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**RACK • SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 • IPECAC RECORDINGS**

In the jade-cultivating climes of online rock journalism, the angle of “band has new album,” is about as interesting as watching Instagram reels of your brother-in-law’s recent bathroom remodel. But when a band decides to follow up their last album from over 26 years ago? That’s high on testicular fortitude and as dumb as fidget spinners. Then you learn that said band is the Jesus Lizard – and everything in your pathetic cultural dystopia suddenly falls away and the air smells like Heaven…

*Rack*, the seventh studio album from this legendary underground-rock fulcrum, comes out into the world on September 13 via Ipecac Recordings. Produced by Paul Allen at Audio Eagle, *Rack* holds 11 tracks of brisk guitar rock you haven’t heard since… the last time the Jesus Lizard took over a stage in your town. Now, over two decades since their last record together, the Jesus Lizard—vocalist David Yow, guitarist Duane Denison, bassist David Wm. Sims and drummer Mac McNeilly—have returned with a record teeming with the kind of madness needed to beat down today’s AOR mediocrity and piss-perfect pop drivel alike.

“None of us really stopped playing,” guitarist Duane Denison shares, “but we stopped making the Jesus Lizard albums. And I think [the time apart] gave us a chance to have a lot of ideas and energy, that’s just sort of backed up—and now it's coming out.”

Since their inception in Chicago ca. 1987, the Jesus Lizard has thrilled audiences all over the planet with their idiosyncratic “noise rock.” That term is rendered in quotes because, let’s face it, it’s not necessarily applicable. The impeccable rocket-thrust rhythm section of Sims and McNeilly was the perfect launchpad for Denison’s jagged yet clean-toned riffing and Yow’s mercurial vocalizations manifesting as everything from panicked citizen, reality escapee or wounded sea mammal. This exciting synergy took on all comers: The bands the Lizard opened for often looked like they phoned their sets in, when the reality was that they were struggling to do a single pull-up on the bar the delegation would set nightly. The Jesus Lizard’s fury carried on through six studio albums, two live recordings and a brace of singles and EPs. Yet none of the cultural emissaries of the last few generations came close to matching the quartet’s sweat equity (literal, psychic).

When America was in its ‘90s “Alternative Nation” thrall, it looked like greater things were going to happen for them: The band shared a split-single with Nirvana (a 1993 release pairing “Puss” from the 1992 *Liar* LP with a new track from the Seattle contingent, “Oh, The Guilt”) and surfed on the checkbook of Capitol Records for two releases. But by 1996, the realities of real-life capitalism and music-biz treachery kicked in hard: McNeilly resigned from behind the kit; Capitol paid them *not* to record a third album just prior to dropping them from the roster; and Yow announced his resignation from the band immediately afterward. The Jesus Lizard were effectively over before the turn of the century.

“The four of us had been through so much as a band,” says McNeilly, whose departure in 1998 is acknowledged by the other three as the beginning of the band’s dissolution. “We are bonded by the music we make, and also by the respect we have for each other. I think that we just function extremely well not only as a band, but as humans who care deeply for one another. If any one of us gets taken out of the equation, it's just not going to be the same.”

The individual members scattered all over the continent chasing various pursuits. When he wasn’t drawing cats, acting in indie films or doing design work, Yow joined Los Angeles duo Qui for a tour and an album, took center stage fronting maverick noise-punk icons Flipper and recording a solo record, 2013’s *Tonight You Look Like A Spider*. When he wasn’t issuing library cards in Nashville, Denison kept busy writing, recording and touring with folks as diverse as alt-rock A-Teams (Tomahawk), British soul talents (Beverley Knight), bona fide stars (Jack White), and country hooligans (Hank III, the Legendary Shack Shakers). Sims pulled out his bass long enough to make solo recordings under the name unFact, but primarily focused on protecting businesses and gentlefolk from taxation without representation via his own certified public accountancy firm. In addition to giving free advice to Gypsies, McNeilly developed a number of predetermined free-form experimental recordings, got involved in recreation-based recovery programs and worked on a high-density verification code index. In his spare time, he can usually be found packing lugs with 100% British wool tweed.

But unlike a lot of bands, the Jesus Lizard’s interpersonal friendships were just as important as the art they made. Loath to call them “reunion gigs,” the original line-up reconvened in 2009 for some “reenactment shows,” celebrating the remastered versions of their catalog released by Touch and Go. Throughout the following years, there were the occasional tri-state weekend rock excursions or a lucrative festival bill. Unbeknownst to Yow, the band were always writing riffs, songs and arrangements in the hopes that their frontman would commit to making new music. Yow finally acquiesced after hearing (and enjoying) Denison picking out some of his typically sleek motifs.

