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MUSIC: FEATURE

Jucifer



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You'd want to be in her band, too: Jucifer's Ed Livengood and Amber Valentine

Sugar and sludge

By [Omar Perez](#)

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Co-worker romance is often a no-no. Dipping the pen in the company ink often winds up with disastrous results. But how about plugging in or pounding away with your bandmate? For Jucifer husband/wife team Ed Livengood and Amber Valentine, not only do they play together, they, well ... *play* together.

"Some couples have a sexual thing and a romantic thing but don't really enjoy doing the same shit," says Valentine, guitarist and vocalist of the Athens, Ga., duo, discussing how having her lifemate -- as she calls Livengood -- alongside

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24/7 isn't as aggravating as it sounds. "But we do. It's the best thing in the world. It probably wouldn't work for 95 percent of the couples, but we're each other's best friends."

The recipe is seemingly perfect for songwriting that tugs at the heartstrings. But consider last year's "I Name You Destroyer," which works through a veil of gritty guitars and stoner-rock riffs accentuated by Livengood's literal drum assault (rumor has it he once broke his arm while playing) and Valentine's vocals that fluctuate between sensual whispers ("Amplifier") to madwoman growls ("Queen B"). Tracks like "Pinned in Glass" emphasize the contrast between sugar (Valentine's girly melodies) and sludge (six-string metal crunch), while a song such as "Memphis" darkens the sonic skyline with piano interludes in midst of rumbling noise, effectively drawing together surges and dirges. The appeal of "Destroyer" lies not only in its constant tempo changes and diversity, but in its simplicity.

"A lot of the catchiest songs are the easiest to write," Valentine says. "But I think a lot of people perceive that as artistically immature."

Born in Gainesville, Fla., Valentine moved to north Georgia before she had any recollections of the area. ("I have this weird sentimental feeling about Florida but no actual memories," she says.) She tinkered with the piano around the age of 5, but switched to guitar in her early teens. She moved to Athens about 12 years ago and met Livengood at a burrito restaurant that doubled as a live music venue, where she had been playing bass in another band. The two played with a drummer, who eventually left, leaving Valentine and Livengood (who moved behind the kit) as a duo. After appearing on several compilations and releasing a 7-inch, *Jucifer* -- a hybrid of O.J. Simpson's "The Juice" nickname and, well, you know -- self-released 1998's "Calling All Cars on the Vegas Strip" debut. Musically, the effort brought together songs written individually by Valentine and Livengood and a handful of collaborations between the two.

"I was a bit scared after we made it, [thinking] that it was a bit too diverse, that we didn't have our sound," Valentine reflects. "But in reality what we did was set a basis for fans to expect whatever weird stuff hits our fancy at any given time. It would be terrible to be in a band that's known for writing specific-sounding songs."

After strong college-radio support, Capricorn Records re-released "Calling All Cars" in 2000, although the label later folded, transferring *Jucifer* to Capricorn offspring Velocette.

It was the band's performances, however, that garnered them the most attention. *Jucifer*'s eardrum-splitting live shows are powered by a barrage of amplifiers, which Valentine says occasionally requires them to check power wattage capabilities at smaller venues, as the risk of blackout is all too real.

"A lot of bands don't tour any more than they have to, but it's one of our favorite things to do," Valentine says. "If we weren't touring, we'd get distracted from playing music."

Playing as many as five shows a week, the duo was bestowed with several Athens-area music awards in 2000 and 2001. The band released the raucous *Lambs* EP in summer 2001 and last year's "I Name You Destroyer." (While the time frame indicates otherwise, the band recorded "Destroyer" before

"Lambs," but released it a year later.)

With three album's worth of music in the archives, Jucifer hopes to release an EP and perhaps a double album sometime in the future. "We're not going to be hard up for songs," she says. "But when you're constantly writing like that, it's frustrating to not be able to put it out as fast as you're producing it." Either way, Valentine says the next record should steer closer to "Lambs" than "Destroyer" and be faster than previous efforts.

Valentine is embracing Jucifer's slow, albeit steady, growth, especially in a time when the indie tag is fraying like the '90s "alternative" counterpart. "I've made friends with people at every level in this industry," she explains. "And I've come to the conclusion that the middle is the best place to be. It really sucks to be in a band that, all of the sudden, is megagigantic. It's not a good thing for a band's career. If we can make records and have enough people supporting us, then we're very, very happy."