type tracks are presented. The title track has tribal type drums with female vocals and a choir in the background with a light acoustic tunes added for atmosphere. Side two basically again consists of Andrea speaking/ singing while the drums and choirs drone in the background with the tune also being carried with a folk violin. All in all not at an amazing release but worth a listen if the ambient/ folk thing is for you.

Hazard (Swe) "Lech" CD 1997 Malignant Records

For those of you unaware this is the new project of Benny Neilson, infamous from the Morthound project of a few years back. Since dissolving his last project Benny has since resurfaced with a new project and new vision of where he wants to take his music. When first hearing this, it would be advisable not to be expecting a reincarnated Morthound. However if one had to compare this, it is more along the lines of the highly minimalistic work of 'This Crying Age' and the more low droning tracks off 'The Goddess how could make the ugly world beautiful'.

Low washes of sound are complemented by slow evolving percussion, while light textures of melodies are interwoven into the soundscapes effortlessly. Liquidous motion and hazy electronic treatments exemplify Benny's overall vision of a surreal dreamscape. Certain parts threaten to evolve into more harsh soundscapes however this never actually eventuates. Light dreamy dub like rhythms emerge sporadically but tend to only meander in the foreground in an effort not to be totally dominant. Dualities in sound are forever present with soothing and relaxing sounds being juxtaposed next to claustrophobic and suffocating atmospheres. Overall this is dreamy and surreal which makes it

particularly hard to review track by track as it works best as a complete body of work. Hazard also promises to be quite prolific with a number of new releases scheduled for this year and if his track contribution on the CMI 50# compilation is anything to go by Hazard should expect to go far.

Ildfrost (Nor) “Natanael” CD 1997 Cold Meat Industry

Well Ildfrost return with their second CD although admittedly I did not get to hear their debut effort. However I did hear one of their tracks of "...& even wolves hid there teeth" CMI sampler CD (which was quite good I might add). I do know that originally Ildfrost consisted of two member, one male, one female. On this disc it appears that the female member has left the fold, leaving the male counterpart to keep the Ildfrost flame alive.

Now what about the music I hear you ask. Well all in all the music held within is not overly dark but more akin to orchestrated sorrowful/ dreamy music. The primary instrument is the keyboard but it is used in such a fashion that a rich sound is attained, being almost real (well as close as you can get in my book). The fourteen tracks flow forwards at a slow pace over fifty seven minutes, but periodically burst into moments of symphonic crescendos. The instruments include the full wind and string section of an orchestra, bells, timpani's, marching drums etc giving the release a very “classical” type feel.

Vocals are included in most tracks where the delivery is presented in monotone style, with the male voice talking in a European accent. The vocals are quite low in the mix and have a slight echo effect on them so following what is being said becomes quite difficult. In this respect the vocal tend to just blend into the background of the music as it flows along. The start of track three sees the Norwegian Black Metal influence infiltrating the music with some horrific high pitched shrieks. All in all I think the use of these vocals somehow undermines the validity of the release and in my opinion it would have been better to leave this out altogether. As the group does not have any real distinctive ties with the Black Metal scene, those outside of it would not understand such vocals thus the screams are likely to work against the release more than in its favor.

Not to say that Ildfrost is music only, the packaging is also quite brilliant. It is presented in card gatefold sleeve (like a mini LP cover), but there is also a written booklet inside the gatefold. Now it is this booklet that is the interesting part. Not only does it have the lyrics it also has a written conversation between two individual discussing the ideas and philosophies behind the work of Natanael. This approach I found refreshing as it is not simply someone preaching their ideas. Furthermore it also gives the opportunity for arguments and questions to be raised within the conversation. This is as much the same way that Friedrich Nietzsche present his philosophies in “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” by means of storytelling and the trials/ situations that Zarathustra faced.

Again another fine release from the Cold Meat deli!

Iron Halo Device (USA) “The Collapsing Void” CD 1998 Malignant Records

The names associated with this Iron Halo Device CD (namely Stone Glass Steel & Phil Easter) have been familiar to me for awhile however I had not heard any output from the said project/ artist. After hearing this CD I most certainly will be

searching out some of the related releases! If it wasn't for the opening announcement that the disc forms a live performance (and the first one for that matter) I would have never picked it. This has to be one of the most well conceived and executed live performances for this genre that I have had the fortune of hearing. Opening with quick paced rhythmic percussion and doomy layers of background rumblings and textures, these gradually take over as more and more layers of suffocating swirling sounds are introduced over a 12 minute length. From a audible sense you have to take this a full piece of work as there are no breaks between sections other than the segmented pieces denoted by digital track insertion points. The merging of sampled sections of music, beats, instruments and vocals are juxtaposed perfectly with the artists own contributions to piece together a flawlessly flowing piece of live art. Static yet flowing deconstructionalist ambience, doomy bass riddled industrial and composed rhythmic electronics are just a few of the descriptions that come to mind, but by no means does this come close to doing this justice. There is just so much going here that my mind is spinning! Harsh yet beautiful, extreme yet calm, subtle yet energetic - the music has so many facets to it. The live portion of the disc fades out after nearly 50 minutes leaving me feeling numb and detached wondering what the section of the CD will present? Taken from home recorded demo's from 1995(I would hardly class this material as 'demo') the second part is also broken up into four 'tracks' Not as openly energetic, the tracks take a more straight forward doomy, ambient industrial route whist travelling at a slower to mid pace. At one point I do believe I picked a noise sample has been taken from Lustmord's "Heresy"? I might be wrong on this but it sounds awfully close to the unearthly wails on the said record. Some truly heavy sections of slow orchestral keyboards help to elevate the foreboding atmosphere of "The Expanding Void" whist a textured and electronically treated vocal sample cuts in and out of the mix during the beginning passage of "Red Memory". Leading the disc into its conclusion is the electronically treated ethic/ middle eastern inspired sounds of "A Passion Vessel". The packaging is top notch (also coming from the genius behind this) and has a particularly interesting excerpt from a court case where it appears that Phil was subjected to a court trial for alleged breach of copyright regulation(related to the sampling and deconstruction aesthetic technique of his music production). For an artist who deserves much wider recognition than he actually has you wonder why a corporation would bother? I gather that both the artist and label would have risked further legal persecution with the issuing of this release, therefore I commend both for being brave enough to bring this to the masses(albeit however selected those masses actually are!). I am truly glad I have experienced the sheer energy and power of Iron Halo Device.

