

What the press has said about:

THINKING PLAGUE

A HISTORY OF MADNESS

CUNEIFORM

2003

lineup: Mike Johnson (guitars & such), Deborah Perry (singing), Dave Willey (bass guitar & accordions), David Shamrock (drums & percussion), Mark Harris (saxes, clarinet, flute), Matt Mitchell (piano, harmonium, synths) - Guests: Kent McLagan (acoustic bass), Jean Harrison (fiddle), Ron Miles (trumpet), David Kerman (drums and percussion), Leslie Jordan (voice), Mark McCoin (samples and various exotica)

"It has been 20 years since Rock In Opposition ceased to exist as a movement in any official sense... Nevertheless, at its best this music can be stimulating and vital. It's only RIO, but I like it.

Carrying the torch for these avant Progressive refuseniks are Thinking Plague, part of a stateside Cow-inspired contingent including 5uu's and Motor Totemist Guild. These groups have...produced some extraordinary work... Their music eschews the salon woodwinds and cellos of the European groups for a more traditional electric palette, and its driving, whirlwind climaxes show a marked influence of King Crimson and Yes, names to make their RIO granddaddies run screaming from the room.

...this new album finds the group's main writer Mike Johnson in [an] apocalyptic mood, layering the pale vocals of Deborah Perry into a huge choir of doom, her exquisitely twisted harmonies spinning tales of war, despair and redemption as the music becomes audaciously, perhaps absurdly, complex. ... Thinking Plague are exciting and ridiculous in equal measure, as good Prog rock should be."

- **Keith Moliné**, *Wire*, Issue 239, January 2004

"Thinking Plague formed in 1983...after guitarist and main composer Mike Johnson answered a notice posted by Bob Drake for a guitarist into "Henry Cow, Yes, etc." ...these initial influences are still prominent in the group's sound - along with King Crimson, Stravinsky, Ligeti, Art Bears, and Univers Zero. ... They're not exactly prolific, but a listen to any of their albums will go to some length at explaining why - the composition and execution obviously takes tons of work. *A History of Madness* is a concept record, inspired by the Albigensian Crusades in 13th C. France and its parallels to current world events. There are song-like pieces at either end of the album, with multitracked bell-like vocals provided by Deborah Perry. ... "Rapture of the Deep"...unfolds in as satisfying and beautiful a manner as might be possible by what is, if not essentially, then practically, a rock band. ... The middle third of the CD, inaugurated by the demoniacally virtuosic "Gúdamy Le Máyagot," is more introspective and features...some ambient pieces. These are Johnson's first foray into that area. ... Thinking Plague is undoubtedly producing some of the finest and most rewarding progressive music in the world today. This is an album that must be heard to be believed."

- **James Beaudreau**, *Signal to Noise*, Winter 2004, Issue 32

"... Thinking Plague, nominally a sextet, picks up five extra players for... *A History Of Madness*...

...the combination works quite well. It ends up sounding full-bodied and detailed, with plenty of understated polyrhythms... unusual instruments pop in and out, including Mike Johnson's four guitars and...miscellaneous percussion, Dave Willey's accordion and melodica, and Mark McCoin's scary combination of "sadbefré, lap-fractar, ründerfôn, and 'exquisite porpenar.'" But with the unifying force of Deborah Perry's insistent vocals on top, the group never gets lost.

...The thing that has always tied it together is the leadership of guitarist Mike Johnson, who contributes ten of the twelve pieces on the record, as well as the lyrics. ... He's a thinker.

...pieces flow together quite coherently, making up a full-bodied suite that tends to feel psychedelic and uneasy.

... The regular, layered pulse and openly harmonized vocals here betray prog rock roots, as does the structured compositional emphasis and architecture. But it's hard to pin down Thinking Plague, especially when it comes to what bin the record belongs in. Just as well. Mike Johnson may be deadly serious, but his music has enough layers to bypass classification." - **Nils Jacobson**, *All About Jazz*, October 2003, www.allaboutjazz.com

"...this year we've taken a more pragmatic approach to sharing our favorite local releases. We've assembled track lists with the best songs from the best albums and artists for situations you may encounter in the coming year -- a custom set of mix tapes from us to you.

