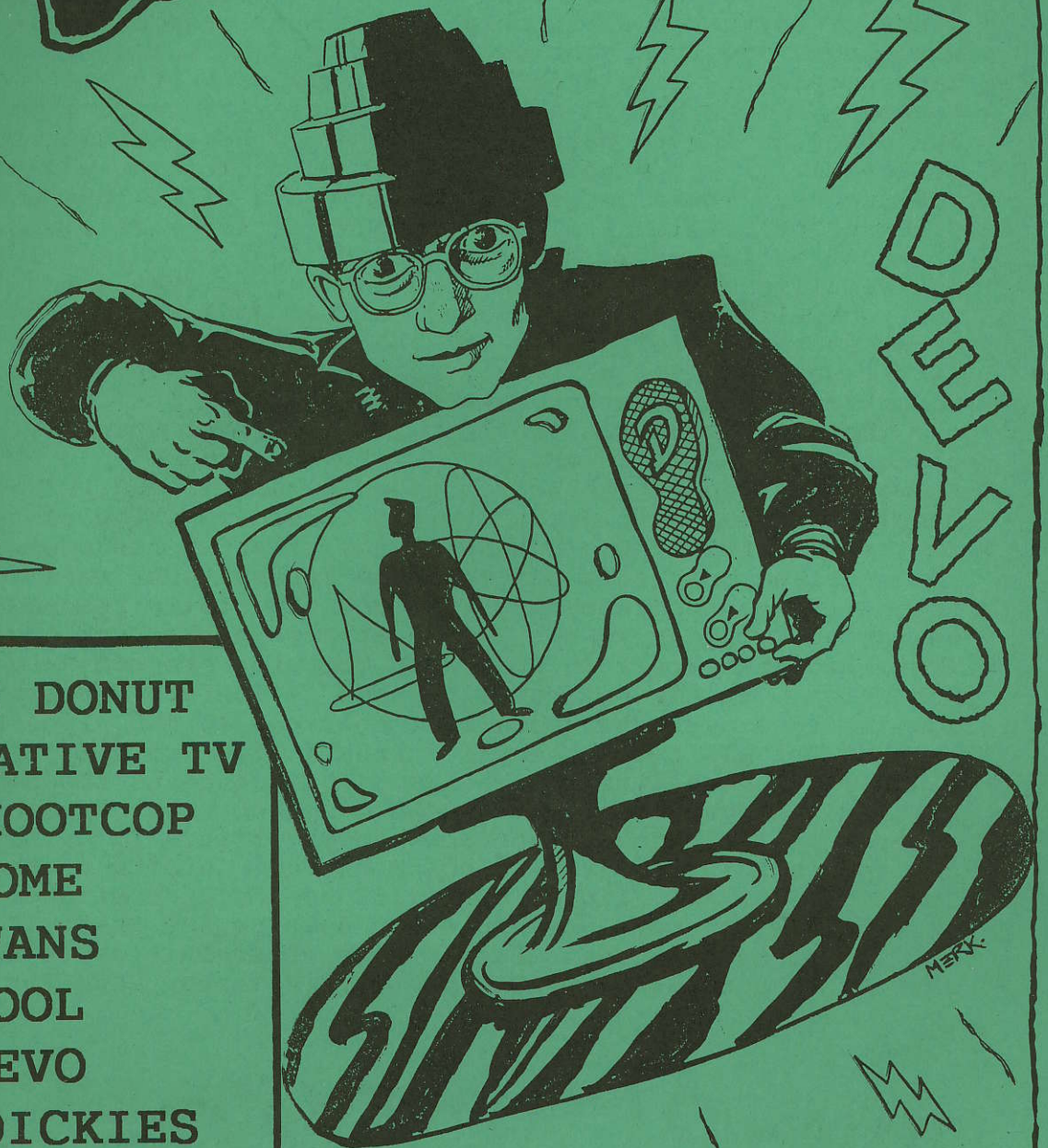


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TRIP AND SLATTING

BONUS !
DIDJITS
7" SINGLE



ALICE DONUT
ALTERNATIVE TV
COPSHOOTCOP
DOME
SWANS
WOOL
DEVO
THE DICKIES

Thursday...well,I'm up for an interview with the Swans.Seems like a good deal,except,the damn place is in the middle of nowhere! They've established themselves in rented accomadation somewhere up in Highgate,miles from the tube stations,even miles (all uphill) from the bus routes...I am not impressed! I finally track them down,and,indeed,Michael Gira and Jarboe are both perfectly charming,but I still think the location could've been slightly more appropriate...anyway,one beer later (Michaels' neat observation ; 'England's the only country in the world where you only get 4beers in a sixpack!') and I'm calm enough to proceed.First thing,this latest offering,'The Great Annihilator',being the first Swans release since 1992.why has there been such a long gap ?