Lustmord (Eng) " Strange Attractor/ Black Star" 12" 1996 Plug Research

When I ordered this I was only really buying it for its collectors value not for the music. That being said, the reason I did not expect much was that I assumed that the sparse dark ambience that Brian Williams presents would be lost amongst the static of an LP. Boy was I wrong! This has to be the most powerful LPs I own (and the artwork suits the release perfectly). The two track present are extended

remixes of some of the material from "Where the Black Stars Hang" CD however some source material from an earlier release "Heresy" has been mixed in. For those unfamiliar with Lustmord, he does not create music as such, but dynamic flowing and evolving darkness. Track 2 (black star) totally blew me away first listen and is undoubtedly one of the most apocalyptic pieces that Lustmord has produced thus far.

Words can not even come close to describing the all consuming darkness of this release thus it is best to leave this review short and obscure like the mastermind behind Lustmord.

Macronympha (USA) "Intensive Care" CD 1998 Self Abuse Records

Now before I begin with the review I will make it known that I am not a huge connoisseur of the noise genre so any points made here are purely from my stance on this style.

This disc is one of the first perks that I have gained since starting this magazine, with this promo CD coming my way after doing the rounds looking for advertisers. To start with I can say that this lives up to what I have come to expect from noise music, both from a sound and visual perspective. The full colour 10 page booklet has various morgue and hospital patient pictures intermixed with extreme pornographic imagery. Obviously these have been used to present the 'music' for their shock value (they certainly hit the mark there). And what of the sounds? Well the 72 minute disc is broken up into 4 'tracks', but you are hard pressed to pick the change from one to the next. This is to say two things - one that they generally sound the same and two – that each track is all over the place in terms of focus and direction. The basis of the noise is extreme in its delivery with full on obliterated frequencies and electronic squeals in a mid to high pitched sound range. The attack is incessant and brutal with little let up, apart from a few lulls to give the listener a short lived reprise before it hurtles headlong back into 'head fuck' territory.

As was said before I feel that this lacks focus as it sounds as someone is flipping through channels of static frequencies on a radio. Some parts hint at becoming structured with looping noise only to change just as quickly, moving off on another tangent.

I may have not fully got the point with this style but I guess if simply extremities is the basic concept behind this, structure and direction become incidental. One thing I do find interesting about this music is just how do these artists go about creating the noise in such an angry guise? For anyone more versed in noise than I, would probably get a real kick out of this.

Megaptera (Swe) "Deep Inside" MLP 1997 Slaughter Productions

Here is a limited mini LP from Megaptera that features one unreleased track and two tracks that were previously featured on two Slaughter Productions Compilations.

Track 1 "Brian Ghost" (being the unreleased one) is heavily rhythmic with a variety of treated sounds and almost upbeat percussive sounds. This track is quite a lot more straightforward in style than the haunting atmospheres I have generally associated with Megaptera. Track 2 "Lurking Fear" does not disappoint

with its more classic type Megaptera sound and structure. Washes of sounds rise and fall gradually building giving off the exact impression of the tracks title. Midway through the sounds become more structured as the track consolidates itself into a slow coherent atmosphere.

The last track (being also the title track) begins with a more ‘wet’ floating type structure which is more sporadic in its delivery. A sampled piano tune makes a brief appearance before the track again lurches back to the sparse void of ambience. Towards the end of the track some angelic chorale vocals are injected into the mix along with the ranting of a religious nut.

The packaging of this goes to show that now all ‘dark’ type music needs to be encased in black. The white foldout sleeve is complimented with a simple grey boarder and the obligatory pictures of mummified bodies.

This is one of just a few current Megaptera releases that will surely propel them to the front the dark/ death ambient genre – a position which has wrongly eluded them thus far. A worthy addition to any record collection.

Megaptera (Swe) “Curse of the Scarecrow” CD 1998 Release Entertainment

The CD first conceived and recorded back in 1995 has finally seen its proper release and not a moment too soon (don’t the clichés make you sick!). Opening with a highly atmospheric yet extremely bass heavy track called ‘Disturbance’, this adequately sets the tone for the 50 minute CD. Claustrophobic swirls of sound merge and evolve while ultra slow pounding beats reverberate underneath. Track two is slightly more focused with a slow machine like drone gradually making way for more clattering sampled sounds and slow beats that aptly reflects the track’s title (Cog-Wheel Machinery). ‘Don’t Desecrate the Dead’ (track three) ups the stakes yet again forging headlong into some the most foreboding death industrial that has ever been produced. Taking a middle line with sustained tones and a repetitive beat/ sound the track is broken up with sampled voices taken from one movie or another. Sampled choral voices also make an appearance giving the perception of being part of the proceedings of a macabre church gathering.

Things are toned down on the title track and, being more minimal death industrial with obscure vocal samples included and partially buried in the mix. During the track ‘More Disturbance’ in amongst the swirling atmosphere and voice samples a repetitive middle eastern type tune plays out its part as the track gradually builds in intensity. The remainder of the album does not disappoint keeping the flair to the well worn death industrial structure, using intense atmosphere and repetitive clattering noises and beats.

The cover art suits the CD perfectly being presented in black and silver featuring various images of skull/ bone collections. The most unusual thing about the photos is that they appear to have been taken inside a church with the bones and skulls being the major focal point of the interior design. Strange indeed!

All in all a great CD that should get Megaptera the recognition that they duly deserve.

