

BLACK METAL OF THE AMERICAS
VOL. 1

current issue features:
interviews with horseback and scroll
features on velvet cacoon and mamaleek
reviews of panopticon, horseback, mutilation
rites, obolus, and botanist

next issue forthcoming



march 04, 2012

a couple of months ago, an incredibly pompous article regarding the state of black metal in the united states was published. the tone of the article was condescending, and the resulting overview of an wonderfully vibrant scene was paltry and scattershot. This document is an effort to correct this perception.

these pieces of paper serve as an entry-way into the current state of usbm, and we hope that you find your way pleasantly.

we've attempted to highlight artists we believe to be expanding and redefining the concept of black metal. we could give a fuck about cries of "intellectualism" or "art-school".

evolve or die.

hail.

ed

&

patrick

all correspondence can be directed to
blackmetalloftheamericas@gmail.com

Mamaleek: Music from the Outer Zone

Three albums in and San Francisco's Mamaleek show no sign of slowing down. In fact, last years **Kurdaitcha** is arguably their least accessible record yet. Not to say that Mamaleek's music is some sort of calculated aggression or a study in pre-meditated abrasion. The sounds and emotion they have traversed in those three albums would take most artists an entire career.

There is no website, no press one-sheet accompanying their releases, no pictures, aside from a lone shot of two small boys. This picture is supposed to be of the supposed brothers, but no verification has been offered. The lone internet presence is a fan-created myspace page, which has them being excited about opening for the upcoming Lana Del Ray tour (*i'd go see it. - ed*).

What it really boils down to is the music. Their first **S/T** (CD-R format, limited 100 copies released by the fine folks at Aquarius Records, now OOP) release had a shoegaze/ambient bent that is alternately blissful & buzzing. Stuttering drum machines that threaten to break down at any minute, bluegrass, sound samples, and xylophones also contribute to the heady brew.

Their next release **Fever Dream** (on the 'Furusiiya label, limited to 300 copies on vinyl) seemed to be both more & less accessible. The shoegaze element is upped a notch but is confounding when juxtaposed with all the other surrounding sounds. There is a definite jazzy feel to this album. Obviously in the Charlie Parker cover for starters and 'Stars Begin To Fall' features a smooth jazz arrangement atop black metal howling. In addition, the album has a looser, more improvisational feel than their last one.

Thanks to Dan Barrett's (of 'Have a Nice Life') Enemies List label, Mamaleek have gained somewhat of a wider exposure. **Kurdaitcha** even landed at #1 on Forbes 'The Best Free Albums of 2011'?? This is especially odd considering the album is less reliant on shoegaze and or indie rock textures, it is definitely their most experimental record yet. They have added some colors to their canvas of sound, check out the exotic sounding horn instrument opening the album on 'The Hypocrite & The Concubine' or the breakdown in 'You Can Bury Me In The East' complete with His Name Is Alive styled-funkiness. If anything, **Kurdaitcha** serves as an entryway for those more eclectic sounds for those who are more accustomed to traditional BM sounds. While those people play catch up, the rest of us await the next glorious missive from this truly unique band. - patrick

Black Metal of a Thousand Faces: An Interview with Jenks Miller of Horseback

You've semi-recently signed to Relapse, and will be releasing a new album through them in the Spring ("Half-Blood"). You've referenced Joseph Campbell and Alejandro Jodorowsky as reference points for previous works, any such inspirations for the new album? Is "Thee Cult of Henry Flynt", and it's more straight-ahead black metal sound an indication of things to come?

Campbell and Jodorowsky are long-standing influences on this project, and they will continue to be touchstones for the foreseeable future (CG Jung is another touchstone). These figures are notable for their ability to both recognize and synthesize ostensibly divergent mythologies in illuminating ways. Campbell's work in comparative mythology is, by nature, more academic than Jodorowsky's, but there are strong similarities between these thinkers. Thematically, Half Blood involves a meditation on hybridity, impurity, and evolution. The semiotic set at work on the record (including the symbols found in Denis Forkas Kostromitin's cover artwork, the record's lyrical content, and the sounds used in the recording) borrows from different mythical traditions throughout history -- the influence of Campbell and Jodorowsky should be apparent.

