

In metal and punk, there's a shorthand for describing bands who model their sound on known genre benchmarks -- if a band sounds like pre-Heartwork Carcass, you can call them "Carcass worship" and plenty of people will know what you mean. Bands who use the famous Discharge beat play d-beat, though "Discharge worship" is a style in its own right. And so on.

I became interested in Pittsburgh's **Zombi** when I heard them described as a Goblin worship band. There's more to it than that, of course, but I want to start there, because Goblin's soundtracks for Romero and Argento movies hold a permanent place in my heart. In the early 2000's, there weren't many bands writing lost-giallo-soundtrack music -- there are more now -- and Zombi's pastiche approach to composition fascinated me. Their Relapse Records debut, *Cosmos*, came charging out of the gate with its central influence on its sleeve, unmistakable to the already-initiated. No horror fiend could hear it without experiencing a profoundly dislocating sense of having been here before -- but not here, exactly: rather, somewhere like here. That's the spindle around which **Steve Moore & Anthony Paterra** have, over the past twenty years, wound threads of near-infinite variety. To describe what their work feels when you hear it requires us to venture a little out into the theoretical weeds.

One of the pleasures we get from music is the shock of the new. There are few listeners, if any, who aren't, in some sense, thrillseekers; we listen for new sounds, for daring experiments, for different styles. We hunger for novelty. But this hunger, I'd argue, is actually a fairly recent development, and is something apart from the need for variety: poets and writers and lawyers of the Roman empire, in the vastly varied canon of work they left behind, insist again and again that their stories, their themes, and their conclusions are all soundly rooted in Greek sources. Medieval English authors, too, make innumerable asides to their readers which amount to "I'm just passing along something I heard elsewhere."

But here's the thing about that, which was no secret to any of those Roman or English authors: nothing gets passed along without being changed by the hands that do the passing. Any act of assemblage or reenactment or re-creation alters the source upon which it acts. Usually, we only notice this in the negative -- when, for example, we say somebody's trying too hard to sound like Nirvana (themselves great practitioners of pastiche) -- but, in the hands of a band like **Zombi**, imitation is the ground floor upon which to build structures that serve, simultaneously and in real time, as reflections of, glosses on, questions about, and endlessly generative hashmarks added to the surface of the blueprint. Marginalia: the alchemy of reversing the flow from source to tributary, the practice of time travel.

They do this by messing with the details -- a process of personalization in which countless other elements contemporary to the single identifiable source are smuggled quietly in: synth beds more Jarre than Simonetti ("XYZT"), guitar approaches audibly more American-TV-in-'84 than Italian-horror-in-'79 ("Breakthrough & Conquer"), digitized Peter Gunn riffs that open onto a 1986 cinema vistas in 7/4 ("Thoughtforms"). The harder you dig in, the more you find; any given **Zombi** song is a collage whose constituent parts lead the listener on a scavenger hunt whose eventual bounty finds connections we might otherwise have labored for years to make. From

Heldon to Jan Hammer, from "Spiral Architect" to "Being Boiled." To listen to **Zombi** is to wander down hallways where every familiar turn opens onto an unexpected view that somehow always feels exactly right. The process of worship: reorientation toward the source, becoming receptive to new information flowing from a known place.

This is the magic of **Zombi's** music, for me -- the known place that transforms right before our eyes into a new place, the new genus consisting of known grafts. It is always fresh, and always feels like a place I might have visited before, but haven't. There's a dreamlike quality to this process of collage: and dreams, I think, are where we hope music will take us, at least some of the time.

The arrival of a new album from **Zombi** is always one of those times.

--John Darnielle, Durham, NC, May 2020.