

TWO
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MONOLOGUES

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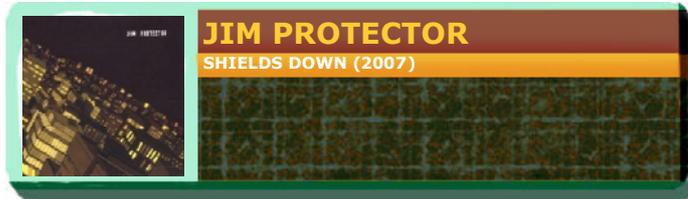
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**JIM PROTECTOR****SHIELDS DOWN (2007)**

Preparing this review was the first exposure I have had to Norway's Jim Protector. The band has been kicking around since '01 and have released a couple of EPs and even a few tracks for compilations, but *Shields Down* is the first full length for the band. Yo La Tengo's Jad Fair throws down a bit of help, as well as Ken Stringfellow from The Posies, who worked on the mixing of the album.

The music is great. Long instrumentals begin to descend on you like an ominous but still slow mounting avalanche. The first track, 'Concept of Gravity' starts off with some simple synth pumps and after two minutes when the drums kick in, you realize that the music had become such a natural progression to your hearing that it sounded as regular as your own breathing. Despite many of the songs being in the five plus minutes mark, they seem to evolve naturally and none of it seems to be dragging on.

Jim Protector hints many times at a sound outside their own (or what I have come to consider as their own at least). Track two carries off with fuzzy guitars that sound like a Pavement or Dino Jr tribute, but at the same time the other guitar is playing something with real railway country sound to it. Then a few minutes in, it turns into some Braid style breaks with some background vocals in a very similar tone to those of Chris Broach.

After the first few tracks, when the vocals finally start to kick in full time, it takes you by surprise. With long bouts of strictly instrumentation the vocals are almost in full competition with the rest of the compositions in order to get some attention. With that said, there isn't anything wrong with the vocals, for all you Saddle-creekheads out there the singer kind of sounds like the early stuff of Todd Baechle from the Faint. Some of the accompanying vocals remind me of Kyle Field from Little Wings, which is always a good thing in my books.

What I don't like about the vocals is when they throw the effects down on it. That static-ey monotonous drone with another heavier-effected voice a pitch or two higher really bugs me. It seems like a trick bands would use to hide the fact that their singer is not great, but Jim Protector doesn't have that problem, so I don't really see the necessity in it all. The third track even has that voice-synth stuff (again, pretty The Faint-esque) but it really takes enjoyment out of the vocals for me. The bare boned vocals in some of that other songs is what really makes it more appealing.

Overall, I doubt this will be making it on any of my 'Best of the year' type lists, but Jim Protector certainly was a pleasurable experience. But don't just take my word for it..

SCORE: 8