

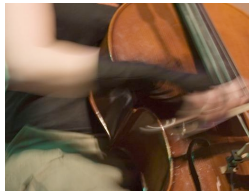


- Left of the Dial Magazine

October 16, 2006

[Polly Panic/Painkiller: Greyday Records](#)

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She might have uprooted herself from the slate gray money machination world of Herman Melville's New York to the drizzly Interzone of Portland, OR, but this is urban decay that feels like the Brooklyn Academy of Music being hit by a ship loaded with rocket propelled grenades: bursts, staccatos and burn baby burn hiss and flare with squeezed out howls from hell. She readily admits a tireless affection for writers/painkillers incorporated, Sylvia Path and Virginia Wolf, though Panic's musical pathways could easily be dubbed twisted, micro-muscled, classical chaos that relates as much to Neurosis, the Melvins, and the Swans as much as to any lithead preoccupations. This is sanitarium stuff that digests a bit roughly, best in small but still lethal doses, like "Soft Witness," in which she declares her readiness to "redesign your disarray," and I believe her because there is very little solitude from her weave of avant-garde modalities and brow pounding, loosely brandished rock heavy rustscapes. It's uninhibited, naked, guttural, and shambolic.

Mostly less heavy but more evocative, "Plathian Fashions" even has a subset of slightly Patti Smith tongue rollicking in places, though higher pitched, with Panic flaring here and there like a dying volcano or a trauma voice migrating from strength and fury to despair and searching the next, even alluding to Plath's "Bell Jar" in a moment of suffocation. "Mother" unleashes the uncertainty of walking alone when mother could not, focusing on the generational fog that keeps us questioning our ability to cut the umbilical chords and the cognitive cables that form the not-so-soft machine of our survival. We're the saplings, frozen things, ready for thaw, she suggests, if the fear can be peeled back and the predatory life forms around us exiled forever. The same pulse returns on "Little Girl," where our identities are still questioned among the days when "razor burns will be your steady love."

There is one common currency: abrasion. We are poc-marked by years of pain breeding, and the song is not a prayer but a hex demolition zone, where the pitched battles for identity, grace, and survival can finish off the hordes of memory vampires that feed on us. The songs never really declare their own spaces; in fact, they meld and melt into vignettes with a mucous membrane still attached to each, with "Pretty Pissing" revisiting the disaster of this breeding, trying to grapple with the alphabet of reason, which has no place in the mongrel heart of love, where she has "learned to hate" and sit pretty "between my lines that I could never find." This played part, this persona, has become almost biological, having become a second skin, the training so perfected that it need not even manifest itself beyond its deep interior dwelling. This too is the locus of "Royal," though with a gothic undertow emanating purple rooms, lullabies, and lies holding exclusive sway, reminding me of Plath's "Daddy," where the nursery puns on the woman in the shoe eventually give way to dad's Hitler boots. When she drops terms like "paint us beautiful" on "Paint," you can smell the reek of turpentine, the psychopathological forays, the grief genesis, and perhaps there is a brief, numbed solace under the spell of the "Acid Rain" falling in the last song, for porous bodies have already been warped and drained, our glassy isolation from the "normal" world exploded into fissures that can be read like small, terrorized mythologies. Not for the faint and feigning.

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