“Duane asked me, ’What do you think of that?’ And I said, ‘Oh, that's pretty good. What are you going to do with that?’ Yow recalls. “And he says, ‘I don't know. Why don't we use it for the new Jesus Lizard record, for fuck's sake?’ I genuinely love the other three guys. They're good at what they do. And so I went, ‘Alright, well, let's go ahead and write a record.’”

On *Rack*, the Jesus Lizard have returned reconstituted, refreshed and positively revving. No tepid, bland tracks to show how they’ve “matured” as songwriters (the great lie bands use to hide behind crap albums, the ones you still have because you rationalize that, “Well, I have all the other ones…”). No inane detours into unnecessary genre exercises. And definitely no weird moves into experimental realms that come off just as contrived and calculated as the top of the *Billboard* Charts. The opening salvo “Hide & Seek” finds Yow singing/*sprechstimming* his way with remarkable clarity as his bandmates shore him up with their patented acceleration. The noir vibes coming off of “What If?” is a startling direction for the band, with Yow narrating the action, like he was looking at a random person in an airport lounge and concocting an elaborate backstory about them. (**“**It's an idea that Duane had had for a long time. He sent me the lyrics. I was having a hard time with that song, and he said I could just say them, so that's what I did.”) The sinister “Alexis Feels Sick” is inspired by Girls Against Boys/Soulside drummer Alexis Fleisig’s guarded opinion of modern life that turns into a treatise of man’s inhumanity to man. “Moto(R)” is playing out of the coolest car tailgating in the parking lot at one of those horrific radio-rock fests (the driver never actually goes into the stadium because if the Lizard aren’t playing, there’s something better streaming somewhere).. And while we’re on the subject of forcing cool into uncool, “Falling Down” reminds all of us in slightly under three-and-a-half minutes how marvelously badassed the Jesus Lizard have always been, making our fists ball-up so tightly they look like the ends of chicken bones.

“What I like about the album is there are deliberately things on here that, sonically and stylistically, are not terribly different from what some of the things we did from the ‘90s,” says Denison. “There's definitely some references to the past, but it's more as a point of departure: We don't stay there and there's other things that are new that we've never done. I felt like it would be a mistake not to reference our past stuff. We had to do something different along with that. But not crazy different, not self-consciously different. Just naturally different because we're at a different point in our lives.”

*Rack* should go far toward satiating the Lizard faithful and explaining to the successive uninformed generations why so many hosannas come along with the band’s reputation. But the Jesus Lizard’s next chapter wouldn’t mean anything if it didn’t have a greater purpose. When content farms talk about the ‘90s, most of the time the discussion leans toward “grunge” or chooses to reflect the visibility of high-charting acts with no similar acknowledgment to the rich underground that spawned them. Consider all the records on labels like Touch and Go, Sub Pop, and Dischord that you *haven’t* heard. The Jesus Lizard are not motivated by promotional certainties or the fallacy of convenient cash-grabs. They only exist because they *want* to be in the same room with each other. Call it self-actualization, a supreme management of the expectations or a genuine interest in avoiding all execrable ways of sucking.

“I feel like we had a reputation among musicians that was very, very strong,” says Sims about the Jesus Lizard’s reputation as your favorite band’s favorite band. “We wanted to play shows because we wanted to, which is also exactly how the album worked out. We literally only made the record because we thought it would be fun to make the record. And I think that's what saved us. We’re putting absolutely no pressure on ourselves to achieve any kind of sales goal or meet any kind of demographic halfway or update anything. It's just like, ‘Let's just make the record we would want to hear.’ It freed us to do whatever we wanted, and I think that yielded the best possible result.”

**“**We were never the face because people didn't quite know where we were coming from,” Denison says about the band’s heyday. “We weren't like the punk rock that was really popular, like, say, Rancid or NOFX or The Offspring or Bad Religion. We weren't part of that. We got lumped in as ‘noise rock,’ but I never got that. When we play songs, they have arrangements and lyrics. If anything, I think there's a kind of a resurgence going on right now in aggressive, noisy, rock music. I can go see Idles play in Nashville in a park in the daytime and it's rammed. I saw Swans the other night and it was fucking crowded with mostly younger people. So I don't know what's going on. I think it's just the internet and there's a certain type of person that this is appealing to, and there's more of them out there now because there's just more people. Oh,” he adds glibly, “and we showed up on a shirt in a movie.” He’s referring to the vintage JL pupil-hearted wolf shirt rocked by Keke Palmer in director Jordan Peele’s “Nope.”

When asked to describe what the 2024 model the Jesus Lizard has in store for a new strata of audiences, Yow deadpans:  “Each one of us is just going to do what we do, you know? David will look like he's really pissed off about something. Duane will look like he’s not sure if he's gay or just not feeling well. Mac will be chewing a very large piece of air, and I'll be acting like an idiot.”

The Jesus Lizard. They might not be young, but they will never, *ever* get fucking *old*.

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