"Thee Cult of Henry Flynt" is no more indicative of future Horseback sounds than any other single song or album has been in the past. I make an effort to resist a linear progression in this project, so that my own process can feel both whimsical and creatively vital. The project's trajectory might be characterized by the loose relationships of an expanding constellation rather than the linear motion of a magic bullet. The music on Half Blood demonstrates the most diverse sonic palette we've employed to date.

In an interview you did with Verbicide (<http://www.verbicidemagazine.com/2010/09/21/interview-horseback/>), you mentioned that "The Invisible Mountain" paralleled the first half of the hero's journey, and you were not yet sure how to articulate

the second half, the hero's return. Is this something you felt you've been able to address on "Half-Blood", or something you're still working on?

Yes, Half Blood relates directly to the hero's return. In Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell describes the process of apotheosis, after which the metaphysical walls dissolve and the hero is able to move between worlds freely. This is understood as the transcendence of duality, which Campbell puts like this: "The two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other -- different as life and death, as day and night. The hero adventures out of the land we know into darkness; there he accomplishes his adventure ... Nevertheless -- and here is a great key to the understanding of myth and symbol -- the two kingdoms are actually one" (Campbell 217). The real adventure occurs in the hero's mind, as he wrestles the shadows birthed by ignorance and inattention. Part of the hero's responsibility upon returning from his adventure is to teach his fellows the freedom won by this process, or "the boon brought from the transcendent deep" (Campbell 218).

The tension at the heart of the return process -- between the way the modern world regards its hybrid or alien forms and the fundamental unity that gives these forms their true shape -- is what Half Blood is about. It's about shedding the skin of duality in order to achieve a more comprehensive worldview.

There are other artists engaged in similar projects; David Lynch, for example, has augmented his film-making career with a project teaching transcendental meditation.

What do you say to people who question when an artist constantly changes their sound as opposed to doing one thing well and refining it throughout their career?

I've heard this kind of question before, and I find it increasingly difficult to relate to. The production and consumption of all music and art is irreducibly context-dependent, so the idea of refining a sound toward a kind of Platonic perfection

seems to have limited utility. As electronic media accelerates the cross-pollination of regional musics, it becomes impossible to retain the kind of hermetical focus that characterized classical forms. So this project necessarily remains open, even as I reach backward (or rather, inward) for archetypal themes. Furthermore, I'm simply not convinced that releasing the same record again and again is equivalent to the process of "refining" a sound. Sometimes, it's more indicative of laziness or a lack of vision.

Certainly, there are artists who attempt this. I've never disguised my love for AC/DC, for example, and some of my favorite metal bands have recently attempted to "return to their roots." But this path is not for me. I prefer roots to nourish new growth.

Lastly, I should note that there is actually a shared vocabulary in all Horseback's releases. Given the proper perspective, the records really aren't so different; I hope that some of Horseback's listeners will care enough to find that perspective. It's "wheels inside of wheels" -- which wheels are actually turning, and in which directions?

The last couple of Horseback releases have been mostly collaborative efforts with metallic noise bands (Pyramids, Locrian). Can you discuss the process of creating those albums? Were they written in the studio, or ahead of time?

Most of that material was written in the studio. The New Dominions collaboration with Locrian was tracked in a single day when they were in town to play Raleigh's inaugural Hopscotch Festival in 2010. I spent some time after Locrian returned to Chicago editing the performances together into more defined forms. The A Throne Without a King collaboration with Pyramids took shape over email, with each contributing musician shaping the sounds in sequence. The end product was very different than R. Loren and I originally discussed, but we were all very pleased with the results. I have found that an openness in studio collaborations often yields a more rewarding final product. because so much of this music is concerned with the texture of the sounds, a more open, organic recording process

is required. That is to say, if everything were decided beforehand, we wouldn't be as free to pursue the "happy accidents" which inevitably occur during the recording process.

How did the collaboration with Noise-Rock legend Matthew Bower come about?

Many years ago, I sent Matthew a letter inquiring about mastering engineers he might recommend for noise records. I'd been following his work in Skullflower and Sunroof! ever since a friend played me Illrd Gatekeeper, and at the time there weren't very many engineers who seemed comfortable working with strange frequencies and production techniques.

We reconnected when we were both working with George Proctor's Turgid Animal label. I think George may have suggested that we do a split, which eventually became the Voltigeurs/Horseback 10". Matthew, Samantha Davies and I also collaborated on a series of visual art pieces, which were originally intended to be the cover for the 10". These will probably end up on a record sooner or later.

