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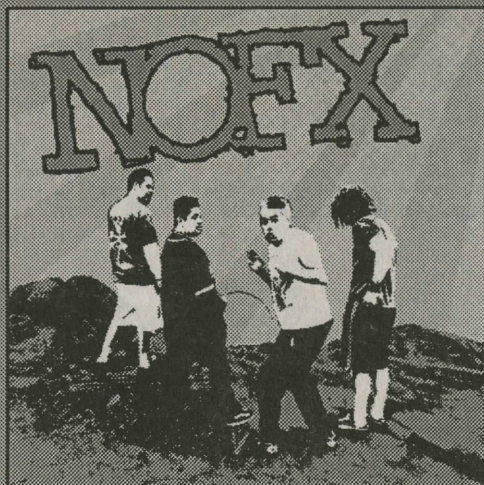
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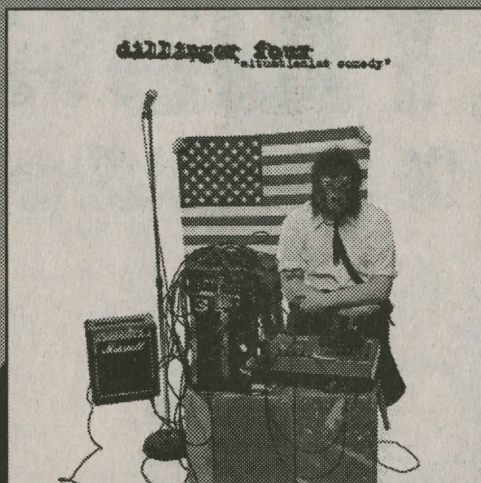
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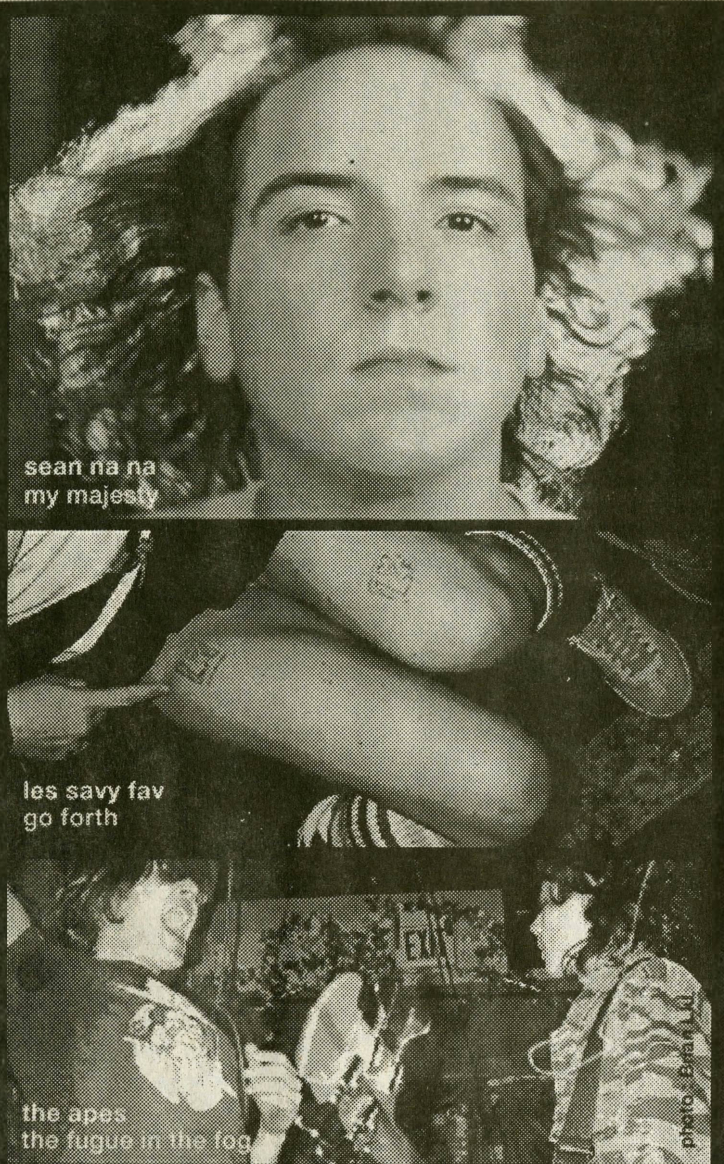
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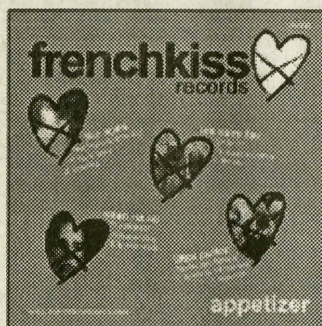


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Brit's Tight Ass Leaks Napalm Death:

Andrew WK

by Justin F. Farrar

"The defiant attitude of teenage punk rockers and heavy metal head-bangers may seem like a rage spawned by the unique disorders of Western culture, but it is not. Adolescence awakens defiant urges in nearly all primates."

-Howard Bloom, *The Lucifer Principle*

"Put yourself in our hand so our voices can be heard and together we'll take on all the world."

-Rob Halford of Judas Priest

"I don't tell people *what* to believe in. I simply tell them to get out there, discover what you believe in and live those beliefs out to the fullest. Maximize your potential."

-Tony Robbins

"I get wet without even trying."

-Andrew WK

Modern rock sprints backwards into the past. Hapless kids hoodwinked by A&R hippie suits slurp mashed rock through silly straws while soiling their Depends at Marilyn Manson and Kid Rock concerts—recycling '74 over and over. Britney's beats slither and grind harder than those fruit

loops' cheap '70s rock star impersonations. She's a forward-looking gal—a totally fuck-able sequence of ones and zeroes wiggling about the pages of a Phil K. Dick novel. Poor, ailing hard rock desperately needs its own download-able deity—a muscular Jesus for the modern dance.

Times are tough for these big time nuclear weapon-producing record companies. Compact disc sales nose-dived in recent months. EMI paid Mariah \$28,000,000 to disappear. Record executives are kicking over rocks in culture's seldom-traversed backwoods frantically looking for something (anything?) that could look good holding those framed platinum records in *Billboard*. As the norm they have offered mainstream America yet another batch of reprocessed classic rock. Detroit's White Stripes dabble in obsolete blues and Zep. The Strokes are fags sucking VU's *Loaded*. Black Rebel Motorcycle Club are a veritable freedom rock revue, and Queens of the Stone Age tease but worship '70s rock too fervently. Torporific bores admirable with pure intentions and quasi-punk integrity. Will some freak *please* make the rawk a musical beacon for absurdity and societal scorn once again!

"For my record's cover I'm wearing a basketball jersey and I'm gushing blood. It's a really well done photo. It's really awesome," boasted Andrew WK as his eyes grew into glowing moons rapping about his

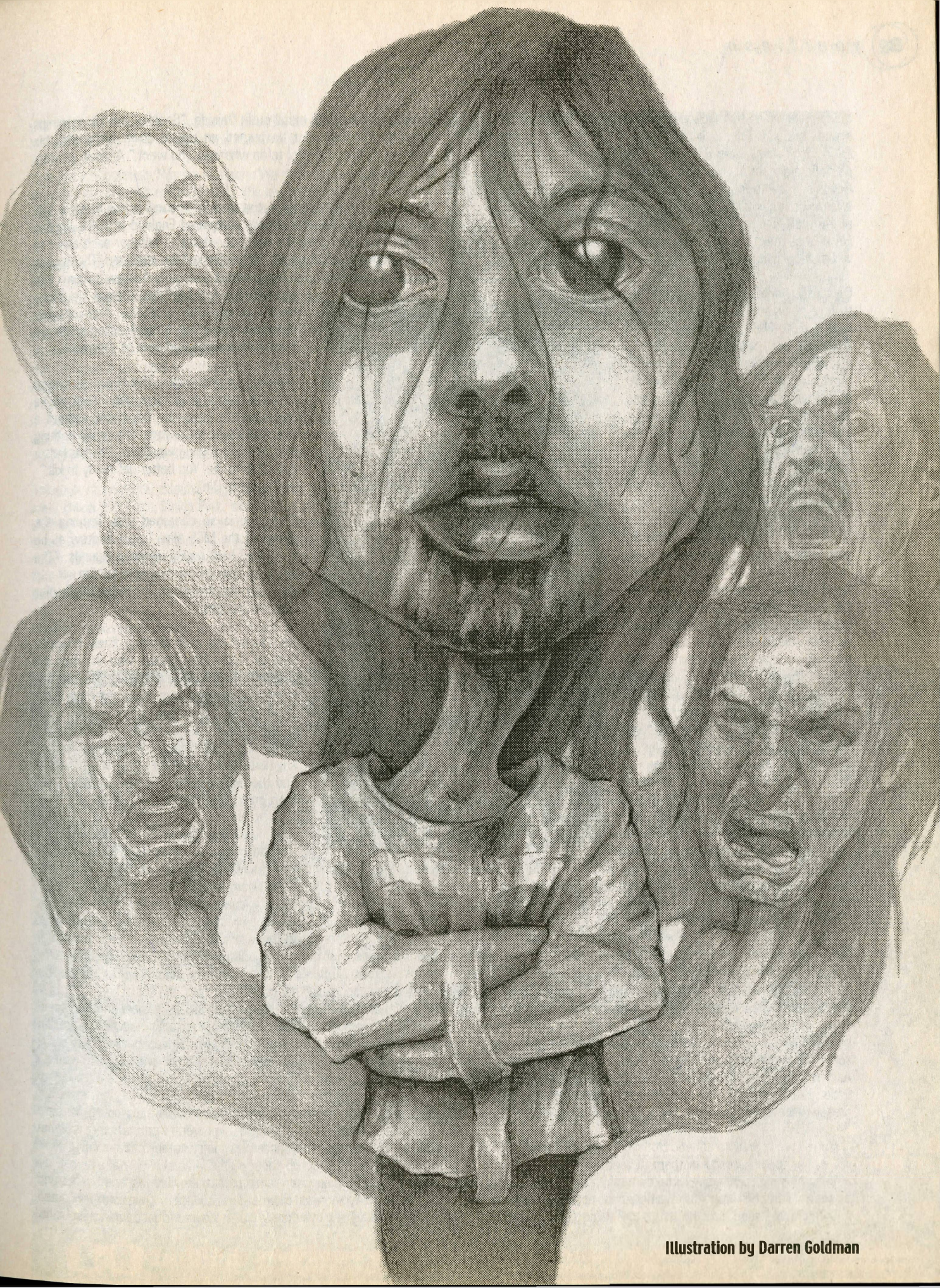


Illustration by Darren Goldman

thunderous dance-metal debut *I Get Wet*. A disc downloaded with the sounds of Judas Priest, Giorgio Moroder, Twisted Sister, Cheap Trick, *ESPN Jock Jams*, and *Bat Out of Hell*, and neatly wrapped in the patriotic grandeur of *Top Gun*'s closing minutes when Maverick tosses Goose's tags into the deep blue sea. And it even passes heavy music's two major litmus tests: bombast and repetition. Twelve totally identical pop-metal dance tracks shimmering with crisp two-stepping *Flashdance* melodies, soaring inspirational choruses and punchy synths while sledgehammer beats and riffs stomp up and down the spine.

Obviously, Andrew is not the first dude to fuse heavy metal and dance music. Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, White Zombie, and Sepultura have all attempted to create danceable metal, though rather unsuccessfully because they invariably abandon the formula that initially made them unique for cheap industrial additives. A record like Sepultura's *Roots* comes off rather soggy due to the layers of extraneous industrial grind smothering some truly punishing grooves.

"Every good band who gets obsessed with dance music turns bad like Throbbing Gristle and Cabaret Voltaire," railed Andrew. "I don't see why they think that they're supposed to do it. They were already doing dance music." In contrast, *I Get Wet* sounds more like a classic hard rock album than pseudo-futuristic NIN cheese because Andrew has fully internalized the production processes behind modern dance music without surrendering huge guitars and towering Marshall stacks. Andrew samples a drummer's beats—crystallizing a human's all-to-brief explosion of naked aggression—and perpetuates them for stretches of time few human drummers could endure—enabling him to pen Quiet Riot-worthy anthems that mechanically propel forward like hardcore techno. In this sense, *I Get Wet* breaks bones more like Sparks' gorgeous but sturdy and barbed dance pop on *No. 1 in Heaven* injected with a dash of testosterone squeezed from the nuts of Andrew's fave death metal outfits.

"My favorite all-time metal band is a tie between Napalm Death and Obituary," professed Andrew as his eyes dug into the linoleum contemplating his idols' respective genius. "Napalm Death basically invented the whole extreme thing and Obituary has the greatest metal singer of all-time, John Tardy." And he is even bent on reviving the standard thrash uniform. The back of *I Get Wet* resembles a picture some obsessed teenage head torn from the pages of *Kerrang!* 1987. Andrew, the Hessian behemoth, stands rigid and tall, arms defiantly folded like Thor: light blue-jeans caked in mud, battered high-tops, a greasy mane of jet-black hair, and a filthy white T-shirt.

"I started wearing more athletic clothing," explained Andrew. "Because it's easier to run around in them. It's easier to jump off railings in athletic clothing." An activity Andrew performs at least a dozen times a show. Perched atop his well-defined physique is a maniacal countenance glaring into the lens, resembling Glen Benton from the

groundbreaking death metal outfit Deicide. "Spooky" Benton worships metal so intensely that he burned an upside-down cross into his forehead. "I think it's cool to do whatever you want," Andrew repeats like a mantra.

Death metal + dance pop = the metallic Spears? Is this Andrew WK for fucking real? Andrew already conquered England in 2001. English football fans looking for the next soundtrack to butcher each other to blast Andrew's debut single "Party Hard" at the stadiums. The English version of *I Get Wet* even has a sticker censoring Andrew's warm, red liquid metal. And MTV has slipped his "Party Hard" video into rotation. Just maybe, America's gun-toting, bomb-building youth are primed for a demented hero all their own.

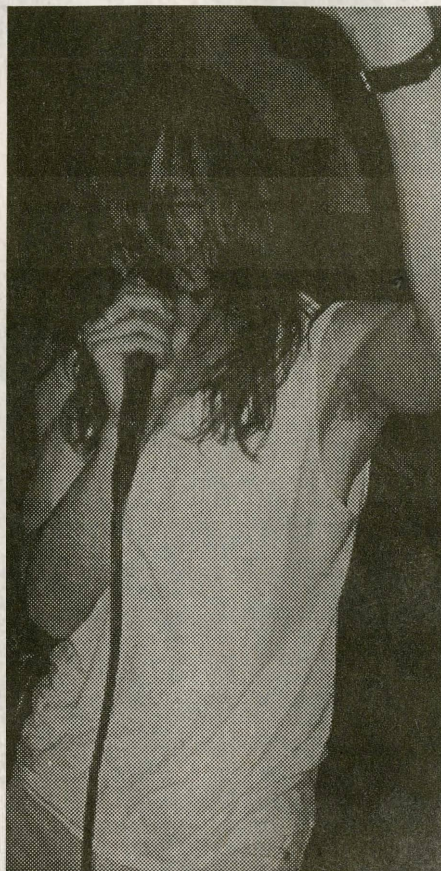
"This is your time to pay. This is your judgment day. We made a sacrifice. And now we've come to take your life. We shoot without a gun. We'll take on anyone. It's really nothing new. It's just a thing we like to do. You better get ready to die. You better get ready to kill."
—"Ready to Die"

"Everyone is so obsessed with keeping the dream of the MC5 alive," said Andrew as he dismissed hard rock's ultimate legends. "The Stooges were cool in their time but I'm not into them. I'm not into retro. Too many bands play like The Stooges."

No 16-year-old snort snorting finely chopped lines of Ridilin even knows who the fuck the Stooges and the MC5 are and does not care to know. Those aging stoners might have been get-down bad-asses in '72. But who (save college brats and pale-faced record geeks) care in 2002? Who even cares about hard rock anymore? Not the pukers shop-lifting Combos and the *Juggs* summer pictorial at the Dairy Mart on a Friday night.

Our once-stoned parents' hard rock existed in a world of morality, political activism, James Dean rebellion, the antisocial outcast of Romantic literature. From Gene Vincent to Starship, from the Lizard King to the Clash, they all rocked for Rousseau's autonomous individual. In the book *The Lucifer Principle*, renegade evolutionist (as well as Michael Jackson's former manager) Howard Bloom tears apart these long-standing misconceptions and, in the process, describes modern youth's new reality. "The superorganism is often a vile and loathsome beast," writes Bloom. "But like the body nourishing her constituent cells, the social beast grants us life. Without her, each of us would perish. That knowledge is woven into our biology. It is the reason that the rigidly individualistic Clint Eastwood does not exist. The internal self-destruct devices with which we come equipped at birth ensure that we will live as components of a larger organism, or we simply will not live at all."

During the '70s our parents' world began rapidly dissolving. Personal power surrendered to systemic power. Corporations replaced governments and corralled individuals into masses of consuming social security numbers knocked about by the laws of supply and demand. A new world designed from complex mathematical equations emerged, which ironically operated more and more like a million protozoa viciously fucking and fighting in a drop of water. Andrew's dance-metal embodies



this modern paradox. It is a brutally primitive attack constructed from intricate combinations of digital and human processes.

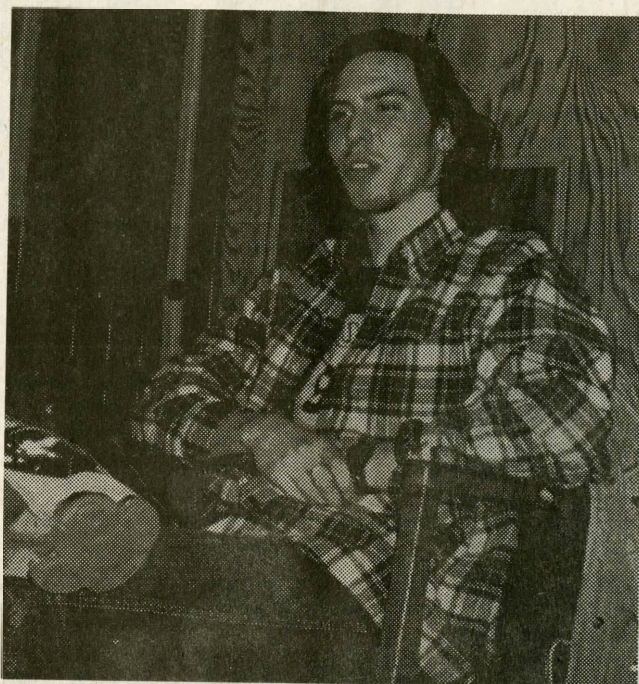
"We are a population. We are a factory. We don't do, but we never did anyway. We are your mother father. We are your final friend. And you can't stop what you can't end. I love New York City."