Necrophorus (Swe) "Yoga" 10" Pic. Disc 1997 Yantra Atmospheres

The always productive Peter Anderson (of better known Raison D'etre/ Stratvm Terror fame) has returned for his second release (after a debut CD) under the Necrophorus moniker. As much as I liked the debut CD I found it patchy in places and some of the vocal treatments got slightly on my nerves. Nevertheless the sounds presented on this vinyl are much more to my liking. For a bit of background, this item is actually released on Peter own label, with this being his first product. Drawing away from predictable inspiration Peter has dedicated this 10" it to his dog with some of the source/ sound material actually having been taken from his pet! Further tribute is shown to "Ronja" by being featured on both sides of the picture vinyl!! As for the music this generally fit in the slow minimalistic school, with washes of sounds and strange noises flowing and evolving. Track one begins with manipulated sounds with a minimalistic rhythm structure that flows forth for about five minutes. At this point a rising/ falling 'spacey' type sound sample is introduced which extend to the completion of the track. Track two is basically an extension of track one in style & sound except it has slightly more going on with the movement of the atmosphere. Towards the middle to end of the song a light middle eastern composition is overlaid to good effect. Generally both tracks follow a similar construction (titles Yoga 1 & Yoga 2) and could potentially make up the one composition if included on a different format.

In reference to the source material some of the strange noises that I could detect in the background included his dog breathing, eating & pushing a food bowl around on the floor! As much as this sounds like it wouldn't work it gels surprisingly well. (I guess no one may have picked these sounds if Peter hadn't announced this was dedicated to his pet). Anyway, anyone interested in getting this better move quickly if they want to obtain this as it is limited to only 315 copies!!

Ordo Equilibrio (Swe) "I4I" 7" Pic. Disc 1997 Cold Meat Industry

Once again CMI never cease to amaze with the artistic production of their products. This picture 7"EP is impressive enough with its runes, roses and symbols, but you are also treated to a full colour sleeve. Both tracks included on this are exclusive to this release and showcase two sides to the 'Ordo' sound. Track one ("In the grassy fields where the world goes to sleep. We kissed this world Goodbye") features the always impressive basis and inclusion of a repetitive acoustic guitar to build the backbone of the sound. Keys, noises & sampled sounds complement the acoustics and monotone male/ female vocals. Track 2 ("War for the Principle of Balance. Nature seeking Equilibrium") is more sparse and focuses on a more post-industrial approach which comes across as quite moving and anthemic. Beginning the track are bell chimes, slow snare beats and commanding spoken vocals which then breaks into a militaristic semi-composed neo-classical tune only to fall back to the beginning structure. This format of the song is repeated throughout it's five odd minute length. My main love in Ordo Equilibrio has always been the use of acoustics to build atmosphere and this release further cements their brilliance in this style. And finally the title

represents “eye for eye” and not ‘one hundred & forty one’ as some have coined it!! Oh, and limited to 1313 copies of course.

Ordo Equilibrio (Swe) “Conquest, Love & Self Perseverance” CD 1998 Cold Meat Industry

Well here we have it, the long awaited third sermon from the male/ female duo Ordo Equilibrio. And where have they chosen to take the listener with this release? Their disdain for the Christian faith has not been dulled however they have further expanded on their interest in S& M via their lyrics. Thirteen tracks are showcased here over a 50 minute span however this time all of the tracks feature lyrics and vocals. This is as opposed to the previous two CD’s that had ambient/ industrial passages intermixed with more composed tracks. Opening with a foreboding horn section and looped laughter a marching snare drones on whilst the spoken monotone vocals of both Chelsea and Tomas present the lyrics in a cold and unfeeling manor.

The acoustic side of Ordo is presented on track two with the looping acoustic riff and light keys filling out the sound. Track three expands on some of the ideas explored on the first album, with the cracking of a whip utilized to form part of the sample rhythm used. The acoustic track found on the previous 7” is featured here, being a good inclusion due to its sheer quality and atmosphere. The track from the CMI 50 compilation is also included, however has undergone a slight remix with an echo effect on the vocals being the most obvious part. In my opinion this is the epitome of Ordo’s sound and will remain one of my favorite tracks that they have produced thus far.

Track 8 (‘The blind are leading the blind are leading the blind are leading the blind’) is quite up tempo with its looping industrial beat and repetitive vocal lines and tune. In amongst the honing of their sounds some more folk elements have made an appearance in the form of folk marching drums and the use of a mouth harp on one track.

With the cover artwork we are treated to a somewhat humorous ‘band’ photo. The picture shows a naked female on all fours with a skull and red candle balanced on her back whilst Chelsea (holding an teddy bear) and Thomas (holding a whip) are kneeling behind her. The front cover shows a picture of Chelsea dressed a school girl posing with dagger and lollipop (with a black background, red roses and the Ordo logo filling out the visual). Although the CD is not as progressive as I may have initially hoped this is a solid CD that remains focused throughout its entirety without loosing its direction. Another essential items for your CD collection.

Orphx (Can) “Fragmentation” CD 1996 Malignant Records

Orphx taking on a tribal power electronic/ death industrial guise this remains one of the interesting CD’s that I own. Sounding like a small piece of many groups it is blended together suitably to be able to retain its own character. A very ‘B.D.N’ styled track opens this with the low rising factory industrial vibes and processed vocals. “Layers of Dura” has static harsh and heavy beats that are produced to the point where the whole mix threatens to collapse under the heavy distortion. Text and spoken word passages float somewhere in the middle of the mix being

indecipherable amongst the infernal clatter. Early mz412 comes to mind more than once especially during the heavy tribal beats of "Ekstasis", complete with its screamed and distorted vocals. Hard listening is abound during the start of "Sepsis" with its highly disorientating use of the balance dial whilst when it calms down to the percussion brings to mind the repetitive nature of some of Deutsch Nepal's noisier efforts.

