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ALBUM REVIEW

THE SOUNDTRACK TO A CABARET HOSTED BY CALIGULA

It's been a long time since Lou Reed encouraged us to "take a walk on the wild side." Not surprisingly it's another New Yorker, Sam Rosenthal, who gives us a road map for our lascivious explorations: Black Tape for a Blue Girl's newest full-length **10 Neurotics**.

If you haven't checked in on this group in awhile you may be in for a surprise. It's still the result of Rosenthal's singular vision, but he's razed the group in order to rebuild it. Sam has carefully created a collection of songs exploring a wide variety of kink and perversion, and to perform these songs he's assembled a new band. Up front are vocalists Athan Maroulis (Spahn Ranch), Laurie Reade (Attrition) & Nicki Jaine. Most notably Sam's found a very puissant partner in actually arranging his songs: Brian Viglione (Dresden Dolls).

Viglione doesn't exactly bring "the rock," but his skills allow Black Tape for a Blue Girl to explore a wider variety of sound and style. Each tale of lust and desire has its own sound, and that is what really makes this set work.

The album kicks off with the Tom Waits-ish doom waltz of "Sailor Boy." If you didn't know that the band had changed you do now. Dirty sound, dirty SUBJECT matter, your mouth should go a little dry wondering if you're ready for the rest of the journey. This song is like a road sign that reads "Abandon purity and hypocrisy all who enter here." Later in the album the talented Nicki Jaine sings "Rotten Zurch Cafe." It comes from similar territory as "Sailor Boy" musically but is slower, more melancholy. And beautiful. By the second number it's clear that gone are the days of darkwave for BTfaBG. "Inch Worm" is a confessional that turns to chant with the chorus, a tale of obsession over body issues. This song seems created to ask us what is pretty, is pretty even good? "Tell Me You've Taken Another" is the most strikingly differ-

ent of the pieces offered here. Its tale of a willing, no begging, cuckold may be a bit much for some, but musically it comes from left field. It evokes the 70s French pervy pop of Serge Gainsbourg. I love this little sleazy listening number.

The rock does come, eventually. Viglione's drumming brings a pounding urgency to "The Pleasure in the Pain." This song is *honestly* sinister, desperate and the rock bombast acts as an excellent counter point and emphasis. Track 13, "Curious Yet Ashamed," is the partner to "Pleasure in the Pain." It comes out of the speakers like the soundtrack to a cabaret hosted by Caligula. The desperation here is even more palatable, the vocal delivery almost crazed. Electronic music may be able to sound kinky, but "Curious Yet Ashamed" proves that rock is better at making music sound *dirty*.

The songs aren't all about dominance and submission (though you can understand a frequent returning to this theme: so many kinks involve issues of control and power even if they're not obviously dom/sub situations). If furries ever wanted an anthem they could do worse than "Marmalade Cat."

10 Neurotics has a level of perverse exploration that falls somewhere above Soft Cell and the Normal, but never gets quite as graphic as Coil. Exploring sexual subcultures can be a harrowing experience. It can leave you blushing or short of breath, but it will definitely get your attention. With these tales of desperation, degradation and dirty whispers Sam Rosenthal commands our attention, controls it. By revealing his desires and setting them to compelling music he's illustrated not only what he wants but what he's capable of. If confidence is the ultimate aphrodisiac than Sam Rosenthal has it in spades.

Highly recommended.