—"I Love NYC"

Teenagers of the '80s and '90s craving mind-numbing noise ignored rock and cranked heavy metal, hardcore, thrash, speed metal, grindcore, death metal, black metal, hip hop, and hardcore techno. When kids did get stoned to a little hard rock they dug bands cutting their sound with metal's overdriven, mechanical rhythms like Guns 'n' Roses, Nirvana, and Soundgarden. Kids like Andrew dug the heavier shit because it pulsated and throbbed in time to the regimentation of micro-managed modern living. It reflected a world as army, factory, and corporation; it reflected the shit going down in their lives. "Judas Priest is one of my favorite true heavy metal bands," proclaimed Andrew, as we discovered that between the two of us we own every single Priest record including the kick-ass later stuff like *Painkiller*.

Although rap-n-metal douche bags Limp Bizkit and their "nu metal" army (Alien Ant Farm, Linkin Park, etc.) bop about the stage in baggy clothing and guitars, the music's unoriginal appropriation of hip hop beats is not the alleged birth of a new hard rock. Instead of making heavy pop music, they commodify metal by cleansing it of menace. In fact, for the first time in rock history, older critics dismiss these sorry-ass metal bands for not grating their ears enough.

"Newer mainstream metal is pissed but in a boring way," railed



Andrew. "They're pissed but they have nothing to be pissed about. They're just not cool."

Wasted youth flying high and crashing into walls like Christopher Bishop, sustaining their volatile existences on a steady diet of Red Bull-



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We dance! We kill! We go! We choke! We go! We stab!
We rob! We steal! Party til you puke!"
—"Party til You Puke"

"I got tired of denying the energy of what I like to do because it doesn't sound like the right quality. I just like the way a really good recording sounds. So, I got out of the lo-fi bad music thing to make more mainstream music.

"The music is definitely important but I'm more into all encompassing things like the show. It's not just about breaking new ground. That's stupid. It's about having as much fun as possible," explained Andrew in the days shortly before Dave Grohl flipped for his music, and Island Records signed him.

"I don't care if they [a major label] screw me over as long as they give me money so I can do what I want to do."

We met on a frigid New England afternoon in Boston. The night before Andrew came up from New York and unleashed his one-man heavy metal karaoke show in some musty well-below-code warehouse in Providence, Rhode Island, then known as the Bulb Clubhouse. He shared that bill with Mikey Wild and the Magic Lanterns, a demented first-generation punk from Philadelphia who gobbles up the same anti-psycho pills as Jeffrey Dahmer. Barkley's Barnyard Critters also played that night—a group of tattered "farm animals" jamming one single blues riff until the sun climbs the rooftops and the rooster crows. Welcome to Andrew WK's incredibly strange beginnings in the bowels of underground freak rock.

Andrew WK—the handsome metal god—was born Andrew Wilkes-Krier in 1979 in Palo Alto, California. Four years later his family moved to Ann Arbor. "My parents just want me to be happy," admitted Andrew, dispelling the crusty conception of head-bangers as maladjusted children. By the age of 15, Andrew had already trained as a classical pianist for 9 years, formed his first band at 13 (in the "Pearl Jam style") as well as jammed in a small handful of other teenage projects, including his first death metal band. This precocious little rocker devoured entire genres in single bites. Then he discovered Ann Arbor's squealing noise-rock scene centered on the tiny but influential independent label Bulb Records.

"Everything changed when I got the Couch 7 inch on Bulb," said Andrew. "That was the turning point. Before that I was already into stuff like John Zorn, Mr. Bungle, and the Boredoms, but Couch was a big deal and that changed things. Just seeing people were doing whatever they wanted was good."

"I met Pete (Larson) and Jim Magas when I was 15 at Schoolkids Records in Ann Arbor. Jim used to work there. I thought they were cool because he was in Couch and they were my favorite band."

Couch's searing distortion and visceral punch provided Andrew with the primal paste for adhering metal riffage to techno-based rhythms a few years later. "Their song 'Old Man' epitomizes my whole approach to

songwriting." Andrew re-recorded a cacophonous dance version of his idols' song as tribute found on the "Party til You Puke" 12 inch released on Larson's Bulb Records back in 2000.

Pete Larson, aka Mr. Velocity Hopkins, quickly became Andrew's friend, mentor, and band mate in the absurd rock combo the Pterodactyls—the only hard rock group in history allegedly fronted by a real live "pterodactyl man." Rare footage circulates of this freak-of-nature swinging from a drop ceiling, outstretched orange wings scraping heads, while Hopkins' guitar and Andrew's drums bash out a much maligned take on the AC/DC songbook but with different song titles; it's unadulterated scum rock.

Unlike most independent label proprietors in America around '94 and '95, Hopkins detested politics and high-art pretense infesting his noise-rock. Even abstract soundscapes—real John Cage territory—should kick ass to high heaven like Van Halen's *Fair Warning* according to Bulb's aesthetic.

Hopkins, a hopeless Iron Maiden fanatic, interpreted the lyrics to Priest's "Living After Midnight" too literally. He pried them with a crowbar from the *British Steel* inner sleeve and constructed an entire heavy metal gestalt. Never mind the label's utter obscurity. Ignore the impenetrable white noise on many of the label's releases. Hopkins will forever maintain, implicitly, that the only difference between Creed and a bizarre Bulb release like an Ass Baboons of Venus CD is the number of copies sold. Bulb denies the cheap successes of subculture fame and remains a struggling entity of the mother kultur. For Hopkins, the popular definition of hard rock is still worth fighting for. More than any specific Bulb sound, Andrew tucked this keep-the-rock-going philosophy deep within his heart and quickly abandoned his fleeting interest in creating murky lo-fi experimental soundscapes— an example of which can be found on the obscure *Labyrinths and Jokes* compilation LP.

"What you like is just what you got to do. Basing stuff that's supposed to be passionate on a concept is not going to be passionate. It's not going to be real."

- andrew wk

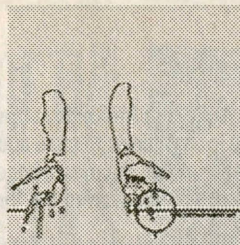
"What you like is just what you got to do," said Andrew. "Basing stuff that's supposed to be really passionate on a concept is not going to be passionate. It's not going to be real."

When Andrew turned 18 he left Ann Arbor—putting college on hold—and relocated to New York in order to translate his manic passion for classical composition, death metal, noise-punk, and Bulb's unrestrained hard rock spirit into a palatable commercial product now known as Andrew WK. (An unsubstantiated theory circulates that he moved to New York for fashion.) "I initially moved to New York because it's all about opportunity. You are paying for the chance for something to happen," explained Andrew, who eventually relocated to Florida shortly after "911" to hang with his new band of Floridian Hessians with pony tails, including the former drummer from his teenage idols, Obituary.

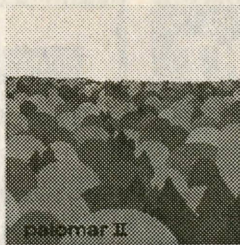
From the narrow confines of his Brooklyn apartment-recording studio, Andrew would judge a jam's hard-rocking potential by twisting the



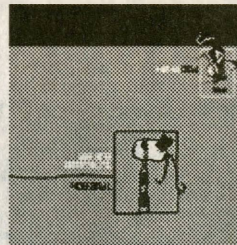
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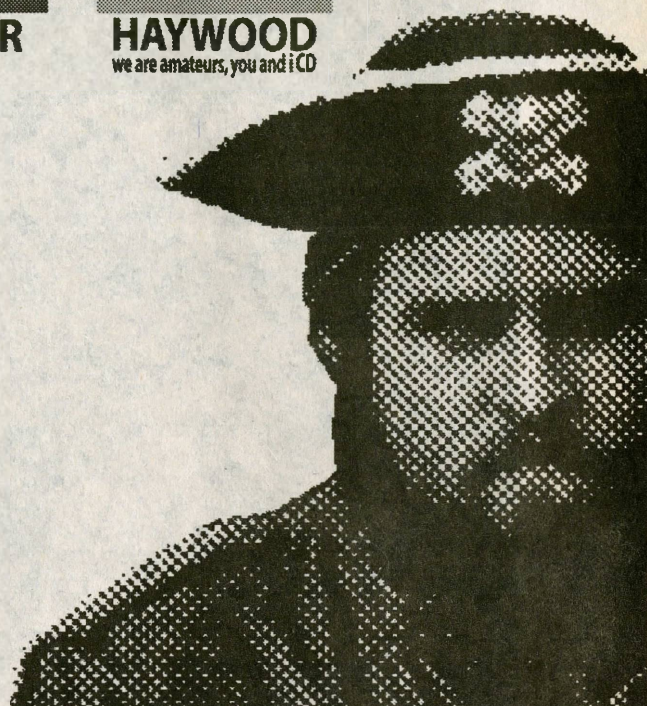


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volume to 11 and slamming about the room in solitude—a one-man Knebworth. He produced three releases for Bulb between '99 and '00: thugged-out rap-n-metal on the *Wolf Eyes/Andrew WK* split 12 inch, aerobic power pop on the *Girls Own Juice* CD EP, and his best so far, the *Party til You Puke* 12 inch, snarling techno sludge.

"I just honestly, at all times, make the best song I can make. I never think about it as someone putting on the CD, listening to it and thinking, 'Oh this is great.' I think about it as though you've listened to it and you know it and then you see it live and it's like an atom bomb because everything is live. My dream is to play in front of a good size crowd who knows my songs."

"How famous do you want to be?" I asked.

"My goal isn't to be famous. It's more like I want to play to 10,000 people. It's not so much the fame as the live show. Concerts are the most amazing thing."

While living in New York, Andrew put together this one-man metal show. He would arrive at a space, blast his CD without vocals, and unleash a litany of preternatural wails and moans, joyously exorcising demons through heavy metal aerobics. It was aggressive, upbeat and wholly positive.

"I almost puked last night [at the Providence show]. It comes from that manic feeling when you are dancing around. I try to make the music as intense as possible."

The show: Andrew queued the CD. The dingy room reeked of oil and antiquated chemicals suspended in a cloud of perspiration. Punks,

ravers and clique-less freakoids packed the space. They cleared a small circle for Hessian Andrew to pace about. His frame immediately arched into a crescent moon, the microphone rose to his lips and disappeared; a wall of black hair swallowed the thing right to the cord.

"ARE YOU REA-DEEEEE?" leapt from inside that hair followed by a chirping toy Casio keyboard. The pounding of programmed aggression and organized hedonism commenced— "Puke," the older techno version, followed by "Old Man" followed by "Puke" two, three, maybe four more times. That beat just kept pulverizing a crowd growing more and more agitated but also drawing closer together into a single shuttering superorganism. We pumped fists like soldiers with armbands, we crawled all over one another, and we tossed Andrew high into the rafters. He swung like a juiced-up gibbon from beam to beam and onto a wooden plank suspended over a blanket of bulging eyes and dropped jaws.

Stomping feet knocked the microphone about a floor dotted with Miller High Life puddles; Andrew ceased crooning two songs before. Back up on that plank, his body fired off a rapid sequence of chops, fists and kicks—motorized head banging. A splitting atomic pellet rocketed through Andrew's limbs, snapping arms and legs straight into the atmosphere. It was looking for an escape hatch; it needed an opportunity to expose itself and melt the entire fucking planet.

Andrew then dived to the concrete, snatched a pair of drumsticks, and hijacked Mikey Wild's drums. The dude began jamming along to his own jams! Rock fans rocking for rock fans dissolving the differences between rock show and dance party. "I don't love anything more than my songs and if the crowd loves them, too, then it's just the best energy." Hopefully, Andrew's live shows, as a pop star on a traditional stage, create that same feeling of brief but palatable freedom.

"I want there to be a resurgence of the more personable things. The cool guy. You don't see the cool guy anymore. Someone you could hang out with," explained Andrew in a tone of logic typically associated with truth tables and objective rationality—a metal mathematician.

Months later during the making of *I Get Wet*, Andrew and I bumped into each other at a show in yet another musty warehouse in Brooklyn where Velocity Hopkins and his wife, DJ Party Girl, were kicking out a set of dirty Mötörhead-drenched scum. "I heard you are making a rock masterpiece," I drunkenly remarked with a crumpled bag full of Bud tall boys cradled like a baby in my arms.

Andrew, a darkly solemn demon-monk, cocked his head slowly. A single eye pierced that ever-swelling black mane. "I'm actually making two masterpieces."

One song after another song, Andrew's voice rips through speaker cones screaming about partying, puking, killing, dying, and loving. You sit immobilized—incredulous (maybe repulsed) but oddly transfixed. "This kid is fucking ridiculous," you (and I most days) mutter. "Does this dude want to fuck or fight? Is Andrew putting me on or is this fruity pebble really serious?"

"Open your mouth. We're all gonna cum. IN-YOUR—FACE!
It's Time to Party. We're gonna have a party tonight"
—"It's Time to Party"

The answer is obvious. He is modern man's most prescient and vital philosopher. ▲

Photos courtesy of the author

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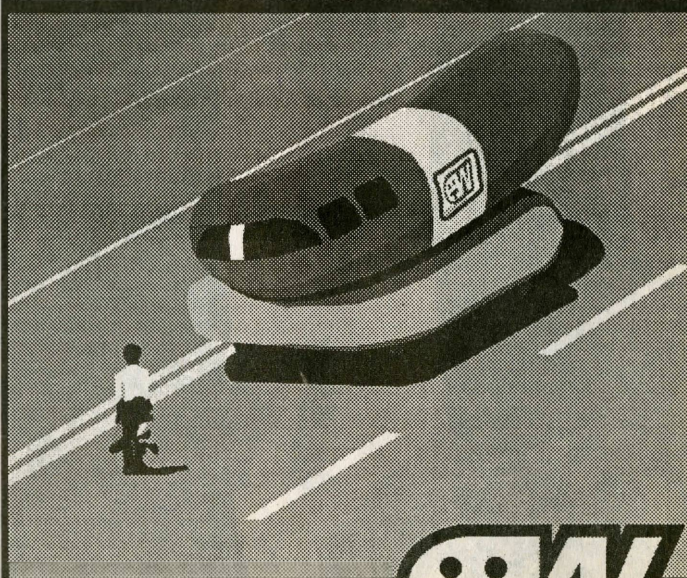
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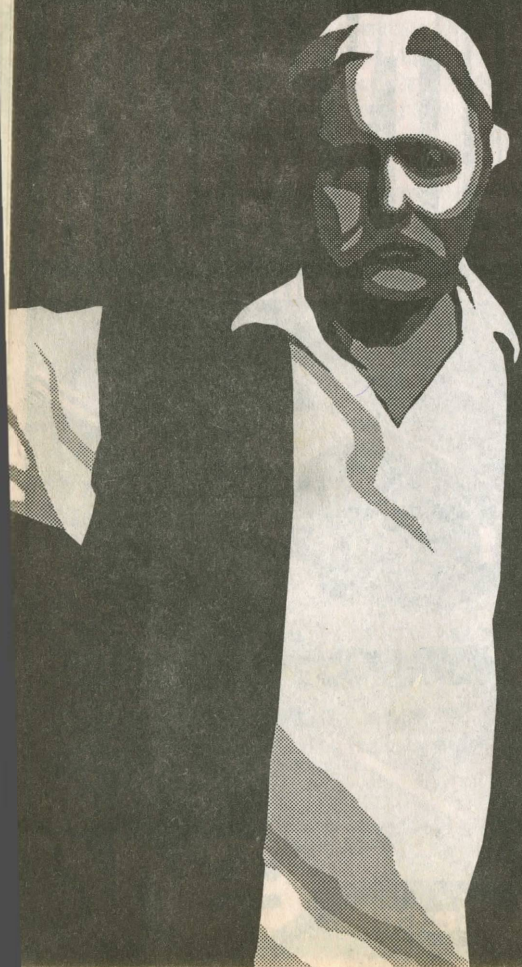
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Born in Stockton, California in 1939, Dannie Martin embarked upon a life of crime at an early age. At thirteen he did his first stint in juvenile hall for stealing a car; two years later he burglarized a school and was sent to reform school, where he was dubbed "Red Hog" after getting into a fight with another teenager over a pork chop. The moniker would follow him throughout his criminal life.

In his early twenties, Martin became addicted to opiates, first an over-the-counter analgesic, later heroin, and many of his subsequent arrests were drug related. He began burglarizing drugstores to support his growing habit and was arrested in 1962 after robbing over a dozen stores. He would spend the next four years in Soledad, San Quentin, and Folsom, where he witnessed the major race riots of the 1960s. Martin spent the next decade in and out of prison on various charges and parole violations, culminating in 1980 when a botched bank robbery landed him in prison with an 18 year sentence.

It was during this period that Martin began to read voraciously and to make his first attempts at writing. Inspired by the classics, Shakespeare, Steinbeck, Hemingway, and Dostoevsky, he soon became interested in philosophy, first Plato and Socrates, and finally Schopenhauer. Martin soon began writing jailhouse poems to entertain his fellow convicts and found that he had a natural aptitude for storytelling.

In the mid '80s Martin began to contribute a long series of articles on prison life to the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Editor Peter Sussman recognized Martin's talent and helped the fledgling writer to sharpen his craft. Martin's essays, many of which were sharply critical of the correctional system, soon gained a devoted readership. Most of these pieces would be collected in 1993's *Committing Journalism: The Prison Writings of Red Hog*. The book was released to tremendous critical acclaim and in the last 20 years has become a seminal work of prison literature.

While still in prison, Martin wrote part of a novel that would ultimately become *The Dishwasher*, which was published in 1995 after he had been released. This was followed two years later by a second novel, *In the Hat*.

I recently spoke with Dannie Martin, who is currently at work on a rewrite of his third novel, *The Shooter's Job*. A fourth, *The Crossroader*, is also in the works.

Dannie

YOUR FLESH: In *Committing Journalism* you describe your decision to become a criminal as a conscious choice, reflecting your abhorrence of the puritan work ethic and of the back-breaking menial jobs of your dustbowl town childhood. Many would misinterpret this as laziness, but certainly writing is very demanding work and requires much self discipline.

DANNIE MARTIN: I am lazy I suppose by a hard-working person's definition, but writing comes easy for me. Being a writer has always been my dream. Working on a dream is more fun than working on the railroad.

YF: Can you discuss the difficulties of assimilating back into the civilian world after spending so much of your adult life in prison?

DM: It's very difficult. In prison you learn to deny and suppress your feelings. You learn that time is something that you do, not something that you utilize. It's very hard to learn again to recognize and deal with feelings and to learn how to use your time instead of just doing it.

