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Bio information: **THINKING PLAGUE**

Title: **DECLINE AND FALL** (Cuneiform Rune 320)

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**FILE UNDER: ROCK / AVANT-PROGRESSIVE**

“The manner in which Thinking Plague...have condensed only the most fertile (and often the most pulverizing) aspect of the last 30 years of progressive exploration into an nth-degree endgame is nothing short of awe-inspiring.” – *Alternative Press*

“...there’s little doubt that Thinking Plague are one of the most inventive, original musical ensembles working today. ...” – *Muze*

"Thinking Plague lays down some of the most rhythmically complex, texturally inventive, and melodically challenging popular music of the last 30 years, and somehow makes it all sound easy and natural." – *All Music Guide*

“Thinking Plague... create a mad sort of progressive rock that some might call RIO...The sum total is a vision of a turbulent and unsettled time and place, though intelligent and piercingly insightful. Recommended.” – *Exposé*

The end is near and it’s never sounded so good. With the release of *Decline and Fall* the seminal Colorado avant-prog rock band **Thinking Plague** captures the tenor of the times with a caustic look at our troubled state of affairs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Where the band’s last studio release, 2003’s acclaimed *A History of Madness* (Cuneiform), delved into the Albiginsian Crusades that ravaged 13<sup>th</sup> century France, *Decline and Fall* dissects contemporary woes, delivering a bracing jolt of apocalyptic imagery set to intricately driving rhythms and incantatory melodies.

Inspired by avant-art rock bands like **Arts Bears** and **Henry Cow**, as well as by contemporary classical composers, Thinking Plague has earned an avid international following by forging a singular synthesis of prog-rock with 20th century classical, folk, and jazz. Rigorously constructed and passionately played, the music makes a compelling case for rock’s relevance as a forum for creative composition. A new album by Thinking Plague is always an event; working slowly and unwaveringly, the group has released a handful of brilliant, art-rock classics. *Decline and Fall* is the latest dispatch from sonic explorers who aren’t afraid of the beasts they find at the edge of the musical map.

Featuring six songs written and composed by guitarist **Mike Johnson**, the sole founding member who’s played on every TP release, *Decline and Fall* introduces the band’s latest incarnation. The most conspicuous addition to the TP universe is dexterous vocalist **Elaine Di Falco**, who handles the band’s steeplechase arrangements with aplomb. Singing with enviable poise and control, she combines cool detachment with righteous anger on elaborate melodic passages that would confound a lesser artist.

Also new to the TP fold is keyboardist/drummer **Kimara Sajn**, who plays both instruments with tremendous authority (although just before finishing *Decline and Fall* the group added drummer **Robin Chestnut**, who appears on one track). Returning are long-time Thinkers **Mark Harris** on reeds and **Dave Willey** on bass. Its worth noting that Johnson, Harris and Willey also work together in another, stylistically-distinct avant-ensemble, called **Hamster Theatre**, which is co-lead by Willey and another musician and based in Colorado Springs. The trio’s on-going musical collaborations outside Thinking Plague contribute to the remarkable sense of continuity that the Denver band retains after so many years and so many other different musicians. But it is Johnson’s compositions that form Thinking Plague’s defining architecture and give the music its distinctive form, despite the band’s fluid lineup. With a trademark sound that embraces knotty polyphony, pulverizing rhythms and mercurial tempo shifts, convoluted forms and thick sticky harmonies, the band seems utterly unimpressed with their status as prog-rock titans.

In many ways, TP’s changing cast reflects the flux that has defined the band since its earliest days. Despite its long lifespan and the many years between records, the group’s basic sound and instrumentation has evolved incrementally, from the raw approach of the seminal first recordings to the deep layering of electronic sounds and samples of the last album. Tough and sinewy, *Decline and Fall* marks something of a return to the band’s roots, with a stripped down sound that reveals TP’s well-honed cohesion.

The album opens with “Malthusian Dances,” a furious rant against those who pollute, despoil and abuse the earth. With Di Falco declaiming lines like “Fleas conspiring, forests expiring/As diseases multiply and rivers run dry” over a pummeling, stuttering beat, the song is a manifesto announcing that the band has returned to fray with no time to lose.

The deceptively sing-song melody of “I Cannot Fly” strips away the comforts of religion (“Never speak to me of ‘Heaven’/No Safety in a sham/screaming lambs”) while the hammering “ Sleeper Cell Anthem” throws a *j’accuse* in the face of humanity (“We are all of us/The Bringers of hunger/The singers of error/The bearers of terror”). Is there any hope? *Decline and Fall* closes with “Climbing the Mountain,” a song that offers respite if not a way out. We may be doomed, but nature still offers succor. Indeed, so does music this smart and uncompromising, though TP isn’t in the habit of singing its own praises.

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Founded in 1982 by Mike Johnson and bass guitarist/drummer **Bob Drake**, Thinking Plague built its following the old-fashioned way, through word of mouth and recordings passed around by fellow musicians and fans. After recruiting classically trained vocalist **Sharon Bradford**, keyboardist **Harry Fleishman** and drummer **Rick Arsenault**, the band performed around Denver but didn't get any traction until recording, mixing and releasing *...A Thinking Plague* in 1984 on their own Endemic label. Drake famously hand-stenciled the album's cover art with spray-paint, and despite pressing only 500 copies of the LP, the band received national attention.

Subsequent albums found TP adding brass and reeds, experimenting with percussion, and joining forces with legendary Henry Cow guitarist **Fred Frith** on *In This Life*, which was released by ex-Henry Cow drummer **Chris Cutler's Recommended Records** in 1989. It would be a decade before the band released its fourth album, but when Johnson relaunched TP with 1998's *In Extremis* the group found the international audience that had long eluded it.

*In Extremis* marked the start of TP's relationship with Cuneiform, which continues with *Decline and Fall*, a prog-rock jeremiad that pulls no punches. The world may be going to hell in a hand basket, but *Decline and Fall* is the work of a band that's ascending to new creative heights.

Even more impressive than the dark brilliance of its studio releases, is the fact that Thinking Plague is also an astoundingly great live band. Thinking Plague's world-class musicians perform its complex music on stage with joyful enthusiasm and seeming ease. Thinking Plague have performed at progressive rock and experimental music festivals world-wide, including **NEARfest** (USA), **Gouveia Art Rock Festival** (Portugal), **Les Tritonales** (France), and such other countries as Germany and Italy. Their concerts are always high-anticipated events by the band's devoted international fanbase. In November 2011, they shared a bill with Hamster Theatre to perform at Cuneiform's dual-city label showcases: in New York, **Cuneiform at The Stone**, and in Baltimore, at **Cunefest's Rock Day**. Fans traveled to their East Coast shows from across and outside the US – from Norway, Sweden, Israel, Canada – resulting in Cunefest's sold-out audiences and capacity crowds.

*For more information on Thinking Plague, see:*  
[www.generalrubric.com/thinkingplague/](http://www.generalrubric.com/thinkingplague/)

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