

Ministry heads faithfully toward doom



Ministry
The Fifth Album
★★★
Capitol Records
1992

By Tim Neff
Emerald Associate Editor

While most remaining post-punk bands are turning a cheerful cheek to their gloomy roots, Ministry just keeps getting more and more irked.

It's sometimes hard to believe that this band — a mid-1980s outgrowth of the danceable

techno-pop pioneered by groups like Depeche Mode and New Order — have become the grungy, apocalyptic, thrash-metal troubadours of the 1990s.

But it's all in a day's work for Ministry frontman Alain Jourgensen, who once declared that if he hadn't pursued a career in music, he would probably be in jail by now.

Keeping that in mind, Ministry's latest album, titled in undecipherable Greek Morse code, offers no surprises. Jourgensen and trusty sidekick Paul Barker pack enough energy into this album to power a small city.

The themes are tried but true — drugs, politics, war and religion. They are all neatly packaged in the traditional Ministry wrappings of highly processed and produced riffs.

It may not sound very unique, but the result is a thrash-metal sound with techno-pop overtones. If you were to put the fans of the two musical genres together in a room, blood would spill. But the musical combination is sweet.

The Ministry sound is rich. Normally abrasive power chords are smoothed into lush soundscapes for easy absorption. Jourgensen finds a riff and stays with it until it mesmerizes and soothes — if that's what you're into. It's also tailor-made for the mosh pit, if headbanging is your cup of tea.

Spliced into the sonic fray are occasional electronic samples, usually taken from well-known movies and speeches. The selection is humorous as well as provoking.

Ministry didn't attain all of this musical chaos overnight. Rather, they have evolved since their first release, *With Sympathy*, in the early 1980s. Here, we thought, was yet another group for new wave trendoids, destined to get the youngsters out onto the dance floor until the band went to that great underage club in the sky.

But then came the legendary

album *Twitch*, an almost 180-degree turnabout for the band. The music was still dance-oriented, but came heavily laced with industrial drumming and synthesized vocals. Good ol' Alain was having a change of heart.

Things were sealed in 1988, when the band released *Land of Rape and Honey*. By now, the Ministry sound was downright angry. The footloose crowd was turning away in droves, but the diehard found enough dance potential in the song "Stigmata" to make it a minor hit in the club scene.

We knew Alain had finally gone over the edge in 1989, when he appeared on Skinny Puppy's album *Rabies* under the clever alias "Alien Jourgensen". That same year, Ministry released *The Mind is a Terrible Thing to Taste*.

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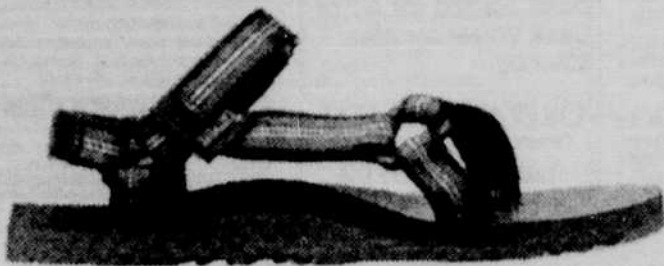
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