YF: What are some of the misconceptions about prison and the criminal life that you see portrayed in the media?

DM: The media thrives on stereotypes, ie the acne-scarred thug who appears out of nowhere with a knife or gun and destroys someone, then fades from view. We begin to doubt that any of these thugs ever had a mother, a sister or any family relationships. That becomes a viewer's idea of a criminal.

YF: Have you observed much change in prison conditions since *Committing Journalism* came out? The book's been quite influential, and I understand that it's been taught in a number of university criminal justice courses.

DM: I am not aware of any positive changes in our prisons and doubt there will be in the next hundred years. States like California are headed back to the stone age with prisons such as Pelican Bay. I am pleased by how *Committing Journalism* is being used in criminal justice and journalism classes. I believe that if there is any hope of improvement in corrections that it's in educating people about what exactly goes on inside. The more secretive and reactionary prisons and their administrations become, the more horrendous conditions will become.

YF: You've done some time in Arizona, so you're probably familiar with Sheriff Joe Arpaio, who's notorious for his hard-nosed stance of depriving

convicts of basic human dignity. Have you heard about his gulag-like "tent city," an outdoor camp for overflow from the county jail? Prisoners, many of whom haven't even been convicted yet, are put out in the often intense heat with inferior rations, etc. Any thoughts on this trend?

DM: I've read extensively about Sheriff Arpaio's "tent jails." I've been in a lot worse. Fresno County in the late '50s and Tulsa Oklahoma are a couple that come to mind. But, believe it or not, there is some deterrent effect. I remember when in my early twenties a group of us would take to the road from Houston and burgle drugstores in small towns. A couple of times the driver would enter Arkansas and everyone in the car would begin yelling "Hey fool, turn this car around. We're in Arkansas!" We

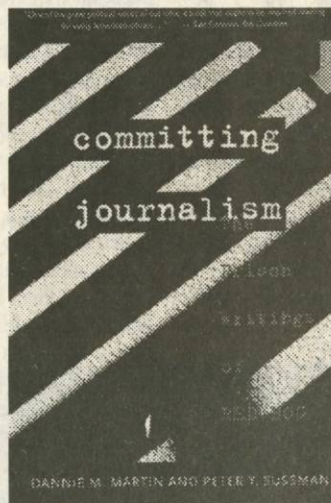
wanted no part of that Arkansas prison or those Arkansas jails. I can hear someone now saying "Man, I ain't doin' nothing in Phoenix!"

First of all, I believe that the majority of the voters in Phoenix agree with Arpaio's policies, and we live in a society where the majority rules the minority through a means of authoritarian force. Arpaio probably believes that security and public protection is his thing. Guilt or innocence is the court's thing, and rehabilitation is God's thing.

The constitution says we're innocent until proven guilty and that we won't be subject to cruel and unusual punishment. Jails tell us otherwise. If you don't have bail money that noble concept is turned inside out. Those tents and subhuman conditions fall into a long jail tradition of "business as usual." Ask anyone who was at Riker's Island in New York during the '30s.

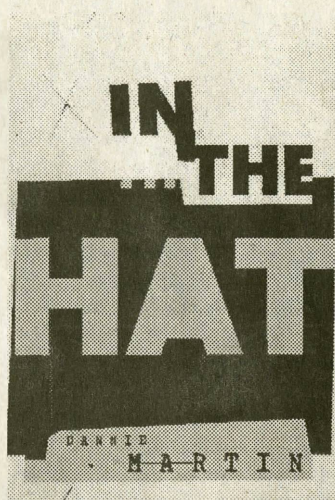
YF: You refer continuously in your work to the code of honor that convicts of your generation had, and maintain that much of this has been lost. Why do you think this is, and have you noticed it getting worse in the years since you wrote *Committing Journalism*?

DM: There was a time way back when convicts had a very tight and cohesive code of honor. We'll keep our word, pay our debts, won't inform, and never plead guilty. The "war on drugs" began the breakdown of those values. People who would never have been outlaws began coming to prison in droves for selling dope, possessing dope, or using it and stealing to get it. They had no idea of underworld values. Convicts



M. Martin

a *Your Flesh* Interview by Patrick Millikin



break down the values of hardcore convicts and they are very successful at it. Nowadays the cops have a more solid gang than convicts. Cops almost never inform on each other and they have a stronger "us versus them" mentality than anyone, except maybe Yassar Arafat.

YF: You've written quite a bit of jailhouse poetry, which will hopefully be collected and published. Although, there's some background info in *Committing Journalism*, can you talk a little bit about how the tradition started? It seems like an almost classical kind of oral storytelling. Do you know how far back it goes? I'll bet rap music has at least some of its origins in jailhouse poetry. I remember reading an interview with Ice-T in

called them "dope babies" because many of them had drug addictions for parents.

The Bureau of Prisons also began taking the most violent psychotics that insane asylums couldn't handle and putting them in the general population of maximum security prisons. They still do this. Most of those nuts are incapable of keeping their word or paying a debt. Dealing with them caused convicts to begin to distrust one another. It also caused convicts to gang up in cliques of "homies" and people they had known forever. Paranoia is contagious. The BOP deliberately imports insanity to

"I am lazy I suppose by a hard-working person's definition, but writing comes easy for me. Being a writer has always been my dream. Working on a dream is more fun than working on the railroad."

- joe blow

which he cited convict writer Iceberg Slim as a main influence.

DM: Up until the late '50s jails had no TV and many had no radios or reading material. Jailhouse poets were our main form of entertainment. Usually after lights out someone would begin reciting a poem in the form of a story. They ranged from scatological and violent to hauntingly beautiful love stories.

There's no doubt in my mind that rap music had its roots there. Some of the poems were rap. A bit of the "Signifying Monkey," about a monkey that taunted and tormented a lion in the jungle:

The monkey got happy/ jumpin up and down/His foot missed the limb/his ass hit the ground./With a rage of lightning/a streak of white heat/the lion was upon him with all four feet/Now lion, you twice my size/please allow me to apologize/But let me off the ground like a good man should/I kick yo ass all over

these woods/The lion jump back gettin in trim/the monkey reached and got that limb/Say Hup! Motherfucker you just as well go 'way/I ain't leavin' this tree no more today

Imagine that ending to a rap beat and you get the idea.

YF: There is a pretty illustrious line of convict writers, from Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet, Brendan Behan, and Chester Himes to contemporaries of yours such as Malcolm Braly, Eddie Bunker, E. Richard Johnson, and Jimmy Santiago Baca. Were any of these writers influential to you? Also, do you feel a sense of community among prison writers or is there rivalry and competition?

DM: A long-time heroin addict and bank robber named Paul Allen was the main influence on Malcolm Braly, Eddie Bunker and myself. Paul was the best editor I've ever encountered. He published some short stuff in *Harper's* and other magazines. He helped and encouraged Bunker on his first novels, became a good friend of Dustin Hoffman's, and, while on the run from a bank robbery warrant would sneak into Dustin's motel and help him on the screenplay to *Straight Time*, from Bunker's novel *No Beast So Fierce*.

I showed Paul my first writing and he told me that I should drop everything else and write. I would have never overcome my doubts and insecurities about my talent without him. He edited and advised me on my articles from prison and on the first half of *The Dishwasher*. Paul died of a heroin overdose at a motel in LA at the age of 65. I don't believe that Braly, Bunker, or myself would have come near as far in the writing game had it not been for Paul Allen.

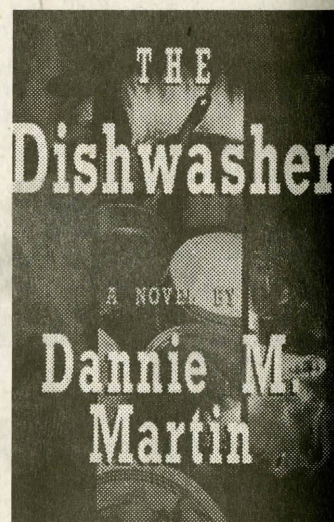
Eddie Bunker is a friend of mine whose writing makes me feel only proud of him. Braly was a better writer than either of us. Wilde and Genet were in that rarefied sphere where genius travels. There's no rivalry in my game, yet there is a sense of camaraderie in that we've all been there and we've all tried hard to define the nature of the beast.

YF: Peter Sussman, your editor at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, was also an early champion of your work. Are you still in touch with him?

DM: Peter and I are still in touch and still friends. He's working on a biography of Jessica Mitford, who he introduced me to as "Decca." She was very fond of Peter. He tells me he's having to read about 10,000 letters and it's a daunting task. But Peter is a formidable editor and a damn good writer and I wager that he mines some pure gold from Decca's letters. He sure pulled the best stuff from mine.

YF: Let's talk a little bit about your novel, *The Dishwasher*. How long did it take you to write it? Were you already working on it when you were writing the columns for the *Chronicle*? The protagonist Bill Malone seems to embody that old school sense of honor and decency that you referred to earlier. Do you have any plans to write about him in the future?

DM: I wrote the first half of *The Dishwasher* before I left prison. I didn't have an agent so I sent that half to an agent in New York. She sent it back and told me I was taking forever to get to the point. Then *Committing Journalism* got published with the help of Fred Hill in San Francisco, who is my agent now. Fred read what I'd written and showed it to Gerry Howard, an editor at W.W. Norton. Gerry liked it, asked me to finish it, and Norton published it in 1995. Many people tell me they would like to see a sequel with Malone as the protagonist. That could happen someday.




YF: I understand that there's been some Hollywood interest in your novels. Do you have any updates on that? It seems like both *The Dishwasher* and *In the Hat* would make fine films if put into the right hands. Both have an epic sense about them that would translate well onto the screen. Have you been approached to write screenplays for either novel?

DM: I've been asked lately by a producer to help with a screenplay of *The Dishwasher* and I've agreed to do it. There is also some interest in *Committing Journalism* by a TV concern. Talks on these projects are coming along but it's still at the "pie in the sky" stage.

YF: I've read and admired your unpublished novel *The Shooter's Job*. I know that it's been a long drawn out ordeal with getting the book published. Does it look like it's going to happen now? Also, can you tell me a bit about *The Crossroaders*?

DM: Thank you for your kind comments about *The Shooter's Job*, but I'm rewriting it now and you probably wouldn't recognize it. I mean root and branch rewriting. *The Crossroaders* is about a woman casino thief in Las Vegas. That's the underworld term for travelling card and dice cheaters: "crossroaders." I believe *The Crossroaders* may be my best one yet. The rough draft is done but also needs work.

YF: Have you considered writing a novel that has nothing to do with underworld life at all?

DM: One of the first things Paul Allen ever told me was: "Man, write about what you know about. You ain't no philosopher, you get away from what you know about you're in deep quicksand." I believe that was excellent advice and I'm sticking with it. 

thee shallows

"A HISTORY OF SPORT FISHING" THEE MORE SHALLOWS



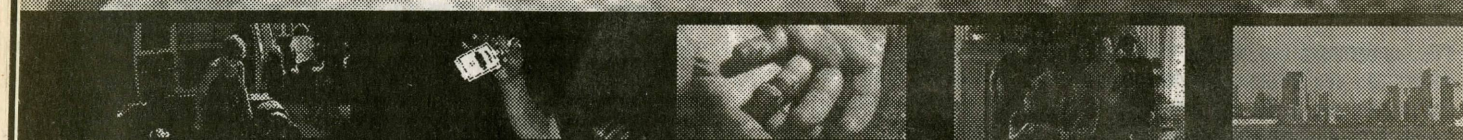
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GOD HATES US ALL:

BY DAVID WILCOX



An Unwound Tour Journal, part I

Foreword

I toured with Unwound during the autumn of their tenth year in what looked to be one of their most ambitious outings — seven people crammed into one van for five weeks, followed by ten days off, then another ten days of touring, capped off by a month in Europe. For the unfamiliar, Unwound are, on an average day, a trio: Justin Trosper (guitar and vocals), Vern Rumsey (bass), and Sara Lund (drums). This line-up has toured exhaustively over the last eight years, with assorted roadies and, in later years, a sound engineer named Dave Doughman, who was recruited again for this expedition. But now, for the first time, Unwound would enlist the services of two additional musicians to help flesh out their newer material, which had been recorded with numerous overdubs and varied instrumentation. To that end, long-time friend/guitarist David Scott Stone (a veteran of recent Melvins tours and former member of the groups Slug and Get Hustle) and original drummer/current collaborator/vital family member Brandt Sandeno, in a poignant commemoration of Unwound's decade-long existence, were added into the mix.

Then there's myself. I met Unwound in the fall of 1995, while they were on tour with Sonic Youth, and we've maintained a solid, if distanced, friendship in the years since (I even released an official live bootleg for them in 1999). Justin and I ran into each other on a couple of occasions in the spring of 2001 (once at South by Southwest, another time while he was touring with the Melvins) and, somehow or another, had banded about the idea of my traveling with them on their upcoming tour. I tried to cloak my unbridled enthusiasm for the idea, knowing that nothing would sabotage it more than excitement. I was correct; Justin informed me in early June that Sara wanted to bring another female along for a change of pace. There ya go. Done deal.

Three weeks before Unwound were scheduled to leave, I received a brief and unexpected email: "David/How's things/Wondering if you still want to do the Unwound tour/More later/Justin." Sara's Y-chromosome deficient options had all backed out. And that's how I got hired.

This is what I got.

MONDAY AUGUST 27, 2001 (Somewhere in Montana)

We're about three hours into day number two of driving and already stuck on an especially unattractive expanse of highway somewhere in the western half of Montana. The van procured for our little odyssey has many quirks we have yet to warm up to, but the most fatal, apparently, is its inability to gauge exactly how much fuel rests in its belly at any given moment. And we haven't quite figured out its efficiency on our own yet. Those fancy grammar school mathematics skills we've all resisted showboating are going to have to be employed from here on out.

Dave Doughman is currently somewhere east of here in a small hatchback with some vaguely hippie-ish-looking woman (at least from my vantage point; a superficial back-of-the-head shot, granted, but alas...), and will presumably be returning any moment with our petrol. That is, if she doesn't speed past us in an ill-timed realization of every macabre hitchhiker tale my mother imparted upon me in my youth, hurtling the

head of our sound engineer like a flaming pumpkin at our dilapidated heap of machinery. Would he still be asking total strangers for pot?

One hour later

So after much toil we roll along once again. Here's how it all played out: One of Montana's finest turned up shortly after Dave and the hippie woman drove off for fuel/ritual decapitation. Expecting that our brave boy would be returning shortly with not only some gasoline but also enough cannabis to draw his speech out an additional three syllables per word, I thought it best to send our friend on his way. He responded with a "you betcha!" — perhaps the most charming thing I've ever heard a cop say. The kicker? He had a *teddy bear* in the rear window of his patrol unit that smiled back at me as he drove off into the horizon. In Montana "the fuzz" are more accurately "the fuzzy."

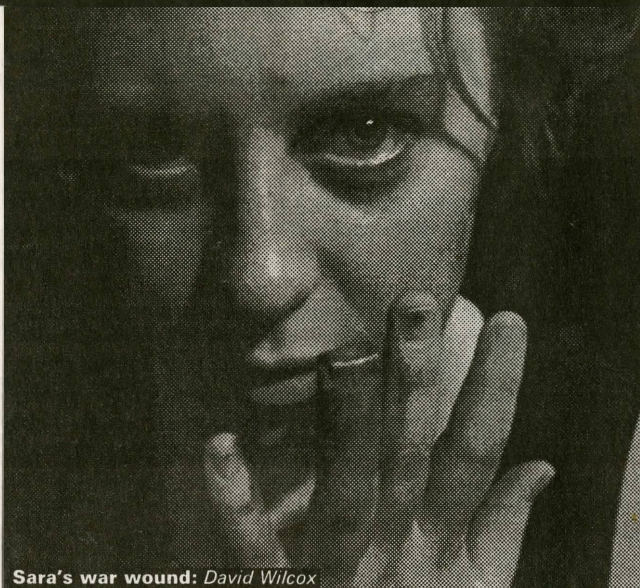
Dave returned carrying a half-gallon milk jug full of gasoline (the nearest gas station was a biker bar/diner with one gas pump and no actual gas containers) that we were forced to funnel into the gas tank with a converted water bottle and a broken beer bottleneck. This helped not one bit, as the gas tank stuttered incessantly but refused to do a final rollover. So Sara and I climbed out of the roost, edged up to the highway and tried to flag down more help.

Our next contestant was a middle-aged family man in a fancy shit-kicker pick-up truck who dismounted from the cab of his steed with cool assurance, the metaphoric Man With No Name, a hand-rolled fag strangled between incisor and mandible, grit-soaked and unafraid, or at least as close as a man wearing a pair of ridiculous jagged-cut wrap-around Ray Ban sunglasses, and a red t-shirt with the brazen pronouncement—in pink fuzzy neon letters, no less—"I ROCK!" tucked into a pair of pleated khaki shorts can get. Yes my good man, you certainly do. And I have even further proof that I must remove the active verb usage of the word "rock" from my vernacular at all costs. Not that our new friend was completely delusional in his hubris: when asked for a jump, he modestly revealed that his truck featured "a 24-volt system I don't think you could handle." How are you going to argue with that? Restrained snickers gagging me more and more with each passing moment, I decided that, as amusing as this all was, an audible laugh would only compound our problems, and thus removed myself from the proceedings.

Good thing too, because I was able to acquire the services of an affable chap from Idaho who gave us a failed jump, then drove me back to the Stagecoach (the biker bar alluded to previously) to refill our milk jug. Not only was he sporting enough to then drive me back to our van, but he even hung around to make sure we got the thing up and running, which we did after a few shakes and jiggles. We all agreed that our Idahoan friend was perfect because he actively helped and didn't engage in superfluous tree-shade-mechanic-style diagnostics (an involuntary macho-affirmation response lumped into the same subcategory of fraternizing as "I totally coulda fucked that girl" and "I was totally gonna whip that guy's ass"). Sara gave him a free CD and off we went, finally!

The Stagecoach was about a mile down the highway and we proceeded

GOD HATES US ALL:



Sara's war wound: David Wilcox

there directly to top the tank off. Dave and I, already veterans of the joint, had spent the few minutes in transit talking up the magic of this log cabin museum to dead animal pelts, taxidermy (a 9 foot cougar!), John Wayne, and 1 percenters. Upon arriving we spent a few moments taking care of obligatory photo-ops, then took turns checking out the men's room—an immaculately-kept three foot wide cube with a toilet at one end and a sitting chair directly across from it. Perfect for a shambles or shooting up that special someone!

Yep, all this to go to North Dakota.

