



## AMN Reviews: Growlers Choir – LIVE au FIMAV (2021; Les Disques VICTO)

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Even those of us who actively seek out weird and unusual music are occasionally surprised. The premise behind the 14-vocalist Growlers Choir is to combine a heavy metal chorus (of guttural death metal singers from various bands) with piped-in instrumentation. Notably, they performed the main theme from *The Omen* followed by a demonic Britney Spears cover to a fair amount of acclaim on the otherwise campy reality show *America's Got Talent*.

But this live recording documents a different performance that took place against the odds. In May 2021, with a pandemic still raging, FIMAV was held in Quebec as usual. Numerous health and safety precautions were in flux (for good reason), and whether the festival was actually a go was not determined until a few weeks before it began.

The Growlers had two pieces of their own music that were adapted for this performance – *Hate Machine* and *The Dayking*. The former has close to conventional metal structures (e.g., heavy riffs and pounding drums) behind the singing. The latter is an 18-minute piece with waves of growling, throat singing, and chanting accompanied by tribal drumming and spoken word poetry from Fortner Anderson.

Distributed around and between these tracks is the three-part *Hydra*, which was a controlled improvisation specific to FIMAV. In addition to the voices, atmospheric background music includes guitar, electronics, and percussion. These pieces are even more outside than the rest of the album, with waves of groans, grunts, frictives, and other mouth-sounds accompanied by crackling deconstructed noises and ungrounded amp feedback. Droning chords and power electronics move in and out of focus, while other passages employ ominous ambiance. In addition to their strange singing, the vocalists also cough, gargle, gag, laugh, yell, and make animalistic sounds. The absolute novelty herein cannot be overemphasized. This is supremely weird music straight from a night terror.

The album ends with *Growlers' Creed*, a chanted manifesto of the group accompanied by whispering, guitar chords, and electronics. A fitting capstone to a unique memorialization of the world's foremost (only?) metal choir.

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