The screeching vocals of Christina and Richard are used in number of tracks to add an unnerving effect. While not being so up front & in your face they are mixed into the background of the aggressive tribal percussion and distorted electronic attack. There is some let up during lengthy 9 minute "Words Once Spoken" track where it takes a slightly noisier take on the Yen Pox styled drone ambience only to evolve into a full holocaust of fried frequencies. The final track hints again at the use of the drone ambient genre, which in itself is a relief after the ear damaged sustained from the preceding tracks. Throwing in other names such as Mental Destruction and Memorandum for further comparison this should be leading you in the right direction of what to expect. Being aggressive, punishing and repetitive, the music manages to retain its full focus of force over the 70+ minute length. This is music to be played loud for full harrowing effect.

Proiekt Hat (Swe) "Lebensunwertes Leben" LP 1998 Cold Meat Industry

Here we go with a review of quite an obscure release from the Cold Meat camp. Admittedly I know next to nothing about this project however when it was billed as 'old school Swedish industrial' I could not resist.

Overall in structure this is very minimalist 'factory' styled industrial. The record starts with a mid paced semi distorted machine rhythm that flows forward but does not really get anywhere over the distance covered. Track 2 'Dislocator of the Souls' is probably my favorite track as it is a bit more structured in the B.D.N style and sound. The next track is more cavernous than its predecessors that rounds out the first side with a short and slow piece of ambient industrial.

The second side starts with a lo-fi distant rumble with more mid range sound rising and falling in the mix over a lengthy track. The final track of the LP remains slow moving but has a more electronic feel with some laid back soothing yet harsh type noise(if this was sped up and more forceful it could possibly pass for power electronics).

The tracks that make up this release are taken from various recording between 1992-97 but if these tracks have ever appeared elsewhere is anyone guess as there is little to no information included on the sleeve. Glancing over the artwork it is easy to see why it is limited to 500 hand numbered LP's. It would be guaranteed that any politically correct individual would most certainly take offence to the anti-Semitic cartoon & symbol, photos of abused children and a person of the 46+2 variety.

Overall this LP is good however I find it slightly unusual for CMI given their current directions of releases.

Puissance (Swe) "Back In Control" CD 1998 Cold Meat Industry

Well, as the title suggests Puissance are back with their second full length offering and are supposedly "back in control". First off I will question to if the wait for this disc was worth it and sadly I must admit the answer is no. However this is not to say this is at all a bad disc. My major complaint is of the eight tracks only three are new. Two tracks were originally featured on their limited 7"EP "Totalitarian Hearts", along with their contribution from the CMI Anniversary compilation. Further, as the disc is only 40 minutes in length it seems a little short for the time frame between discs. Well anyway on with a review of the music. I will admit that there has been a definite progression since the debut effort with the duo delving further into a mix of militaristic neoclassical orchestral music and dark industrial styles. The first track is a low-key industrial piece with some composition included in the background. The disc takes a leap forward with track two into a more composed orchestral track with heavy slow marching drumming and a slow moving yet stirring melody. As track three arrives I will crown it as being the best track of the disc (which was the same song from the CMI 50# comp). This song is a full classical piece that begins with a sad & somber tone but then periodically breaks into apocalyptic crescendos over its 5 minute length. Spoken word vocals are included in both tracks 2 & 3 which gives the listener some interesting insight into the philosophy of the group. Track 4 falls back in a dark minimalist industrial vein with vocal samples of a controversial nature being intertwined (i.e.: detailing subjects of recreational murder, torture, bondage, a police interview with the British serial killer who buried victims under the floorboards in his kitchen etc). As the samples are kept low in the mix and have a slight effect on them, half the fun is trying to make out exactly what is being said! Track 5 (also featured on the 7") is a great listen with full distorted production, fast and heavy marching drumming and the ranting vocals. Much of the charm of this song lies in the sustained notes and sounds in the background with the heavy rhythm drumming moving it forward at a fast pace. Tracks 6 & 7 yet again play around with the juxtaposition of orchestral and industrial styles further cementing their own style and sound. The final track "Totalitarian Hearts" (which takes its name from the title of the previous 7" EP) will be very controversial due to the lyrics and I can say without a doubt they will definitely be misinterpreted. Again this song is an orchestral marching type song but has a more folkish element due to the accompanying flute tune. The vocals in this song are less commanding, possibly being even a little condescending in style and tone. In regards to the last line of the lyrics of this song, from my knowledge of Puissance's stance it appears to be at odds with other lyrics and ideas contained on the album. (As I don't want to fall into the trap of misinterpretation, give the lyrics in the booklet a read and see if you can determine exactly what I am getting at). As can be seen the album is basically split between industrial type tracks and neoclassical orchestral tracks. As much as this sounds like a contradiction in sound the two styles work surprisingly well. Although far from being a classic release it is yet again a solid offering from the Cold Meat camp.

Raison D'être (Swe) "Reflections from a Time of Opening MCMXCI" CD 1997 Bloodless Creations

I imagine that the upcoming Australian label of 'Bloodless Creations' would have scored quite a coup with the release of this disc. As the label is relatively unknown in the ambient field it would be an understatement to say that many other ambient labels would kill to have opportunity to release an artist of Raison D'etre's caliber.

Somber sounds and dark atmospheres are what Raison D'etre does best by utilizing a deep spiritual undercurrent and dark twist on the catholic religious type sounds. Slow rhythms and beats are complimented by lush compositions that don't rise to spiraling heights but choose to keep a minimalist evolving tone. Predominantly this disc is a collection of Peter Anderson's early works when Raison D'etre first surfaced early in the 1990's. The majority of tracks were originally released by 'Old Europa Café' on an MC from a few years back entitled 'Conspectus', however the 8 tracks from this are mixed up with a 5 previously unreleased tracks. All tracks have been reordered and remixed to complete quite an impressive document of how Peter has evolved with his compositions & is a strong representation of both past works and future directions. A disc for fans of Raison D'etre and the Cold Meat Industry sounds alike.

