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At War With Self - 2007 - "Acts of God"

(56:05 / 'SGM')



TRACK LIST:

1. Acts of God 3:37
2. 911 5:01
3. Threads 6:01
4. Ursa Minor 6:48
5. End In Blue 7:23
6. Martyr 6:35
7. No Place 7:43
8. Choke Loud 4:19
9. Refugee 8:33

LINEUP:

Glenn Snelwar - ac. & el. guitars, mandolins, e-bow; synthesizers
 Damon Trotta - basses; synths; didgeridoo; vocals; programming

With:

Manfred Dikkers - drums
 Steve Decker - drums
 Mark Sunshine - vocals
 Dave Archer - synthesizers
 James Von Buelow - guitars

Prolosion. Basically a duo of Glenn Snelwar and Damon Trotta, the US project AT WAR WITH SELF has existed since 1995. Following "Tom Between Dimensions" from 2001, "Acts of God" is their second release, on which the guys, while both being multi-instrumentalists, are backed up by five guest musicians. Glenn Snelwar has also collaborated with Sean Malone's Gordian Knot - not as a musician by the way, but as a songwriter.

Analysis. Containing an approximately equal number of songs and instrumental pieces (five and four, respectively), in terms of style "Acts of God" comes across as an entity of multiple faces rather than a merely many-sided creation. Made up of textures belonging to such varied musical aesthetics as progressive Doom Metal, Techno Metal, Space Rock, Art-Rock, Jazz-Fusion, Acoustic, Electronic, Industrial, Experimental, Classical and Avant-garde, this is one of the brightest and at once most successful examples of trans-genre approach. With the exception of *the title number* (an excellent piece, most of which only consists of acoustic guitar patterns), probably

each of the tracks here can serve as a specimen of the ensemble's poly-stylistic, kind of conglomerated palette where, though, everything bears a fully well ordered character, meaning in the eyes of experienced prog lover for sure. The six tracks that follow the opener, *911*, *Threads*, *Ursa Minor*, *End In Blue*, *Martyr* and *No Place* are all outstanding and are highly diverse in all senses, each passing through a number of dynamic changes, with, so to speak, progressive treasures awaiting the listener almost at every turn. To say simply and unpretentiously, the group often do rock hard on each, and what astonishes me in most of such movements, besides their stylistic multi-dimensionality, is the presence of (usually finger-style) acoustic guitar that crosses the length and breadth of harder textures, which in turn takes place on four of those. Where the band best of all succeeded in integrating the differing stylistic components into one fabric is on *911*, *Threads* and *Martyr*. These tracks are so eventful that each is in some ways perceived as a string of changes, though it's not the same as when one turning point follows another. This polymorphous music reveals pleasing contrast not only between different sections of a piece, but also within almost any particular section. I feel it's beyond my powers to accurately convey the essence of this creation to you readers, but what I can tell you for sure this is in many ways a new musical lexicon where different, often seemingly incongruous forms find themselves coexisting in harmony within the same composition. There are quite a few echoes of the outfit's famous predecessors to be heard on the album, but before I continue to talk on the matter, I must make a reservation that the influences are much more often transitory than otherwise. The King Crimson connection can easily be detected in some of the guitar techniques and some vocals as well and is the most prevalent here, manifesting itself now alone, such as on both *Threads* (basically dark complex Prog-Metal with some hints of Red and Elephant Talk) and *Choke Loud*, now along with Porcupine Tree ("Signify"), such as on *Ursa Minor* or *No Place*, both featuring less 'big guns' than any of their next-door neighbors in the track list. Bits of "Signify" inform of themselves also within the space-rock and -metal arrangements on *End In Blue*, whilst a relatively long chain of spacey effects closer to the piece's finale evokes Planets from "Wildhoney" by Tiamat. The raging techno- and doom-metal battles on *911* invoke those Swedish doomsters, as well as Mekong Delta circa "Kaleidoscope", while the jazz-tinged piano from *Threads* may bring to mind Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess. My favorite track on the disc would be *Martyr*, which at times calls up the first two creations of Sieges Even, "Life Circle" and "Steps", whilst once even plunges me into the atmosphere of Univers Zero's "Heatwave". While being also a container of a few styles and featuring some bright acoustic guitar leads as well, the longest track, *Refugee*, is nevertheless somewhat samey, since the music is almost invariably slow throughout.

Conclusion. Despite some influences, "Acts of God" is a highly innovative, fresh-sounding album performed with a true creative spirit. I can't say this is an extremely complex creation, but it's undoubtedly complex enough to be of interest to any open-minded prog fan with a broad horizon. Overall, this is certainly a masterpiece, and it is only the concluding track that prevents me from adding an exclamation mark to the rating.

VM=Vitaly Menshikov: *December 16, 2007*

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