

Hard-core radical theatrics flavor Ministry, Skinny Puppy's albums

Easy on the nihilism: Ministry finds less violent frame of mind

By John Righter

Of The Battalion Staff

Ministry
The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste

From a man who knows something about minds, tastes and terrible things, Alain Jourgensen (he now spells it Alien, but he'll always be Alain to me), the main schizoid behind the industrialized hallucinations of Ministry, has injected a dark and violent antibody into the pastel dreaminess of the "Just Say No" decade.

The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste, the fourth full-length release by Jourgensen, offers a gritty taste of last year's *The Land Of Rape And Honey*. Fortunately, however, it progresses beyond that album's hard-core-inspired nihilism into a more vivid and complete trip.

Along with fellow mate Paul Barker, a returnee from *Land*, Jourgensen has culled his experiences from not only his past Ministry projects, but also from his various work with Revolting Cocks, Pailhead, Lard, Skinny Puppy and other underground-industrial projects.

In fact, it's impossible to know everything Jourgensen has been involved in, since he uses so many pseudonyms, a practice popular within the rebellious acid-house scene. (For example, who are Hypo Luxa and Hermes Pan, the producers for this album and most of Jourgensen's work? Jourgensen?)

On *The Mind Is A Terrible Thing To Taste*, Jourgensen continues to shock and perplex, but eases from the perpetual, numbing spasms of *Rape*.

Compared with the unpredictable leap from 1986's *Twitch to Rape*, *Mind* is a safe and easy tab to swallow. Even for an someone as enigmatic as Jourgensen, it's hard to freak the hell out of everyone twice in a row.

Not that Jourgensen doesn't give it his best shot. A self-proclaimed acid-head and all-around masochist, Jourgensen comes out ripping on "Thieves," the album's opening track.

"Thieves" was a welcomed adjustment for me, not in intensity, but in the fact it helped lessen my feelings that Jourgensen is a fascist and a racist.

Working with radically-tinged humanitarians like Skinny Puppy and ex-Minor Threat frontman Ian MacKay would lead you to believe otherwise, but songs like "Stigmata" and "Flashback" left me doubting Jourgensen's intentions on *Rape*.

It also didn't help that in that same time period Jourgensen shaved part of his head and inserted iron crosses, got a tattoo of a goat hung on an upside-down cross and admitted to having a fixation on violence and LSD. I felt justified in my feelings.

Now I feel confused. "Thieves," though reactionary in its presentation and depiction (an electric drill plays a prominent role in the song), is an anti-bigotry song that plays off the ignorance of racists and hate-mongers.

"Cannibal Song" and the rapper "Test" also lay question to Jourgensen's true beliefs and feelings.

I tend to believe that Jourgensen

plays along the lines of Alice Cooper in his shock-value theatrics and flavors his messages with the reactionary pro-ness of Skinny Puppy.

It is the modern philosophy, seen elsewhere in the writing of William Burroughs and the directing of David Lynch, that it takes a shocking, albeit excessive statement to get your message recognized. Ministry and

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Jourgensen are definitely excessive and shocking.

Radical is a good description for "Breathe," a pro-conservation, environmentalist song that shows the influence of Jourgensen's work with Skinny Puppy, and more specifically his enrollment in the industrialized-conglomerate Revolting Cocks.

On the other hand, the previously mentioned "Test" and bassy "So What" mix in the flavorings of his rawer work with Pailhead. The

Rabies: 'Stranger than you have ever imagined'

By Chuck Lovejoy

Of The Battalion Staff

Skinny Puppy
Rabies
Capitol

"Be prepared to enter a world stranger than you have ever imagined," a voice warns on "Hexonxonx," the second song on Skinny Puppy's new album, *Rabies*.

I wouldn't exactly go that far, but *Rabies*, the Pups' seventh musical compilation, comes pretty close.

In fact, the whole project that is Skinny Puppy is a trip to a world more bizarre than most people care to hear about.

The whole thing started in the summer of 1983, when the band's founders, Cevin Key and Nivek Ogre, stumbled on the idea of Skinny Puppy — a look at the world through the eyes of a hungry, homeless and helpless dog.

That vision is not a pretty one. The band, which now includes Dwayne Goettel (formerly of the band Psyche) and guest artists such as Alain Jourgensen (of Ministry and Revolting Cocks fame), has tackled several controversial topics with its electronic wizardry.

For example, the group's last album, *Vivisect VI*, dealt with animal research and testing. The tour supporting the album sported a live show in which vocalist Ogre transformed from an man oblivious to the plight of animals used in medical testing to one enlightened about them.