Raison D'etre (Swe) "In sadness, silence and solitude" CD 1997 Cold Meat Industry

With little fanfare surrounding the release of this disc I was quite surprised when the promo disc arrived in the post. Before this time there was absolutely no rumors or mention of when to expect a new CD, but here it was! Peter has managed to be quite diverse with his releases while still encompassing the trademark sounds, with this disc being no exception (this is his 4th – not including the 'Reflections... CD). To say the music enclosed on the album is sparse is an understatement. Peter has definitely mastered the art of subtly knowing that what is left out is often more important than what is left in.

Stylistically Raison D'etre has previously been reasonable composed, however this release sees a departure more towards the realms of dark isolationist ambience. I was very disheartened when first experiencing this to the point of writing it off but it wasn't until after five or so listens that I really began to appreciate its sparseness. The backbone of this album is a flowing current of evolving sound (akin to Lustmord) that works on a multitude of levels. The sounds morph and evolve over the length of the disc with some more composed moments of keys, bells, rhythms and catholic type chanting sporadically placed throughout. It would also appear that some of the darker, harsher sounds have been influenced by another of Peter's side projects namely Stratvm Terror. Of the six lengthy tracks, track two is the most composed with its mid paced rhythm flowing forward with lush keys and vocal chants. This feel is also again reproduced towards the completion of the album. This album is dark yet ultimately beautiful to the point of being indescribable, which one must hear to fully comprehend. Undoubtedly Peter Anderson's best work as Raison D'etre

yet. (note: I only recently discovered that this disc is compromised of both live recordings and studio works – unbelievable!).

Sanctum (Swe) “The answer to his riddle” 10” pic. Disc 1998 Cold Meat Industry

What can one say about Sanctum? They are surely one of the most innovative bands within any genre of music at this point time as they cover so many styles and themes within their music. For me I do believe that there is a certain commercial potential for this group with their perfect mix of theatrical music combined with enough industrial sensibilities and a heavy does of moving melodies. After such a stunning debut album as ‘Lupus in Fabula’ this 10” is a bridging release to their upcoming album. The title track here has also recently been featured on the CMI “Absolute Supper” compilation, which is easily their most commercially viable song to date. Beginning with a classical type vibe, when the track hits its industrial phase the powerful female vocals soar over the driving and distorted samples. Heaven forbid if I was to refer to this as ‘pop’ music buts that’s exactly what it is in its own quirky way.

‘Madelene’ is the next track to follow that is more laid back and theatrical in presentation with strings and wind instruments making up the majority of the structure. A dark twist is taken in the song when earth shatteringly heavy beats enter and eventually take over the mix along with harsh aggressive spoken vocals and more sweet female vocals.

Side two begins with a stunning remix of ‘in two minds’ (a track from the debut) to which I am still unsure to which version I like better as both are stunningly great. This is emotional industrial band music at its best. The final track ‘euphoria’ is almost a throw away piece as it is very short with a repetitive sample and vocal overlay. Not really worth a mention in comparison with what else is on offer here. Apart from the stunning visual presentation of the picture disc EP the cover is more artistically personal than CMI’s normal output with its transparent ‘tracing paper’ over wrap. Might I add this is limited to 1000 so I suggest you act fast.

Shinjuku Filth (Aus) “Raised by Wolves” MCD 1997 Iridium

The nastier, dirtier and more technology & techno orientated alter ego of Shinjuku Thief returns with this second offering of a mini CD. The music contained within actually made up 35 minutes of the musical backdrop of the Handspan Theatre Company’s show (also entitled ‘Raised by Wolves’) which was performed in Melbourne, Australia in October 1997. A harsh rhythm/ techno type structure makes up the predominant sound however none of this is remotely commercially orientated. A certain ‘junk’ type style is evident with vocal snippets, sounds and samples entered randomly into the mix giving it quite an unstructured cut and paste sound at times. Heavy rhythmic techno drumming moves many of tracks along at a blistering pace with some distorted guitar saxophone and keys added in certain sections. Other tracks slow things down slightly with heavily manipulated distortion rounding off the chaotic mix of beats & sounds. Track six has a slight departure in sound more akin to the classical type sounds of Shinjuku Thief’s ‘The Scribbler’ which morphs into a techno dub song towards the end. Taken out of the context of the stage show this release sometimes

appears to be patchy and disjointed without the complimentary visuals, however there is still merit to be found within the music. Although mostly very removed from the sounds of Darrin's other works, this is nonetheless an interesting release and worth a listen if you are a little open minded to more varied sounds of a techo mix with a dark undercurrent.

The 3rd & The Mortal (Nor) "In This Room" CD 1997 Music for Nations

(This review may not be typical of the rest of the albums presented here but I still think it is worthy of a listen for those who listen to a wide variety of styles of music). Well, well. Since the departure of Kari Ruslatten after the bands debut CD this band have really changed direction and not for the worse I might add. Gone are the folk influence replaced by prog rock, blues and jazz influences. This is the bands third full length and the second with their new female vocalist Ann-Mari Edvadsen. (not including the MCD "nightswan") As fantastic a vocalist Kari was I feel Ann-Mari's style of singing better suits the type of music the band are currently writing. Many of the songs have a floating, emotional feel to them and just meld one into the other like travelling in a dream. The track "So pure" sees the band in a full jazz mood with Ann-Mari experimenting with the vocals rather than just having the passive sweet female voice. This experimentation is taken further in the tracks "sophisticated vampires (to the point of being disharmonic) and "did you" which has her screaming in an aggressive voice asking "did you kill me, did you bury me?". On some tracks no vocals are present, with them simply acting as a musical bridge to float you to the next piece on offer. This makes the CD progress really well as a single piece of music rather than just a collection of tracks. Distorted & acoustic guitars, grand piano, keyboards, tapes, and samples (& drums of course) have been the main ingredients of choice but as the band have six members all active in the song writing process one can be assured they are not one dimensional. The music has a top notch production and the studio has been used extensively to produce a rich and diverse album that is not just a taped live representation of the band. I will admit this band will have lost many along the way from the more extreme scenes but they certainly won't shake me that easily. It is the bands willingness to experiment with influences and styles which helps them remain fresh and undated to my ears.

