



The Yoga of Metal

"More people know about YOB than Ninkasi," says Mike Scheidt, vocalist and guitarist for Eugene doom metal band **YOB**. The band, just off a U.S. and Canadian tour, is revving up for another go around, but this time the tour includes a trip to Europe and "Hellfest" in France, where YOB is slated to appear before 40,000-plus fans.

We're sitting in a corner booth at New Day Bakery drinking decaf coffee. Scheidt is doing justice to a vegetarian omelet and relaying the innards of his nearly fifteen-year-long music venture. From the outset he's what you'd expect from a metalhead. But a second look reveals that his tattoo sleeves aren't those of a Satan-worshipping nihilist – they're of Om symbols and lotus flowers – and if there's any sort of chip on his shoulder, it's well obscured by an amiable smile and pensive demeanor.

YOB's music is like that too, characterized by mantric repetition and wide-open sonic landscapes holding space for lyrics whose themes Scheidt calls "universal." And more literally than figuratively, the band's songs are about the universe. Everyone on the blogosphere, including the folks at NPR, *New York Times*, *Pitchfork* and *Stereogum*, has had their say, tipped their hats and put *Atma* (YOB's latest release) on their 2011 best metal album lists. But most of that has to do with *Atma*'s trailblazing within the genre of doom metal.

As formidable as the band is in that respect, nobody's really given recognition or delved too deeply into Scheidt's words, which bring a whole new light to YOB's music. *Atma* is the Sanskrit word for "self" – often referred to in the Hindu Vedas and Upanishads – and much of the album's exploration concerns a transcendental struggle within the self in search of something or someone.

"Prepare the Ground," the opening track to the album, immediately manhandles the listener into the monotonous mantra with a jarring riff that awakens and forces awareness. Two minutes in, the quantum mystic begins his vocal meditation: "One hundred thousand/ Repetitions/ Recite the mantra/ Flowers unfold."

Not devoid of the epic solo or occasional death growl, Scheidt's material takes metal to new levels. Despite all the recent notoriety, he's true to his underground roots and waives off the publicity. He won't be selling out any time soon. One can expect the same fierce independence from a YOB show.

Scheidt explains that when he gets on stage, he wants to face the audience, open the chest a bit, center himself and prepare for sacred communion. It sounds more like a yoga practice. And that's kind of what it is: it's the yoga of metal.

"We all connect and share in the space together," says Scheidt, "intentionally, aware of our interconnectedness."

YOB plays 9 pm Friday, Dec. 9, at WOW Hall; \$10 adv., \$12 door. – *Andrew Hitz*



The Mystery of McCombs

Cass McCombs released two full-length albums in 2011. Makes you look at that pile of autumn leaves you've been neglecting in your yard differently, doesn't it? There is a lot of legend surrounding McCombs – that he leads a nomadic life living in cars, or sleeps on couches and is obsessed with death. The intensely private artist only furthers the mystique with his opaque songwriting, shunning of the spotlight and aversion to interviews. Even his publicity photos seem to be calculated in order to maximize mystique.

McCombs' first release of 2011, *Wit's End*, is a sleepy and atmospheric collection of songs mixing the psych-folk of Donovan and the dark soul of Leonard Cohen with an Elliot Smith-like twist on making retro sound thoroughly contemporary. The album opens with "County Line," recalling John Lennon's solo work, and continues through a cycle of richly arranged tracks featuring folk, jazz and classical flourishes, but never rising above the dopamine drone that serves as a backdrop to McCombs' "send you straight to the liner notes" lyrics.

It's hard not to look at McCombs' releases this year for themes or messages that might carry over from one to the other. If *Wit's End* is the night before, then the Westerberg-esque *Humor Risk* is the morning after. The psychedelic haze is still present and McCombs rarely sings in more than a muttering hum. But the guitars are now electric and fuzzy, the songwriting punchy and concise, the rhythms tight and driving, the melodies almost catchy.

Maybe nothing links these two recordings. Maybe McCombs is simply a highly prolific artist justifying his status as one of the "it" singer/songwriters right now. Maybe, like his penchant for mystery in his public persona, he's toying with us, making us wonder and ask why. In a rare interview McCombs recently told *Pitchfork.com*: "You can't just explain a joke, can you? Either it isn't funny, or the person just totally missed the punchline."

Regardless, McCombs has us listening and he's rewarding us for doing so.

Cass McCombs plays 9 pm Friday, Dec. 9, at Cozmic; \$9. – *William Kennedy*



Jacking Christmas

The Grouch is more than just an ill emcee; he is considered by most to be one of the reasons conscious hip hop is called conscious hip hop. To say Grouch is a pioneer of the genre isn't descriptive enough. He is a big part of why the Living Legends crew grew to be the overwhelming success story that it is – selling 300,000 records independently, in a time when record labels were still omnipotent entities in the music industry – and an ambassador for conscious hip hop who helped bring the music to Europe. Grouch is perhaps best described as a hip hop catalyst, for his uncanny ability to bring incredibly talented groups together both on stage and in the studio. He is responsible for doing just that yet again, with the "How the Grouch Stole Christmas" tour.

Evidence, L.A.-based graffiti writer turned producer and emcee, is an artist best known for his work in the group he helped found, Dilated Peoples. Stepping out into the spotlight as a solo artist and having recently released *Cats and Dogs*, Evidence will be establishing his stage show with a new never-before-seen swagger.

Eligh, another standout emcee from the Living Legends crew, will also be stealing Christmas alongside The Grouch. A rapper whose style many attempt to emulate, Eligh possesses a cadence that is definitively his own. Known for his uplifting and at times surreal content, Eligh's music is as intense as his live performances. Look to see him dropping all new cuts from his recent album, *Therapy At 3*.

Yet one more insanely talented hip hop act will also be on the bill – keep your ears open for **Zion I**, the Oakland hip hop duo known for fusing live instrumentation with heady lyrics. No part of this show will disappoint.

The "How Grouch Stole Christmas" tour plays 9 pm Thursday, Dec. 8, at WOW Hall; \$20 adv., \$25 door. – *Dante Zuñiga-West*