

JINJER – King of Everything

written by John Yohe | May 1, 2017



The Ukrainian band JINJER are a bit of a mash-up of metal sub-genres: they have the cookie monster growl, and sometimes can sound death metal-y, but especially with this third album, *King of Everything*, they have emerged as progressive metal: Odd time signatures and tempo shifts abound, with both heavy distorted (and fast) sections, along with clean-guitar dreamier parts, somewhere between Fates Warning/Dream Theatre and Voivod/Tool.

JINJER did have two guitar players, but Dimitriy Oksen left in 2015, leaving, imho, Roman Ibramkhalilov more freedom to expand his playing and songwriting. No loss of heaviness, but an increase in distinctive style. The whole band seems to have stepped up to the personnel change: It is a pleasure to hear a good bass player, Eugene Abdiukhanov, getting more room to play melodies and even chordal sections, sometimes even a little string-popping, which sounds not at all funky, but more metallic, more machine-like, which adds to the Voivod-y science-fiction feel.

But my greatest pleasure is listening to the drums. JINJER has had, according to their website bio, somewhat of Spinal Tap-esque history with drummers. They've all been good, but Dimitriy Kim, who played on *King of Everything*, has been the best. He can thrash out with thundering double bass when necessary, but he has a jazzy feel too, and his real talent is in allowing space, or creating it, for example in a section of "I Speak Astronomy" which, *I think*, is in 3/4, but in which he emphasizes the up-beats. Honestly, I can't quite ever count it out, which I love: any music where I can't tell where 'one' is, I love. He's like a combination of Dave Lombardo from Slayer, and Stuart Copeland from the Police. Except (the Spinal Tap curse!) if I'm

reading the band's website bio correctly, he has left, and Vladislav Ulasevich is in. Ulasevich seems to be doing a fine job in some of the new live footage, but alas, Dimitri, we hardly knew you...

But I must say, JINJER is all about their singer, Tatiana Shmailyuk. My intro to her was in their video for "Just Another," (recommended by YouTube, I think because of my interest in Dawn Crosby and Detente/Fear of God) which is just concert footage from some outdoor festival. When Shmailyuk walks out after the music starts, in yoga pants and dreadlocks, she looks like a yoga instructor, and you expect her to say "Namasté." Instead, she opens her mouth with an angry cookie-monster growl which I would've thought belonged to a man if I wasn't seeing her do it...

I have never been a fan of cookie monster singing. I do like power in singers, like Crosby and Tom Araya from Slayer, but the growl has always seemed a wee bit pretentious, caught up in death metal bands' seeming inability to out-grow their Dungeons & Dragons childhoods. The fact that women do it now too seems only funny, though I like that more women are involved in metal now, period, that it's less of a boy's club, and that there is an outlet for female anger. You know, that some teenager somewhere has other options than Lorde, and that said teenager might even get to mosh and slam dance if she so wanted.

I also suspect that cookie monster isn't even called cookie monster anymore: another sign of its practitioners taking themselves too seriously (that, or I'm just old). But, at the growl, I almost went on to some other video. But then the footage captures a close of Shmailyuk standing in front of the drums, looking out at the crowd, smiling and doing this un-metal-esque dance-bob. It's only two seconds, but in that body language I saw Shmailyuk not taking herself, or the growling, too seriously. And right after that, the song enters the chorus, in which she sings, with a great strong voice.

And yeah, she's hot. But more importantly, she has charisma, amazing camera presence. I went on to what turned out to be at least half a dozen videos, and in each she electrifies the screen, from the lower budget ones like "Sit, Stay, Roll Over" in which she whips her dreads around like a weapon, crouching over the moving camera like a gargoyle, to the high budget sci-fi "I Speak Astronomy" (their best song) in which she stands still, moving her hands in a kind of hypnotizing Walk-Like-An-Egyptian manner. If I were a movie producer or director, I would sign her up to be a femme fatale or love-interest/side-kick in the next big international thriller starring Matt Damon. Plus, she speaks Russian! Bonus!

All these new metal bands from Europe (or anywhere) are singing in English, to appeal to the (huge) American market, of which I am a part. Sometimes these lyrics written in a second language create some funny, almost absurd lines, like The Scorpions' "Here I am / Rock you like a hurricane." Though it was a hit, so who am I to criticize? (And yet: "The bitch is hungry / she needs to kill / so give her inches / and feel all well" ????)

This worked best for the quebequois band Voivod, with singer Snake's lines complimenting the mechanical, futuristic feels of the music, so that they seem like music from a post-industrial apocalypse future. And this is where JINJER fits in as well, as in "I Speak Astronomy," but also in, say, "King of Everything," which could be anti-authoritarian critique from the future, or today. Take the first line, "We do what we have been trained to." A native speaker would have said/written "We do what we have been trained to do," keeping the infinitive at the end. Shmailyuk also turns 'trained' into a two-syllable word. It's just a little odd, like someone from another world, or time, talking. Or yeah, just a non-native English speaker rebelling against her American Empire overlords. So, in that sense, a timeless sound.

But there can be another kind of depth to her lyrics (I assume she writes them, though haven't determined for sure) beyond a healthy 'fuck you' to authority. I keep going off on "I Speak Astronomy" but it's just so good: the 'speaker' of the song might be a sci-fi monster speaking to a "space man": "tell me / why are you so suspicious / when you see / black holes / in my eyes" or it could just be a metaphor for a regular relationship. When we hear the line at the end, repeated, "Wave your hand / from parallel universe" (notice the Russian-esque non-use of an article) it could be the end of a tragic science-fiction story, or it could be figurative, in the sense of 'what if?'—of two people breaking up, but thinking what if in a parallel universe, we still knew each other? I've thought this about a few ex-girlfriends. Maybe I'm reaching, but it adds a nice sad melancholy, which in metal is rare.

I haven't gone too much into JINJER's politics, and it's maybe less apparent or obvious on *King of Everything*, but their criticism of capitalism and authority in general puts them far above even other bands on Napalm who at best might be rejecting christianity with their Satan and swords imagery. I've certainly grown to appreciate cookie monster growling, especially from a woman and especially from Tatiana Shmailyuk (who I think should go the Madonna/Shakira route and just be 'Tatiana'). What better response might there be to the rise of fascism in American and Europe than an angry primal growl?