

## COVER CHARGE.

# THE WINTER IN AEPRIIL

SCHAILE'S JUDGMENT IS UNQUESTIONABLY GOOD

BY SAM PFEIFLE

**What better source** for gothic music than a woman who's actually died and come back to life? Seems that Aepriil Schaile, that experience behind her, has a unique perspective on a genre of music that's obsessed with the macabre. She also spent a year or so in self-imposed exile, living in a shack on the edge of town through a bitter winter.

As her self-penned mythology notes, "The solitude of exile taught me that to be oneself, with only the gods and spirits as witness, requires a large and heavy coin, but it is a price well paid. For after this sacrificial death there was a resurrection; music was the early spring green of the earth upon which I stood and the alchemical gold in my blackened hand."

Music was the only choice, really.

Luckily, she's a damn fine piano player armed with a voice that's not exactly your typical powerhouse, but has a distinct (and creepy) quality to it, like Grace Slick with black lipstick. She's got the look, too, like a female Robert Smith, the kind of gal you can easily fall in love with, or maybe, more accurately, become entranced by.

Just try watching one of her live shows, where she's ably backed by cellist Jerusha Robinson and percussionist Michael Mazzenga (try and find two better names to till out a goth band, just try). The woman is like a black hole personified, sucking all attention toward her until it's like there's nothing else in the room, nothing else in the city, nothing else in the world that you can ever remember noticing.

Listening to the demo she put together earlier this year, it's clear the effect is not limited to her live shows. Even if this isn't really your bag, the wailing and the down-tempo, her songs still have an effect on you that's hard to escape. Like the way some people react to morphine — it makes them itchy, but they can't get enough of it. The title track, "You Murder Me," seems to be Schaile's personal anthem of sorts. "I spit and curse, I never sleep," she enunciates in haunting high-register tones, "I looked right in and joy collapsed . . . I'm made of blood and hanging meat." Her piano and Mazzenga's

bassy drums create a cacophony of sound that builds and crashes and leaves a deathly silence in its wake before entering into the next verse.

The result, here and on other songs, is very operatic, very narrative, but the songs still have a shape and a form that keeps them from being so esoteric as to be inaccessible. Songs run about four minutes, don't distend into anything overly difficult to grasp, and have enough thoughtful touches — audible gasps that lead into all stops, low-end drum rolls — for the music aficionado.

And when she screams, they never get too overpowering, retaining their melody despite the increased passion. But this stuff is creepy, don't get me wrong, maybe a little over the top for a Halloween party that doesn't actually mean business.

Schaile can do pretty, too (just look at the pictures, right?). Her "This Place" has plenty of pop elements as the piano and the violin (played on her demo by Robin Fetkhe) intertwine to produce sounds that wouldn't sound out of place on an Amy Grant album — and wouldn't you like to have those two women in the same room together. Plenty to talk about, what with the opposing ways of looking at the grand cosmic order, no? "Place" is a portrait of Schaile's outsider status: "I said please, please, help me, but I don't believe you heard."

Unless you're totally heartless, you've got to connect a little bit with her sentiment. "All the people's lights blow like fireflies," she intones. "I am standing on the winter hill, looking at them through the night." She shows she can reach down for some serious timbre, weighing her words with heavy emotion.

The counterpoint comes in "Lay Me Down," a classic echoing of the Lord's Prayer, which Schaile implies has never been adequately answered. She shows her vulnerable side here, singing with a child's voice and innocence. There's a bit of Sinéad O'Connor, all spare and minimal, maybe even a touch of her accent.

By the finish, you'll find yourself agreeing with Schaile: "You Murder Me."

### WHAT COMES NEXT

Aepriil Schaile and the Judgment play a gig utterly suited to their live performance on October 15 for the "Sacred and Profane," an annual arts and music festival held on Peaks Island. Normally, the festival is held on the Fall Equinox, but this year it's closer to Halloween — all the better for Schaile's dark way of thinking.

