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Christopher PARTRIDGE (ed.), *Anthems of Apocalypse: Popular Music and Apocalyptic Thought*

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Christopher Partridge (ed.), *Anthems of Apocalypse: Popular Music and Apocalyptic Thought*, Sheffield, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012, 150 p.

SHEFFIELD PHOENIX has established a small, yet successful, niche in the academic publishing market. As a portion of the Bible in the Modern World collection, *Anthems of Apocalypse* marks the fourth of a series specializing in examining instances where popular culture engages end of the world constructs. This edited collection of essays surveys various instances where popular musicians have taken the occulture (encompassing elements of the spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial) as their creative muse, be it across full careers or for singularly-focused works.

When edited collections work their best, there is congruence throughout the offerings. Despite individual authors having their respective unique concentrations, a unifying conceptual whole can fluidly bridge the reader from chapter to chapter, or at least offer a sense of thematic or historical connectedness. Lacking such larger scale framing, a sense of disjointedness comes to make the individual parts valued in isolation rather than as contributions to a whole. For *Anthems of Apocalypse*, individual chapters offer engaging insights or provide useful chronologies of artists and their respective creations. Unfortunately, the conceptualization of book as a cohesive entity falls a bit shy, never quite tying together its contents in a fluid and structured way.

As an example, of the eight chapters, five arguably hold connection to hard rock/heavy metal. In itself, this seems reasonable as metal has a well established track record for crafting songs of war, the occult, Satan, and damnations. Yet, in comparison to breadth of scope offered by Janssen and Whitelock in *Apocalyptic Jukebox*, the three remaining chapters on Nick Cave,

Johnny Cash, and Current 93 (and of no fault to those chapters) seem less than enough to really account for the book's targeted aim, to communicate how artists across the whole of popular music disseminated occulturally significant apocalyptic thought. Tellingly, editor Christopher Partridge seems to know this too as, in his final comments, he distances himself from the project by pointing out his late stage participation and being limited to previous accepted commissions. While his confession ultimately comes across as (wrongfully) insulting the work put forth by the contributors, it also underscores the project's lack of conceptual vision all the more.

Following Partridge's introduction, wherein he establishes his prior work on the occulture as a foundational touchpoint for apocalyptic studies, the majority of the chapters see specific artists and their work deconstructed in light of its occultural contents. In chapter one, Roland Boer presents the apocalyptic through three modes (as genre, ideology, and movement) and situates his analysis across Nick Cave's career through these lenses. Most effectively, Boer's interpretative reads of Cave's discography highlights connection between the songs and Biblical parallels (for example, linking a thematic series of "Flood" songs to the Book of Genesis) and, thereby, offers a clear illustration of the application of eschatology to popular music. Similarly, Mark Sweetnam convincingly situates Johnny Cash and his penchant for writing and recording gospel songs through both a resistance to specific denominational allegiances and congruence to dispensationalism reflective of Hal Lindsay in the early 1970s. Additionally, artists less prone to receiv-

ing attention within academic purview are notably presented and the coverage of the straight edge Earth Crisis, Tom Morello's post Rage Against the Machine Nightwatchman project, and the apocalyptic folk/industrial outfit Current 93 will likely serve as introductions for those less familiar with sounds beyond the mainstream.

Two chapters, Michael Moberg's review of Christian metal artists and Rupert Till's take on traditional heavy metal, divert from single artist analyses and present more generalized overviews of the styles' respective relationships to apocalyptic themes. Predictably, a theme of evangelism prevails in Christian metal wherein Moberg notes a tendency toward paraphrasing specific scripture as a means of repeatedly conveying awareness to Judgment and spiritual conflict between good and evil. To Moberg, this contrasts secular metal's well established proclivity toward emphasizing the darker, more sinister elements of the occulture. Till's chapter, after reviewing these same notions, covers additional familiar ground to those in metal studies via detailed reads of early Black Sabbath recordings and Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast*. Where Till's offerings become most compelling stems from applying the Jungian concept of "the shadow" to both metal's occulturic prominence and headbanging as a dance form. Here, Till suggests the communal connection to the collective unconscious mediates the very appeal of confronting fears of death and destruction and that metal, as a means of shadow play, may well be constructive when not taken to obsessive extremes.

Steven Knowles offers the strongest chapter. Utilizing both textual deconstruction and ethnographic methodologies, Knowles hones an apt intersection of interpreting *Extreme's III Sides to Every Story* release, accounting for fan perceptions on the record, and assessing connections to evangelical themes. Close reads of

specific songs are contextualized and related through scriptural and situational origins, ranging from singer Gary Cherone's Christian convictions and history with dispensationalist theology to prophetic interpretations of pre-millennial politics and the Gulf War.

Given the strength of this final chapter, the lasting impression of the book invites one lingering point of potential criticism. This final prevailing issue with *Anthems of Apocalypse* lies less with what respective authors contribute to the text, but with what the whole encompasses in terms of its contemporary relevancy. As illustrative examples, the portrayals of Extreme, Iron Maiden, and Black Sabbath are perfectly viable. Yet, as Knowles notes in his chapter, eighteen years separate the release of *III Sides to Every Story* and his analysis, giving rise to questions of just how contemporary the examples put forth really are. Of the ninety-six items listed in the discography, only twenty-one have release dates 2005 or later (including a Jerry Lee Lewis anthology and three posthumous Johnny Cash releases), and solely four of these received specific attention within their respective core chapters (both Nightwatchman records, Current 93's 2006 release, and a single song from Saint's 2006 record). Given the aims of the Bible in the Modern World series and music's brisk turnover of new and emerging artists and releases, *Anthems of Apocalypse* reflects a more historical tenor than what is likely ideal.

References

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