TUESDAY AUGUST 28 (Fargo, ND)

Today, with my own two eyes, I bore witness to Vern's consumption of a hot dog, a meatball sandwich, and six inches of a foot-long corn dog, the other half of which has been impaled on our antenna like a Jolly Roger.

Tour finally started tonight after what felt like two lifetimes of pointless driving. The NoDak accent jokes were coming fast and furious on the way into town courtesy of Brandt and Justin, the absolute finest undocumented comedy team of all time. My dialect, however, sucks.

The show tonight was moved to a bingo hall called "The Moose Lodge," and thus became a 21+ affair. Doesn't seem like that would bode well in a town like Fargo, where I would imagine 75 percent of the youth over voting age throw themselves to the mercy of their Scene Reports as soon as all 18 candles are blown out. XBRRX and Drums and Tuba don't meet up with us until Minneapolis, so tonight local bands Vertigo and The Deaths rounded out the bill.

Merch station was set up in the bar one room over from the stage, right next to a popcorn machine, making me feel even more like a circus concessionaire than I normally would. As it was the first show I was in desperate need of a bank for the change box, so I decided to strut down Broadway, past the long line of underage kids begging and pleading for admittance, looking for change and my first real meal of the day.

I found no food except another Goddamn Subway franchise and decided I couldn't dip in that lake again (having had it once Sunday night and twice yesterday). My gamble never paid off; there were no other fast

and convenient eateries anywhere near the venue. I had to settle for four pieces of domino-sized (as in "bones," not the brand) cheese pizza Brandt later bestowed upon me.

Change, however, was found quite easily at a VFW hall down the block, where a matronly woman named Annie displayed unflinching patience as I flip-flopped like a jackass over and over on how I wanted the small bills. In my defense, it'd been a long day, I was famished, and my thoughts were distracted by a nearby table of drunk, retirement-age xenophobes who, I ascertained by their matching "Blue Light Special" knit shirts, had just completed shifts at a local K-Mart. The hot topic of discussion appeared to be the audacity of a fellow co-worker who'd just gotten off the boat, so to speak:

— "Yah, so he pulls his back out, an den he starts lookin for da worker's comp, an dey'll give it to him, cause, ya know, dey don't want ta get called racist."

— "Well I guess I should just go down to city hall den and get myself one of dem foreign names."

— "Ya know, I've been working in dis country all my life, <dramatic pause> and I caught my share of hell – but I don't ask for *nothin*. And these people, dey come here and dey take; dey ask for; dey get..."

Back at the show, the crowd seemed a bit nonplussed by the whole affair. Band sounded good but the set isn't streamlined yet (only the second live show by the five-piece line-up) and ran a bit long at almost two hours. I also wonder if the audience members were actually bingo participants more interested in waiting for their numbers to be lit on the big bingo card above the drumkit.

Myself, I got to spend some time with a Cuban-expatriate Latin jazz instructor named Diego, who was so impressed by the inclusion of vinyl LPs at the merch table that he bowed before me. Fucking Commie.

Made up for my hunger by consuming many bottles of "Moose Drool," the local lager, into the wee small hours, a strategy replicated by everyone else except designated driver and king among men Dave Stone, who was so intent on getting us to bed safely that he came to a complete stop at every flashing yellow light on the deserted street between the lodge and the hotel.

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 29 (Outside Fargo)

The flies have been swarming every place we've passed through so far, and a small army has currently fortified themselves within our van. For the last half-hour we've been smashing them with one of Vern's shoes, but they just seem to keep multiplying; I can count ten carcasses littering our roof and still more continue to land on me. Combined with my lack of a shower, I feel quite like a fresh yummy piece of shit at the moment. And my right hand now smells like Vern's feet.

The van was shaking horribly on the highway this morning so we stopped somewhere outside of town to have the tires tended to. Turns out the brakes were fucked as well, and by the time all was said and done the band wound up dropping \$500 on repairs. Of course the story doesn't end there: we also had to kill four hours on a stretch of road that featured one Jiffy Lube, a tiny shopping center called Woodbridge Mall, and a Target. Dave Stone and I decided to check out the action at the mall while the rest of the crew strode down to Target, sans Vern, who stayed behind at the garage.

An Unwound Tour Journal, part I

Woodbridge Mall was a resoundingly depressing experience, a holdover from the first wave of the 1980s mall explosion that has since seen time leave it behind, utterly lacking in the amenities that mark its successors: food courts, multi-level design, atriums, actual shops, etc. Within its walls were two hair salons, a manicurist, a toy store that *rented* board games, a decrepit two-screen movie theatre, and many, many power walkers. Most importantly, there wasn't a bookstore of any sort, so my quest to purchase a copy of the Motley Crue biography continues!

Utterly dejected, we joined the others down at Target and managed to entertain ourselves for a period. Dave Doughman is one of those people whose Look can make absurd tacky clothing laugh-out-loud funny, and the store's hat selection was perfect fodder for him. Justin, Brandt and I bought various *Hot Wheels* cars and proceeded to indulge in all manner of childish fun at the "Food Ave. Deli;" namely, acting out car-chase scenes between Trosper's cop car and mine and Brandt's souped-up ghetto-issue low riders, complete with racial epithets and crash noises. Brandt also purchased some pocket-sized contraption that plays ultra-shitty sounding snippets of Britney Spears and Faith Hill hits, which were screeched out as a soundtrack. All this hoo-hah elicited looks from local residents that indicated we were registering as either retarded or "fags," maybe both.

All the mania could sustain us for only so long however, and by the time

Happy Hour rolled around, marking our *third hour* in the same Target, we'd all lapsed into near-comas. Vern's arrival with the van shortly after 5:30 was all that kept us from breaking down into tears. So now we're en route to Minneapolis, with the skies around us a foreboding dark green, rain blowing sideways in blinding sheets, and flies, the markers and connoisseurs of rot, ominously buzzing around in a frenzy.

THURSDAY AUGUST 30 (Minneapolis, MN)

There's an absolutely brilliant interview with Slayer in the new issue of *Guitar World*, and we're all quite excited about it this morning. Kerry King spends a good chunk of time expounding on the sophisticated theological perspective at the heart of their new record *God Hates Us All*: "You could ask me, do I believe in God? And I'd say, 'No - I don't!'" Jump back! Tom Araya also goes on record as being really into Sting's *Dream of Blue Turtles* album and therefore officially outs himself as a pud.

So we managed to make it to Minneapolis in one piece, pulling up in front of the Entry at ten o'clock sharp. The cancellation of sound check was a foregone conclusion, but you've gotta let the small stuff fall to the wayside when you're faced with the unmovable power of Nature, your only shield being a questionable vehicle and a half-eaten corn dog. The latter of the two, by the way, is in quite sad shape, having contracted a rather nasty case of mange in all the wind and rain, though it actually looks better now that its dead-bug-and-cornmeal-coating has been shed.

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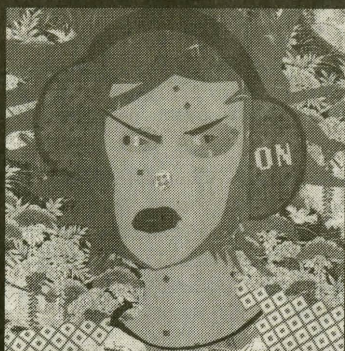
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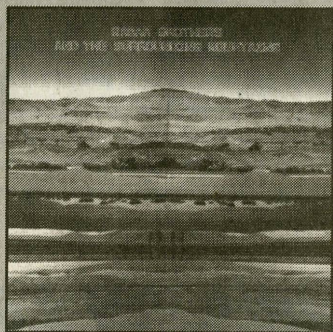
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GOD HATES US ALL:

Our arrival did not in any way abate the comedy of errors that was our Wednesday, however. Two minutes after parking the van for load-in Sara's hand got slammed in the front passenger door and remained there until Justin could get his car keys out of his pocket and into the lock. I wasn't present for the event but got a good look at the aftermath in the dressing room; cracked nails, gashes from the impact steadily releasing drops of the blood that had flowed to her fingertips faster than it could be released, instead backing-up around her knuckles and visibly throbbing, clotting in step with the bruising. Yes, she still played the show and didn't miss a fucking beat, the show-off.

For some reason, Vern's bass amp wasn't working, and twas feared it had been rained on in the NoDak thunderstorm. Luckily we have Professor Dave Stone with us, who cracked open that sumbitch and worked a little magic on it in no time flat. Show finally took off from there after a day of events that I have to think would have resulted in a justifiable cancellation from a lesser band. And it's a good thing it didn't, because the room was wall-to-wall enthusiastic and appreciative folk. Good, good show.

The cramped dance floor scene carried over into the "merch booth" (and I use the term liberally), which was actually a 2'x 2' bit of space at the end of the bar where I attempted to display 7 CDs, 10 LPs, 3 singles, buttons, and three t-shirt designs in three sizes each while dodging bar backs humping big heavy boxes of liquor on top of their heads. I also got to overhear some local dick music writer grill Steve from XBXX for details on KRS because he had some "music to shop around." Where do you even begin describing how pathetic it is for a man in his 30s to ask an 18-year-old kid for advice on breaking into the music biz?

FRIDAY AUGUST 31 (En route to Chicago, IL)

College shows are perhaps the musician's sneakiest manifestation of whoredom, much more so than wedding receptions and frat parties, which are implicitly *private* functions with not a whiff of artistic intent beyond parting a fool and their money. College gigs, on the other hand, parade as legitimate events where a band dictates the terms of their performance, all the way down to the material presented, with relative assurance that the engagement will be promoted to any and all interested parties. The carrot at the end of this stick, far beyond normal bar/club dates, is a guarantee typically twice the normal fee, fattened by the play money skimmed off the top of nebulous "student use fees" that appear on every tuition statement.

How's that different from any other show? Well, there's a turvy to the high guarantee bit—it's being offered by "promoters" (usually half-wit college radio tightasses enjoying a brief flirtation with aggrandized non-celebrity types before their descent into marriage and obesity) with *no* financial stake in the outcome. So, things like advertising outside the campus cafeteria never seem too crucial, and trivial matters like sound systems or drinking water never get a second thought. Musicians fully anticipate this: they know damn well going into it that they'll be playing to random yahoos who got in free with their board cards hoping to hear Dave Matthews covers; that the sound will be shit; that someone in the throes of a mental stutter will be running things; that they might get paid via US mail three weeks after the fact. Still they sign on. Close your eyes, think about something pleasant, it'll all be over before you know it. So if college shows are whoring, consider the Unwound/XBXX free show at the University of Wisconsin-Madison a truly epic gangbang. It

An Unwound Tour Journal, part I

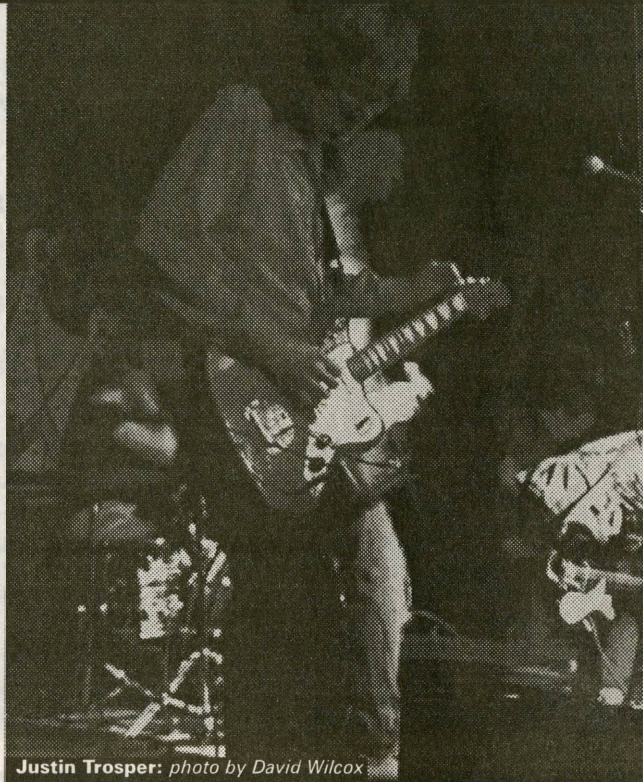
was held outdoors, with a lake full of sailboats providing the backdrop to a stage surrounded by people eating their dinner. When we arrived at sundown it felt like a Palm Beach resort. Doughman cranked *Zeppelin III* over the sound system while we set everything up, which seemed to clear out much of the riff-raff. I overheard one departing mother tell her disturbed five-year-old daughter that when she got to college she'd "like music like that too." (smile)

The crowd estimate I heard for the evening was around 1,500 people, and of that amount I'd peg about 85 percent of them as guys with puka shell necklaces and Abercrombie and Fitch sweatshirts. Most of them spent the evening sipping beer in between cell phone calls and exchanging glances of confused silent laughter, the "do these people really think they know what they're doing?" kind.

Some Jay Z look-alike approached me at one point, posse in tow, under the assumption that I was Unwound's manager and could pull some strings to get him on stage in between bands to freestyle. My pat response of "no" resulted in a slew of insults being hurled my way as he stormed off, balls in hand, "punk motherfucker" being the only line I could decipher. DJ Mushmouth then got into it with XBXR X because there was an unused microphone on stage during their set that he'd been blatantly Jim Crowed out of.

Poor XBXR X. Madison had been earmarked as a trouble spot for them a few days prior to the show when the promoter attempted to kick them off the bill after hearing "from sources" that they break everything and cause trouble. For one, I could not imagine XBXR X causing trouble because they're barely more than teenagers and there's no way on god's green earth they could *finish* trouble. As far as damage goes, their equipment has more chips and dents than most but there's a reason they never plug into house systems—they don't want to risk fucking up other people's stuff. But whatever—a semi-reasonable concern that can be dispelled with a couple of phone calls, right? Nope, and here's the true genius of college promoters at work: her solution was that U of W would still let them play on campus, headlining a show to be held at the exact same time that *Unwound* was playing. Yes—the headliner's handpicked support act would instead play a competing show. She was rightfully told to get fucked by both bands' booking agents and dropped the idea, but still wasn't finished crawling up everyone's ass. Her "compromise" on the matter was that XBXR X could play, but if they wanted to get their whopping \$150 guarantee they "couldn't pull any of that play for 10 minutes shit." They would be expected to play the default contractually obligated 30-45 minute set, even though their entire record doesn't last 20 (and, if we want to split hairs, Unwound played twice their contracted length for no extra money and I didn't see her pull the plug). So they played half an hour, their longest set ever, and pulled it off by standing on stage in the dark for 15 minutes while a drum loop played. They looked miserable. Adding insult to injury, Chris XBXR X got bitch slapped while selling merchandise when he told some sorority sister that their stickers weren't free. While he stood there in shock, carefully noting the ready stance of her boyfriend Fred Durst, she took one anyway.

It should go without saying that our lovely promoter was no nicer to them, but boy howdy, she could not have been more forthcoming with hospitality for us, unless of course she'd bothered to honor the section of Unwound's contract underneath that heading. She kept offering to get



Justin Trosper: photo by David Wilcox

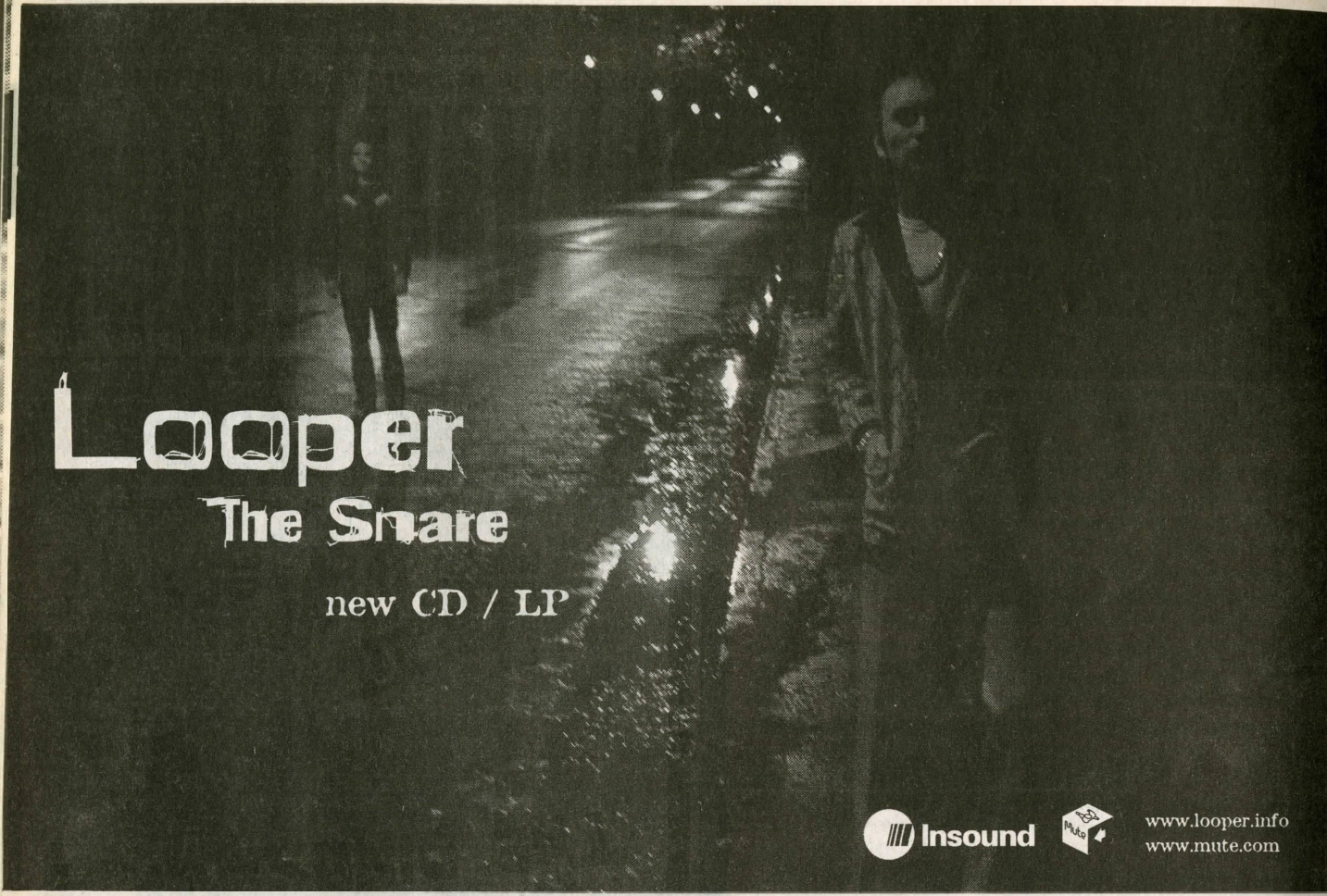
me a Brat and a beer so she could give me the "Wisconsin Experience," and it took all my will to not, in the immortal words of Dave Clifford, unfurl my parachute and descend upon Dick Joke Island.

