



The Thermals: *The Body, The Blood, The Machine* (Sub Pop)

The Thermals found their stride on their previous outing, *Fuckin' A*, which lived up to its title and then some, all raw energy and crackling attack. *The Body, The Blood, The Machine* cleans things up a bit—recorded by Fugazi's Brendan Canty, the band finally gets the fidelity and presence they deserve. The loss of drummer Jordan Hudson prior to recording has not had a lingering effect—singer/guitarist Hutch Harris and bassist Kathy Foster play the drums themselves (as they did back on their first LP), and Canty makes them sound great.

Playing what they call (with a wink) “post-pop-punk,” this power trio cranks out insatiable punk rock with ample hooks and time-proven chord progressions. It's guitar-driven in the classic sense—fantastically so. Big stereo guitars light the way for immediate, anthemic bursts of songs.

Within the bounds of this basic approach, the Thermals don't limit themselves—witness a Cars-esque keyboard lead Camaroiing us into “A Pillar of Salt,” “Here's Your Future” coming at you like the Buzzcocks with a radio preacher and a textbook less-is-more guitar solo, a bit of bar rock on “Returning to the Fold,” or a slinking minor romp on “Power Doesn't Run on Nothing.”

Not one of these catchy backdrops quite prepares you for its accompanying lyrics. Harris really takes center stage on this outing, the instruments providing supporting structures over which he expounds, accuses, apologizes, preaches, loves, and hates. The lyrics, according to the Thermals, “envision a United States governed by a fascist Christian state, and focus on the need to escape.” This is disturbingly easy to envision, and Harris goes at it with spit and bile, refusing to be complicit *or* complacent, equating blood and oil, Jesus and Nazis, willing even to crawl “back to the sea” (on the track with that name) from whence we came, de-evolving away from these dismal developments. He seems to mock the righteous and inane on “Returning to the Fold” with his yells of “wait for me.” On “A Pillar of Salt” Harris gives you chills just before the chorus release with “We don't want to die or apologize for our dirty god, our dirty bodies.” Throughout the album, he's fuming with palpable disaffection. But not disaffection in the stylized, boring sense: that implies certain laziness, which is simply not present here. Let's call it a seething rage, a rallying cry—a vitriolic admonition that we may soon be trapped on Planet of the Christian Apes. (www.thethermals.com)

8 Blips out of 10

By J. Pace

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