



Crystal Antlers

EP

(Touch & Go)

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by [Mehan Jayasuriya](#)

Punk rock can be a lot of things: visceral, angsty, direct, catchy, anthemic. But rare is the band that makes punk rock sound soulful. So it is to their credit that Crystal Antlers, a much-hyped five piece from Long Beach, California, manage to pull off just that feat, barreling through their six-song debut EP with both a sense of reckless abandon and a feeling of soul that's palpable, if not easy to define.

Crystal Antlers is a punk band only in the loosest sense of that term; the band often plays loud, hard and fast, though its songs incorporate elements from such disparate genres as psych, garage, and prog. They've got a killer rhythm section that figures prominently in the mix, they're not afraid to solo or wander off on psychedelic tangents, their vocalist alternates between a hoarse scream and a bluesy wail and when they rock out--which is often--they fire on all cylinders.

Sound familiar? If it doesn't, you might want to check out the liner notes, where you'll be surprised to learn that the Mars Volta's Ikey Owens is the man responsible for this EP's commendable production, which preserves the intensity of the band's infamous live show while giving each of the players room to breathe. Yes, Crystal Antlers are brimming with ideas, so much so that they're almost *too* ambitious. Unlike the Mars Volta, however, they know a thing or two about restraint; while they're not afraid to indulge their proggy instincts, they never do so to the point of, well, wankery. What's more, Crystal Antlers sound genuinely rough around the edges where the Mars Volta sound slick and overproduced. On this EP, the Antlers have wisely chosen to coat everything with a thick layer of fuzz, lending the six songs a cohesive aesthetic even as they diverge stylistically.

It's hard to identify highlights here, mostly because each of the six songs is a highlight unto itself. Opener "Until the Sun Dies (Part 2)" is a grimy, start-and-stop garage tune with halting, organ-driven codas. "Vexation" comes tearing out of the gate with such momentum and intensity that the song sounds like it could fall apart at any second (At the Drive-In fans, take note). "A Thousand Eyes" features enough haunted house organ to please all but the most discerning Murder City Devils fans, not to mention the most compelling extended soloing this side of Omar Rodríguez-López's afro. "Arcturus" is so heavy, it's essentially a hardcore song. And closing number "Parting Song for the Torn Sky" recalls the drawn-out, psychedelic proto-punk of the Stooges.

Listening to this EP, it's hard to believe that this is Crystal Antlers' first official release (initially self-released, it's now been reissued by Touch & Go). It's enough to make a critic want to hoist unrealistic expectations upon the young band's shoulders, to send its members forth to single-handedly save rock and roll. But we must recall that less than ten years ago, a similar, aforementioned band breathed new life into punk rock by filtering it through a diverse set of influences without surrendering a shred of passion or energy. Before long, critics had lined up to hail

them as the next big thing and in the blink of an eye, the band had broken up under the strain of increased scrutiny, only to reemerge months later as a bloated, afro-sporting, self-indulgent prog act.

You know, I think I'll keep my mouth shut.

RATING: 

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