...the Soil Bleeds Black (USA) "The Kingdom & its Fey" DLP 1997 Cruel Moon International

Firstly to anyone thinking of buying this, act quickly and get the double LP version as it has 10 bonus minutes of music not on the CD, not to mention it being limited and the layout being heaps better. I'm sure not that many people are aware of this strangely titled group but anyone who knows a thing or two about the record label CMI will have at least heard the name. Most of the music on this release is not actually new to me as I was lucky enough to snare a copy of their two earlier tape releases (limited to 100 each) which comprised most of the tracks herein. The first time I heard this I was a little taken aback by the upbeat folky elements as I was expected mostly dark music akin to

what Mortiis is doing. Over a number of listens the actual ingenuity is revealed. It is heavily based on synthesized percussion and melody but used in manor to express folkish beats, cymbals, horns, flutes, trumpets etc. All of the tracks are fairly short (there are 30 tracks on the DLP) but this means an ample amount of variety. Many different themes are explored through slower tracks but also many up tempo sections can be found. Male vocal in a talking/chanting style enter on a few occasions but there are also female vocals interwoven more periodically. The use of background sound effects and vocal samples add to the atmosphere and help carry the feel of a concept and story being played out. Admittedly this folk inspired medieval style of music will not be for everyone but if this review sparks your interest, do make an effort to seek out this unique formation.

...the Soil Bleeds Black (USA) “March of the Infidels” CD 1998 Draenor Productions

Back with their second full length CD (I hear that there has also already been another tape album and third CD, with the fourth and fifth in production) the highly productive ...the Soil Bleeds Black continue where the last CD left off. There has been minimal if any change in style, sound and production from the last album, thus the above review is still typically applicable. Background dialogue and sound samples used to illustrate battles and other themes have been sampled from Braveheart and other movies I can't pick. Bard Algol of Cernunnos Woods also pops up on one of the tracks with his distinctive vocalizations. Now for a couple of gripes. My main concern with this project is the lack of progression and sound between albums. If it is simply a matter of churning out tracks with little thought to constantly progressing, they risk loosing the interest they have generated thus far. Furthermore I wonder in it's current guise how far this style can be taken. Spanning 16 tracks over 37 minutes this is significantly shorter than the first album which questions if the amount of proposed albums could be shortened by consolidating material. These are just a few minimal concerns so if previous material caught your attention this won't disappoint. As with the last album the cover art is distinctive and impressive strait from the hand of one of the members.

Trial of the Bow (Aus) “Rite Of Passage” CD 1997 Release Entertainment

After the exceptional “Ornamentation” MCD from 1995 Trial of the Bow return with their debut full length. In the few years between the two recordings it appears that the duo's stylistic approach to their song writing has altered slightly. While the MCD flowed together as a piece of ethereal/ tribal ambience the new CD seems to consist more individual tracks. Ten tracks are on offer all being of a different nature and theme while still using the common threads of middle eastern sound and structure. Trial of the Bow have managed to use the middle Eastern sounds to create dark brooding and emotional music without giving the feel of being in a Budist temple. A definite highpoint for the group is that no keyboards or electronic instruments are used. What is heard are the all real thing which gives a natural and authentic flavor that is so often lost with synthesized sounds.

The CD opens with the track "Father of the Flower" and is a mid paced tune with tabla drums, acoustic guitar, eastern and western string instruments and soaring background chanting vocals. "Ubar" is the next song which is slightly more up tempo with the basic structure being of percussion and wind instruments with the accompany again of an acoustic guitar.

Track three "the promise" resembles the floating feel of the MCD in it's slow moving pace which has a cello brooding under the strong percussion. This theme flows into the next track "Serpent" this time with a sorrowful flute tune carrying the tune.

Track five is a departure from the other songs as for me is one of the highlights although it has the least happening. Being extremely hypnotic the songs floats along by the sounds of bowed instruments without using an actual tune. Notes/sounds flow into one another and evolve over the length of the 6 minute track.

Track 8 uses a recorded to my ears which sounds more of a Baroque style while the percussion remains firmly rooted in the middle eastern style.

The finally of the album comes by the name of "Alizee" with it's deep reverberating bowed double bass rumbles while male vocals chant a haunting tune.

In comparison to the MCD many more themes have been explored with this release, but at the same time it seems the flow of the album has been sacrificed for the stature of the individual tracks.

One theme will be experimented with but before you can get fully engrossed within it moves on the next track where another theme will be explored. In this respect repetition is avoided. This is a minor complaint on my part and by no means reflects on the quality of this release.

Obvious comparisons can be made to elements of Dead Can Dance but Trial of the Bow have definitely managed to carve themselves a niche within the world music realms. It will be the darker elements of this group that will attract interest from the dark ambient and metal scenes but still an open mind is a definite prerequisite for this album. Great interest has been shown in this group in the international sphere but sadly they still remain relatively unknown within their home country. A definite shame if they do not gain the expose in Australia that they so deserve.

Stratvm Terror (Swe) "Pain Implantation" CD 1998 Malignant Records

Fresh off the press this is the brand spanking new CD on Malignant Records further solidifying the high standard of releases that has preceded it (Cheers Jason for provided me with a promo copy!). For those unaware this is the second CD from Stratvm Terror, after the 1995 "Pariah Demise" CD and two previous tape releases preceding that. This project is a side project of Peter Anderson (better known for outputs as *raison d'être*) who works with another individual by the name of Tobias Larsson to bring forth the sounds of decadence presented here. Whilst Peter's output in other projects has been sorrowful and beautiful this steers well clear of that territory driving headlong into inspiration derived from aggression and pain. The aptly titled CD "Pain Implantation" is probably a good description of the music, given the focus of the approach. Sparse and suffocating atmospheres float forth while distorted noise samples are