Top Ten Songs for Someone With a Multiple Musicality Disorder... Be yourself, they tell you. But what "self" should you be today? The alternative-music-loving intellectual? The jazz-obsessed boho? The punk-rocking wildman? Or how about all of the above -- simultaneously?:

4. "Blown Apart" from *A History of Madness*, by Thinking Plague...

Colorado's longest-surviving art-rock aggregation checks in with another thoroughly worthy opus courtesy of mastermind Mike Johnson and a batch of mad conspirators. "Blown Apart" is more than eight minutes' worth of stops, starts, eccentric time signatures and mind-bending surprises."

- **Michael Roberts/Westword Staff**, "All Mixed Up: The year's best local music becomes the soundtrack of our lives.", *Westword*, Dec 25, 2003, www.westword.com

"... A concept album; meant to be taken in it's entirety, this flows from track to track in a wholly organic manner. This Colorado-based band fuse complex art rock with finely nuanced details and delicate filigree amidst the start-stop tempo shifts and odd meters that add up to sinister secrets and overwhelming questions. ... Inspired by equal parts of Bartok, Stravinsky, Art Bears and Henry Cow, with a strong Euro-folk element as well. There is also more of an accent on acoustic instrumentation here than on their previous releases, which warms things considerably... To my ears this is the most satisfying and enjoyable album these folks have yet produced; merging accessibility with ambitious creativity in a seamless song cycle."

- **Dream Magazine**, #4

"... Most music based on popular forms...is like a photo in that it describes a single situation... A movie, on the other hand, usually presents a journey... Thinking Plague's music is like that. The album is a journey from start to end, and you never pass by the same scene twice. Parts of it are manic and dissonant...other parts are quiet and contemplative... You have to slow yourself down and listen carefully...because a life without rest is exhausting, and something new is coming just around the bend."

- **Jon Davis**, *Exposé*, #28, December 2003

"...this incarnation of the band is perhaps the most balanced of any. ... With this set of twelve pieces, the group falls further under the dark umbrella of Present and Univers Zero as the arranged chaos becomes a familiar pattern of tension and release. ... Deborah Perry's lead vocal...is a constant...her pleasant delivery provides a point of light through the abyss. Daniel Denis and Dagmar Krause would both be proud of the influence they have wrought upon "Consolamentum" that features Perry's semi-spoken-words in a modern dirge enhanced by Johnson's brilliant hammer-on and backwards guitar parts. Johnson and Willey have also dug deeper into mainland European roots with the gypsy-like "Gúdamy Le Máyagot" ... Mark McCoin...creates a sound mat...not unlike...the disturbing backdrops done by Biota. ...Johnson and crowd can be proud of pushing the envelope yet again to its nth degree."

- **Jeff Melton**, *Exposé*, #28, December 2003

“Thinking Plague... create a mad sort of progressive rock that some might call RIO... Track one, “Blown Apart,” picks up where 1999’s *In Extremis*, left off; it’s a visceral and muscular display of angular and atonal prog rock that jumps lithely from brutal aggressiveness...to sublime melodicism. It serves as a model for much of the album’s band tracks ...”*Consolamentum*,” delves into a Stockhausen-inspired arrangement that pairs Deborah Perry’s broadly sketched vocals to harmonium and brass. ... Lyrically the album offers some biting observations on the world today, though these are nicely balanced with...wistful poetry... The sum total is a vision of a turbulent and unsettled time and place, though intelligent and piercingly insightful. Recommended.”

- Paul Hightower, *Exposé*, #28, December 2003

“...Thinking Plague's studied fusion of various subversive forms of rock, seemingly bound together into a dense, restless macro-fugue, is spit out as polyphonic, rocket scientist prog. ...

"Blown Apart"...Perry delivers an unassuming, yet insistent vocal lead, under which bass and percussion forcefully slam a backbeat into the distinctly out of the pocket groove. ... If I didn't know this was some fairly highbrow happenings, I'd say it jammed. ... Johnson has a flair for making lines and sub-melodies clear in the midst of considerable commotion...

...Eastern-tinged "Gúdamy le Máyagot" emits the most potent contact high on the record... It's also one of the few times Thinking Plague really step out of the arrangement and deliver real, adrenaline-fueled stomp... one of the cooler moments on *Madness* is actually the dark-ambient etude "Least Aether for Saxophone & Le Gouffre", featuring one half solo ruminations from reedist Mark Harris...and another micro-polyphonic mix of strings, bubbles and distant metallic friction.