Yes, Madison eats my shit, but I must give due credit to the campus bookstore, where the staff is wise enough to carry Motley Crue's *The Dirt* in their regular inventory, no doubt aiding countless students with their dissertations on Tommy's girlfriend Bullwinkle, who looks like a moose and can shoot her cum across a room.

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 2 (Bloomington, IN)

We're in town for Bloomington Fest, a 3-day festival featuring tons of heretofore unknown bands and most of the Secretly Canadian roster (the label's headquarters are in town). Danielson Famile already played here on Friday night, much to my chagrin, but I'm trying to console myself with the knowledge that a band called John Wilkes Booze is on the bill tonight. Do bring on Jesus Christ Superfly and REO Speedealer as well!

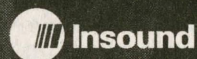
Ms. Lund originally hails from this little inbred township (as do The Gizmos!), which feels quite a bit like the inbred township her bandmates call home. We're staying at the house she grew up in, a quaint deep blue abode with a tiny but brilliant front porch you could stare at leaves and dirt from until your muscles atrophy, or at least until your ass goes numb. Haven't met her mother yet, who has a pottery studio in their garage and apparently never throws anything away, judging by the piles of magazines and papers that confront you at every third step in the house. A classic scholar. I've also gotten to see the remaining relics of Sara's rebellious youth, including the Red Hot Chili Peppers poster that I know is hers, no matter what she says.



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GOD HATES US ALL:

We spent the last two days in Chicago, with shows at the Empty Bottle on Friday and Fireside Bowl on Saturday. Both were fine, Empty Bottle in an efficient, comfortable, "glad ta have ya" way and Fireside in an everything-smells-like-piss-don't-touch-the-walls shithole-charm way. Got to spend some quality time with an old friend who was at one time familiar with the contours of my current girlfriend. Also finally met *Your Flesh* publisher Peter Davis, who bought me whiskey until I begged off and then introduced me to various members of AtomBombPocketKnife, including the member who tends bar at the Empty Bottle. I'd recalled her beautifully subtle hot-goth-girl look fondly since she assisted a particular drinking binge of mine there years ago. It was nice to see my memory wasn't exaggerated.

A few hours were enjoyed before the Fireside show at the home of Unwound pal Big Mike, a man so large he dwarfs Vern. He possesses an enviable collection of soul records and videos that could entertain any geek I know for weeks. Watched a bit of *Wattstax* and an amazing bootleg of Van Halen at the US Festival, where DLR was boosted and drunk and even more of a monkey than usual, missing entire verses and slurring what little he could remember. His taunt to a water-hurling fan in the front row of "I'll fuck your girlfriend, maaan" was enunciated beautifully, however. "That's not a microphone in my pants California, I'm just happy to see ya!"

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 5 (Newport, KY)

Four p.m. and we're just now on the road to Oberlin. As was the case last Wednesday, we had to wait 5 hours for the van to get some basic tune-up maintenance. Fortunately we were able to keep our hotel rooms until late in the afternoon and didn't have to kill time in a discount shopping outlet.

Show at the Southgate house last night saw the poorest turnout of any show so far, with a little under a hundred people there. It actually translated into my not being terribly busy most of the night and so I got to relax and enjoy the music as a fan more than usual. There couldn't have been more than 15 people in attendance when XBXRX went on, and they responded with a pretty inspired bit of directed aggression. Steve did an amazing baseball slide into a row of tables early on that made the crowd take a few extra steps back, and Chris pulled off a picture-perfect handstand on Michael's drumkit that climaxed with him falling over on his head, tearing down the drums and most of their *personal* stagelights (take that, Madison) along with him. Justin recreated the feat at the end of Unwound's set (during "Bodies") and bashed his leg up against Sara's kick drum, earning a healthy little bruise for his efforts. Drums and Tuba (who joined the tour in Chicago) played what I thought was their best set so far, more textural with less emphasis on their tight, fusion-y time signature changes that frankly bore me to tears.

Newport will also be remembered as the night Vern severed the cord with whatever Kurt Cobain resemblance people kept finding in him. I think the final straw was a letter to the editor of *Rockpile* magazine entitled "Weekend at Vernie's," which queried why two of the members of Unwound were "propping up a stuffed Kurt Cobain doll *Weekend at Bernie's*-style" in a photo that had run in a previous issue. He has since dyed his hair jet black and shaved his 3-day stubble into a variation of the Fu Manchu, kind of like John Christ or Eerie Von circa the first Danzig record.

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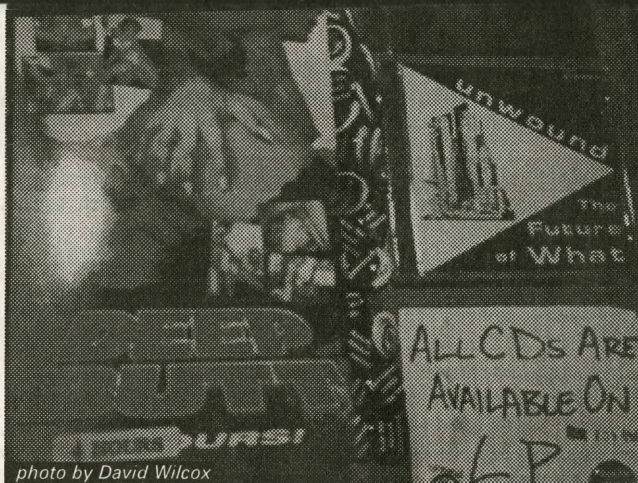


photo by David Wilcox

Nashville on Monday—Big Rock Club experience at the Exit-In, where a system of neon lights outlines a guitar body on the ceiling and a Wall of Fame lists notables who've graced their stage, my two personal favorites being Jim Varney and Chuck Mangione. Some dreadful album-rock filler that I fear may have been the new Iggy Pop CD pounded relentlessly out of the house system in between bands. Oh—and bourbon was \$7 a shot, in Tennessee of all places! Unless you're in New York, you can almost always call the appropriateness of a venue based on their liquor prices.

Post-show festivities were held at a historic area bar called Springwater, where our hostess was an obnoxious, beyond-inebriated tart Doughman met on previous visits with his band, Swearing at Motorists. She and a handful of friends whom I doubt even came to the show hung around making us uncomfortable with their starfucker treatment until very, very late. Our hostess jumped into the back of my chair at one point when I was leaning forward and asked if she could tickle my ribs and kiss my earlobes. When I replied that I'd appreciate her not doing so, she harnessed enough motor skills to spit out, "Are you *gaaay* or sumthin?" She then moved around the circle of our entourage (*enthusiastically* including Sara) being shot down repeatedly and providing all manner of ribald amusement along the way.

To get a small break from the sexual harassment I wandered down the street and gazed upon the fatuous city block-sized Parthenon replica that was under construction. In Memphis, the big civic center is known as The Pyramid. Does the state of Tennessee actively encourage the hiring of "Introduction to Western Civilization" professors as city planners?

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 6 (Oberlin, OH)

Oberlin College is an extremely well funded private school with a healthy contingent of music students. Drums and Tuba are very popular here, which might be expected from a school that counts John McEntire as an alumnus. Lots of hippie lesbian Ani DiFranco types in attendance in light of D&T's *Righteous Babe* release. I did not succeed in persuading anyone to play Janis Ian covers.

We pulled into Oberlin well past load-in time but considering the van delays it could have been much worse. Still had enough time for sound check but the doors had to be held for an extra quarter-hour, while the line to get in grew steadily. In the grand scheme of things, not a big deal,

GOD HATES US ALL:

at least to us. We started switching out Unwound and XBXR's equipment, not hurriedly, joking around a bit and enjoying ourselves but still steadily moving the gear.

The "promoters" for the evening (again, this will drive home the silliness of college shows) were being supervised by some boorish faculty advisor/chaperone/den mother type whose job presumably was to wipe their asses and make sure they flossed before bed. She did not care for us. Not one bit. We had tried her patience all evening and our irresponsible ambivalence about the nonexistent near-riot brewing beyond the hall's steel floodgates was the push that threw Big Momma off her stool and into a fit. "Would you all quit farting around?!" echoed all around us, reeking of condescension and the threat of an impending "time out." What could we do, suddenly faced with the frustration we'd unwittingly caused this poor woman? We laughed. Heartily and openly. She was clearly not amused: "We've done 1100 concerts this year (quick math – over three a day) and I *refuse* to let you all think you're *special*!" That brought Doughman into the fray for a quick debate about professionalism, age and maturity, in which he made some very good points that could have been easily rebutted by anyone privy to our behavior in Target the week before.

Everything went fine from there, but I'm pretty sure that, in her head, that woman killed us in countless imaginative ways for the rest of the evening.

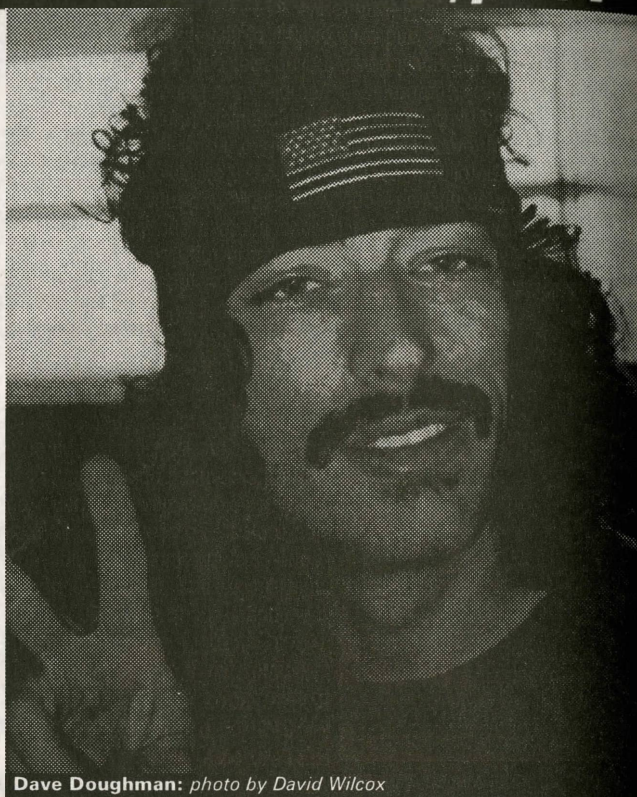
FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 7 (Detroit, MI)

For once we made it to town on schedule, but promptly got lost due to faulty Mapquest directions, which added another half hour onto what should have been a leisurely three-hour drive. I count my lucky stars to have not been behind the wheel, because watching J Tro play chicken in traffic with little idea where he was supposed to be or how to get there took me back to my first tour, and the experience of getting stuck in the madness of Philadelphia's one-way system for two early morning hours, fully wrecked from sleep deprivation.

After righting our course, we had the chance to drive past Comerica Park, the new-ish home of the Detroit Tigers, a hideous aesthetic wreck even more displeasing to the eye than Enron Field back home. Particularly awful are the huge white Bengal tigers with baseballs stuffed in their mouths lining the outfield walls. I turned in my seat to gauge everyone else's reaction to it when I noticed that Sara's face was smashed up against the window, her hand resting open palmed against the glass alongside it, entranced by the sight of a coffee shop across the street and meekly muttering "There's coffee." Ever seen the cartoons where a starving character visualizes the smell of a bakery floating by, then hypnotically follows it? That's sorta what she looked like.

Venue for the evening, The Magic Stick, is a fun-filled multi-level complex where the club itself sits above a bowling alley, comfortably fits 400 or so and, unlike Chicago's Fireside Bowl, has whole sections where you might consider sitting down or walking wearing your own shoes. There are two different eateries on-site: "Sgt. Pepperoni's Rock n Roll Pizzeria" (ugh); and a café where Justin, Sara, Dave Stone and I had hands down the best meal of tour so far, served up by a waiter who first called himself a moron and then informed those three that they "rock" (there's that pesky active verb form again!), so I gather the typical Unwound fan is an idiot waiter.


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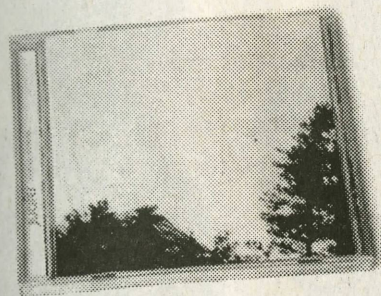


Dave Doughman: photo by David Wilcox

Joe Preston (of the band Thrones) paid a surprise visit tonight, being on the road himself but having the night off. I hardly recognized him with his new braids. Sounds like he's been having a better than average Thrones tour, so hopefully his shows with us next week will continue the trend. As for the bands we've been touring with, tonight was our last evening together and it's a bit sad. Wish the show itself had been more climactic; the crowd was punier than expected and not terribly responsive. XBXR again played to almost no one. It seems like they've had fun overall but were only happy with three or four of the shows, and much as I've enjoyed their company I can see where they weren't in their optimum environment (tiny all-ages clubs and basements). Drums and Tuba have gotten better receptions and been quite a pleasure to be around, friendly, even displaying some dry humor, but musically I remain unmoved.

If only I could say the same for the two fuckers who, on separate occasions, saw fit to knock their beer and backwash all over my pants and the Unwound wares in the lightless ghetto provided by the club. We're going to have to start requesting track lighting on the rider.

Next issue: Eastward, Ho! Follow the exploits of the band as they head to NY. Their timing couldn't be worse. 



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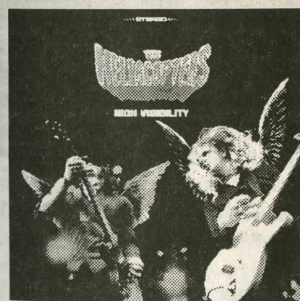
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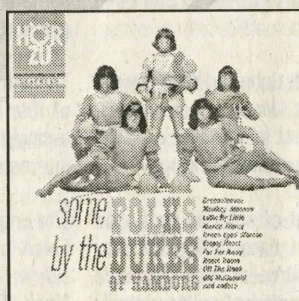


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Suntanama

by James Jackson Toth

It's well after midnight, and I've been waiting inside a converted, hollowed out wine cask in the basement of the New York City club Tonic, waiting for any of the six members of Suntanama to arrive so that I can conduct this interview.

Earlier in the night, the band—singer Catfish, guitarists John and Keith, bassist Dave, drummer Moose, and multi-instrumentalist Jason—seem almost excited to be interviewed for what would be the first feature article on the band (misleading blurbs in alternative newsweeklies notwithstanding).

Suntanama then proceed to play a rollicking set of solid, blues-based rock and roll. Everyone seems to have a great time during the set, including the band. It becomes clear that any journalist with the nerve to declare Suntanama "ironists" risks being accused of never actually witnessing the band perform.

Still, as the free drinks began to flow and the night wears on, the band grows increasingly evasive and difficult to connect with.

Eventually I am joined in the cask by Moose, the band's amiable drummer. The tape recorder isn't rolling when he shows me his John Bonham tattoo, intr oduces me to his cousin, who happens to walk by where we're sitting, and refuses to believe that I've never tried a German meat dish called *sauer brauten*. Moose is a "friendly drunk." He momentarily puts me at ease, but he disappears as fast as he enters, spilling his vodka on the way out.

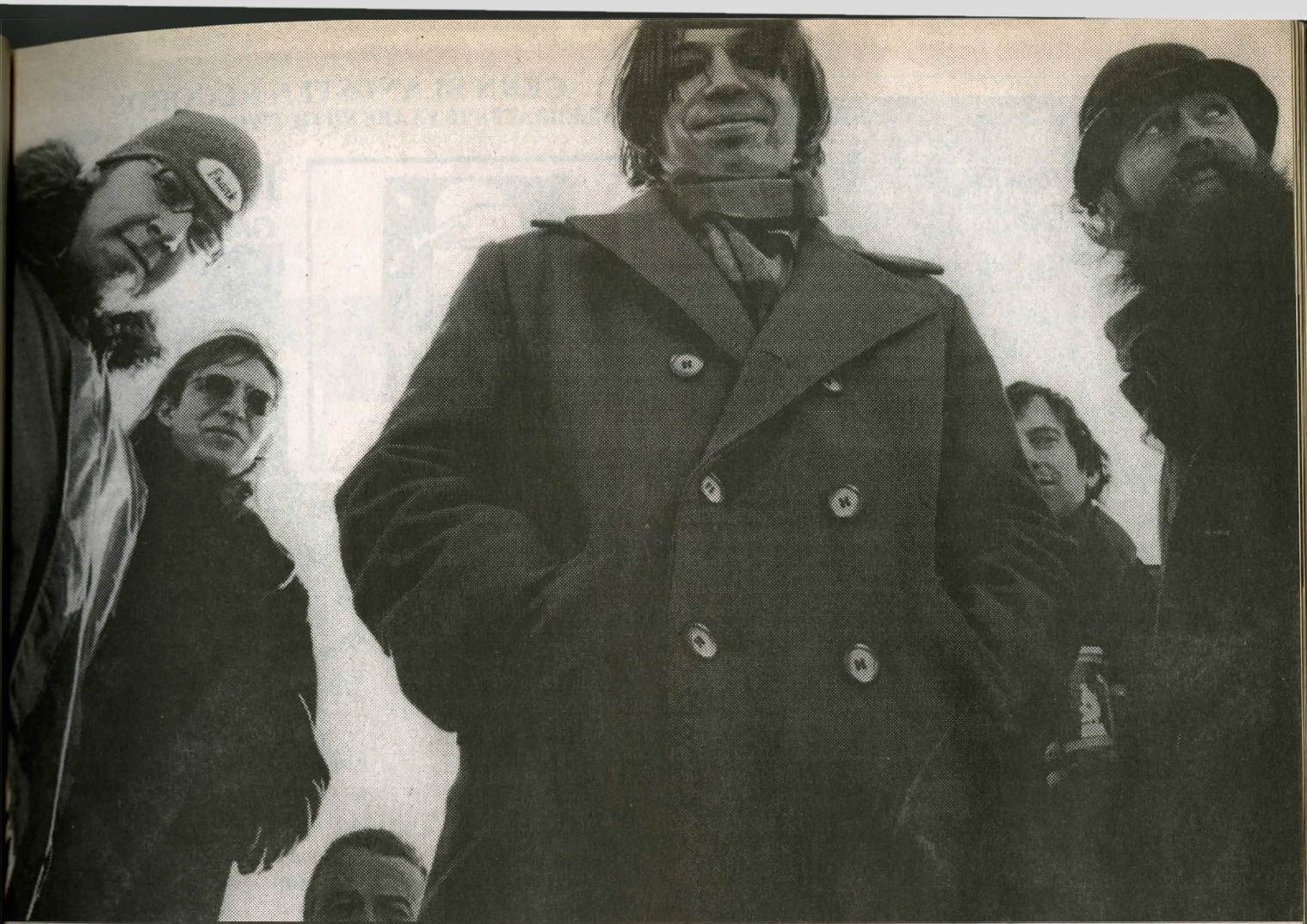
At this point I am rather tired and looking to get on with the proceedings, quite aware that I am missing a midnight acoustic performance by Avey Tare upstairs. I venture back up to look for the band. Excuses and promises are made. Relations become strained.

