

## ASTMA – 600 POUNDS OF BODY

Once again Sweden is put in the spotlight, after the very good **Angst** (already **Pouppée Fabrikk**) album released in 2014, with the **Astma** trio project, one of the better emanations of the *old school EBM* in the recent years.

Surely, **600 pounds of body** has been one of the more long-awaited records of the recent years because of the high quality of the demo available in the past years and because of the awaited quality, even because, in addition, this album marked, along with the **kFactor** and **Serpents** albums, the comeback of one of the most important *electro-industrial / old school EBM* (if not the most important), **Nader Moumneh's Electro aggression records**.

The album we're talking about shows a trio strongly linked to the Anhalt sound (it's not casual that they've presented their album during the last Familientreffen, that takes place there) and to an idea of EBM which goal is to show a modern and well-produced sound, strongly linked, at the same time, to the roots of this music. Their sound is clearly influenced by the Swedish masters of EBM, Pouppée Fabrikk, as far as a particular taste for siderurgic and clear synths, unpredictable dissonant melodies and rough and aggressive vocals are concerned. That of Astma is an essay of what EBM was before the advent of the several electro and trance influences, an opera magna divided into two albums that, within forty-two songs (brand new songs, remakes and remixes), portrays the status of the genre at its best and shows itself as a new term of comparison in the old school history of the genre.

If musically, as far as the first disc (brand new songs) is concerned, the listener moves between more or less minimalist compositions (without particular gimmicks), between very fast ridings more strongly influenced by punk than by Nitzer Ebb and granitic *mid tempo* (the Pouppée Fabrikk formula), without omitting more electro episodes, as far as the lyrics are concerned, we can consider the album as a handbook of the perfect EBM act: the main topics are all there, from the critique of war in *Unknown soldier* to the search of alienation to deny the social relationships and società in a more general way in *Telephone terror*, from ironic lyrics linked to a certain kind of *machismo* typical of early EBM as it's possible to find in songs such as *Evil bitches RIP*, a funny song dedicated to a category of women now extinct to the exaltation of the power plant considered a mythical place of the industrial culture into the EBM world in *Power plant*, from the cold analysis of the social decay in *Human decay* to the sport as a way to shut off from the regular reality (even football is preferred by men too) in *A global game* to the curiosity veiled of irony regarding different cultures such as the Japanese one in *Body in Japan*, to the ironic refusal of the hotter seasons in *Summer plagues*, and so on. This was EBM: a genre that, in its stylistic-rhythmic rigidity, played and laughed at various topics, always highlighting the idea of making things *together*, the idea of *community* that still today belongs to the Anhalt EBM community and that links the various projects commonly included into this "extremist" group.

Even the *machismo* and the exaltation of the man as the dominant figure upon the woman that is chasen, searched for, as in *Stalking you*, is nothing more than an ironic *clichè* that should be read always ironically, and shouldn't be read as a real manifestation of superiority of any kind. Musically, the best episodes are the *mid tempo*, within which the trio succeeds into showing, by using slow, complex and heavy rhythms, all their energy, and the songs in which different rhythms coexist and give themselves a major personality, like happen in the opener *Telephone terror*, one of the best episodes of the whole album, or like happen in the remake of *Where are you*, vaguely

influenced by *electro-industrial*. Between the *mid tempo* songs, one of the best episodes, even if extremely minimalist, is the slow and engaging rhythm of *Mr. Miller*, reasonably widely remixed in the second disc, **Asthmatic percussions & contagious basslines**, not omitting *Snake bite*, that, lyrically as well as musically, tries to break that aura of physical-formal perfection that undoubtedly the genre contains.

As well analyzed by a writer as Alexander Rred, in fact, in its primordial incarnation, *EBM* tries to delete the gap that separates it from *rock* music, and that's the reason why *punk* music is so interestingly translated into the rhythm of the faster songs, and, in particular, how this music wants to emphasize the bodily perfection. The precise rhythms and the dissonant sounds are completed with lyrics such as that of *Human decay* and form perfect examples of settling of the bodily perfection (exalting the perfection of the machine-body and not its deterioration). In *Snake bite*, therefore, even in the lyrics, the need to free from the genre schemes could be perceived, schemes that potentially could bring to a stagnation, through the bite of the snake, that with its poison makes the men lose its safety, and this brings him to mayhem. This state of loss has a fundamental role in the process of understanding of the *EBM* work of these Swedish musicians and the genre in a more general way, and it's the bite of the snake that, after the golden age of the genre, "infected it", having a primary role in the development of its several declinations.

Anyway Astma remains loyal to their formula linked to the original *EBM* sound, conscious, at the same time, that without a minimum propulsive thrust, without a *Where are you*, the musician could reach a *Dead end*, and, at the end, 600 pounds of body even throws, although in its monolithic sound, the starting bricks for a development of the *Anhalt sound*.

Partially different is the discourse made, even if not always with awesome results, in the huge *remix album* *Asthmatic percussions and contagious basslines*. Here it's possible to find remixes of loads of acts which have felt the need to paying an homage to one of the most fresh interesting acts of the genre: it's not uncommon to listen to more straight to the point remixes which update the sound of the three Swedish musicians putting it in direct contact with what's produced in northern Europe (and Germany), like in the remixes made by **Signal Aout 42** and **Armageddon Dildos**, but at the same time even more cold and minimalist remixes could be listened, and these could offer something more, different, as in the example of **Plastic noise experience**, now *label mates* (with the **Serpents** monicker), a project which proposes an interesting remix of *Mr. Miller*, which constantly alternates a granitic, cold and minimalist *mid tempo* and a very fast electronic *punk* assault in the long *chorus*. This is not the only interesting episode, because the same song is remixed with a more strongly *industrial rock* by the not so famous **The blister exists** and the way more known new superstars **Full contact 69**. Parzialmente diverso è il discorso intrapreso nell'altrettanto importante, anche se non sempre particolarmente riuscito, succoso *album di remix*, il già citato *Asthmatic percussions & contagious basslines*.

The very good remix of *Unknown soldier* made by the widely cited Serpents, merging, in their famous formula, the slow and complex sound of PNE and the electronic-groovy character of the faster and rushing *EBM*, the more entangled and dreamy version of *Telephone terror* composed by kFactor and the undoubtedly *synth pop* character shown by the historic project **The psychic force** that remixes *Suffer and pain* completes the artwork. There's nothing particularly new to add to the honest and good, but non particularly engaging, remixes made by the so close to an *old school* approach (with a modern mood) **Autodafeh**, that demonstrate to have a less solid *trademark*

instead of what shown by Astma even in their rhythmically/stylistically simpler and apparently average songs.

In conclusion, the three swedish musicians, with 600 pounds of body, create one of the most original and massive *EBM* works of the latest years (although being so much *old school*), using at their best all the genre's *clichés*, even supported by a very professional production. Astma represents the new term of comparison in their genre, you definitely have to listen this record to believe it.

Voto: 8

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