

**SUICIDE****A WAY OF LIFE**

## Suicide

## A Way of Life

[Wax Trax!; 1988; r: Blast First/Mute; 2004]

Rating: 8.3

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Funnily enough, Suicide are victims of themselves. Their 1977 debut album is so ridiculously unique, innovative, and influential that it's easy to forget that they've made other records. For all the praise given to "Frankie Teardrop" and "Cheree", there's respectful silence regarding most of the rest of their catalog, as if to say "yeah, that's okay, but you heard the debut, right?" This is sad not only because it boxes Alan Vega and Martin Rev into one tiny corner of their career in most people's minds, but also because the other albums are actually pretty damn good.

Forgoing a missive on why their second (also self-titled) album is just as good as their first, I'll cut to the chase at hand and announce that if *A Way of Life* had been their debut-- even in 1988 when it was originally released-- people would be talking about it every bit as much as they do the real debut. By the time it came out-- more than 10 years removed from their debut-- Suicide's influence had spread throughout the dance and industrial music scenes, with plenty of spillage into synth-pop and punk, but no one had yet managed to sound anything like them. Indeed, if there's one thing *A Way of Life* drives home more than any other, it's that Suicide never stopped being ahead of their time, their signature big-reverb synth-pop/50s rock 'n' roll/industrial noise melange (would you hate me if I coined the term dronebilly?) too singular to be touched by anyone else.

Alan Vega's Elvis Presley-imprisoned-at-Vlad the Impaler's-house croon is a big part of what sets them apart, his tortured balladeer groaning and punky swagger rendering him a more dynamic frontman than just about any other act in any of the genres Suicide helped give birth to. One-man-band Martin Rev, meanwhile, makes artificiality into a virtue with his spot-on arrangements that alternately crawl and get on the good foot, frequently suggesting 28th Century doo-wop and rockabilly. *A Way of Life* puts their range on full display, pouring all of their evil energy into nine creepily ingratiated industrial pop songs, augmented on the reissue's second disc by a freaktacular live performance at London's Town & Country from 1987 that features material from each of their first three albums.

The specifics don't really do it justice, but "Surrender" is the perfect prom theme for Twin Peaks High, a glowing 50s ballad replete with gauzy, ethereal female backing harmonies, Vega at his most Dean Martin (if Dean Martin were into S&M) and "Earth Angel" guitar arpeggios transposed to the synths. "Jukebox Baby 96" is the most explicit rockabilly track, and if the Stray Cats played a note-for note cover of Rev's cleverly detailed arrangement, not one of those notes would sound out of place. The crackling and buzzing mechanics and thwacking beats of "Rain of Ruin", meanwhile are less novel, and Rev's machines couple with Vega's clipped vocalizations to sound almost Wire-ish on "Dominic Christ", bass line bending and warping over an insistent electro beat.

When measured against their fist two albums, *A Way of Life* might be the runt of the litter, but it's still a very good, well-developed album, and now that it's back with a lengthy, mid-fi, but spirited live performance attached, fans really don't have much excuse for ignoring it.