

Revocation: "CHAOS OF FORMS" (CD Review)

Written by Jeremy Webster

Tuesday, 04 October 2011 10:17



On first listen, CHAOS OF FORMS, the new album from the Boston, Massachusetts band Revocation, is not dissimilar to what you think you'd hear if you took a crapload of your favorite old thrash-metal records, threw them in a sonic blender, crammed in a few death-metal tones and hit the "puree" button. Yet such a description goes nowhere near doing this band justice.

It's certainly true that thrash metal has been enjoying a revival in popularity in recent years, but these guys aren't just showing up with slight tweaks of what Slayer, Megadeth, Exodus and the rest of that lot have already been doing for decades now. Guitarist/vocalist/chief composer David Davidson is a beastly, lightning-quick riff factory disguised in human flesh, and CHAOS OF FORMS arrives from an assembly line running at 100 percent efficiency. To stick with that analogy: Rather than being an exact or near replica of other previous such factories, the Revocation facility is a stand-alone construct that has merely used pre-existing assembly-line parts to serve as the framework for unique constructs of their very own.



Take "Cradle Robber," for example. The purist thrash of album opener "Cretin" seems to stylistically continue into this second track, judging from its opening. When the vocals kick in, though, the verse construction morphs more to a death-metal intensity, with blast-beat drumming and ever-harsher vocals with death growls in the background. Then the chorus flips back to a thrash feel, and the listener is surprised to hear the vocals suddenly go into a short, seemingly out-of-nowhere harmonized line.

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It's this ability to take elements of various metal styles and find interesting ways for them to interact within a composition that really makes CHAOS OF FORMS an extraordinary listening experience. Third track "Harlot" starts out with an immediate intensity, but when you reach the guitar solo, you find yourself traversing a wah-wah-heavy blues-based affair. "Conjuring the Cataclysm" opens with an Opeth-esque acoustic ditty that terminates with the song reset into a heavy blues-based segment that leads it into solid doom-style riffing, culminating in a chorus stylistically ripe with black-metal feel and technique. "No Funeral" is, for the most part, a happy, up-tempo punk/metal outing with killer lead-guitar technique showing up in the choruses; then the solo goes into the sort of dual-guitar harmonizing you expect from bands like Iron Maiden and Judas Priest. The epic title track starts out with a sort of latter-career Death type of feel, then veers into another acoustic interlude that carries the listener for a few moments before dropping them off at a warm instrumental segment that, with less intensive drumming, wouldn't necessarily feel out of place on a Pelican album before it returns to Schuldiner-land.

Is all of this cross-genre exploration fantastic? Not necessarily. Whether it succeeds or fails will, of course, depend on a listener's preferred genres. The thrash element is the album's most pervasive stylistic foundation, so if you don't like thrash, this isn't something you'll necessarily want to pick up. The only time I found myself at odds with Revocation's style-stapling was during "The Watchers," which starts out as one of the album's darkest and heaviest tunes, only to have the flow interrupted by the sudden emergence of orchestral instruments and synthesizer-playing in a far more upbeat, jazzy and whimsical style at about the three-minute mark. The song follows that with a Symphony X-reminiscent gallop-and-guitar section that brings things somewhat back to sobriety, but the sudden jazzy bit irrevocably derails the song's momentum and feel by being just too radical a stylistic transition. Still, this was the only moment in the album that found me questioning Davidson's compositional ideas.

If there's something holding Revocation back at this point in their career, the lack of a vocal identity as dynamic as their compositional and instrumental identities would be the likely culprit. The production on CHAOS OF FORMS is tremendous, and the band as a whole—which, in addition to Davidson, is comprised of Dan Gargiulo on second guitar, Anthony Buda handling bass and vocals and Phil Dubois-Coyne blasting away on the drums—is a tight-knit unit with a lot of talent between them. Their main vocal style, though, is far more akin to a sort of generic metalcore rasp/scream. That's not the only vocal style utilized on the album; a few of the songs have backing death-growl vocals, as mentioned earlier, and on occasion the vocals switch up a bit, such as with the genre-appropriate shrieking in the black-metal-ish bits of "Conjuring the Cataclysm."

Elements like this are too few and far between, though, and the default vocal style just isn't as

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unique or as interesting as the band's compositional eclecticism. It may, in fact, detract from it, and the last thing these guys need is their not-terribly-interesting vocals weakening their compositional strength, which is this album's true core. While Autopsy's recent release *MACABRE ETERNAL* isn't a similar-sounding album, Chris Reifert's vocal work there makes for a good example of imaginative vocal exploration truly adding to the overall atmosphere and, consequently, compositional strength of the album, as each song almost has its own "voice," so to speak, and none of them sound like run-of-the-mill death-metal vocals. Outside of that sort of extreme, Revocation should certainly be aspiring to a voice that can seem more identifiable as *them* and less identifiable as "This is how extreme metal vocalists tend to generally sound."

Still, there have been tons of acts whose vocals haven't exactly been the greatest on the planet, and the *real* meat here lies in Revocation's ability to take metal music in all its various genres and styles, deconstruct it, see how it ticks, build a nice framework of thrash and adorn that structure with the parts they see fit to use, as translated by Davidson's wicked talent for awesome riffery. *CHAOS OF FORMS* is a tremendous album that serves not just as a love letter or homage to metal, but recycles and reforges it in the band's own unique vision to keep it evolving. For those with a wide appreciation of metal's variations and musicianship capable of keeping the overall genre fresh, entertaining and interesting, *CHAOS OF FORMS* should be a must-buy.

