

Witchcraft - The Alchemist (2007)

Written by bluesever

Friday, 29 July 2016 11:01 - Last Updated Tuesday, 09 April 2019 20:41

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1. *Walk Between the Lines* 3:24 2. *If Crimson Was Your Colour* 3:47 3. *Leva* 4:33 4. *Hey Doctor* 5:12 5. *Samaritan Burden* 6:27 6. *Remembered* 5:14 7. *The Alchemist (parts 1, 2 & 3)* 14:38
Magnus Pelander - Vocals, Guitars John Hoyles - Guitars, Guitars (acoustic) Ola Henriksson - Bass Fredrik Jansson – Drums

Despite its self-serious tone, the third album by this Swedish doom outfit is old-school stoner rock, the band no longer posturing as Satan's messiah but rather hedging their apocalyptic metal with a psychedelic euphoria.

Since forming in 2000, Witchcraft's made no bones about their adoration of Roky Erickson and Pentagram's Bobby Liebling. However, despite both figures receiving nearly equal shine in Witchcraft interviews, the latter's left a disproportionately large mark on these Swedes' doom metal assault. Like equally cartoonish countrymen the Hives, Witchcraft doesn't flinch when copping their beloved retro bands, refusing to update even the most garish traits of classic metal, most notably Black Sabbath and Pentagram. *The Alchemist*, Witchcraft's third LP, sticks to many of these traits-- the compulsive riffing, Renaissance Faire charade, dramatic builds upon dramatic builds-- though it's also Witchcraft's first overt display of a Roky Erickson influence, and a better album for it.

On part one of the epic three-part, 14-minute title track, singer Magnus Pelander declares he "can blow your mind," and most of *The Alchemist* seeks to do just that in the old school stoner rock style. This is music for blazing in your parent's basement, the band no longer posturing as Satan's messiah but rather hedging their apocalyptic metal with a psychedelic euphoria. Of course, overall there's still a self-serious tone, with lots of phrases suitable to hear only at Comic-Con (e.g. "Constitution of murder!...Institution of sadness!" or "In our darkest hour/ When the dragon releases its power"). Regardless of what yarn he's spinning, though, Pelander's

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vocals really pop from the mix, a welcome change from most of the band's previous work recorded on vintage 1970s studio equipment. Opener "Walking the Line" will cause many double-takes, the song's bouncy melody taking a cue from Josh Homme's catchy brand of stoner rock. You can even feel the 13th Floor Elevators love on "Remembered", its death march verse contrasted by a trippy chorus and wah-wah guitar solo too loopy by metal standards.

With all the Arthurian lore and story-telling zeal, The Alchemist could actually be a fun record with a little tongue-in-cheekiness thrown in. But despite the looser psych vibe, the album follows the well-trod path to Mordor (or something like it). Along the way Sabbath riffs and scene-stealing howls cue us in when the stakes get particularly high, but the music often sounds as hyperbolic as the tale its soundtracking. That said, Witchcraft's made leaps and bounds since their debut, back when they'd be confused for the kind of macabre Scandinavian metal act that'd murder its bassist for inspiration. If these guys could just quit letting their Tolkien complex overwhelm the music, they might someday do their touchstones justice and escape their current snicker-inducing status. --- Adam Moerder, pitchfork.com

Album "The Alchemist" został wydany zaledwie pięć lat temu, a brzmi jak jakieś zaginione dzieło z początku lat 70. W porównaniu z poprzednimi albumami Witchcraft, "The Alchemist" wydaje się nieco lżejszy, choć grupa wciąż gra przede wszystkim dynamiczne utwory, oparte na doom metalowych riffach w stylu Black Sabbath czy Pentagram (np. "Walking Between the Lines", "Hey Doctor"). Być może jest to kwestia większego nacisku na wyrazistość melodii - zespół nie miał wcześniej w repertuarze tak chwytliwych utworów, jak "Walking Between the Lines", "If Crimson Was Your Colour", czy - przede wszystkim - "Remembered".

Z każdym kolejnym utworem, longplay coraz bardziej zachwyca. Prawdziwa magia rozpoczyna się wraz z wolniejszym "Samaritan Burden", opartym na wyrazistej linii basu i zakończeniem wzbogaconym o brzmienia akustyczne. Ale to i tak nic przy rewelacyjnym "Remembered". W zasadniczej części utworu riffowe zwrotki kontrastują z łagodnym refrenem, a na koniec pojawia się świetna solówka na saksofonie, które idealnie wtapia się w sabbathowe riffy. Jest jeszcze ponad 11-minutowy tytułowy "The Alchemist", składający się z trzech części. Pierwsza to ciągłe zmiany klimatu. Obok mocnych riffów, pojawiają się fragmenty balladowe o nieco folkowym charakterze. Część druga, prog rockowa, to delikatne dźwięki gitar i melotronu, które jednak stają się coraz bardziej intensywne. W ostatniej części, zespół wraca do mocnego riffowania.

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"The Alchemist" to jeden z najwspanialszych albumów ostatniej dekady, będący niezwykle podróżą do najlepszych lat muzyki rockowej. --- Paweł Pałasz, pablosreviews.blogspot.com

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