

Therion - Gothic Kabbalah (2007)

Written by bluesever

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CD1 1. "Der Mitternachtslöwe" – 5:38 2. "Gothic Kabbalah" – 4:33 3. "The Perrenial Sophia" – 4:54 4. "Wisdom and the Cage" – 5:02 5. "Son of the Staves of Time" – 4:47 6. "Tuna 1613: Momentum Excitationis" – 4:23 7. "Trul" – 5:11 8. "Close up the Streams" – 3:55
CD2 1. "Wand of Abaris" – 5:51 2. "Three Treasures" – 5:20 3. "The Path to Arcady" – 3:54 4. "TOF – The Trinity" – 6:18 5. "Chain of Minerva" – 5:21 6. "The Falling Stone" – 4:46 7. "Adulruna Rediviva" – 13:37 Christofer Johnsson
- Guitars, Keyboards, Programming Kristian Niemann - Guitars, Keyboards Johan Niemann - Bass, Guitars, Guitars (acoustic) Petter Karlsson - Drums, Guitars, Keyboards, Percussion, Choir (on "Chain of Minerva") + Mats Levén – Vocals, Guitars Snowy Shaw - Vocals Katarina Lilja - Vocals Hannah Holgersson - Soprano Jonas Samuelsson-Nerbe - Tenor Karin Fjellander - Choral soprano Ken Hensley - Hammond organ Joakim Svalberg - Hammond organ Rolf Pilotti - Flute Stefan Glaumann – Tambourine

Sweden's Therion have been lauded the world over, just about, for their wildly influential and experimental symphonic heavy metal; it incorporates not only classical ambitions and arrangements, but the integration of European folk and even industrial elementals into their sound. Add to this guitarist, songwriter and conceptualist Christofer Johnsson and (non)performing scholar/lyricist Thomas Karlsson's collective studied knowledge of myths, arcane occult knowledge, and folklore from around the globe (East of the Atlantic anyway) and you have the very beginnings of Therion's reach and command of artful heavy music. Johnsson added an opera singer (and now two) a couple of years back to bring life to his simultaneously pretentious and operatic vision of a quadrology of Nordic myth that began with Secret of the Runes, continued in the simultaneously issued Sirius B and Lemuria, and sees its grand -- and oh is it grand -- finale in Gothic Kaballah, the most righteous vision of excess heavy metal has ever seen.

Gothic Kaballah is a double disc -- by an eight-member strong Therion -- with help from friends (one of whom is organist Ken Hensley, formerly of Uriah Heep). It is the epitome of conceptually

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oriented symphonic metal. It brings together melodies from the West and the East. Its orchestrations are lavish, but the attack is heavier than Odin's wrath -- check "T.O.F. The Trinity" on disc two for a small but punishing bit of evidence of the magical menace found there. Produced by the band and Mats Levén -- who also co-wrote music, played guitar and is featured on lead vocals a great deal of the time -- Gothic Kaballah makes no concessions except one: for the very first time, the band has written and sung in English. But perhaps that's no concession at all considering Americans are the only nationality who hasn't grasped the ragged glory and rugged power of Therion: as a colleague puts it complimentarily, they are the Meat Loaf of metal. The reference is the sheer wide-ranging grandeur in composition, performance, production and execution in their work. They do everything big. This is rock with a big "R." It transcends the metal genre though it is certainly a heavy metal record but it moves territorially into prog rock as well, but a prog rock that's easy to get next to. The tempo and key changes have been part of the Therion compositional mode for a long time, but here the transitions are seamless even as the traditional metal elements remain heavier than the burden of the gods. The album's story is one of intense literary scrutiny, critical investigation, and dramatic pyrotechnics. Richard Wagner would have been proud to write for Therion. Their excesses were his own: dynamics in drama for the sake of moving a story through its paces, revealing secrets, horrors, and promises and revelations of what preceded and proceeds from the Judeo-Christian apocalypse. Therion ascend the staircase of the gods on Gothic Kaballah and tells them to bring it on, while simultaneously acknowledging their ferocity, glory and power.

As the crackling guitar and bass riffs open "Die Mitternachtslöwe" on disc one, and keyboards and blastbeats enter with sinister force, a soprano sings "In the end of time, in times of revelation/Lion from the north will appear in a dark nation..." Petter Karlsson and Levén add a chorus to further the tale "...Read the forecast/fear the eagle/See the wonders, trust the lion/Read the prophecy, the savior of midnight..." without a trace of irony; guitars play in counterpoint then a single bass chord carries the menacing tension until the tune ends. The listener has entered the netherworld of Gothic Kaballah, where light shines through punishing guitar forms, a murky smoke and mirror-adorned cave of fact and fiction, elliptical storytelling, pronounced thematics, changing keyboards and introductions and disappearances of characters from gods to animals to mortals and sprites of every stripe. Oh yeah, there are numerous killer dual guitar leads to top it all off. The title track, with its low-tuned guitars and basses playing in sharp counterpoint, ushers in sledgehammer cadences that Metallica could never have imagined, let alone pulled off, and they give way to folk melodies -- that really are melodies -- and booming tom toms that offer the melding of tribal expression, gritty keyboard sounds, and classically oriented harmonics. The way the story is told and the different musical landscapes used to move it along offer the argument that Therion have created the first great rock opera of the 21st century. Not that you have to pay attention to the narrative to appreciate it: this is the metal that disappeared aboveground in the U.S. a decade or more ago.

Gothic Kaballah is the first shot from the Therion canon on the American market in earnest. Aimed squarely for the Yankee heart, it conquers with theater, menace and above all a stellar

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Nordic stoicism which rebels while it assumes the mantle of control. Currently there is no one on the scene that can come close to Therion's ambition or ability (the conviction, spiritual devotion, and maniacal pummel in "The Perennial Sophia" or "Son of the Staves of Time" should shut up all but the most cynical metalheads). Therion have the money, the promotion, the chops, and the sheer vision to make this happen without a smirk or a nod to kitsch. This is the right introduction for America (though all their records are available here); those who come to Gothic Kaballah as their first taste of this band would do well to pick up the rest of the quadrology and listen in order. Gothic Kaballah is brilliant, disturbing, grandiose and very listenable -- those who thought metal was for knuckleheads and the ignorant should pay heed and give this baby a spin. It possesses both bone-riffing thud and bell-ringing clarity, orchestral strings and bass throbs that sends the dials spinning into the red. It is destined to be a classic. This is Euro-metal at its zenith; it moves the entire heavy metal universe a giant leap forward. It may be early in 2007, but already Gothic Kaballah is the gold standard to beat. ---Thom Jurek, allmusic.com

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