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Live Review – Agonhymn, Sydney 2010

News posted **Monday, August 9** 2010 at 02:00 PM.

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Agonhymn

Empire Hotel, Sydney

Friday, August 9

By the time doom duo Agonhymn plug in and play it's about 1.30am. Remaining metal heads are from previous bands (Summonus, Adrift for Days, Bad Voodoo) or are inebriated like the guy swaggering around with a confederate flag hanging from his pocket, wearing a W.A.S.P t-shirt with "I FUCK LIKE A BEAST" emblazoned on the back. Real friendly though – he felt my ass at least twice.

Knowing in advance how dense and crushing Agonhymn's sound is, I get a shiver of anticipation when I see all that empty space on stage. Drummer Liam Brewer is on a riser towards the back, so singer and guitarist Dav Byrne appears all alone up the front. How will they pull it off? But few in the crowd who start the Agonhymn journey abandon it. They are utterly compelling, utterly convincing. A gruelling intensity permeates their set – intensity that other doom acts need volume or show-ponying to summon. Because Agonhymn are a two-piece, almost by default their savagely brutal sound demands respect. It seems brave and raw when compared to metal acts that front up with a two-tonne truckload of gear and gearheads. Aside from using a splitter to play through both a bass and a guitar rig, Byrne at least appears to keep it simple. No frills, no fancy vocal effects, no fucking around. And nothing gets lost in the mix – mistakes included. The audience see every cue he and Brewer share, hear every note.

Tonight is a Black Sabbath tribute night and Agonhymn perform 'Electric Funeral' as a special treat. From where I'm standing, a glowering red sphere – the cymbal in the stage lights – obscures Brewer's head, his long, wizardly beard flowing out from beneath. As the perfect audio riposte to this vision, they reverse out of the sludge of one of their gloomier meditations and crank out one of the best stoner riffs I've heard this side of Sleep's 'Dragonaut'. And the awesome thing? You get to hear it again ... and again and again.

It's funny to think that doom originally appealed as a way to strip back and slow down "metal" that was too busy, too showy, too poppy in pace. Or maybe it was just a way to keep Black Sabbath's cold corpse respectfully warm. Either way, it too has calcified into tradition over the years and developed a tendency to prop itself up with its emblems of slow pace, down-tuning, repetition and intense volume. Bands abound that are a sum total of all these parts with a completely hollow centre.

Not Agonhymn. Intent is everything; the sound is the symptom. Like Heathen Skulls labelmates, the [now defunct](#) Grey Daturas, Agonhymn take you on a journey. For me, that's why I come. Sure, I like the big, dumb, riffalicious fun of stoner doom too but for totally different reasons, none of which involve transportation. With Agonhymn, you enter their world, see things through their eyes. That involves trust on their part to invite you, and trust on yours to accept on their terms. Occupying Agonhymn's headspace might not always be an enjoyable place to be, but you do it to exit your own skin, to surrender, to come out on the other side, punished and purged.

by **Kate Hennessy**

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King_Rat said 1 day ago:

Bendigo Pride.



Big Bad Bo said 1 day ago:

one of the best bands in the country for this kinda thing, shame sydney has taken a while to latch onto them.



Goathair said 1 day ago:

Arrrrgh..another shame about Sydney comment. We'll have to send down something for you to latch onto down there. But Agonhymn, goddamn, certainly a band that punishes you for taking the trip with them. This sums it up.



happycow said 1 day ago:

Hey it's that dude from EBAGC. (temp drummer #7)



King_Rat said 1 day ago:

Hopefully not so temp.

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