

Bio information: **THINKING PLAGUE**

Title: "**IN EXTREMIS**" (Cuneiform Rune 113)

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Thinking Plague is a Colorado-based ensemble that explores the frontiers where rock, folk, jazz and modern symphonic music meet. Through these explorations, the band has created what Journal Wired called "a genre of music unto itself, eclectically derivative in a bold way and spectacularly innovative in the old-fashioned sense of genuine originality." Guitarist/composer Mike Johnson's music combines lyricism with intense and sophisticated rhythmic and harmonic ideas.

The band grew out of the basement recording experiments of Johnson and bassist/drummer Bob Drake in the early eighties. In 1982 they formed an ensemble for live performance. They released their first LP, "..a thinking plague," in 1984 on their own Endemic label. They produced and engineered the record themselves, and used minimal funds borrowed from friends or scraped together amongst themselves to press it. Each album cover was hand painted by Bob Drake.

Intent on making more powerful recordings and dissatisfied with the chemistry of that first lineup, Johnson and Drake disbanded the group. They began recording new songs and began working with a singer/songwriter named Suzanne Lewis. In 1987 their second album, "Moonsongs," was released by Dead Man's Curve in London. The record was described as "stunning" by Option.

In early 1989 reed player Mark Harris joined the group, making clarinet, saxes and flute permanent features of the sound. Shane Hotle came in on keyboards. With this line up Johnson wrote a body of new art songs that were more subtle and original than previous material. In addition to the usual rock band instrumentation, violin, tabla, and various other African and Balinese percussion instruments were incorporated. This material became the next record, "In This Life," which was released as a CD in 1989 on ReR to universal critical acclaim. Boston Rock called it "astonishing!" and Ear Magazine said, "Thinking Plague has climbed into a niche uniquely its own."

At this point, Lewis left Colorado to pursue her own musical direction, while Drake moved to Los Angeles where he worked as a recording engineer. In LA, Drake met up with drummer David Kerman, leader of 5uu's and drummer for other notable bands such as Present and Blast. Kerman joined Thinking Plague in 1990. Thus began a period of concerts and recording of new material, some of which is featured on In Extremis. In 1994, Drake moved to France, thereby ending his day-to-day involvement with the band.

In 1996, Johnson formed a new nucleus for Thinking Plague featuring vocalist Deborah Perry and bassist Dave Willey. With Kerman on drums, Harris on reeds, Hotle and a number of guest keyboardists stepping in, the new Thinking Plague began recording Johnson's new material. This material, combined with the best of the early 90's recordings, is what is contained on In Extremis. The title, In Extremis, is Latin, meaning 'at the very point of death'. The songs delve into the feelings of fear, resignation and enlightenment which result from one's realization of the imminence of death. With In Extremis, Thinking Plague's music has achieved a new level of lyricism, maturity and clarity.