There has been a rash of collaborations between metal, drone, and noise artists in recent years. Why do you think that is, or rather what affinities do you feel these genres share?

The genres you've mentioned all employ so-called "extreme" sounds and techniques. I remember discovering academic drone music like Phill Niblock and Pauline Oliveros in high school, as an avid metalhead searching for even more challenging sounds (at that point, "drone" was called "new music" or "modern classical music"; even today, I think the term "drone" more accurately describes a baseline frequency in certain compositions like the raga, rather than any particular genre). It was probably at that point that the walls came down -- since then, genres haven't been very useful to me in organizing the sounds I'm listening to. I would imagine that many artists making this sort of music feel similarly; that is, their urge to make music isn't inspired by a love for any one genre, but by a love of sound itself.

On "The Invisible Mountain", there was a sense of warm openness, of desolation that reminded me of Crazy Horse-era Neil Young, or sort of an Americanized take on glacial doom. It seems as if late Americana is becoming more and more of a touchstone for black metal (bands like Panopticon, Vit, etc). Do you feel like this is the start of a sort of regional sound, akin to the Glenn Branca-inspired New York Bands, and the Cascadian movement?

I'd hesitate to recognize any particular regional sound at this point. Those labels seem to make more sense in retrospect, as a part of a history of a time and place, and I wouldn't want to force that sort of characterization on active artists. It is true that the other artists we've collaborated with seem influenced by similar sounds (including, but not limited to, extreme metal, new music, noise, goth/punk, krautrock, folk musics, and the ragged Americana you've mentioned); however, Horseback's regional peers (by that I mean other bands operating in central North Carolina) have an incredibly diverse array of sounds and aesthetic sensibilities. I speak for myself when noting that I remain a huge Neil Young fan; his guitar playing, along with Richard Thompson's (and, in some cases, Keiji Haino's), remain some of my biggest influences in both Horseback and Mount Moriah.

Has the transition from Utech to Relapse affected the way you approach Horseback, and if so, how?

I don't think it's affected my creative process. It's affected the resources that can be employed in that process, but not the process itself. Horseback has continued to work with smaller labels after signing with Relapse, including Utech, who released New Dominions.

Any touring plans for the new year, now that Horseback seems to have a stable full-band line-up?

We're going to try to do some limited/regional touring in 2012, but I don't have any details at this point. Mount Moriah is far more active as a live band, so scheduling Horseback tours can be a challenge. I hope to know more details soon.

Horseback's newest album "Half-Blood" is due for release on Relapse Records in Spring 2012. They recently have just released a 7-in on Brutal Panda

Records entitled "On the Eclipse". Jenks also plays solo, and in Mount Moriah.

- ed.

Hear My Prayers: An Interview with Scroll's Jesse Kevon

On November 14th, 2011, OMGVinyl.com made a post regarding Scroll's debut release. Within hours, the tape was sold out. This story is a fairly common narrative among black metal releases. Still, this was a debut from an unknown band, with absolutely no hype. I was lucky enough to grab a copy of the tape, and was blown away. Scroll blends the more depressive aspects of cascadian black metal with a tinge of ambient noise in a most impressive fashion. There is an almost churchly precision to the music, as the atmosphere leans towards the immense, instead of the cliched evil. "The songs on this album were derived from liturgical texts, funeral hymns, and ancient prayers," said Jesse Kevon, the gentleman behind Scroll when pressed about his lyrical content.

We got the chance to digitally communicate with Jesse and pick his brain regarding this release, and his answers were as thought-out as the music he produces. "I was met with a bit of grief this past summer, so what you hear rather than darkness and hopelessness, is just raw emotion. The songs have a sense of anger, abandonment, longing, and confusion. At the same time, a sense of joy, hope, and adoration," he wrote, and it is this sort of contradiction I find most interesting about his music. Using a typically anger-centric music like black metal to express hope has been a source of much teeth-gnashing among the faithful, but I find the confluence fascinating, and the contrast, extremely effective. Talking to Jesse about this sort of new "transcendental" (to steal a marketing phrase) black metal yielded an interesting result. Where I see black metal as a genre marked by certain musical characteristics, he sees a genre defined by an ideology (weirdly enough, this is how I feel about punk rock).

