

Rock 'em All Festival: Venom and Company Tremble Technopolis!

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In the afternoon sun, on July 30, at Athens Technopolis Arts Center, hordes of black-clad rivet-heads; noise freaks; guitar homos; gothlings, and quasi-satanic deviants came to hear the legendary, apocalyptic rock band Venom perform live. Not only Venom, but five, count em' five other cartilage-crushing, gristle grinding metal bands came to play their own unique brands of stentorian, hypersonic, brainwave-distorting, electric music. It was intense, to say the least.

As one might expect, multiple body piercings; excessive tattooage; Maltese crosses and stainless steel jewelry depicting bones; pentagrams; the Beast and his innumerable minions and various and sundry internal body organs were standard issue accessories and accoutrements for the attending crowd.

The show began with the band Pain of Salvation (POS). They played a loud, determined, but luke-warm series of crunch-metal tunes with curiously high-voiced choruses sprinkled throughout the pieces. They weren't bad for kids, but not great for pros. Their tracks could use some spicing up in the blood-lust adrenaline department.

POS was followed by Portuguese metalistas Moonspell. They played double-bass drum driven, low-end, ker-chunking songs which featured some great end-of-the-world roaring and grumbling vocal work. In addition, they are, in my opinion, the best hair-whippers I've ever seen. Their shiny, synchronized, protein-enriched tresses spun in high speed, choreographed perfection for most of their set.

After Moonspell finished their time on stage, Meshuggah joined the late afternoon festivities. They played sludgy, jack-hammer anger-metal, directed at no one in particular. There was no audience neck-bopping or great connection with the majority of the crowd during their set. Guitar lead breaks sounded like microchip arcade games running amok. It was just loudly broadcasted anger, everywhere, all the time. They seem to hate everything. It's good music for moshing, but that's about it.

When Meshuggah finished their on-stage rants, Italian metal-oid cuties Lacuna Coil took their turn at playing. They were the only band of the day which featured two lead singers. Metal pin-up girl Christina Scabbia wailed female-longing epistles with Homeric journey themes running throughout them. The six-piece band played with later-period KISS-style riffing and song construction.

After Lacuna Coil, Iced Earth mounted the stage like mythic Norse cavalry men. They played a very professional and tight set of of greatly Metallica-influenced material. Their pieces bled a lot of Frank Ferzetta, Boris Valejo and JRR Tolkein fantasy-based thematic material with soaring, Dio-esque vocals. Many of their songs sound like the final quarter-mile of an inter-galactic chariot race. With Jedi knight capability they played their infinitely complex electric guitar pieces that 100% stir-fried the crowd's collective forebrain.

And then, for the evenings main course, Venom took the stage. Their sound is an indescribable collision of transistor board and vacuum tube blow-out meets defective, electro-shock therapy equipment consuming itself in a Las Vegas style, chemo-electric suicide. Their songs "Welcome to Hell," "Straight to Hell," and "Antichrist," whipped-up the crowd in front of the stage to complete mouth-frothing lunacy. They danced in wild, concentric circles waving phosphorescent traffic flares high above their heads. It looked like a coven of 21st century Druids prostrating themselves in cabalistic ecstasy before their chosen cult guitar-shamans.