In between, Ogre took on the persona of the vivisectionist, and

croonings and bizarre orchestration of "Cannibal Song" sound peculiarly reminiscent of early P.I.L., circa *Flowers Of Romance*.

In fact, I was pleased to hear this diversification, something missing within the continuous drumming of *Rape*.

The implementation of shock and

shock-value theatrics is certainly effective in terms of drawing attention and response to an issue or feeling. But that effectiveness is squandered if it is completely engulfed in a mass of archaic noise and subliminal tricks without pause or relief.

Mind is much stronger and definitely more appealing than *Rape* because it switches gears and throws loops like the militant-rap of "Test" (The Grand Rapper, whoever he is,

does the vocals). Jourgensen even enlists other singers (The Grand Rapper and Chris Connelly) for three of the tracks and leaves vocals off another.

Apparently, Jourgensen felt the necessity to produce the nihilistic *Rape* to distance himself from the earlier *With Sympathy and Twitch* albums. He even has gone so far as to block the release of *Twitch* on CD.

He was certainly successful, but quite frankly, I was really disturbed by the hatred and subliminal processes of *Rape* (and I'm not easily disturbed).

Mind is much more ambiguous, which I suspect is Jourgensen's goal, and I don't leave it feeling as if I just had my head kicked in by a Doc Marten boot. It works through conciliation.

Case in point: the finale "Dream Song" is probably the most disturbing song Ministry has ever done, yet it is also probably its softest and prettiest number.

Ambiguity? Maybe Jourgensen is becoming more confident in his feelings. Maybe Jourgensen is becoming more serious with his music. Maybe Jourgensen has finally just fried his brain to mush and doesn't know what the hell he is doing.

I don't know, but I do recommend *Mind* to those of you with a mind for terrible things and ambiguous tastes.

in the end seemingly became the tortured test animal, writhing to the band's haunting synthesizer sounds.

On *Rabies*, Skinny Puppy's approach to the problems of the world is considerably less extreme, although still incredibly pessimistic.

The entire project seems more mainstream and more accessible than *Vivisect VI*, which was characterized by computerized distortion and reverberation of already amorphous songs. (This change obviously is attributable to the presence of Jourgensen, who helped produce the album.)

Still, there's still more than enough haunting and heavy synthesizer rhythms and sampled (and real) screaming to make you only want to listen to *Rabies* with the lights on.

The album begins with "Rudent," a danceable, almost subdued effort that shows how synthesizer rhythms should be used. From there, the LP's songs run the industrial dance gamut.

"Hexonxonx" features a (I hate to say it) peppy beat that is surprisingly similar to Book of Love's "Witchcraft" — but the similarities end there. There is no way anyone could confuse Book of Love's smooth chantings with Ogre's gravelly vocals.

"Fascist Jock Itch" comes as close to trash-type punk as music can come without Suicidal Tendencies leaping out of your speakers amidst the machine-gun drum and guitar repetitions.

"Rain" is a beatless stew of synthesizer noises, sampled laughter, sobs and screams and Ogre's computer-garbled wailings.

The only complaint I have about *Rabies* is that you can't quite make out the band's lyrics — half the words are screamed and the other half are lost amid the hypnotic computerized poundings. Words are printed on the cassette liner, but I wasn't able to fit them with any individual songs.

In fact, the only words truly discernable are sampled voices and bits of conversations, as in "Hexonxonx."

But perhaps the band is using these to make statements above and beyond the lyrical meanings of the songs.

"Tin Omen," the album's dance floor-bound first single, contains the voice of a woman who repeatedly cries, "All good people are asleep and dreaming." "Fascist Jock Itch" is distinguished by a man who says, "Brothers should be close, don't you think?" And a man in "Worklock" declares, "Now is the only thing that's real."

The lyrics of "Rivers" are composed entirely of a myriad of sampled musings from a variety of people speaking in different tones and accents.

Still, it's almost frustrating that it's so hard to understand Skinny Puppy's songs. If you pay \$10 for a cassette and \$15 for a CD, it would be nice to know what point the artist is trying to get across — especially when they insist on screaming it at you.

On the other hand, maybe I don't want to know what Skinny Puppy is trying to tell the world. I don't like nightmares.

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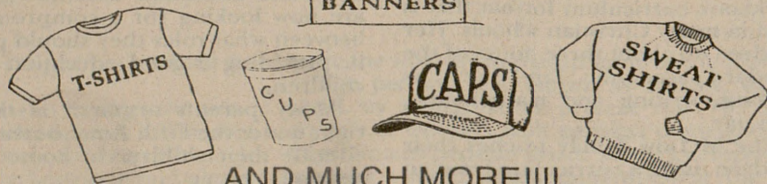
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