...when a band draws upon aspects of modern composition, arrangement and performance a world removed from even most of the hip underground stuff out there, and still have people coming back for more, they're probably onto something. Interesting stuff and fans will not be disappointed.”

- Dominique Leone, *ground and sky*, December 4, 2011, www.progreviews.com

“...guitarist Mike Johnson leads his ensemble through a potpourri of unearthly soundscapes coupled with an abstract aesthetic amid offbeat time signatures and more. The core sextet benefits from noted jazz trumpeter Ron Miles and ace prog-rock drummer Dave Kerman... vocalist Deborah Perry adds a sense of innocence to these mystically fabricated works, based upon contoured arrangements.

... Complex music for sure, yet Johnson and associates’ stab at madness, largely translates into a *magical mystery tour* for the new millennium. Recommended...”

- Glenn Astarita, *Jazz Review*, www.jazzreview.com

“Whether you consider them progressive rock, avant-garde, or a part of the knottier Rock in Opposition camp, there’s little doubt that Thinking Plague are one of the most inventive, original musical ensembles working today. They take a bit from all the aforementioned styles, as well as from jazz and modern classical, and transmute it all into something wholly unique and distinctive. Though *A History of Madness* is as cutting-edge as can be, there’s a very definite through line to the compositions, and a melodic sensibility that’s forward-looking without being off-putting. ...constantly shifting latticework that offers delightful surprises at every turn, as rewarding as they are challenging.”

- Muze, www.muze.com, September 16, 2003

“A semi-regular random listing of what's been grabbing our ears/eyes/orifices lately... Thinking Plague *A History of Madness*... Mike Johnson's crew...soldiers on...with their mix of early Crimson dynamics and Henry Cow brittle-rock... Deborah Perry (on 'vocal emissions') makes a good mouth piece..."Blown Apart" is a great tale of destruction and rebirth that even agonistic can believe in.”

- Jason Gross and David Manning, “Digital JukeJointBox”, *Perfect Sound Forever*, Fall 2003

“...this is "adult music", in the real sense... the listener only has to have an adult perspective on music, and a capability to understand it and its content... The music itself is really well balanced, with no unnecessary musical ideas. ... It works very filmically, story like. ... The story itself is rather dark, the music is "colourful" ...with a real dramatic, but an ever controlled tension. ... An enthralling successful effort. ...”

- Gerald Van Waes, *Progressive Homestead*, progressive.homestead.com

“...this work has own life... Insane rhythmic constructions, sometimes apparently chaotic... this is one the most "difficult" bands of the actual worldwide progressive scene. The point is that...this really sounds great and awakes our sense of adventure and discovery. ...”

- Spulit, *Prog-PT*, August 17, 2004

“... Their brand of progressive rock owes more to Frank Zappa, King Crimson, Henry Cow, and Gentle Giant than the more symphonic groups, as the band has a very angular, avant-garde approach that is high on quirky, complex arrangements. ...

... Thinking Plague go for more atmospheric & acoustic moments on the 12 tracks included here. "Blown Apart", which kicks off the CD, is probably most representative of the Thinking Plague style, with repetitive, dissonant keyboards, jagged guitar lines, and Deborah Perry's wispy vocals. ... As on most Thinking Plague releases, there are numerous short pieces that serve as seques to the longer tracks...

... *A History of Madness*...is an enjoyable slice of the avant-garde as only Thinking Plague can create.”

- Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, October 2, 2003, www.seaoftranquility.org

“Top 40 (or so) For 2003 ... 5. Thinking Plague *A History Of Madness*” - *Tone Clusters*, 2003

“Putting into words the ravishing beauty of this material is next to impossible: this is without a doubt the best Thinking Plague album – balanced, difficult yet exceedingly evocative in every single minute. This music moves lots of emotions... (think of the creative peaks of Henry Cow, but also Genesis and Yes to get a comparison about the intensity of this CD) – not to mention that maybe Thinking Plague’s charts are even harder!

...“normal” progressive projects... can’t possibly be compared to such a magnificent compositional dexterity. And what about the sound?

Everything’s lodged in its perfect place, wonderfully detailed and craftily planned. ... Like magicians, these guys know the formula for appearing and disappearing during a normal life’s course – but when they come back, they release records with a noble scale.”

- Massimo Ricci, *Touching Extremes*, www.touchingextremes.org