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Chrome, *Feel it Like a Scientist*: Offworlders

Work too hard to make sense of **Chrome**'s weirdo transwarp spacepunk and you're liable to bust a lobe. Quiet for a decade at least in terms of studio output, the San Francisco avant rockers returned last year with a crowdfunded compilation of unreleased material called ***Half-Machine from the Sun: The Lost Tracks from '78-'80*** (review here) covering songs from late founder **Damon Edge** and guitarist/vocalist **Helios Creed**, who leads the current incarnation of **Chrome** on their first album since 2002, ***Feel it Like a Scientist***. Making up for lost time seems to be the order of the day. ***Feel it Like a Scientist*** is 16 tracks and 62 minutes long, spread over two LPs or a linear CD of consistently off-the-wall experiments like "Lipstick" and "Brady the Chicken Boy" — with its bok-bok noises and in-studio laughs and forward bassline sounding like an after-the-fact blueprint for early **Primus** — and synth-drenched New Wave proto-punk freakouts, fuzz guitars intermittently taking the front position to make a track like "Captain Boson" sound even stranger. Recorded over the course of 2012 to 2014, **Chrome**'s return channels industrial malevolence in "Big Brats" as easily as keyboard mindcap and heavy rock rollout in "Prophecy," and is every bit as strange and exciting as one could ask.

The historical context of **Chrome**, begun by **Damon Edge**, hitting a stride with **Edge** and **Creed** working together and then continued on by **Creed**, stopping and restarting to get to this point — the lineup of **Creed**, drummer/sampler **Aleph Omega**, **Tommy Grenas** on keys/noise, bassist **Steve Fishman** (**Lux Vibratus** also features on more than half the tracks), backing vocalist **Anne Dromeda** and guitarist **Lou Miratti** — is about as disjointed and difficult to trace as the music on ***Feel it Like a Scientist*** itself, but liner notes to the CD provide some direction for how the album came together. What works best about it, though, is that however deep you want to dig, **Chrome** will meet you on that level. That is, if you feel like putting in research to relating ***Feel it Like a Scientist*** to **Creed**'s prolific solo output or what one might call **Chrome**'s heyday — though that designation would seem to automatically discount the quality of the material here, which isn't the intent — you can do that and "Something in the Cloud" s spaced-out vibes will still resonate, or you can ignore all of it as **Anne Dromeda** takes the lead vocal on noisy rocker "Unbreakable Fiburide Lithium Plastic" and go with the many punches provided. Whatever you want to take into account as you listen, it's up to you.

That said, by the time one gets down to the wash of vibe that is "Himalayanelimination" and the droning finale that arrives with "Nymph Droid," ***Feel it Like a Scientist*** benefits from knowing something of what **Chrome** have done in the past, the influence they've had one more than a generation of bizarro rockers, and so on. And it can be hard to separate the actual listening experience from the fact that it's been so long since the last **Chrome** full-length, but if there's anything to take away from these 16 tracks, it's that the outfit has more than academic value, and that the beamed-in progressiveness they display seems to have its (giant, face-consuming) eye turned forward rather than back. This does not sound like a one-off, and it does not sound like a final album. The material is vibrant and comes with a clear sense of the joy of its creation. It's a spirit as inimitable as the craft on display throughout and no less individualized, and it speaks to the possibilities that lay within the current incarnation of **Chrome** for where they might next wind-up on this new mission, their minds in a gas cloud and their amps on overdrive. Going by the vast swath of styles they bend to their command on these tracks, that trip is just beginning, and if there's a destination, it could just as easily belong to another universe as to our own.

Chrome, "Prophecy"

CHROME ~ Prophecy

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