Michael ; We'd released at least an album and a single or two every year for ten years,as well as the World of Skin albums and various live albums.So,I just thought it was time to take a break,both for our audience and us.We just took 6 or 8 months doing nothing except writing,before we began to get involved with the new album,and then we also got involved in talking to major labels,and that also took up a lot of time...but that was a waste of time,nothing ever came of it...so then,after we'd decided not to use a major,we had to find a new label.It just took up a lot of time,but also gave us more free time to do other things.'

Talking about major labels,your time with MCA didn't seem to be particularly successful, but in many ways you did test the ground for future 'alternative' bands who did have success on major labels...

Michael ; We were with MCA from 1989 to 1990,and it was a disaster! Our whole career has been a disaster as far as financial success goes...I mean,we'd actually signed to a subsidiary of MCA which was supposedly staffed by people more in-line with alternative music,and we were supposed to be the main thrust of that subsidiary. But right after we signed,MCA went thru a big shake-up,and virtually everyone we had been expecting to work with either got fired or quit. Fortunately,after one album we were able to part company,and were then in a position to start 'Young God' records...so,with this record, we tried the major labels again,because like anyone,we could certainly stand to have a regular income,but none of them seemed to grasp what The Swans really is,or how to market us... But,certainly,back in 89,I have to admit,I had no idea how to control things,so I just got sucked-in to the process.Particularly in the States,I was acting as my own manager,and as such I was practically raped...you just can't be an artist and deal with those people as well, because they're as shrewd as Hell.I was manipulated and screwed around quite a bit...that was the worst experience I've ever had,I personally am still in debt from that record...I still owe lawyers,I still owe accountants.I have never recovered from it,financially.And as far as the record itself goes,less people heard that album than any of our other records,because MCA just dropped it straight away.It was just a total,utter,despicable disaster...'

Certainly,the 'Burning World' LP doesn't seem to have been your most successful creatively,either...

I was happy with parts of it.I don't like my vocals on it at all.I think it didn't work because we were working with an outside producer -altho' I think Bill Laswell has done some great stuff in his own right,but it just didn't work for us to be produced by someone else.I just cramped-up,vocally,and their sound was hideous...I think Jarboe sounds great on that record,and I think the songs were good,but overall it just wasn't produced in the correct way for Swans...it could've been a great record but it all went wrong...I mean,I can't denounce it totally,because a lot of people did actually like...I like the actual songs,but I really do think that my vocals sucked! I really got so uptight,I couldn't cope with Bill Laswell sitting there,he just seemed to have no compassion towards the vocals...I couldn't work like that because I just couldn't relax.Not that I'm blaming him...but it was the label who wouldn't let us produce ourselves,even tho' we'd produced everything we'd done upto that point...they still wouldn't let us do it.'

12 To begin with,Swans was originally perceived

as a 'band',but over the years it has clearly become much more your personal vision... Michael ; Yes,that's how it is...obviously,I collaborate very strongly with Jarboe,but it remains very much my project,that's why she also does other projects...with Swans,I'm the producer,I'm God,hahaha! No,I mean,Swans is just the people I put together,it's not a band.It's different,like,having a band together for touring,that's obviously different then...it's kinda like the way Jim Thirwell works,altho in my case,Jarboe does contribute very strongly.

But you do have an album due to be released in the near future just as 'Michael Gira'...why did you feel the need to separate this from 'Swans' material...

Michael ; Well,even tho' the Swans is my project,it's not just 'Michael Gira',I do try to build the music,create a filmic atmosphere on the record,you know,make the whole event happen. Whereas on this solo album,it's more centred on my words and my songs,the lyrics and my voice.I don't think I could've done that within the context of Swans,it would've become too personal,and I try not to do that within Swans...this album is far more personal,more to do with me as a person,it's very emotional.

Do you feel that just working on one project such as Swans is not enough ?

Michael ; I feel I do have to do those other things,I have to keep working...we did the Skin material because we felt at that time that we wanted to work together,outside of Swans,to create a different atmosphere...but then we were able to incorporate those ideas into Swans as well...

Swans has always had a reputation of being musically very powerful,but it seems that recently,your use of 'power' within your music has become much more subtle...

Michael ; I hope so...I mean,to me,Bob Dylan singing 'Gates of Eden' is much,much more powerful than Metallica...I suppose it all depends on what you think of as 'powerful',but I always think of things in terms of the strength with which they're presented...like,to me,just hearing John Cale alone on the piano is incredibly powerful...