Eventually I snag guitarists John and Keith, the latter decked out in an oversized Wu Tang Clan t-shirt. They are friendly and well spoken, if somewhat intoxicated. It is from these two members of Suntanama that I gain the vital information and answers to the questions in my spiral notepad.

This information, for all intents and purposes, could provide the readers of *Your Flesh* with an informed essay on the band, but is better kept to a single paragraph so as not to eclipse from the word-count the more interesting developments of the evening.

The origin of the name, I am told, comes from an Ol' Dirty Bastard lyric. I also learn that the band was formed two years ago on a Minneapolis sidewalk, and that Suntanama "hate the elusive shit" for which the No Neck Blues Band, the group with which Suntanama shares three members, have become known. I am told that the scarcity of Suntanama's 7" single on *Sound@One* can be chalked up solely to Keith's laziness on matters of cover-making, and not to any sort of mischievously self-conscious (non) image. They are recording their debut album with Neil Hagerty in Virginia. Hagerty himself assured me that Chicago label Drag City would be releasing the record, a fact that the band themselves refuse to corroborate. I learn that Suntanama are inspired not only by the Stones (the band they most closely resemble) but by obscure bluegrass players such as Chris Barrow, a sideman known for his session work with Leonard Cohen, among others. "Session players are the best," John reveals to me with a chuckle.

Enter Catfish. Catfish is the reason this story is being written. When I met him earlier in the evening, he was sober, speaking in a soft, friendly manner. Two or three regional accents and a veritable wine cask worth of spirits later, he's obnoxious, speaking exclusively in a faux British accent, acting defensively and telling me to "fuck off" when I so much



as mention his band's apparent connection to the No Neck Blues Band. I'm bigger than he is so I press on, baiting him with references to the Pure Prairie League. Imagine Dylan in *Don't Look Back* squaring off not against some bespectacled and wiry journalist/sycophant, but with a broad-shouldered fan of Ragnar Redbeard who is looking for holes in this Suntanama story by any means necessary.

Catfish looks a bit like Tom Petty, acts like both Gallagher Brothers, dresses like Gene Clark, and sings like Mick Jagger. He is Ozzy in a nudie suit. His place of origin changes drastically each time I ask, though bandmate John assures me that the cockney-speaking Catfish is "as Brooklyn as it gets."

Catfish has obviously learned a lot watching and admiring rock stars act obnoxious and opaque, but his occasional admissions betray the feel of a young man who doesn't quite fit the clothes he has picked out for himself. He gives the impression of a desperate actor, which is all a good rock star needs to be anyway. And Catfish is a good rock star.

"As far as us being an offshoot of No Neck (Blues Band), that's fucking bullshit!" he spits from across the table. "This thing's been percolating for a long time."

I explain that until the debut record comes out and Suntanama forge their own distinct identity, people will doubtlessly be drawn by proxy to the affiliation with No Neck, regardless of how fair that may or may not be. Catfish is livid.

I then bring up Derek and the Dominos, because it seems like a good example, and I know Catfish will appreciate the reference. I explain to Catfish that, whether he likes it or not, members of No Neck are marginally

identifiable characters within the counter-cultural mass of noise freaks, jazz weirdoes, and art fags in the ever-expanding New York "scene." I explain that much like Clapton could not escape the stigma of being Clapton, perhaps the No Neck connection will be similarly hard to shake.

"That's a bad example," he counters. "I want everyone to know that Suntanama is not a No Neck spin-off," he plainly states, spitting out the last two words like they were vinegar on his tongue. "I'm sick of being written up in the 'Jazz and Experimental' section."

Although it isn't clear to what publication he specifically refers, or if he's speaking in general, one can certainly begin to sympathize with Catfish. His band, admittedly, sounds nothing like the No Neck Blues Band, who, speaking in terms of sound, are to Suntanama what Nurse With Wound are to the Black Crowes. Also, taking into account the origin of the band, during which time not a single member of the No Neck tribe played in Suntanama, it seems clear that Catfish, brash and defensive as he may seem, may have a legitimate complaint. Even I insensitively opened the interview with a round of No Neck queries. Suntanama is a rock and roll band.

As for the collective modus operandi, I ask Keith if Suntanama would like to be noticed by people outside of the loft-as-venue set. "Sure, we want exposure. We like to do a good job. We do put the effort into playing in front of people."


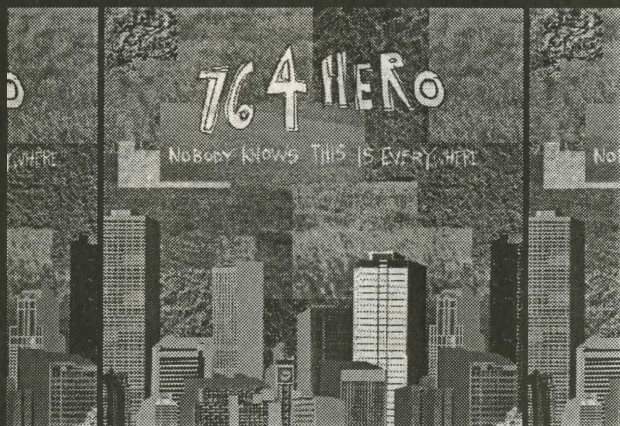
With their bluesy loose salutes to the unrefined spirit of decadent rock and roll, and a frontman with enough personality to fill the entire Estrus roster, the dice are sure to tumble Suntanama's way, and it's a sure bet it'll be on their own autonomous terms when they do. 

Photo by Sara Press



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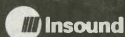
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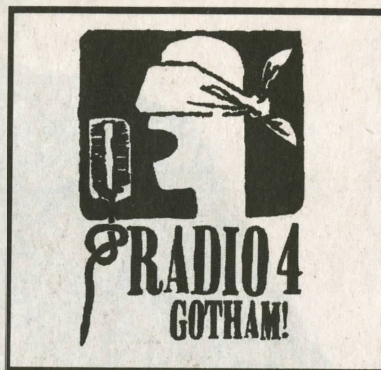
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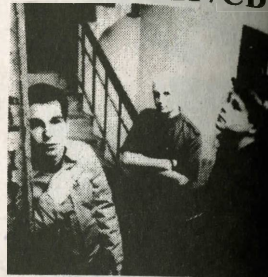
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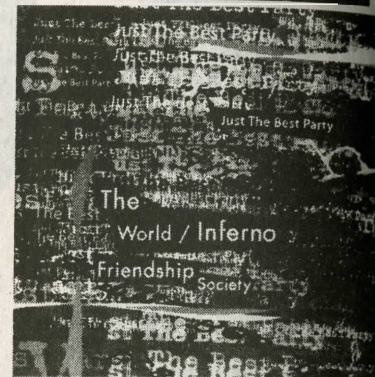
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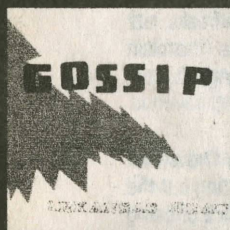


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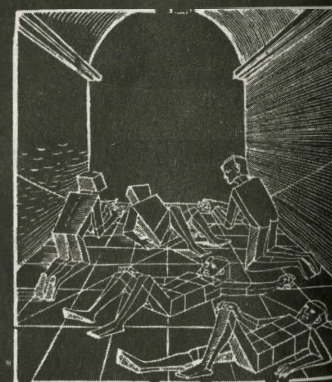
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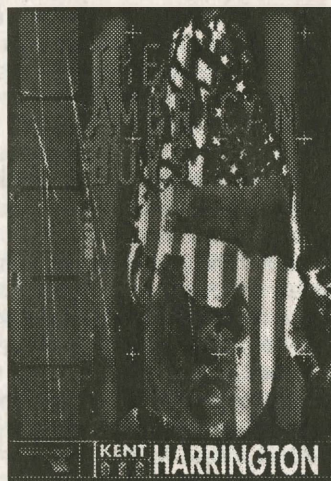
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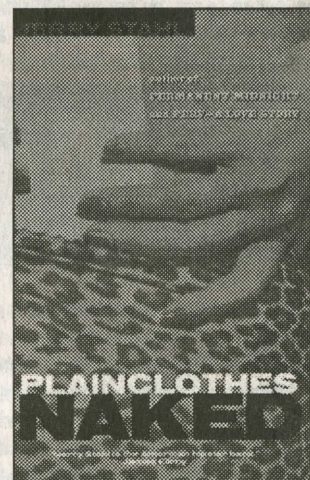
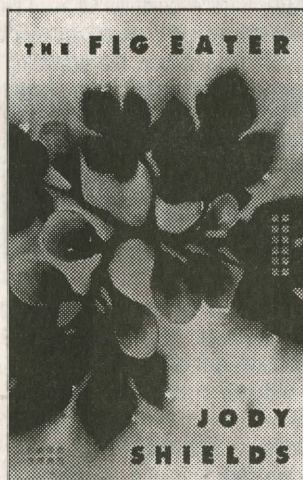
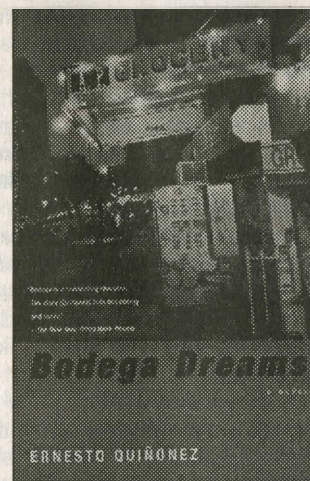
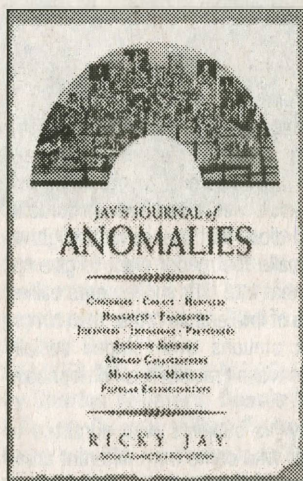


THE AMERICAN BOYS

by Kent Harrington; Dennis McMillan, 2000

The American Boys is a spy-thriller that introduces us to CIA operative Alex Law toward the end of his career. Alex Law has changed the fate of nations almost single-handedly during his tenure as a CIA operative. If you find that last sentence absurd, then this book may not be for you. In order to entirely enjoy this book you will need to suspend your disbelief. Alex Law has made a lot of enemies in the agency through the years. He is a man of power, but he is also a man hated by several of his colleagues. Hated so much that one of them has married his ex-wife and is hell-bent on destroying Alex's life while in the meantime carrying out a plot to assassinate the President.

Admittedly, I have not read much writing in the spy or espionage genre, so perhaps I needed to settle in to what seemed like overly dramatic characters and an over-the-top plot. I had a hard time getting into this book at first, but eventually found myself looking forward to reading it. As strange as it may sound, I find it easier to relate to and believe the plots of Hong Kong action films than I do the plots of Hollywood action movies. In Hong Kong films the tension and conflict is always of a more personal nature: revenge, personal justice, protecting a single life, etc. In Hollywood action movies it seems that American audiences want to see the world saved every time they buy a ticket: Aliens are invading, the asteroid will destroy the earth, the President is going to be shot. I think what redeemed this book for me was the personal conflict and tensions between Alex Law and the agent who has set out to destroy him. Jealousy, hatred, and revenge on a personal level. As absurd as this may sound, the book's Presidential assassination plotline very much takes a backseat to the personal conflict between Alex and his nemesis.



There is something intangibly appealing about this book, and if you like a good thriller, I think you will enjoy it. *Eric Frost*

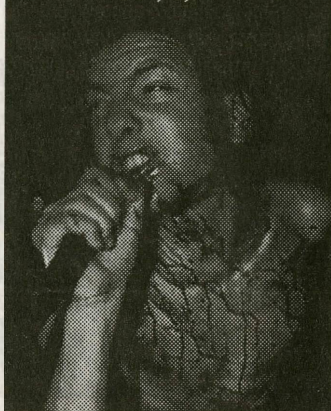
AMERICAN HARDCORE

by Steven Blush; Feral House, 2001

I have little respect for someone who uses a literary opportunity for an ulterior motive, which is what author Blush does here. The former music promoter makes a disingenuous attempt to document the history of the "hardcore" punk movement while pimping his third generation band, No Trend, which had absolutely nothing to do with any of it.

AMERICAN HARDCORE

A Tribal History by Steven Blush



And that's the least of our worries, even though the damn thing sold out its first printing of 5,000, equally worrisome.

The history of anything is generally a mine-filled literary excursion, a venture that requires astute observation (being there, for example) and a vast and varied network of accounts and sources. Perhaps most egregious in this case is Blush's reliance on dubious sources, which is knotted together with his inept reasoning skills, an inability to convey thought via the written word, and a disregard for accuracy.

Other than that, though, knock

yourself out. But be warned that while somewhat entertaining, the book fails to capture the mood of the era.

The entertainment value, though, is delightful, like *People* magazine meets the local college newspaper, where the inane is heralded.

Shining example of dubious sources: this non-sequiter from Jello Biafra on page 206? "You know me? There's nothing I like less than intolerant people..." A statement like that from an intolerant, myopic man like Biafra is mind numbing, but almost makes sense when taken in context. At certain points, though, the unbridled idiocy that passes for thought—from both subjects and author—will make the reader want to give up. In the opening chapter, Blush asserts that late '70s movements calling for the scrapping of disco were displays of intolerance rather than simply spirited gimmicks. He states, "Rock stations even staged socially sanctioned disco record burnings. If this wasn't racism and homophobia, I don't know what was."

Perhaps he was more encouraged by his subjects who admitted to beating up people who had long hair or who came from different areas of the country. Blush's politically correct shortsightedness, coupled with his failure to rely on heresy, is a fatal flaw.

While he does manage to maintain a pedestrian grip on what "hardcore" was, his gossipy tone fails to convey the passion and the prevailing

cronies so readily embraced when they returned to the Midwest from DC with black Xs on their hands and shorn locks, quickly adopting the style of their new hardcore brethren. He's even hypocritical enough to deny it in these pages.

The numerous inaccuracies in *American Hardcore* fall into the category of amateurish and humorous rather than harmful. The author's referral to "...Peter Marwick, one of America's most prestigious accounting firms" when speaking of Gibby Haynes's (Butthole Surfers) past job is actually Peat Marwick, the internationally renowned and esteemed company. Blush also lovingly refers to Houston's Mydolls as an all female band but Jorge, the drummer, was a male. Fear's legendary appearance on *Saturday Night Live* on Oct. 31, 1981, is reported to be in November. John Belushi is reported to have died several weeks later but his death date was March 5, 1982, four months later.

These are such rudimentary details that any journalist or author should catch, details that undermine credibility. Blush also manages to lump No Trend in with Flipper at one point.

It is an amazing stretch to equate almost anyone with Flipper, who defied and defined the hardcore ethic. Besides being historically opportunist and audacious in a most childish manner, the omission of Flipper as a pioneer of the movement, despite the fact that their music didn't conform, is a glaring deficit.

Blush's over reliance on third hand information renders his book an inaccurate tome on one of music's defining moments as well as society's. In the early '80s, in a Detroit newspaper, John Brannon called hardcore "blues music for the suburbs," a smart and succinct starting point for such an exposé.

Better than that, the people who could have provided more insight were either never contacted or refused to talk about the era.

The words from Poison Idea's Jerry A are the smartest thing anyone in the book said: "I never gave a shit about the scene or unity or whatever. We made our own fuckin' music and hung with our friends. There were some great hardcore bands and some really shitty ones. But I didn't hang out on the scene. I thought it all got very stupid very fast."

Hardcore, indeed. *Miller*

BODEGA DREAMS

by Ernesto Quiñonez; *Vintage Contemporaries, 2000*

I was intrigued: Quiñonez is being touted as the leading ray in a new wave of urban Latino writers and this, his first novel, has been described as an ingenious bit of ethnic neo-noir. But this hits me as being more in the non-noir vein of Bernard Malamud's (*The Assistant; The Fixer*) tales of low-rent desperation than the nail-biting nerve-fuck of Jim Thompson (against who all others are judged). Set in today's Spanish Harlem, it does, however, have the requisite labyrinth plot twists and the classic "crime does not pay" lesson/ending. And it's not too shabby for a first novel, at that.

Our boy, Chino, has managed to steer clear of the path of drugs and crime taken by most of his peers, instead marrying a Catholic girl and setting his sights on college. But, through his delinquent, high-school protector Sapo, he gets caught up in the world of Willie Bodega, an ex '60s radical who uses his profits from crack traffic to better the neighborhood. With the aid of his lawyer partner, Bodega gives student loans, converts burnt-out buildings to budget housing, helps out new businesses, even backs a Salsa music museum, all the while remaining unseen and only a mythic name to those he assists. Starry-eyed and beaming, he espouses his dream of elevating Hispanic America from its imposed squalor and of reuniting with an old flame from the '60s—who just happens to be Chino's aunt. At first, Chino writes off Bodega and his operation as pure folly, but he inevitably finds himself drawn into a world which offers hope for his people—and jeopardizes his own future. In return for a new apartment, he agrees to serve as romantic liaison, doing his best to rationalize his involvement with the benevolent drug lord and keep it all *on the level*. But the fallout from mysterious, seemingly unrelated events pulls him deeper into the mire. Blanca,

Pulp

reviews

sense of mission that drove pioneers like Toxic Reasons (a band that opened many doors and do not appear in this book, save for a paragraph and a disparaging quote from a Butthole Surfer) to live on \$5 a day.

The DIY ethic is inevitably delved into, and with some degree of cultural perspective. Still, key omissions and the tentative tone make it apparent that the author is an outsider, despite his promise in the forward that "it takes a hardcore mind to write a hardcore book."

He now pushes his book while wearing a Germs t-shirt, the same shirt he likely wore as a college kid in the early '80s, all a-twitter over this music form he so lovingly praises.

Meanwhile, there are more shady sources than a *Washington Post* story. Barry Henssler, a gossipy pissant who is capable of stupidity to match his girth, injects cartoonish, juvenile perspective that has little to do with reality.

In fact, I recall the humor in watching those Ohio kids (Necros) cringe at the women who populated the early scene, truly terrified of any female who would dare return their slack-jawed stares.

