

Bio information: **THINKING PLAGUE**

Title: "**EARLY PLAGUE YEARS**" (Cuneiform Rune 141)

Cuneiform promotion dept: (301) 589-8894 / fax (301) 589-1819

email: Cuneiform2@aol.com [publicity & promotion]; CuneiformRadio@aol.com [radio]

<http://www.cuneiformrecords.com>

FILE UNDER: ROCK

Thinking Plague is a Colorado-based ensemble that explores the frontier where punk and progressive rock, world music, jazz and contemporary classical music meet. *Journal Wired* called its sound "a genre of music unto itself, eclectically derivative in a bold way and spectacularly innovative in the old-fashioned sense of genuine originality."

The band grew out of the basement recording experiments of Mike Johnson, the band's guitarist and main composer, and bassist/drummer Bob Drake. As Johnson told *Audion* magazine:

"Bob Drake and I met...in 1978. He and I were both fans of Henry Cow, Gentle Giant, early seventies Yes, Genesis, ELP, and...Mahavishnu. We were "rock" musicians but I had been a classical fan since childhood, which led me to Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Bartok, Shostakovich, W. Schumann, Britten, etc. Over the years I developed the desire to achieve that kind of expression and the depth while using the power or "rawness" of rock instruments or styles. When Bob and I met we clicked on these lines instantly... we began to make... song ideas. Art Bears appeared about then and we were profoundly affected by their simplicity mixed with subtlety. I was seeking a "rock" musical language that would not be a slave to the tonal harmonic tradition and would not sound like fusion or improvisational noise. So I sort of distilled elements from all the above including punk, ersatz or facetious jazz (I like to make fun), techno-pop, "world" music, and so on. The first result appears on our first lp *A Thinking Plague*..."

In 1982, they formed an ensemble for live performance. Of the band's name, Johnson told *Audion*:

For me, creativity is very personal and "art" is the window that we open on our inner selves to let that creativity be transmitted to other psyches that are able or willing to receive it. So anyway, Thinking Plague means the disease of thinking in a society where too much thinking is considered as grounds for shunning, suspicion of mental instability, dismissal as out of touch with the "real" world... The disease of the dreamer be she/he a scientist or a poet."

The band soon began producing and recording its first album, ...*A Thinking Plague*, "an excruciating process because we were using borrowed time at a friend's little eight-track recording studio out there in the slaughterhouse region [of Denver], called The Packing House. The basement of the place actually had what looked like bloodstains on the wall." Self-released in 1984 as a limited edition lp of 500 copies, with hand painted album covers by Bob Drake, it featured members Sharon and Mark Bradford, Mark Fuller and Harry Fleishman in addition to Johnson and Drake. *A Thinking Plague* was "Recommended" by *Spin* while *Sound Choice* noted that "Thinking Plague are on to something... Good, fun... experimental music." It also captured the attention of Chris Cutler, whose ReR/Recommended would help distribute the band's first two releases and release its 3rd, *In This Life*.

Thinking Plague's second album, *Moonsongs*, was released as a cassette in 1986 on the band's Endemic label and, in 1987, reissued on lp by Dead Man's Curve, a subsidiary of Red Rhino in London. Called "stunning" by *Option* and "spell-binding" by *CMJ*, the lp was the band's first with singer/songwriter Susanne Lewis, of whom *CMJ* observed: "Astonishing vocals: Susanne Lewis... is equal parts snarling Lydia Lunch and angelic Liz Frazier." In addition to Lewis, Johnson and Drake, the lp also featured band members Mark Fuller, Eric Moon, Marc McGoin.

Early Plague Years features Thinking Plague's first two albums, remixed and remastered by Bob Drake from the original tapes, on a single CD that sonically surpasses the original, out-of-print pressings. It is the band's 5th release, and its 2nd on the Cuneiform label. *Early Plague Years* will enable fans to trace the band's evolution from its work with vocalist Sharon Bradford and early experiments with an arty new-wave sound, to its work with vocalist Susanne Lewis and a style one critic called "literally a new wrinkle in that borderline that has formed between art rock/progrock and the avant garde/neoclassical. If there is to be an evolution to art rock, this is where it lies." (*The Apex*)