

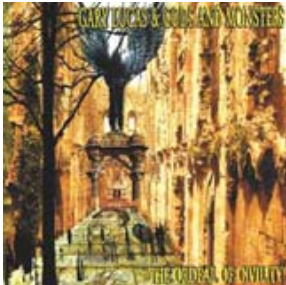
## ALBUM REVIEW

### Gary Lucas & Gods And Monsters

#### The Ordeal Of Civility

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reviewer: Claudia A



Grammy-nominated **Gary Lucas** is a virtuoso whose hands stir many pots. His latest album – in collaboration with his band **Gods And Monsters** – is ample proof.

By citing a quote from the 1935 *James Whale* classic **The Bride Of Frankenstein** in the CD booklet, we can guess in which direction Lucas' latest musical excursion takes us before we've even checked out the first track.

I don't mean to say that this is an album of avantgarde scores for horror movies (though Lucas strongly dabbles in that particular metier also) but it is a work of bold and experimental creations – hence the quote “To a new world of gods and monsters”. In turn, Lucas' band goes by the moniker Gods And Monsters.

While this world-class guitarist and songwriter has worked with almost everyone who is someone (including **Captain Beefheart** and the late **Jeff Buckley**), his dream team of a band consists of *Billy Ficca* (television) on drums, *Ernie Brooks* (**Modern Lovers**) on bass, *Jason Candler* (**Hungry March Band**) on to- and tenor sax, and last but not least *Joe Hendel* on trombone and keys.

The result is 'The Ordeal Of Civility' (the title is a reference to the book by John Murray Cuddihy – an arcane meditation on Jewish identity in an anti-Semitic 20th Century). Gods and monsters... persecutors and the persecuted... one begins to see a loose connection within the context of Lucas' music, for his refusal to conform to the mainstream – instead opting for more daring and groundbreaking compositions – sees the aforementioned references act as a metaphor.

The album's eleven tracks melt free-jazz, rock, prog-rock, blues, pop, classical and even folk into a concoction that will never be appreciated by the mainstream. It will, however, be treasured by music lovers who aren't adverse to the idea to have their brain cells stimulated.

'LuvzOldSweetSong' (try repeating that in a non-sober state!) reminds somewhat of early Bowie as well as Reed's solo days, but it's Lucas singing here. In fact, it's Lucas singing throughout the album (voice not quite on a par with his celebrated guitar skills). SweetSong is a nice and mellow arrangement that's great to hum along to. Slightly more folk- and country-blues orientated is 'Chime On' – shining with spot-on female backing vocals. I'd like to hear Lucas perform that one with 60's Canadian Cree protest singer *Buffy Sainte-Marie*.

The tune changes considerably on 'Swamp T'ing' – strong on good ole sax/trumpet interludes that somehow suggest 70's cop flicks, the track paces along at the speed of a NY minute.

Lucas revisits his musical past on the distinctly blues-rock/avantgarde-jazz orientated 'Hot And Cold Everything', a track that's clearly Captain Beefheart influenced (Lucas spent five years playing the fretboard for the Captain). The number is a real mind-f\*\*k for sure, and amongst my favourites on the album.

Same goes for 'Climb The Highest Mountain' - starting off with singular guitar riffs, J. Chandler's orchestrated horn sounds add panache halfway in. Bursting with melodious rock and soul, it gradually drifts into an adrenalin-pushing, free-floating affair during which all let their hair down.

Now for the anti-dote, which arrives in the shape of the 'Lady Of Shalott' – a ballad that's testimony to Lucas' wit. While the overall vibe is decidedly medieval the lyrics are definitely not based upon Tennyson's famous poem. Instead, they are given a modern twist: “Shall we meet and have a drink? / I need a day or two to think / Will it snow or will it rain / And will we ever meet again? / It's hard to say just what it was / And all because you are the Lady Of Shalott / Just what is real and what is not.” Inspired!

It's rootsy folk-blues all the way with 'Whirlygig' – an energetic and purely acoustic number. Who knows, maybe the band was too busy chomping away on polk salad in order to sing. Only Music.

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The rollicking 'Peep Show Bible' (10 out of 10 for the title alone!) is bound to procure the wrath of the entire Bible Belt (and probably the wrath of Republican candidate Mitt Romney, too). Throwing around with, you guessed it, biblical references and even going so far as to incorporate a few chords of 'Amazing Grace' (albeit performed on slide guitar), the track is anything but an innocent lamb. Far from it, this riotous number could well been performed by the Blues Brothers: "Now put your hands together and move to the sound of the cross. The world is in a tangle, go ahead babe, just let it hang there, let it dangle." For the love of Jesus, show some mercy!

A stomping and aggressive rhythm dominates 'Depression', while its frenzied saxophone perfectly underlines a theme about recession, depression and a country on the verge of collapse. On the other end of the spectrum lies the instrumental 'Lazy Flowers' in all its tranquillity, while providing another opportunity for Lucas' to show off his impeccable guitar skills.

Closing track 'Jedwabne' is heavy stuff indeed, for this 'requiem' deals with the killing of over three hundred Jews in the Polish town of Jedwabne in 1941. However, the song is not just Lucas' personal lament but his commentary on the fact that the outrage was actually committed by Polish citizens (albeit with the complicity of the Nazis). As can be expected, a song with such deeply disturbing topic can only be sombre in tone and composition, and it is. With a deliberate low voice, Lucas brings to life images of unimaginable terror – a very different terror to the fictional ones created by *Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*.

'The Ordeal Of Civility' was produced by former **Talking Heads** member *Jerry Harrison*, which puts the icing on the cake. This work by freethinkers, movers, groovers and shakers doesn't make for an easy digest; neither does it strive to be. The complexity of the album challenges you to listen to it time and time again. Be assured, you will discover different facets with every listen.