At one point Henssler attempts to shed the herd mentality he and his

Chino's pure-as-cane-sugar wife, is his conscience, always a reminder of what's really at stake. God knows I've read enough of this hardboiled stuff, but I didn't really see the big twist coming at the end of this one. Seems so obvious now, I feel quite the pud. Good job.

Only real problem I had was a scene where Chino, being questioned by police, was a little on the James Dean side. Tough back-talk from such a bookish character was difficult to swallow. Minor gripe.

Quiñonez clearly abides by the most important rule of his craft: Write What You Know. This is where he's from, the characters a reflection of people he's grown up with. This is how they live, how they talk. No, I don't hail from Spanish Harlem. But I've been around enough individuals who do, and I was uncannily reminded of several of them during the course of this book. It's obvious that Chino and the author are one and the same. In the story, Chino is in college (majoring in literature), wishing others in his community would choose a similar path. Quiñonez still lives in New York, teaching bilingual fourth grade in the public school system. If you're a fan of classic crime-noir, this could be a little on the soft side. But if you've plowed through most of the classics, this'll make a pleasant detour. *Peter Aaron*

CITY OF BONES

by Michael Connelly; Little, Brown & Co., 2002

Connelly's best at what is called the police procedural and in the current field there are few who match him at it. This is what I think is either the tenth or eleventh book in as many years and once again it features his main protagonist, Harry Bosch. All of Connelly's books are worth reading, but his stand-alone novels and the last couple of Bosch books *Trunk Music* and *Angel's Flight* suffered from some softening and saw the guy losing a bit of the steely edge of his earlier novels. Fortunately *City of Bones* jumps back to the speed the Bosch series peaked at last with *The Last Coyote*, delving deeper into the guy's tortured psyche, just the way I like it. The only misstep is a love interest with an outcome telegraphed so far out that you can't help to know what's coming. Nonetheless, Connelly is king when it comes to keeping his details straight and there are few writers in the game better at character development. Bottom line: whether it's his softer fare or a sure-fire grinder like this one, it's nice to see somebody transcending the genre by taking it into the best seller's list. Pick it up and while you're at it, be on the lookout this summer for Connelly's *Blood Work* to hit the silver screen. It is the first of his books to be adapted to film and will star Clint Eastwood. Could be really good if it stays true to the source. I for one am thrilled, but considering the Hollywood track record, I approach with cautious reserve. *Peter Davis*

DARK KNIGHT 2: THE DARK NIGHT STRIKES AGAIN Issues 1 and 2

by Frank Miller and Lynn Varley; DC Comics, 2002

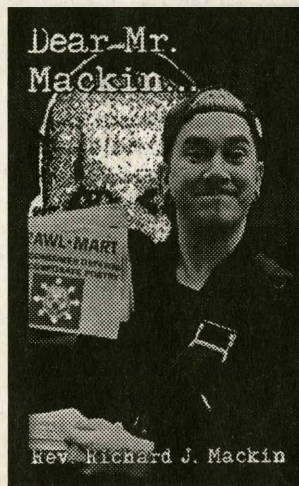
I admit it. I've got a problem with Frank Miller. I think his comics are pointlessly violent, needlessly elaborate, and overly reliant on a very limited bag of tricks to get the job done. On the other hand, I'll also admit that the classic *Dark Knight Returns* was one of the favorite comics of my youth. It was with conflicting emotions, then that I purchased the *DK2* at my local comic shop. Would this mark the triumphal redemption of Miller? Or would this, like so many other recent projects, dull the memory of early creativity and masterful storytelling? It turns out that both these things are somewhat true. The first issue of *DK2* is, really, quite a lot of fun. The story is predictably all encompassing. Lex Luthor runs a shadow government fronted by an imaginary president. He keeps the public pacified through streams of brain draining media. Superman is his servile tool. Against this backdrop of corruption Batman's underground army (gangs of street punks that he began to train at the close of *DK1*) are finally ready for action and the aging Bats is out to reclaim America. This isn't new territory for Miller. In fact, this is a fairly clean rendition of Miller's take on Batman ideology (and apparently Miller's belief about the state of American consciousness, ironic for someone who produces stuff as brain numbing as *Sin City*). What's fun about the comic is that the Bat militia goes about freeing/reviving every

cool character in the DC oeuvre. We get the Green Arrow, Plastic Man, the Atom, the Flash, and even (to my great joy and appreciation) the Question. On top of that, at the end of issue one, we get to see Bats kick Superman's ass. Again! Unfortunately, all the great promise of the first issue peters out in the second. Issue two is firmly on *Sin City* territory, except Miller and Varley's use of color serve to make the art even more confusing than ever. This comic has all the subtlety of a Jerry Bruckheimer film. Alas, the emperor wears no clothes. *Jason Cons*

DEAR MR. MACKIN

by Rev. Richard J. Mackin, Gorsky Press, 2001

Remember a few years back when Jerry Seinfeld released a book of phony letters that he sent to corporations and their ilk? Well, no surprise, someone was doing it years before Seinfeld. That someone would be the 40-something Reverend Richard J. Mackin whose nonstop, corporate terrorism does pose some funny questions and often the responses are equally hilarious. Ever wonder what the "nog" is in egg nog? Mr. Mackin is going to find out for you. You have a problem identifying all 2,000 body



parts that Lever soap claims to clean, so does Mr. Mackin who sent dozens of letters asking them to prove their claim. *Dear Mr. Mackin* got me through a plane ride from San Francisco to New Jersey where the passengers seemed to have a problem with my sudden bursts of laughter. *Troy Brookins*

DELIVER ME FROM DALLAS

by Charles Willeford; Dennis McMillan, 2001

If *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner and *The Getaway* by Jim Thompson had a baby the result would be *Deliver Me from Dallas*. A crime-thriller with a shifting chapter to chapter multi-character perspective, Deliver is as good as anything Willeford has ever done.

Bill Brown is an L.A. cop who has had his share of trouble. So much trouble that he has been busted all the way down to traffic duty. Bill quickly finds his way into more difficulty by punching out a stubborn motorist in the heat of the moment, and needs to leave town in a hurry. Dallas seems like as good a place to lay low as any, and after Bill arrives into town the action of the novel quickly begins to unfold. Finding himself short of money and a clean change of clothes, Bill decides to pull the old "Let me help you put your luggage in that locker" grift on the nearest country rube in the bus station, then absconds to a hotel with the man's luggage and settles in to wait out his L.A. troubles. But there is one problem. The suitcase he has stolen from the man in the bus station turns out to be full of money. Ransom money from a kidnapping. Bill Brown soon finds out that trouble tends to breed more trouble, as he is hunted by the Dallas police and the kidnappers who want their hard-earned loot back.

The novel features the usual brilliant cast of wonderfully crafted Willeford characters, enhanced by the fact that most, if not all of them get to have their own distinct voices as the tale shifts perspective from chapter to chapter. Highlights of the novel include a wonderfully written Hitchcockesque showdown scene at a carnival that is so vividly drawn you can almost see the images click by frame by frame in high-contrast black and white. Also of note is a wonderful romantic sub-plot between the sister of the kidnapped child and protagonist Bill Brown. It is a love story like the one in the movie *Rainmaker* between the Matt Damon and Claire Danes characters that the watcher/reader knows is a bad idea; borders on taboo; ultimately shouldn't happen, but as you watch it unfolding you ache for it to happen anyhow.

I am glad that *Deliver* has finally made its way onto the shelves, it is another great addition to any crime fiction collection, and a special treat for all of us Willeford fans. *Eric Frost*

DRAWN AND QUARTERLY #4

edited by Chris Oliveros; Drawn and Quarterly, 2001

D&Q 4 marks the second issue published in the new, large-scale format. The size, beautiful graphic design (this issue's cover by Steven Guarnaccia is every bit as stunning as last issue's Chris Ware tribute to Frank King), and highly pleasing length (around 160 pages) make this one of the best investments you can make in a comic book anthology. Oliveros seems intent on using these collections to highlight non-American (and especially European and Canadian) work. This issue contains, among other gems, another stunning boxing story from French artist Hincker Blutch, a story about the Russian suppression of revolution in Budapest in 1956, by Hungarian/Israeli author Miriam Katin, and a charming parable by Swiss artist Nicolas Robel. *D&Q 4* may not be as strong in content as *D&Q 3*. Its major weakness is an uninspired 50 page biography of Herge. But this issue's graphic strengths more than make up for its weaknesses. R. Sikoryak contributes a version of the *Scarlet Letter* told in Little Lulu format that is, if anything, even better than his Batman version of *Crime and Punishment* in *D&Q 3*. There are 16 reprints of Harry Mayerovitch's World War II era Film Board of Canada posters that are alone more than worth the price of admission. Best of all, there are another 30 reprints of classic Gasoline Alley strips. It's still shocking to see these beautiful pages. Frank King's use of color, narrative, and spatial experimentation were way ahead of their time and are still complex and engaging enough to get even Scott McCloud running in circles. These reprints are a gift to comic fans everywhere. Ultimately, there's no reason not to run out and buy this issue and, if you don't already have it, issue #3 as well. *Jason Cons*

THE FIG EATER

By Jody Shields; Little, Brown & Co., 2001

The Fig Eater is an engrossing book. Its charms lie not so much in the plot—the book is cast as a murder mystery that proffers likely suspects early on. Plot twists are few and not especially ingenious. The appeal of *The Fig Eater* lies in the background details that author Jody Shields supplies with wanton profligacy. Most of this material is entirely extraneous to the narrative and even the characters' development. But what emerges is an incredibly sensual and evocative picture of middle

A different continent, a century away, involving people living the "good life"—not rich but solidly middle class. Very comfortable, very regimented. I must admit that the *mis en scene* is charmingly exotic, no less alien and novel than, say, pre-colonial Benares, or the capitol city of the second largest continent of that fourth planet orbiting Alpha Centauri.

While the plot is thin, there is a substantial textual thrust created and that revolves around the dynamic interaction between the world views of the Inspector (no name given, so he's reduced—or elevated depending on how you look at it—to an archetype) investigating the murder upon which the plot hangs, and the Inspector's wife Erzebet. He is all about logic, science, investigation and analysis. Erzebet, on the other hand is immersed in intuition, art and magick. She becomes interested in the murder case and mounts her own parallel investigation via her own means. While he is seeking scientifically verifiable fact, he seeks to let it manifest itself without his interference. This turns out to be his approach to police work in general, as well as in his home, social life as well as his sexual life with Erzebet. The results, across the board are extraordinary and exquisite.

I can't compare to a video game 'cause I don't play 'em but *The Fig Eater* is more engrossing and immersing an experience than any TV show or most films I've seen in the past two years. Bravissimo! *Howard W.*

HEART OF THE OLD COUNTRY

By Tim McLoughlin; Akashic Books, 2001

Nope. I just can't buy in. Tim McLoughlin's first novel, *Heart of the Old Country* isn't convincing in terms of dialogue, action/reaction dynamics, motivations deep or shallow. They just don't seem real. At the same time it's not especially stylized enough to possibly be considered an abstraction, expressionistic, or surrealistic reverie.

The story is set in contemporary Brooklyn, in an enclave of lower middle class white folk, documenting the neighborhood's erstwhile well-defined (in terms of ethnicity mainly) subculture in severe decline, perhaps sounding its nicotine-stained death rattle. The remaining inhabitants are rapidly losing a war of attrition to a shifting population of more recent immigrants, and white-flight by relatives, co-workers, and onetime neighbors to 'burbland. The main characters are 19 year old Mike, his widowed dad, their colleagues and employers at a Mob-affiliated car service, and a couple of broads. Their predicament, as pertains to the plot here, is the severely limited courses of action left open to them, amounting to little more than ill-fated lives of boredom, a lack of achievement and a pathetic death. Options include dead-end jobs, chump-change hood-dom, the Mob if they're lucky. McLoughlin has done an excellent job of sketching this situation in minute, vivid detail, and creating a genuinely depressing *mise en scene*.

But it's difficult to really care about the main characters or feel sympathy for their plight. They are drawn two-dimensionally, just cartoons of congenital losers. What's missing is any sense of their motivation or the events and circumstances that prompted them to make the choices they have. And poignancy and empathy comes from understanding that there were choices, what those choices were, why the wrong ones were made, and how it could have all turned out for the best. None of that happens in the course of *Heart of the Old Country*.

Mike is an excellent case in point. He bemoans the self-imposed limitations he sees his friends, father and girlfriend wholeheartedly embracing, their lack of nobility, sense of adventure, possibility for change and progress. Having enrolled in college in Manhattan—just minutes from his house apparently—he can't wait to drop out and backpedal from this immediate opportunity to start building a future of his own design. Appalled at the predictability of his family and friends' milieu, he makes no serious effort to even investigate what his fellow students might have to offer. And no substantial explanation is ever provided.

The denouement of *Heart of the Old Country* comes when Mike agrees to become a runner for a minor Mob boss, is ambushed and escapes but holds onto the goods, pretending they were lost in the attack; then gets

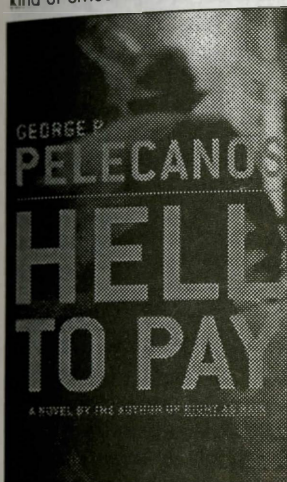
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class life in Vienna at the turn of the last century.

Shields spends a lot of time describing the food, its preparation, and even the markets where basic raw ingredients are purchased. Stews, roasts, stuffings, myriad puddings, cakes, and assorted pastries. There's still more space devoted to the fare peculiar to particular classes of restaurants, coffee houses, street vendors and kiosks respectively—it's all portrayed as very vivid, intense, and not a little exotic. The author gives similar treatment to the architecture of Vienna, individual buildings and their functions and interior environments (the depiction of an arboretum and medical museum are especial strange and wonderful trips) as well as the overall cityscape, street lay-outs, parks, and outlying woodlands.

All these details are put into context and interpreted so that you get a sense of more than just the artifacts, you almost get a first hand sense of the culture that produced them. Moreover, you're given a glimpse of how societal conventions are woven through it all—how styles and the individual's right to sport them act as class signifiers for instance.

caught. A lot of suspense and high drama ensues but when the situation is resolved Mike emerges utterly unchanged in any meaningful way. Heart of the Country echoes much of classic Hubert Selby in its depiction of lives filled with petty and not so petty indignities and transgressions, marked by slim hopes and overwhelmingly bad odds. But where Selby creates enormous poignancy by showing the series of circumstances pushing characters towards a bad end he also indicates to his readers that there are roads not taken and that choices have been made; just the wrong choices. McLoughlin has not and thus lacks that kind of emotional wallop. *Howard W.*



HELL TO PAY

by George P. Pelecanos; Little, Brown, 2002

Pelecanos has a way of writing that makes you feel like he has in-depth knowledge about everything. From muscle cars and hip hop to Sergio Leone soundtracks and high-end electronics, Pelecanos's eye for detail is extraordinary. When you read a Pelecanos book you feel as if you inhabit the landscapes and eras that he recreates, feel that you learn something each time you pick up one of his novels.

Hell to Pay is the second installment in the latest Pelecanos trilogy, featuring the detective team of

Derek Strange and Terry Quinn. Having met in the first novel, *Right as Rain*, when Strange was asked to investigate a shooting that Quinn committed while on duty as a cop, we find the two men now partnered up and deeply embroiled in each other's lives. That said, the narrative of *Hell to Pay* is structured in such a way that both Strange and Quinn have their own plots and sub-plots, their own conflicts to resolve by the end of the novel. The structure is a gamble, but Pelecanos pulls it off brilliantly. You put the novel down feeling that both of the protagonists have received equal time and each of their plots has resonance with the other and meld into a greater narrative.

Strange finds himself investigating the murder of one of the boys he coached in football. The boy is shot while with his uncle who has made enemies of some local drug dealers by stiffing them money. Strange investigates this murder and does a background check on a friend's future son-in-law in tandem, and both investigations end up serving as a catalyst for some strong self-examination of his own life.

Quinn partners up with a team of two women investigators who specialize in returning young female runaways to their homes. This line of work usually means dealing with pimps and low-lives, and when they act on information from a young woman on the street to return a girl who doesn't necessarily want to be returned home, things start to go bad. It is in this section of the book that Pelecanos writes one of the most amazing and tactile fight scenes in the history of detective fiction. I literally found myself reaching up to make sure all the pieces of my own face were still intact while I was reading.

Pelecanos has made great strides with this latest trilogy and I think it is some of his strongest work yet. Unlike some of his other series, Strange and Quinn grow in positive ways over the course of these two novels. Pelecanos makes these characters as human and complex as we all are, but we can only strive to be as strong and self aware. *Eric Frost*

HOSTAGE

by Robert Crais; Doubleday, 2001

I've been a fan of Crais (pronounced "Chris") since the publication of his paperback original *The Monkey's Raincoat* which introduced the longstanding serialization of his private investigator Elvis Cole.

As characters go, Cole's a fictional being imbued with all the fatalistic,

human flaws you might—unpredictably—expect. Cole's a modernized character fashioned with the requisite dosage of humorous sarcasm and enough of the hard-boiled grit to sate the hard core fan of the genre. Unlike other writers of the field there hasn't been much sign of him leading this character down a safe and cozy route. I have found this to be a common tendency some writers can't resist. If anything Crais's progressively managed to make the Cole series a lot harder with each successive novel, culminating where we last left him with the totally unhinged and labyrinthian opus that was *LA Requiem*. A book which largely turned the table on his fans by introducing a very cool, hard-as-nails back story regarding Cole's wet ops partner, former cop Joe Pike, and by seeing much of the story through the eyes of this character.

So why (oh, why?) is it that *Hostage*, Crais's first stand-alone novel is such a disappointment? Is it because Crais finally caved into the tendencies his background as a TV writer compelled him to? Yeah, I buy that. Totally. This has "created for film" written all over it. Predictably too, this is total submission to the kind of hack work I'd never expect from somebody whose work previous is nothing less than respectable.

Hostage concerns itself with the dunder-headed moves three small time crooks (two brothers: one the elder but-not-so-wise; the dim-but-not-stupid little bro with a conscience; the gigantic-and-foreboding-silent pal who the eldest met in stir but doesn't really know too well) who embark on a calamitous post-convenience store holdup adventure. It's one of those tales where one stupid move escalates into a domino effect of ensuing bad moves. Think the inverse of *Planes, Trains, and Automobiles* but at the creative level of a made-for-TV movie.

