

## At War With Self - Acts Of God



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**Tracklist:** *Acts Of God* (3:37), *911* (5:01), *Threads* (6:01), *Ursa Minor* (6:48), *End In Blue* (7:23), *Martyr* (6:35), *No Place* (7:43), *Choke Loud* (4:19), *Refugee* (8:33)

This is the second CD to be released under the name *At War With Self*, the first being the 2005 instrumental album ***Torn Between Dimensions***. In terms of personnel the only link to the previous release is the main guy behind the project, Glenn Snelwar. Glenn achieved some fame by working with Sean Malone and appearing on the debut ***Gordian Knot*** CD in 1995, and had the services of prog stalwarts Michael Manring and Mark Zonder on the previous release. This time, on top of collaborating closely with long-time friend and bassist Damon Trotta he has also assembled some other musicians to form a band, albeit studio based, at least for the present time. Another big change is that this disc has five tracks with vocals, the duties being shared by Damon and Mark Sunshine.

The title track, *Acts Of God*, kicks-off with a bright and breezy 12-string duet which gently introduces some disharmonic weirdness as it goes along before industrial slow thudding with ominous ambient sounds lead into the album proper. Guitars start to wail (that'll be the E-Bow listed on the cover) and to be honest it's all rather creepy. *911* builds up quickly with multiple layers - a slow **King Crimson**-esque riff, fast metronomic nylon-string acoustic, ambient synths, more spooky noises then some pacey precise drums take up the rhythm with crunchy chords. This is a very good track indeed - a little difficult to place it in the prog schema. There's a lot of **Bob Fripp** influence in the guitar but it also reminds me in some ways of **Pain Of Salvation**, in some ways that is but not the production style which is rather harsh. There's a definite industrial vibe here and some excellent guitar work, the solo lines also reminding of **Steve Wilson's** less melodic stylings. The bass guitar has a deep woody tone much much like the sound used by **Les Claypool** of **Primus** although I hasten to add the style is not the same. So far so good.

*Threads* is the first vocal track and the feel of the music has changed a little, now it sounds a lot like **The Mars Volta** slowed-down, a bit funky, a bit metal, a bit prog and a bit weird too. The singer's voice takes some getting used to as it's quite distinctive - imagine the love-child of **Layne Staley** and **Kevin Moore** and you're there or there about - sort of drawling and depressing. *Ursa Minor* slows the pace right down, the main focus is on the vocals here with mostly ambient instrumental support (it's those E-Bows again) with the drums jumping in from time to time. The beginning of *End In Blue* sounds uncannily like **The Flaming Lips** from the *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots* era, all Moog-ish synth bass and tinny drum-machine patterns - this persists throughout much of the track but mostly gets submerged in the guitars, voice and synths. Actually I think the singing here isn't bad, ah yes, this is Damon on vocals rather than Mark Sunshine, works a lot better for me.

*Martyr* opens with some fake mellotron chords so beloved of our genre - it's all rather foreboding but there's nothing to fear, this is one of the best tracks on the album. After the intro keyboard section the pace hots up, heavy guitar crunching away with very effective acoustic picking over the top. The keyboards keep a present throughout and add some apocalyptic King Crimson tones mid-track. Toward the end there's a cacophonous section that's not unlike some of the avant-garde work of **Roger Trigeaux** (Univers Zero, Present), it's all very much "in your face" but it's good. *No Place* once again brings back the Mars Volta thoughts and now the singer sounds like **Wayne Coyne** from the aforementioned Flaming Lips. The track is a mix of avant-garde, grunge, funk and a little jazz - not the best cut on the album by any means, it feels a bit too ad-hoc. *Choke Land* starts badly (blippy synth bass and random-ish noises) but really as it progresses into what sounds more like a King Crimson jam from the *Beat* recording sessions - think industrial Fripp meets Primus.

And so we come to the closing track, *Refugee*. Like the opening of the album this starts quite brightly, almost sounds commercial with some beautiful steel acoustic bottleneck guitar and a decent melody on the voice. The drum patterns

and crunchy electric guitar slowly deteriorate as we go along - it's actually rather clever the way this is done but it should stop around the 4 minute mark, at least before the vocals get in on the act singing an off-kilter version of *When The Saints Come Marching In*, really I find this un-listenable.

There's a lot to savour on this CD but you have to live with some less great moments. I do think that cutting some of the weaker material (like the final four minutes of *Refugee* and shortening *End In Blue*) would have produced a much stronger album. *911*, *Matyr* and *Choke Land* are all really excellent pieces - the music is heavy and complex without ever going into shredding and will appeal to many prog-metalheads out there. Really a tricky one to either recommend or not, check the samples and judge for yourselves.

**Conclusion: 7 out of 10**

**DAVE BAIRD**