

MUSIC ARCHIVES

The Godfathers, Part II

by ROBIN ROTHMAN

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Calling Bauhaus “goth” is like calling Christ a Christian. I mean, shouldn’t one define the creation by the creator and not vice versa? After all, the Big J wasn’t likely to have included Jews for Jesus or Jim Bakker in his list of Last Supper predictions. Neither could the “godfathers of goth” have foreseen what their combination of reggae rhythms, screeching guitar, Iggy/Bowie obsession, and an epic tribute to Dracula would, to varying degrees, spawn over the next 20-some years: Christian Death, Sisters of Mercy, Jane’s Addiction, NIN, Tool, Marilyn Manson, Kittie. Revolution begets evolution. And so it goes.

The irony is that, having helped to originate the genre, David J, Daniel Ash, Peter Murphy, and Kevin Haskins have all subsequently refused to embrace it. None of the music they’ve made since their 1983 breakup (and now since their 1998 Resurrection Tour) sounds much like Bauhaus, unless you count Murphy’s naturally gloomy baritone, which he can hardly help. As solo artists, Bauhaus are anything *but* goth.

Armed mainly with an acoustic guitar rather than the bass he wielded as a Bauhau, David J has since adopted an anti-glam, stripped-down, Dylan-with-accompaniment ambience. On *Estranged* (Urbane Music), his seventh solo effort, what stands out, though, is Stones-style honky-tonk. The pedal steel twang of American Music Club’s Bruce Kaphan is immediate on “The Guitar Man,” which also features finger-picked guitar and backing vocals from Red House Painters’ Mark Kozelek, plus a double-dose of Jane’s Addiction—Steven Perkins provides drum accompaniment, and Dave Navarro’s screeching licks augment the subject matter like a slide show of a leather-clad rock star projected behind a live, lone strummer on a stool. “Mess Up” is like the toe-tappiest XTC absurdity sprinkled with bits of Clapton’s saddest playing. “Ruined Cities” takes a bizarre Madonna vocal approach to a Love and Rockets-like melody, then spins into Beatles “la la la la” pop.

Daniel Ash tried his hand at a similar pseudo-coffeehouse approach, back in 1991. Chockfulla covers—like a slow and droning “Blue Moon,” *Coming Down* was pure tedium. Thankfully, he later plugged back in and cranked the volume back. A decade down the line on *Daniel Ash* (Psychobaby), alone in his home studio, he’s committed himself to the club vibe he’d once hinted at in Tones on Tail and L&R. But of course, rooming with DJ Keoki and spinning weekly at a friend’s bar doesn’t guarantee you’ll be a loops-and-beats master. “Kid 2000,” though, is an extraordinarily Floyd-ish brooder propelled by a child’s monologue about his idea of utopia.

Peter Murphy’s imminent sixth album, *Dust* (Metropolis), meanwhile, trades in his previous solo poppiness for Middle Eastern violin, tribal African rhythms, classical intonations, and uniquely ethereal, sensual vocal delivery. Otherworldly like Dead Can Dance or Peter Gabriel’s brilliant soundtrack for *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Dust* haunts without pause, at least until the tacked-on closing dirgification of 1995’s “Subway (Epilogue).”

Even stranger, Kevin Haskins is holed away somewhere with Doug DeAngelis nowadays, atmospherically scoring video games and movies. Don’t let *Crow III* mislead you; try reconciling the remix of “U+Me=Us (Calculus)” by 2Gether with his somber persona as a so-called goth icon.

David J plays the Lion’s Den April 1.

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