

Blasphemer – The Sixth Hour (2020)

Written by bluesever (Bogdan Marszałkowski)
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1 *Let Him Be Crucified* 3:58 2 *Hail, King Of The Jews!* 3:33 3 *The Stumbling Block* 3:58 4 *Stabat Mater* 4:33 5 *Blessed Are The Wombs That Never Bore* 1:20 6 *Lord Of Lies* 3:36 7 *Via Dolorosa* 3:20 8 *The Robe Of Mockery* 4:02 9 *I.N.R.I.* 4:22 10 *The Sixth Hour* 3:41
Clod "The Ripper" De Rosa - vocals, bass Simone Brigo - guitar, backing vocals Nicolò Brambilla - guitar, backing vocals Davide Cazziol - drums

Italy's BLASPHEMER have been grinding away in the underground Italian extreme metal scene for just over two decades now. Their 2008 debut, *On the Inexistence of God* was incredibly well received by the underground, but it wasn't until 2016 before they released their equally celebrated follow-up, *Ritual Theophagy*. Having near-perfected their highly technical brand of brutal death metal, there was a worry that the next record would simply be more of the same – however, BLASPHEMER don't disappoint. Their third LP, *The Sixth Hour*, sees the quartet expand their songwriting chops, crafting a full concept album centred on the final hours in the life of Jesus Christ and blending their signature brand of slamming brutality with a heavy dose of blackened atmosphere. On paper, this all sounds like the ingredients for a fantastic record – but does *The Sixth Hour* live up to the potential?

It absolutely does. For lovers of sonic bludgeoning above all else, a more expansive sound can be a worrying step away from the tried-and-tested roots of BLASPHEMER's style, but right from the offset of *Let Him Be Crucified* the foursome quell these worries. Yes, there is a lot more going on here than the aural blunt force trauma the band showed with their first two records – but that aspect of their sound is still at the forefront. But subtle, black metal melodies and clever songwriting helps to make the brutality hit all the harder. This is a theme that carries throughout *The Sixth Hour* as a whole.

Single *Hail, King of the Jews!* brings one of the record's catchiest moments with infectious

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grooves and vocal patterns, while the one-two of The Stumbling Block and Stabat Mater is utterly crushing. Coming as a welcome interlude, Blessed are the Wombs that Never Bore offers up a stunning acoustic piece, allowing a bit of breathing space from the untamed aggression, but not from the unsettled atmosphere. Lord of Lies crashes in after the moment of respite with all the subtlety of a jackhammer, while Via Dolorosa lets BLASPHEMER take a slight step back, focusing more on atmosphere than aggression.

Well into Side B of The Sixth Hour, The Robe of Mockery makes its mark as one of the record's strongest songs. Wonderful guitar work from guitarists Simone Brigo and Nicolò Brambilla makes the track immediately memorable, while front man Clod de Rosa barks his heresy with renewed vigour. It's clear BLASPHEMER saved the best for last here; the last third of the album, starting with The Robe of Mockery, sees the quartet up for already stellar game. I.N.R.I carries some unexpected flourishes of melody while bringing the tempo to an all time high; video single The Deposition is arguably the catchiest track BLASPHEMER have released to date, leaning hard into the blackened style of riffing while closing track De Profundis ends the record on a haunting note. But it is The Sixth Hour's title track that really steals the spotlight, bringing a groove-heavy swagger, savage delivery and hook-heavy execution to the forefront.

The Sixth Hour is a marvellous work from start to finish – backed up with a fascinating conceptual basis, BLASPHEMER have really come into their own here. Blending their tried-and-tested brand of hyper-brutal death metal with a healthy dose of blackened atmosphere and melody, BLASPHEMER have hit the bulls-eye with The Sixth Hour. Their latest record may just be the one to put them shoulder to shoulder with the leaders of the Italian death metal scene – watch this space. ---Fraser Wilson, distortedmag.com

Ricordate i Blasphemer di “On the Inexistence of God” e “Devouring Deception”? Apprezzatissimi esempi di ‘brutal’ death metal a stelle e strisce che una dozzina di anni fa, insieme alle prime opere di Septycal Gorge, Hour of Penance e Fleshgod Apocalypse, contribuirono a rilanciare la scena estrema del nostro paese? Se la risposta è sì, allora dimenticateli in fretta e furia, perché siamo nel 2020 e questa band è cambiata parecchio da allora, sia in termini di line-up che – soprattutto – di offerta musicale.

L'amore per il metallo della morte di Simone Brigo e Clod 'The Ripper' Rosa, la capacità di declinarlo in forma impattante e catchy nonostante la ferocia di fondo, sono rimasti al loro posto,

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ma questi elementi vengono oggi filtrati attraverso la lente di un approccio 100% vecchia scuola e di inedite sbandate in territori black metal, per un risultato finale mai così avvincente e variegato. Arruolati i giovani Nicolò Brambilla alla chitarra (Ekpyrosis) e Davide Cazziol alla batteria (ex Helion), i Nostri si gettano in un groviglio di sonorità novantiane coltivato con grande cura e criterio, pagando pegno alla stagione d'oro del genere e ai suoi interpreti leggendari senza per questo risultare anacronistici o forzatamente rétro.

Deicide, Morbid Angel e Sinister (o Dead Congregation, volendo citare un gruppo più recente) sono quindi i primi termini di paragone di "The Sixth Hour", opera che porta a termine il restyling avviato dal precedente "Ritual Theophagy" in un'escalation dai toni barbari e diabolici, allentando e irrigidendo la tensione secondo un gusto sopraffino e un'assoluta padronanza delle dinamiche del songwriting. In effetti, si potrebbe pensare ai dodici episodi della tracklist come a percorsi sonori che – partendo da basi piane – finiscono per arrampicarsi su pareti più ripide e frastagliate, all'insegna di una tecnica messa sempre al servizio della narrazione e lungi dallo scendere nell'onanismo di molti act contemporanei. Proprio come su un "Covenant", un "Hate" o un "Once Upon the Cross", ogni brano presenta almeno un riff o una melodia che si imprime a fuoco nella memoria, con esiti che fanno subito pensare al bagaglio old school della formazione lombarda, tra parentesi spaventosamente orecchiabili, digressioni infernali e affondi nel caos organizzato di marca Trey Azaghoth.

Tre quarti d'ora di musica che, dalla hit istantanea "Hail, King of the Jews!" all'epica "I.N.R.I.", passando per l'omaggio a "Desolate Ways" di "Blessed Are the Wombs That Never Bore", ci riconsegnano dei Blasphemer all'apice dell'ispirazione e della maturità stilistica, oltre che sancire il primo grande disco death metal dell'anno. ---Giacomo Slongo, metalitalia.com

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