Your more recent albums have been quite lengthy,but also very precisely constructed... Michael ; Yes,I do perceive whole albums,I don't go into a studio just to record how a band sounds...I want to create a whole experience that makes it far more interesting... The albums that have been the biggest influences on me,things as far back as 'Magical Mystery Tour' or 'The White Album',I've always liked that approach towards making an album...to me,that's what made them great.I like albums to be more like a film experience,rather than just a collection of songs.I mean,I suppose some bands could be interesting for a while if you just recorded them playing their songs in a room,but to me,that's the most uninteresting thing in the world.I much prefer to take the sound-sources,manipulate them to Hell,and make them into something else.

Do you find it more convenient to be able to construct an album with the CD format in mind,rather than having to structure the music in line with different record sides...

I certainly don't work with vinyl in mind anymore,I work with 72 minutes in mind...I'm really pleased to work with CDs,personally I'm not fetishistic about vinyl...I really can't tell the difference between the two formats... maybe vinyl is sorta warmer,but I kinda like the harder sound you can get on CD...I like CDs because it enables you to work towards a continuous piece...

Would you say that constructing an album for CD,as one whole piece,is more like constructing a live performance,in that,you're putting together music to be heard as a whole piece ?

Michael ; Well,the album isn't a whole performance,it's hundreds of little performances put together...it's certainly not performed live in the studio,or anything...Although the way that you get to hear it,as a continuous piece,is more like hearing a live performance...as I've already said,it's more like a movie to me... and,ofcourse,live performance will always be much more immediate and spontaneous.

I believe you have a book ready for publication soon ?

Michael ; Yes,it's called 'The Consumer,and



Other Stories', and it's being published by Rollins' publishing company, '2.13.61'. It's a collection of short-stories, half of which was originally published, mostly in the Eighties, but the rest of which has been written during the last year. I've always been interested in writing, but I kinda stopped back in the late Eighties just because I really wanted to concentrate on music. But once we moved out of New York City, I found that I had enough time to work on it once again...

You've mentioned several times that you consider your music in filmic terms...do you have any aspirations to work more closely with that medium, perhaps producing soundtracks or whatever...

Michael ; Yeah, but that's like asking me, would I have any ambitions to inherit a million dollars! Ofcourse, I'd love to do that, but will it happen - No!

Jarbow ; Actually, we did do a soundtrack, maybe a year ago, for a Beth B film. That was the first time we'd ever done anything like that, and it was good, a nice experience...

Michael ; Actually, we did take some of that soundtrack stuff and put it on the new album, just some of the instrumental stuff... so, yeah, we'd certainly like to do more soundtrack material, but I can't see that ever happening on any large scale...

What are your plans for the near future ? I've heard that you don't want to tour as Swans just yet...

Michael ; Yes, but we may be touring as 'World of Skin', just three or four of us...we don't want to perform as Swans, but we would probably play material from the new Swans album, perhaps some older stuff, too, just playing it in very

stripped down versions. But other than that, after this album, there'll be my solo album, Jarboe's solo album, and then another Swans album, which is already almost completed... so, we'll have a lot of stuff coming out. Jarboe ; I think we're going to be very busy for the next year or so...

And there it ended, because their busy schedule meant that another interview was only minutes away, and my busy schedule meant that I had to find my way outta darkest Highgate, and back across London, for yet more music...

Did you ever get that feeling of deja vu ? Yeah, third day in a row, opening yet another show, it's those Phantom Pregnancies again... Wow, this almost makes it a tour, three gigs in three days, that's pretty prolific. And they're getting tighter, the set's down to 5 minutes tonight. The indie kids just don't get it, but then again, did you ever expect that they would ? No...great stuff indeed. Next up, Comet Gain, a totally unnecessary effort, so I ignore them & move straight along to Wat Tyler. Again, total bewilderment to the indie kids. The perfect Xmas entertainment, I'd say...foul, disgusting, irreverent, insulting...lovely! You can't get better value than Wat Tyler, to b'sure...the haedliners are Heavenly. This probably made Sean very happy, but it's certainly not my cup of tea. I stay for a few songs, just to see how it goes, but bail pretty early. After all, I can still get home in time for 'Bakersfield PD'. That's a nice way to go...

Friday night, an intended brief visit to the Underworld to catch Travis Cut, but it ends up wasting a full evening. Travis Cut, first onstage, and by far the best act of the night. A good noisy, tuneful punk band, none of that Offspring rock-nonsense. Maybe Travis Cut will get better