

## Mp3 Howden/ Wakeford - Wormwood



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folk ambient violin 11 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Ambient, ROCK: Progressive Rock Details: And the third angel sounded, And there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, And it fell upon the third part of the rivers, And upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: And the third part of the waters became wormwood; And many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter. Revelations of John, Chapter 8, Verses 10 - 11 Matt Howden, who has wide associations with the neofolk scene both through direct participation in Sieben and other projects and by virtue of his Redroom recording studio which he runs with such obvious enthusiasm, and Tony Wakeford (Sol Invictus, L'Orchestre Noir) who needs no introduction here, are no strangers to collaboration. Matt has played regularly with Tony's Sol Invictus, and the pair had an earlier release as a duo with Three Nine. Tony tells me that he and Matt will also be touring as a duo in the near future. Their latest collaboration - exclusively previewed here - is inspired by the Book of Revelation. Despite the imagined centrality of Revelations to 'apocalyptic folk', Tony's doom-laden lyrics have in the past taken their inspiration mainly from pagan sources, but this theme was chosen by Matt and examines events contingent on the opening of the Seventh Seal when a star called Wormwood immolates the earth turning a third part of its waters to wormwood. These trippy, surreal horrors are what entertained people before reality TV. Once heavy stuff, they now provide a ready resource for image-mining, though here the chilling mythology is only the starting point for an interpretation that is a challenging reminder of the human condition and its visualisation of such a vengeful and sadistic God. Why wormwood? As our regular readers will know, wormwood provides the psychoactive ingredient in absinthe, drink of preference for fin de siècle bohemians and some contemporary acquaintances. It's negative associations in the Bible presumably derive mainly from its recognised bitterness and toxicity. The Biblical theme is

introduced in the opening track, 'The Wormwood Season', and sustained throughout the album. This first track combines in disorientating juxtaposition the sinister subject matter and a slinky, syncopated tune played by Tony on bass and Matt on dark, moody violin. 'The Star Is Wormwood' continues the theme with a mantra featuring bass, ominous minimalist strings and industrial sounds. 'Thy Mother' is a little more extensive lyrically but not much. An orchestral opening introduces a hieratic Tony and Matt declaiming alternate lines of a dark ritual tracing progress from birth to death and reinterpreting the Biblical cosmos in terms of the essentially pagan theme of human mortality. 'The Wormwood Tree' is very folky with Tony singing solo and then Matt and Tony singing in unison. It's like Breton 'kan ha diskan' and very reminiscent of Tony and Karl Blake on 'Cupid Death'. Now the real thing may be more of a bush than a tree, but reference here to a tree of death hanging with corpses conjures a specifically Germanic image. 'Brief As A Flower' has an electric-folk-style violin intro and interludes in Fairport fashion, but the vocals move it into another area. Another musing on mortality, Matt's lyrics, music and vocals are absolutely brilliant on this track. 'Cast Upon The Earth' features the essence of the Biblical reference that we quote at the head of this review, while in 'Care Sunday' church bells (of the friendly country-church-on-a-Sunday variety) introduce another jaunty violin riff and a nursery-rhyme-style folk song whose tune and rhythm once again establish a ritualistic feel. In 'The Lamb' Matt sings an earlier part from the Revelations narrative with slow violin accompaniment and interludes and a background of 'industrial' noise and percussion. This sounds particularly good. In 'Heaven Burning' Tony and Matt sing the crucial Wormwood verses again against an 'experimental' cacophony. 'Under The Moon' is a percussive but languid instrumental drawing on the album's established musical idioms. The musical approach in the final track, 'The Wormwood Doll', is unmistakably reminiscent of The Doors. It tells the macabre story of a barren woman falling victim to the wiles of a magician, an example of magic realism that one could imagine emanating from Nick Cave. All in all it's a very innovative and interesting collaboration which should delight fans of both artists.

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