injected, taking not so much a noise angle but a more sicken tone in their frequencies. This is an intensely harsh listen - but I do mean this in a good manor. While the previous recordings took a bit more structured pummeling rhythmic focus this has veered off into harsh electronic/ ambient territory. Selected tracks included sections of distorted industrial beats but this focus remains somewhat subdued. People familiar with Statvm's sound will find the distinctive tones are still present it is just the style has been slightly altered. The distorted vocals and voice samples of previous efforts are also absent, but in no way does this detract from the overall effect. The opener "Nerve Short Circuit" lulls the listener into a false sense of relaxation before the distorted frequencies leap out to reek havoc on the listeners cerebral area. The ambient noise of "Intravenous Pain Injection" whist could not be described as true noise, the ever incessant mid to high pitched static certainly reflect the track's title. Some parallels in the overall background structure can be made with the latest *raison d'être* CD, which gives rise to the question - which project is inspiring the other? There are no real standout tracks as all are of a high quality and they work well as a complete body of sound over a 70 minute length. This is pinnacle of technological decadence put to sound, being an impressive addition to the catalogue of the productive Peter Anderson & Co.

Various Artists (Wld) "Death Odors II" CD 1997 Slaughter Productions

Compilation CD's are always an unusual thing. On one hand they can showcase a wide variety of artists but can lack focus and direction. On the other hand they can work extremely well as a complete body of work, without appearing to have the contribution of many individuals. In the case of this release it falls somewhere in between. Common threads of sound and structure are evident but it also works well to showcase both known and unknown groups.

Opening with a track "The Final Day": from 'Megaptera', I find it annoying that it is only an except as I have had the pleasure of hearing the complete track on a 'Fever Pitch' sampler cassette. Low droning base rumbles while minimalist monk type samples are interjected occasionally. This except version concludes just prior to the track exploding into rhythmic death industrial, so if you want to hear the track in its entirety you will have to also purchase the "Beautiful Chaos" MCD! Up next is well know and respected '*raison d'être*'. Using the 'less is more' concept Peter continues the themes touched upon on his latest CD. The track is quite minimal in structure with muti-layered slabs of organic sound and treated keyboards. The result is no less than what we have come to expect from this artist – a track which hauntingly dark yet extremely beautiful.

The 'Deutsch Nepal' track opens with a quirky keyboard melody with the input/collaboration from 'No Festival of Light' being quite evident when a bass heavy looping sample comes clattering into the mix. This continues throughout the remaining 10 minutes while keyboards and the trademark distorted vocals of Lina pop in for a visit. All in all not a bad track but tends not to hold my interest for its whole length, given its repetitive nature.

'Archon Satani' don't do anything other than what has been showcased on his latest and final releases with a track of the trademark low-fi 'void' type ambience. Although quite standard still worthy of a mention.

The next track “dark territory” being my first encounter with ‘Negru Voda’ (a Megaptera side project) I am highly impressed. What we have here is noisy and harsh death industrial at its best! Agonizing high pitch squeals introduce this before a factory noise ‘beat’ surges into the mix and are gradually overlaid to meld into pummeling finally.

‘Statvm Terror’ (another raison d’être side project) are included with an unusually titled track called ‘Another Thong’. The project being more industrial and technology oriented, the track has quite a lot going on. With the basic structure of layered sound a variety of looping samples and mid paced beats blend in and out of the song’s makeup.

Heading into the second half of the disc the names of the groups become less familiar and I can’t say I have heard any of their collective outputs before. For a quick rundown ‘Soldnergeist’ feature a pretty standard looping death industrial track with repeated vocal samples to boot.

‘Discipline’ take a more neo classical approach and although not a bad track, they have a fair way to go before this would stand up next to ‘In Slaughter Natives’ of ‘The Protagonist’.

‘No Festival of Light’ have their own track included here and while their sound is fairly unique within the ambient definition (somewhat like early ‘Archon Satani’ but less organic and more beat/ keyboard oriented) it is not more than slightly above average. ‘Memoria’s’ track seems to lack focus over the first half with sporadic factory industrial sounds, which is held together better when a ‘raison d’être’ type keyboard passage is used. From the second half of this track this might be a group to keep an eye on.

‘Crepuscule’ who hail from America sound distinctively European with comparisons to be made to early MZ 412, with a track of rumbling bass and tortured samples and vocals.

Rounding out the CD is ‘Keimverbreitung’ from Italy with a cavernous ambient sound not unlike ‘Tombstone’ (also from Italy). Light tunes from a piano and wood wind instrument float in the background of the mix avoiding being the focal point.

In conclusion this is a good CD which features well known and well worn artists amongst upcoming talent. With deluxe packaging this comes with a good recommendation.

Various Artists (Wld) “The Absolute Supper” DCD 1997 Cold Meat Industry

The reasoning behind this deluxe double gatefold digi pack release is the celebration of CMI’s 10th anniversary/ 50th release. With 20 groups spanning two discs, 22 tracks and 2 hours & 14 minutes this could turn into a marathon review. This is exactly why I will try to keep this short and sweet! The whole range of CMI’s “sound” can be found here from the lo-fi floating ambience to structured neo classical industrial through to harsh grating death industrial.

The well know groups, In Slaughter Natives, Ordo Equilibrio, Sanctum, Puissance, Arcana, Mortiis, Raison D’être, Brighter Death Now and Archon Satani all put in solid and impressive efforts.

Newcomers to the label being The Protagonist, Sephiroth, Hazard, Megaptera, Frozen Faces and Nacht all have really impressive tracks. *(By newcomers I

mean that they are new to having music released on CMI with their current projects-this also excludes the involvement in previous projects). The remaining groups Desiderii Marginis, Frozen Faces, MZ412, Deutch Nepal, Ildfrost and Cintecelle Diavolvi are also worthy of a mention. All I can say is that anyone with no interest in the ambient/ industrial scene would still find something to like here. Priced as a single CD and with detailed information of the history of the label and groups included, you can't go wrong. Do not hesitate to purchase this extremely well presented and well realized release.

