

Return of the Scary People

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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In my college years – and that feels so very long ago right now – the CD player was loaded with the likes of Ministry, Skinny Puppy, and Skrew. It was the 15-minute heyday of industrial, and all those bands had my ears.

Distorted, thin, speed-metal guitars, all riff and no melody. Pounding dance-club beats. Buried vocals screaming or growling menacing tripe. Samples providing much of the sonic texture.

It didn't last long. The industrial sound quickly grew tired and dated, and it soon mutated (and in some cases matured) into some interesting forms: the post-industrial experimental noise of Nine Inch Nails, the theatrical, David Bowie-filtered Satanic silliness of Marilyn Manson, the sample-heavy dance of purveyors like Prodigy, the dense guitar textures of Tool, and the ever-popular rap-metal cocktail. You can even hear the industrial influence on artists as diverse as Björk, Radiohead, and Portishead.

Less than a decade later, it's already regression time. The Savage Gentlemen have just released a debut CD on the Land of Nod label, and damned if it isn't the early '90s all over again. I'm not complaining, exactly. It feels good to return to my youth, and The Savage Gentlemen are pretty good at what they do. It's just that the industrial formula was of a time, and that time has passed. Industrial pioneers like Ministry and Skinny Puppy were innovators who built the bridge to some of today's most bracing music, but they got left behind.

It's possible I'm not giving enough credit to The Savage Gentlemen. Between the predictable blasts of straight-ahead noise, the album is often very sophisticated and interesting, and sometimes strikingly fresh.

The major problem, it seems to this old fart, is that the CD kicks off with the rote "Filth" and returns to that well several times too many. Too many songs are indistinguishable, and the repetition wears me down. (But my stamina is not what it once was.)

The exceptions can be striking. "Riverside" is what I can only describe as an industrial ballad, and it works. "No Mask" is largely standard, but offers a funny tongue-in-cheek chorus and a

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haunting guitar coda that sounds like whale calls.

“Love’s Curse” features interestingly jagged vocals and guitars, with a corny keyboard line that would have been perfectly at home in the early electronica of Kraftwerk. That dynamic is used to good effect elsewhere on the album. And there’s not a single song that doesn’t feature some snatch or flourish that grabbed my attention and stopped in my tracks. They just come too infrequently.

The band is a bit of a self-styled mystery, the members going by the monikers “Count Jabula” (vocals), “Baron Krellborhn Sydow” (keyboards), “Lord Cyberion Biomech” (guitar), and “Chauncey Miller” (bass) and dressing up in some horror-movie/goth/S&M outfits. It’s this level of affectation that makes Marilyn Manson so hard to take seriously if you’re not 15, and it repels most efforts at looking closely at The Savage Gentlemen.

There’s the good chance the band doesn’t want any serious consideration, and that’s unfortunate. If industrial metal is your cup o’ blood, The Savage Gentlemen are quite accomplished. But if you’re looking for something a bit more interesting, all you get are teases.

The Savage Gentlemen will host a CD-release party on Saturday, November 25, at 8 p.m. at the American Legion Post 227, 829 16th Avenue in East Moline.