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## Crystal Antlers:

EP

[self-released; 2008]

Rating: 8.5

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There aren't many bands I've listened to more than Crystal Antlers this year, but I still don't think there's an optimum way to hear them yet. If the buzz sends you to MySpace, you'll get their impact but not their dynamics. Catch one of their cramped live shows and you'll get their in-it-to-win-it intensity but not their expansiveness. Hear their self-released EP, and you're getting closer-- besides existing at the cross-section of so many styles, the disc finds the band at a more important nexus of potential and realization. In person, Crystal Antlers look like outcasts from six different bands, and at various points on this record, they sound like it, too: Merging psych, garage, lo-fi, prog, and countless other influences, the group easily maintains consistency despite a complete inability to be pinned to any specific movement or trend (so long as you're not counting the increasingly frustrating trend of unimaginative bandnames).

You might come across comparisons to Les Savy Fav, an appropriate call if you consider it shorthand for "relentlessly energetic band with crowd-pleasing stage antics." *EP*'s opener "A Thousand Eyes" is evidence enough of that: Beginning with doomy, lo-fi minor arpeggios, it soon explodes into a Latin-influenced rumble before the band piledrives into a swaggering psych hook, the track sounds something like if Comets on Fire inverted their ratio of chaos-to-craft. Beneath the squall, "Vexation"'s headsnapping pace and flesh-searing bass riff could be a Stooges-style punk shoutalong. The organ riff that "Owl" pogos on is a found relic from late-1960s Venice Beach with a monolithic vocal melody. And like any long-haired throwback worth its bongos, *EP* ends with the loosest and longest number, the seven-minute swamp lurch of "Parting Song for the Torn Sky".

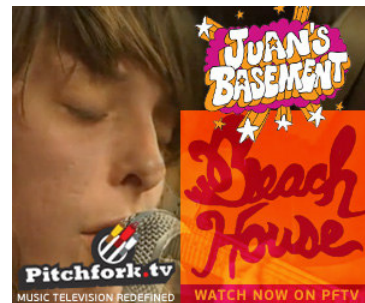
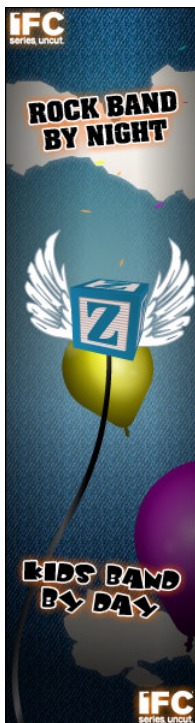
As much as it diverges from the brain-frying aim of typical psych-rock outings, *EP* is an unorthodox summer record-- not so much for driving to the beach as actually being in its sweltering grasp, equal parts scorched earth and wide open spaces. Credit to producer Ikey Owens (aka Mars Volta's keyboardist-- there's hope!) for finding enough room for every instrument, few of which act in their traditional scope. If you find yourself humming any of the riffs, odds are they'll come from singer Jonny Bell, who treats his bass like a six-string while guitar (check the appropriate titanic "Arcturus") and organ provide shading under an ozone of reverb that, like early My Morning Jacket, gives an impression of an expansive soundworld the band can grow into.

It's tempting to be patient and call this disc a stopgap on the way to a triumphant debut full-length. But *EP* is plenty substantial as is; at 25 minutes, it's only a few shy of *Nouns* or, more to the point, any number of psych-rock classics from decades past. Of course, if you're still waiting on further evidence of how much there is to like about these guys, consider that I waited until the end of this review to mention that their percussionist is named Sexual Chocolate.

**MySpace:** <http://www.myspace.com/crystalantlers>

**MP3:** Crystal Antlers: Vexation

- Ian Cohen, June 11, 2008



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