Vond (Swe) "The Dark River" CD 1996 Shivadarshana

Mortiis has definitely lost the plot. With all the hype that has surrounded him over the past few years it appears he has lost any inkling of self criticism. Here he is back with his second full length by the side project Vond. While normally I have enjoyed Mortiis's previous works under whatever name, I can no longer say this is the case. He seems to be churning out whatever he records without giving it much thought to if it is of quality or not. This Vond CD has average songs (of the ones that sound decent sound more like Fata Morgana than Vond), shit vocals on two tracks and blatant mistakes in track 4 (take a listen, you can hardly miss it). The title track is an attempt at a dark ambient piece (ie no keyboards, just low rumblings, vocals and predictably the sound of running water). This comes off really weak and I find myself jumping for the skip button.

For a bit of advice Mortiis needs to simply practice his compositions a bit more before recording so he can get all of the keys played in time, not a millisecond off (as is the case here), which has resulted in an amateurish sound. Hence again the comments on self criticism. Musically he can write good songs but stylistically and technically his playing of the keyboard leaves a bit to be desired. Furthermore Mortiis obviously has not studied economic rationalism as he would realise that the consolidation of his projects would result in a stronger unit that is more varied and diverse. Granted not everything he writes would fit the music under the Mortiis banner, but having four side projects is testing the fans loyalty a bit much.

Some will say this is great simply because it is from the hand of Mortiis (probably why Shivadarshana licensed it) but I am going to be more skeptical of his outputs from now on. I just fully hope that this disease is limited only to this second Vond CD and that Mortiis will prove me wrong with future releases, but at this point I am just finding it hard to swallow this piece of dross.

Vond (Swe) "Green Eyed Demon" 1997 Extreme Subterranea

After reading the above review of Vond's previous disc I gather you are wondering why I would even bother with this. When this first came out I had absolutely no wish to purchase this however when Jason at Malignant Records gave this a good recommendation I could not resist. (note: Jason has always had a general distaste for all of Mortiis's outputs, so when he said this was good I was willing to take this on face value). If anyone gave this to me to try and guess who it was, Mortiis would have been the last person I would have picked. Gone is the heavy keyboard basis replaced with a 'death ambient/ industrial' sound.

The album is broken up into seven tracks with five being structured pieces with the final two being short vocal samples.

The disc begins with a low frequency track that rumbles along with some sort of vocals buried underneath the various layers of distortion. The track also includes dialogue detailing the process involved the electric chair execution of a condemned individual. This track is generally limited to a dark repetitive hum while although track two begins much the same ends up more varied due to the layered structure. Again a story/ dialogue samples of a necrophile/ cannibal/ serial killer is included which I believe was taken from an old movie entitled "Deranged".

Track three ups the disc another notch with a cavernous sound complemented with a slow rhythmic foundation. Various vocals are again included to encompass a good effect.

Track four "to the dreamer dead & the dreamer dying" is the closest this disc gets to previous outputs of Vond however the new styled dark ambient backbone is retained with light keyboards included as a backdrop. Further a 'Raison D'etre' like chant/ choir has been sampled. When this track picks up it mildly soars with its orchestral composition (which still has the slight Mortiis like sound).

It has been quite a while since music has really unnerved me however the final 'musical track' on this disc "(beyond hope): Hell starts Now" really hit a nerve on the first few listens. With its extreme bludgeoning layered vocals & sound it actually coming off somewhat like "Brighter Death Now's" new musical approach. This release (along with the new & improved sound and structure that Mortiis portrays on his track on the "The Absolute Supper" compilation) I can finally say that we will yet see some true quality from the Mortiis camp.

Wejdas (Lit) "Wejdas" CD 1998 Red Stream

Containing only three tracks over 47 minutes we are subjected to lengthy passages of unusual pagan/medieval/ folk styled 'new age' music. Starting off with a promising keyboard passage the scene is set whilst low chanting vocals rise in the background. After about 4 minutes this fades out to be replaced by various field recordings of "nature" sounds intermixed with light beats, sections of keys and slow drumming, treated vocals and other sounds, all generally kept to the background. They way this is presented gives the listener the feel they are listening to a movie without being able to see the images. The direction of the sounds tends to be quite sporadic and unfocused which doesn't help it to retain full interest. Heading to the 30 minute mark of the opener the original keyboard passage is reintroduced to take the track to it's conclusion. The shorter 10 minute track two has an unusual electronically treated rhythm that is not unlike some of the left of centre quirky tracks Deutsch Nepal has produced. Remaining structured and repetitive the track cyclically moves through its sounds, and sees a flute run included towards the end for good measure. The final track is very dreamy and new age styled complete with a sorrowful wind instrument passage. One gripe that I have is that I find the use of electronically created sounds tends to detract from the overall aesthetic of which is trying to be created. By trying to project a sound of the past the electronic sounds tend to be too sterile. Possibly if the keyboard instruments were made to sound more authentic this would not

be as much of a problem As interesting CD nonetheless that certainly showcases creative ideas.

Yen Pox (USA) “Blood Music” CD 1996 Malignant Records

After a tape release and 7” I believe that this is the groups first offering on CD. Yen Pox create what is coined as ‘dark ambience’ which is an over simplistic yet relevant term. I don’t think what is on this disc could be called music as such but should rather be referred to as atmospheres. Predominantly minimalistic in style, noises and sounds flow and evolve over the length of the six track, 70 minute disc. This is similar in what is on offer from another dark ambient project ‘Lustmord’ but the sounds present here have a more ‘wet’ underwater element. No keyboards are used, rather source material recording are processed by electronic means to create the ambience on offer. Besides this point of being created from an electronic medium the atmospheres sound very natural, evoking arcane visions and primal fears of something utterly dark, yet hidden & incomprehensible.

For anyone not skilled in listening to this form of ambience will ultimately call this release boring due to it’s minimalistic nature, but it is not something that you listen directly to. Put this CD on in the background or while you go to sleep and let it grow and evolve around you to gain the full effect.

Yen Pox with “Blood Music” definitely prove they are a force to be reckoned with in the dark ambient realm, as is the up and coming label “Malignant Records” who have released this gem.