

Saturday, August 4, 2007

Stealing Moments You Said Were Gone

[Thank You - Help God](#)



Everyone talks about the summer of 1994. Cap'n Jazz, Universal Order of Armageddon, John Henry West, Mohinder. All of my favorite bands. Everyone nailing their Rites of Spring/Moss Icon/Hated impressions. Crying at shows, workpants constantly dirty from rolling around on basement floors in this funny agony/ecstasy dance and we were all comfortable with the word "emo" like what could make more sense? But I want to talk about the summer of 1995, or maybe even the autumn of 1995. When the first Rye Coalition (ex-Merel) 7"s came out; or Daredevil (ex-Indian Summer) was supposed to tour but didn't; some other label besides Gravity released the 3rd Antioch Arrow LP, the circus music one ("your mascara... it's running"); when Policy of Three played their last show and burned their gear and dudes just sat in the back drunk and acting jaded. Early September, I remember sitting in my room with what would turn out to be my last mail order from Old Glory Distro, surly and disappointed, a stack of records that either mimicked my favorites to the point of nullification, or veered so far from their earlier work that it felt like a betrayal. I sat next to the record player, running through Delta 72, Young Pioneers and Carbomb in total disbelief and ache, this guy Max sitting on my bed with a similar annoyance, demanding that the "next big thing" happen soon. Like we were just waiting for music to come along and save us.

It went on like this for years, the dudes from Indian Summer ending up in electronica bands, that funny moment of hardcore guys playing free jazz, then every band got keyboards, or Tarot Bolero and this weird cabaret scene, eventually screamo appeared, and I guess at that point I completely lost touch with it all, it just became unapproachable for me. There were a million other records I cared about at that point, so it's not like I had some void in my life, but it still felt like a surrender, like I was giving up on something I shouldn't have. If I spent the rest of my life trying, I really could never say enough good things about Tonie Joy's guitar playing; or accurately describe how the angular, fractured song structures of Fisticuffs Bluff actually shook my body, or relate how desperately I wanted to play drums like Ron Anarchy, how I couldn't even begin to fathom how he approached those rhythms; above all, I'll really never be able to express what this music did for me, the way it taught me to recognize the parallels of extremes, that the transport of agony is no different than the transport of euphoria; I had already gotten pretty good at abandoning myself to despair thanks to Henry Rollins, but I never knew you could do it the other way.

When I saw Thank You play the other night I absolutely lost it; I felt kicked, shaken, creeped out, thrown in the air like a child. It was suffocating, and it was completely joyful. And I was immediately ready to describe it as an amazing reminder of that 1994 era that I loved so dearly, their whiplash dynamics and head-hung/last-gasp energy a familiar, long-absent excitement. But that's not it at all. Thank You don't sound like 1994, they sound like 1995 should've sounded. Okay that sounds dismissive but it's meant to sound like praise. The thing is that their music is the first positive, forward movement in that realm that I've heard since those seeming glory day. It's not important that it happened now instead of then because their sound is not at all nostalgic; they simply picked up a thread and moved forward, the same way Anasarca had sharpened and developed the sounds of The Hated—progress irrespective of time passed. I'm still not saying it right. Thank You don't sound like any of those 1994 bands, they sound like what those bands could've become if they continued to evolve, continued to run down dark passages and peek under rocks.

Sometimes going back and listening to. like, Current is a pretty bitter pill. I remember thinking that all that Summer 1994 emo was so contrary to what was happening in mainstream music at the time but in retrospect the quiet-loud-quiet-loud structure is remarkably similar to, um, Nirvana, and that weary, sore-throated but melodic vocal style treads in the same territory as (forgive me) Eddie Vedder.

But there's no real precedent for the Thank You's dynamic sense, which works on so many different planes of sound, operating on such different scales than volume or passion. Sometimes the two guys up front would bow their heads over keyboards, churning out evil, haunted house dirge, while the drums skittered and crashed like thieves surrounding you in the dark, and sometimes the whole band exploded and raged with a overpowering unity. Their agility was unpredictable but never off-putting, the room was transfixed, at turns appropriately still and appropriately violent. There were familiar sounds and there were sounds that seemed like phantoms. They always seemed to know when the audience needed a break; better than that they always knew when the audience felt like a break but were better off without one, and where another band would've come off as oppressive, they came off as friendly geniuses.

Thank You were unquestionably one of the best bands I've seen, and I was so glad to get their CD, released by the amazing [Wildfire Wildfire](#) collective. The nine songs of "World City" touch all the same senses as their live show; uneasing and triumphant, clever and dire. "Help God" in particular is an unchartably great song, full of misdirection, mind-destroying guitar/bass interplay and possibly the most musical and celebratory drumming I've ever heard in a rock band. The CD obviously couldn't have the same power as their live set, but there's a nice trade-off—a ton of tiny, subtle sounds that were buried in their live set are able to surface. It goes without question that I would've lost my mind had I received this record in the mail as a teenager instead of all that boring, disconcerting mimicry, but even as I sit here listening to "World City" I'm losing my mind on a level that I can't imagine being surpassed a decade ago. I'll admit I forgot how much I like the sound of jagged guitars and sudden, breath-stopping pauses, but there's no way a Moss Icon/Cap'n Jazz/Lync revival would've reminded me. It took Thank You, who remembered those things and made a new sound to remind me, and I couldn't be happier for it.

posted by Ethan Swan at [5:49 PM](#) [3 Comments](#) 

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