

Band of the Week: Cathedral

Resident sound-nerd [Tom Killingbeck](#) thumbs through reams of musty vinyl so you don't have to. Here are his weekly recommendations...

Monday 2 May 2011

#25: Cathedral



Who: Lee Dorrian, Garry Jennings, Leo Smee, Brian Dixon.

When: 1980s-2010s.

Where: UK.

Why: Of all the Neolithic strands of heavy metal, [doom](#) is perhaps the least evolved. Since [Black Sabbath](#) first burped out the embittered gas of the atrophied Sixties youth, hosts of longhaired bands have built mighty legacies on three gigantic distorted chords. Towards the end of the Eighties, metal had become more and more extreme, in terms of speed and aggression. Death, speed and thrash ruled the airspace of parking lots and bedrooms across the metal world. [Lee Dorrian](#) was one of those most responsible for this craze in lightspeed riffs, cookie monster vocals and machine-gun blastbeats. As lead growler for Brummie grindcore pioneers [Napalm Death](#), he was a posterboy for the music media's smirking, ironic coverage of one of the most exciting and intriguing punk scenes in history. Perhaps that's why he went back to basics for his next musical project - [Cathedral](#) were born to continue the minimalistic, Sabbath-derived works of bands like [Pentagram](#), [Saint Vitus](#) and [Trouble](#).

He got together with two other speed fanatics, Mark Griffiths, a [Carcass](#) roadie and Garry Jennings, formerly of thrashers [Acid Reign](#). This motely crew set themselves against the racing riffs of the peers and friends, electing to utilise monolithic, chronic grooves to damage their listener's brains in a different way. Their first demo, *In Memoriam*, was released in 1991, on Dorrian's label [Rise Above Records](#) - one of the

initial releases on an imprint that would come to house the likes of [Electric Wizard](#) and [Orange Goblin](#), re-igniting the English traditional metal scene for years to come. They were soon signed to UK label [Earache](#), and released their seminal debut *Forest of Equilibrium*. It featured a bevy of seismic riffs, an unmistakably English streak of horror and misery, as well as iconic and surreal cover art from [Dave Patchett](#), who would become their go-to artist for most of their career. Updating the doom metal rulebook for a post-death metal era, its cavernous, despondent vocal performances and searing NWOBHM solos were complemented with molasses-thick seas of distortion and percussion that evoked the death march at an [obese sloth's](#) funeral.

With the metal world reaching the height of its death craze – this was, after all, the early Nineties, where even [Nirvana](#), the biggest band in the world, were [covering Unleashed](#) – Cathedral were signed to [Columbia](#) due to their associations rather than their sound. Major label backing helped *The Ethereal Mirror*, their second LP, to reach a far greater audience than any doom band since Sabbath had yet reached. But they flew too close to the sun, and returned to Earache for *The Carnival Bizarre*; now with Brian Dixon and Leo Smees as the rhythm section. Their sound had altered as well, heralded rather unwisely as ‘disco doom’, music videos cringingly featured [metal hippies dancing on 70s dancefloors](#) with dry ice and coloured lights. The tunes were of rare quality, though – [Tony Iommi](#) even stepping in to deliver guitar on one track, perfectly at home with their rollicking stoner bounce. Their cartoonish lyrics, mainly concerned with [British horror movies](#) and psychedelic fantasy, were the perfect antidote to the staid, corporately sodomised metal scene of the mid-90s. Later records would come to display an overt progressive influence, instruments like [mellotrons](#) and Hammond organs rearing their heads while song structures and themes became more and more ambitious. Announcing their retirement earlier this year, it’s hard to think of a band that has contributed more to England’s underground metal scene in the last 20 years. Rest in peace, boys.

Influences: Black Sabbath, Saint Vitus, Trouble, Witchfinder General, Pentagram.

Influenced: Reverend Bizarre, Acrimony, Burning Witch, Moss, Isis.

Sample Lyric: ‘My name is Hopkins, I’m the Witchfinder General / My impotence deceives me, your beauty turns me pale’.

Which Record: *Forest of Equilibrium* (Earache, 1991)



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