"I always respect when an artists incorporates various influences into a genre as bleak as black metal. I do however, believe that black metal is something different than most of those bands, not just in the music or appearance, but in ideology. Black metal is rooted in darkness, in total chaos," going on to say "I'm hesitant to refer to Scroll as black metal.

Musically, it is influenced by black metal, but in ideology it is far from that. I have described Scroll as black metal in the past some, but only for the sake of words and technicalities." Regardless of what genre Jesse classifies his music as, we are excited to see what comes next from Scroll. The debut cassette is sold out, but a re-issue limited to 100 is on the way, and there is hope for a possible live Scroll performance.

Scroll's website is <http://http://scroll.bandcamp.com/>

-ed.



Velvet Cacoon: Thanks for the Mysteries

Portland, Oregon's Velvet Cacoon may very well be the most polarizing band in black metal. Sure, Cradle of Filth and Dimmu Borgir may inspire more hatred but nobody confounded the grim hordes quite like Velvet Cacoon. Most of the backlash started from their very inception, when they released "demo" recordings to file-sharing networks. These recordings were actually re-tagged MP3s by other artists. Regardless of the iffy morality, this stunt seemed like a deliberate offense to the notoriously touchy black metal community. Honestly, who else would have been bothered, aside from the original artists? This does bring the legitimacy of their later releases into question. One cannot imagine the same trick working multiple times, especially in this day and age where music spreads like a disease.

The first album **Dextronaut** was self-released by the band on Peer-to-Peer platforms in 2002. It was later re-mastered and re-released with a 2nd disc of three ambient tracks but the first disc-missing tracks 8 & 10 by Full Moon Productions in December 2006. In 2010, Khrysanthoney re-released the album once again in an un-mastered format with all the tracks restored to the original 10-track length. **Dextronaut** is most traditional sounding of all Velvet Cacoon's albums, opening with 'Bloodletting', a bit of Dark Ambient before the buzzing onslaught of 'Infinite Plateau' kicks in. Velvet Cacoon seemed to take the melancholic undercurrent in Burzum's music to its natural conclusion; absolute bliss.

Genevieve was released in 2004 (also on Full Moon Productions), and is probably their best-known album, due to the mighty Southern Lord pressing a limited edition Vinyl run in 2007. **Northsuite** followed in 2005 (Full Moon Productions), which contained the ACTUAL demos of the band. Southern Lord also put out a limited Vinyl run of this release.

Velvet Cacoon ended in 2009, going out with a bang by releasing two monster albums. First up, **Atropine** shows Velvet Cacoon in their full on Ambient mode with two discs of haunting drones that are by turns creepy, sinister, and beautiful. The near unpronounceable **P aa opal poere pr.33** caps off their career with which is arguably the most perfect distillation of their mysteriously depressive sound.

Velvet Cacoon's legacy to Black Metal was much more than their music, although their music is more than strong enough to stand alone. Josh aka SGL was labeled as a trust fund kid who was trying get some street cred (ironic since black metal started in Scandinavia, not really known as an impoverished area of the world). As Angela aka LVG (other half of VC) pointed out in an interview, their harshest critics paradoxically, are the ones that have given the band the most attention. Those who value image just as much or perhaps even more than the actual MUSIC felt had. A knee jerk reaction occurred that immediately discounted the music once the reports of pre-fabrication came in, which actually may have been the plan all along.

- patrick.

"And on the subject of Velvet Cacoon, the band is a total fraud. Nothing about it holds any importance. The "How the Last Day" demo isn't even us. It's Miranda Lehman from Portland. (check the Wiki site). "Dizzy" isn't us. It's "My Violent Ego". Nothing is us. "Northsuite" was recorded in 3 hours and sold to a fake label who paid us enough for rent and substances. That's why its so terrible. We're utter bastards. We have no respect for anything. Now we're beginning the campaign to show just what we've done. We are walking examples of what far too many drugs will do. They make you crave havoc. They make you want to turn the world upside down while laughing like a maniac.

And now the soft afterglow sets in. VC is winding down. One last album. One final collection. And the damn thing isn't even recorded yet. Maybe we'll just steal it too. I must tell you that our correspondence will not continue much longer. I'm going to make a clean break - you'll know when the moment hits. You'll know exactly what I mean too.

First, I must convince the world that I am nothing special or intelligent, nor was Velvet Cacoon. If there was discussion about us before, I can only imagine what is about to come.

Feel free to spread this letter." - Josh of Velvet Cacoon, posted on their google mailing list, now deleted. Archived by Metal Archives.

Sightings in the Wild: Reviews

Panopticon - Social Disservices Flenser Records, 2011

Despite a title that would make Dave Mustaine cringe, the latest effort from Kentucky's Panopticon is a startlingly nuanced effort from a scene characterized by one-note emotionality. Austin Lunn takes dead aim at the flawed government institutions dedicated to taking care of children who have fallen through the cracks, be they orphans, or suffer from mental illness. It's heartening to see black metal focused outward, instead of mulling over the darkness within. Music-wise, Panopticon is better than they've ever been, contrasting absolutely miserable passages of pummeling drums and haunting keys with triumphant and warm guitar solos. "Healed by the life I would one day lead," howls Austin in the last track ("Patient") and it's this kind of bitter hope that permeates the record. This is the strongest work we've seen from Panopticon, and we are really excited to see what he turns his unflinching eye on next.

Horseback - On the Eclipse EP Brutal Panda, 2012

"On the Eclipse" starts with the unexpected sounds of a organ. At this point, Jenks Miller has pulled so many disparate influences into Horseback that we shouldn't REALLY be surprised, but it's a startlingly 1970's sounding introduction. Quickly, we're disabused of any Ghost-retro-style shenanigans, as Jenk's unique rasp rings out over a twangy guitar with a rumbly bass line anchoring the whole thing. It's a track that would not have sounded out of place on "The Invisible Mountain", bearing a lot of the Western-style repetition that album was known for. The B-side, "Broken Orb" utilizes the same tools, but creates a much more ambient environment. Guitar lines spool and unspool over the drone of the organ, and there's a strange sense of oscillation. All in all, this is a strong release from an artist constantly expanding his palette. While it lacks the exploratory spark of any of the recent Horseback collaborations, there's a strong feeling of clarity and sophistication.

Mutilation Rites - I Am Legion EP Gilead Media, 2012

Goddamn, these guys are not fucking around. They switch from straight-ahead blasting-full-on black metal assault mode to dissonant and catchy riffage with the ease of a finely tuned machine. The start-stop business that opens "Blood Will Tell" is a groovy little bit that is annihilated within minutes by a driving riff that catapults the song along. These guys are incredibly adept at stitching these pieces together and creating actual songs out of them. Each of these three tracks is distinct, and memorable, and that is no small feat in black metal. Brooklyn is starting to wield a disgustingly diverse black metal scene, and these guys definitely add a new flavor to that melting pot.

Obolus Lament EP Flenser Records, 2012

Ah, yes, the melancholia of depressive black metal. Black metal generally strips the heft and weight of traditional heavy metal away in favor of trebly tremolo riffs, and shrieks. I find that depressive black metal, on the whole, tends to do this to an extreme, creating music with a languid urgency. This is generally not what I'm looking for. Obolus on the other hand, seem to be applying the lessons of funeral doom to their black metal, and as such have created an EP with a sort of noble suffering aesthetic. I do not mean to imply that there are any real musical characteristics of doom here, merely that the sort of weighted brow and continual autumn of that genre has taken up residence here. This is a somber affair, with vocals overtaken by shimmering guitars and vicious drums. Get exceedingly bummed out.

Botanist - I: The Suicide Tree/II: A Rose from the Dead tUMMULt recordings, 2012

This is one of the weirdest things I've come across in some time. Botanist is a one-man project that eschews guitars for hammer dulcimer and other forms of melodic percussion. Their subject matter? Plants. Much like Carcass did with medical terminology, Botanist makes botany sound incredibly evil. I am still at a loss as to if this conceit is an incredibly on-point skewering

of Satan-obsessed bands like Waitan, or merely the product of a very interesting individual. Musically, Botanist is... well, weird. Inquisition-style frog-croaks dominate the mix, while black metal riffs are played on instruments not really designed to accommodate them. There are some beautiful and otherworldly moments, but usually the whole affair sounds very sparse. As a result, this seems like more of an oddity than required listening. Definitely a unique and thematically interesting entity, however.