Hate to slag the guy (didn't think I ever would) but with a string of worthwhile and compellingly entertaining novels prior to this, I certainly expected more. Indeed, upon the books conclusion I not only felt robbed and duped, but I also felt as if I was hit with the train, plane, and automobile.

Avoid this, and jump right to *LA Requiem* if you like it—which you undoubtedly will—read the rest of the Coles series in or out of sequence. They're all good. This isn't. *Peter Davis*

IN COLD SWEAT: INTERVIEWS WITH REALLY SCARY MUSICIANS

by Tom Wictor; Limelight Editions, 2000

The secondary title of this book could be "Interviews with bass players." It consists of four interviews with bass players Gene Simmons, Scott Thunes, Peter Hook, and Jerry Casale that were originally done by the author for *Bass Player Magazine*. Despite the fact that I had never really listened to any of the bands that these people were in and the fact that whole parts of these interviews focused on playing the bass, I can honestly say that I enjoyed reading this book. Each of the subjects has had an interesting career and decent insights into music and life. But, I think the ultimate reason I liked this book was because of the very interesting circumstances of the interviews themselves. These people are almost impossible to get a hold of, let alone interview. After waiting for hours to interview Peter Hook, the interviewer is told that he has ten minutes to conduct the interview and they do it in the kitchen of the club where Hook is going to play that night. The Gene Simmons interview takes place during some studio sessions and contains some interesting behind-the-scenes info for KISS fans. *In Cold Sweat* is a fast read, and if you are a fan of any of the many bands that have had the dubious distinction of calling one of these blokes their bass player, do check it out. *Eric Frost*

JAY'S JOURNAL OF ANOMALIES

by Ricky Jay; Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2001

What can you say about Ricky Jay? That he's the best historian of magic in the world? That he's the best card sharp alive? That his talent is wasted in all those David Mamet films? All of these things are probably true. For those of you not familiar with Jay, he made his name as a magician and historian of magic through numerous illustrious appearances, events, and books (most notably, the tragically out of print *Cards as Weapons*, a manual for throwing playing cards that has to

be the best of its kind. His performance (that should be missed for neither love nor money) makes its slow way around the country from time to time and goes under the name "Ricky Jay and His 52 Assistants." But most immediately relevant, from 1994 to 2000, he published an irregular magazine called *Jay's Journal of Anomalies*. These journals, long available only on eBay for exorbitant sums of money, have now been collected into one, exquisitely designed volume for the utter and abject pleasure of the reader. The *Journal* can be thought of as an extension of Jay's last project, *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women*, in that its primary goal is to provide brief expositions on anomalous people/things—for example, intellectual dogs, nose amputations, and slight of hand artists—and place them in some sort of historical context. Jay's writing is funny, but far from glib. It's apparent that he holds his subjects in high-reverence. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the whole project is that the information and the numerous reprints, photos, and diagrams all come from Jay's vast personal collection. Reading the book is sure to give you a strong dose of "If-only-he-was-my-friend-I-could-go-and-play-with-his-stuff" syndrome, but also make you wonder what gems Jay is actually hiding from us. The *Journal* doesn't come cheap (the books elaborate design jacks the price up to a hefty \$40) but for anyone who cultivates the bizarre and loves the magician/trixter underground, this book is a must.

Jason Cons

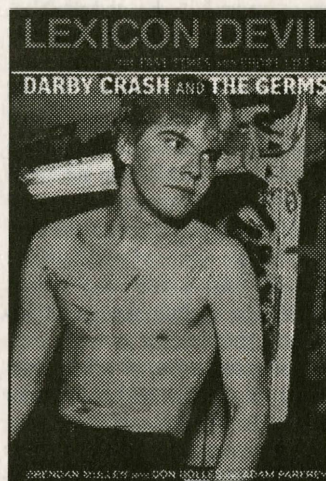
LAST WISH #2

by Adam Berenstein

The long awaited second installment of *Last Wish* should secure Adam Berenstein's reputation as both an accomplished story-teller and a breathtaking artist. *Last Wish* is a sort of coming of age tale set against the bleak backdrop of Buffalo, New York. The second issue continues the story of Moses, a young filmmaker/artist and his various relationships (personal, familial, and romantic). Moses' struggle to find his own identity is juxtaposed with scenes from his past. As one might expect, present and past inform each other in a pleasingly non-linear fashion. *Last Wish's* story is simple enough, and there are certainly many comics out there that have tackled similar issues. What sets *Last Wish* apart, however, is Berenstein's often genius execution. The shifts between past and present; the beautiful post-industrial landscapes, and the stark, almost woodcut feel of the art (especially the use of line and weight to show emotion) combine to give *Last Wish* its almost alien, yet inviting,

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feel. The narrative of *Last Wish 2* is, perhaps, not as dynamic as the first issue and its story seems primarily concerned with character development (it's the second installment of a planned six issue series). However, Berenstein's unique artistic style truly comes into its own in this issue. There's no use of grayscale or other conventional tools to convey emotion. These comics get the job done with a masterful use of line and positive and negative space. While the first issue pioneered this format, the second sees Berenstein really becoming more comfortable with the style and bolder in his experimentation. While lack of a major publisher may make these small masterpieces somewhat difficult to find, it's surely worth the effort to track them down. Berenstein's work promises to restore some of the dignity to the tired and clichéd genre of comics realism. One can only hope that, when the story is complete, it will be published in a readily available collected edition for the appreciation of all. Jason Cons



LEXICON DEVIL: THE FAST TIMES AND SHORT LIFE OF DARBY CRASH AND THE GERMS by Brendan Mullen with Don Bolles and Adam Parfrey; Feral House, 2002

Published just shortly on the heels of the mostly enjoyable but somewhat thin *We've Got The Neutron Bomb: The Untold History of LA Punk* (also by Brendan Mullen but with Mark Spitz aboard as co-author) is this wholly enjoyable back story regarding one of L.A.'s most legendary punk acts made all the more notorious simply because their lead-singer and would-be cult leader aspirant

Darby Crash took his own life with an intentionally lethal dose of heroin. Funny what wonders *death* does for a career in the public eye, don't you think? But really, credit where credit is due. We can't overlook (GI), one of the all time great punk records ever.

While *Lexicon* fully discloses the rise and fall of The Germs this is predominantly the story of Darby Crash, aka, Bobby Pyn, aka Paul Beahm. A largely sad and factual account of a white trash kid from the lower class community of Venice Beach, CA. By all accounts, a bright kid who came into his own without ever really finding himself.

Thumbing my way through I couldn't help but recognize with crystal clarity the number of kids I grew up with in Southern California and largely the environment in which I was raised. And notably, co-author and editor Adam Parfrey put my familiarity in context in his publisher's preface, capturing my attention and hooking me in from the start. Parfrey states the following:

"When reading a couple interview transcripts I suddenly became dizzy and broke into a cold sweat, when words, words alone sunk to the pit of my stomach. What was being said did not affect me as much as how it was being said—the 1974 West L.A. juvie style in all its confusion, ignorance, and arrogance sucker-punched me in the gut, and brought me back to a time and place I spent so many years trying to forget."

Still, there's been a lot of mythology spun over the years regarding the Germs'—and more specifically Darby's—legacy so consequently I lapped this up with the appropriate grain of salt—the brand of salt which all history books should be seasoned with—and that is likely why I found the following statement of former band manager Nicole Panter to be one of the more honest and straight-forward things printed:

"I thought he was troubled, talented, bright, but certainly no genius—I still don't think he was a genius, but he was smart enough to die before anyone could figure that out. Lots of people on the scene really disliked him and maybe even feared him a bit and with good reason, he was very much a pest."

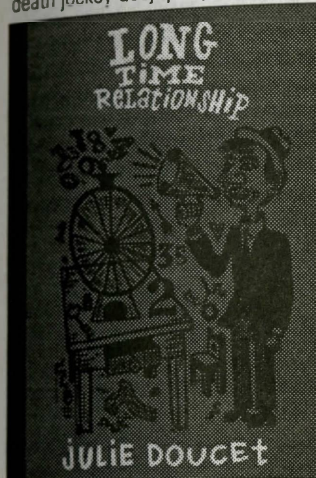
Told completely as a natural oral history a la Leg's McNeil's *Please Kill Me*, *Lexicon* leaves you to determine who's full of shit and who is not. The conflicting stories, insights, and points of view are succinctly edited together, chock full of anecdotes and lots of salient points of historical minutiae that lends the book a really tight, narrative flow and keeps the pages turning. This one's a keeper. Peter Davis

LITTLE ENGINES #2

Adam Voith moved to Seattle two years ago and launched TNI Books, an imprint whose releases merged the worlds of indie rock and publishing with products like *Postcards and Audio Letters*, a "found-word" CD by Damien Jurado, a children's book with a 7 inch by Pedro the Lion called *A Guitar for Janie*; and Voith's own novel, *Bridges with Spirit*, about the lives of bohemians after college.

With *Little Engines*, Voith has moved on to publishing a literary journal

which he hopes will inspire writers and artists to produce works for TNI Books. The second issue features a pretty good selection of fiction (including an excerpt from Camden Joy's forthcoming novel, *Hubcap* (including an excerpt from Bethann Shannon's photo-booth pictures of people *Diamondstar Halo*), found tape transcripts, and an intriguing article about death jockey deejays by Josh Hooten. Pick it up. *Trinity C.*

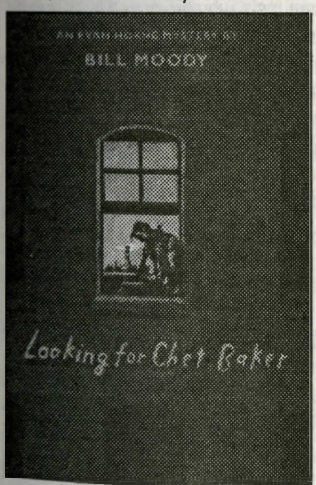


LONG TIME RELATIONSHIP

by Julie Doucet, Drawn & Quarterly, 2001

Drawn & Quarterly has released this cloth-bound collection of Julie Doucet's drawings. Most of these are collected from previous, very limited, zines and books that were published in Europe and Canada. Some refer to Doucet as the female Robert Crumb and while that may be true in the sense that they both have an eye for the grotesque, Doucet's ability to draw doesn't come close to that of Crumb's. Her style resembles a crude blend of both Peter Bagge and Crumb that lends itself quite

well to her medium, but doesn't necessarily stand out as overtly original. There are some interesting concepts in *Long Time Relationship* including Doucet's drawings of people based only on their personal ads and a preview of her latest work that includes drawings of people in found photos. I'm sure that the basement kids get off on knowing that one of their own is actually female—poor Doucet—and slobber all over her work, but I can barely muster some drool. *Troy Brookins*



LOOKING FOR CHET BAKER

by Bill Moody; Walker Books, 2002

In 1988, legendary jazz trumpeter Chet Baker fell to his death from a hotel window in Amsterdam. A notorious junkie, Baker was doubtlessly high at the time, yet questions persist about whether he was murdered by a drug dealer to whom he was in debt, committed suicide (frustrated by a lack of appreciation in the States, Baker, like so many other jazz artists, retreated in his last years to Europe, where his genius found a more receptive audience), or simply nodded out and slipped to his death. Novelist and jazz drummer Bill

Moody explores these questions and more in *Looking for Chet Baker*, the fifth in his Evan Horne mystery series. Pianist and former private investigator Horne, in London playing a series of gigs at Ronnie Scott's, is approached by an old acquaintance, a musicologist who is researching a book on Baker. Happy to have his chops back after an accident which temporarily crippled the use of one of his hands, Horne is anxious to focus on his music and to put the investigating business behind him, so he refuses his friend's persistent pleas for assistance. When the academic suddenly goes missing in Amsterdam, however, Horne is pulled unwillingly into the case, which seems to be connected to his friend's research into Baker's death. Moody does an excellent job of not only painting an illuminating portrait of a complex and often difficult musician, but he provides an insider's perspective on the jazz world and on the creative process that a non-musician just couldn't give. Anyone looking for further information on

Chet Baker would do well to check out J. De Valk's excellent, recently translated biography, *Chet Baker: His Life and Music* (Berkeley Hills Books, 2000). Also worth seeking out is the currently out-of-print documentary, *Let's Get Lost*, released just a year before Baker's death. *Patrick Milliken*

METAL: REBORN THROUGH HATE

I have no exposure to about 90 percent of the bands and recordings covered in *Metal* although I do have some experience with Coroner and Cathedral who are the subjects of features here. But that is not important. What is important is that the anonymous author of this xeroxed 5 x 8 fanzine is doing some of the best writing about music I've come across in years. Beginning with his opening admission that "Much of my appreciation for metal is based around conveniently ignoring lots of things" (face it, that statement can be just as valid when you insert the name of any brand of pop music in 2002) the writer clearly demonstrates a level of self-knowledge, intellectual honesty, and clear-eyed analysis completely unfamiliar to most of the people who write about music.

The mag is set up as an uninterrupted, two-column flow of verbiage. There are no divisions between interviews and reviews. It practically invites the reader to either latch on for the whole ride or turn away. And if you immerse yourself into the flow of the writing you will not stop until the words stop on the paper. If *Metal* was just the unhindered opinionating of one person, well expressed and somewhat controversial, that would be understandable. What makes the ride remarkable is what the writer examines and how he conveys ideas. Let's take this portion of the mag that deals with the issue of "selling out."

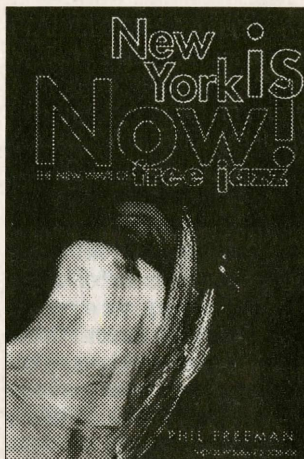
"Tell me something. Given the option, should a band be judged by its independent phase or by the phase during which it was a component in an economically developed company? I think it should be judged by how honestly it makes the transition between the two. How do you intend to judge honesty? Intentions are not necessarily discernable from outside the rehearsal room. I'm only wondering at what point the audience can assume that a band has the resources to exert the most control over how it represents itself."

Where else have you read anything so concisely stated on the topic? The writer goes on to examine the issue in light of the recorded work of Dimmu Borgir and I am completely incompetent to judge his argument based on that evidence. But again, that's not the point. The point is how clearly *Metal* lays out a case and proceeds to examine it.

What really sold me on this writer was his writing about music writing. By specifically examining the rating of records in *Terrorizer* magazine, the author reveals the laziness and stupidity that dominates the genre:

"There are 161 reviews in *Terrorizer* #90... A minimal 14 score less than 5, which you would think is the average score on a 0-10 rating scale. Consequently, you might construe 91% of what they review as average-or-better. Until you notice the key, that is, which actually says '3-4.5: Average'. It follows that 91% of what they are reviewing is in fact better than average. Wow! ... If I assume that any album with a rating of 7.5 or higher is allegedly worth buying, then it turns out that I am expected to spend my hard-earned money on about 60 albums. A month. It's obviously complete bullshit. There are not 60 albums worth buying released in a whole year, let alone a month even if you are less critical than I am, actually have the time to listen to 60 albums a month and can afford to buy them."

Forget that this magazine is about a metal, take any magazine that rates albums and apply the same logical process. It's that thought process, combined with an ability to express the results in English, that makes this a great read. A better read than nearly everything else out there and the particularities of metal really don't matter once you get into the mag. *Metal* has risen to the top of the must read pile for me. Get a copy for yourself if you are even mildly interested in good writing about music. [P.O. Box 416, Devault, PA 19432] *Bruce Adams*



NEW YORK IS NOW!: THE NEW WAVE OF FREE JAZZ

by Phil Freeman; The Telegraph Company, 2001

We're all opinionated here, aren't we? So I really can't hold it against Phil Freeman that he's written what is, in essence, an extended screed that is part condemnation and part advocacy. Freeman has narrowed his sights to the NYC cohort of free jazz musicians concentrated around Matthew Shipp, William Parker, David S. Ware, and the Aum Fidelity label in general. And as a passionate supporter of these musicians Freeman is effective and

knowledgeable. He makes a case for the value of the musicians he covers and by concentrating on players like Roy Campbell or Daniel Carter on a chapter by chapter basis (along with the aforementioned musicians) Freeman provides some valuable insight. No, there is nothing wrong with passionate and informed fandom.

Unfortunately, it's the bigger picture where *New York is Now!* falls short. Freeman makes a big deal about the fact that he comes to free jazz from a background as a fan of heavy music and makes some good points about the embrace of free and improvising musicians by the indie rock community. Unfortunately, he has decided to pipe in with his two cents about current jazz music and that's where I have some problems with this book.

Phil Freeman has summoned up the hobgoblin of my little mind. He is inconsistent. Freeman rightfully condemns the Stanley Crouch/Wynton Marsalis crowd for their inability and unwillingness to acknowledge the place of free music in the jazz continuum and goes at Ken Burns's *Jazz* documentary and it's dismissal of the last 40 years of improvised music with hammers and tongs. But at the same time, Freeman decides that he too can decide who is and isn't worthy of jazz legitimacy. So shortly after declaiming jazz critics' attempts to write Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane out of the jazz tradition, Freeman writes off John Zorn: *He is at heart a dilettante, and this scattershot, all-things-being-equal*

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approach is disrespectful to the music he absorbs and spits back... Everything he does is always diluted with something else; it's as if he's afraid to commit himself... He's a huckster... He is not a jazz musician. He follows no tradition.

Freeman returns to pick on Zorn a few chapters later when describing the Vision Fest and the supposed detriments of Zorn's involvement. All of which ends up reading like scenester sour grapes. Whatever the faults of John Zorn's music, detailing them does nothing to expose the strengths of Test or Joe Morris. By getting bogged down in penny ante debates about who is or isn't a jazz musician, Freeman loses track. By the end of this book Freeman comes across as being as tight assed and exclusive about music as most of the critics he condemns. **Bruce Adams**

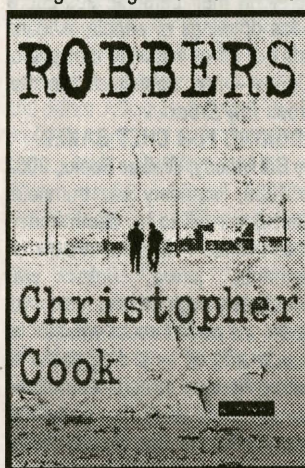
PLAINCLOTHES NAKED

by Jerry Stahl; William Morrow, 2002

A quick look at the back of *Plainclothes Naked* should lead anyone to think that Jerry Stahl is the greatest thing to happen to humor since the deaths of Lenny Bruce and the best crime writer to see print since Jim

Thompson. Authors as interesting as Tobias Wolff, JT LeRoy, and Nick Tosches proclaim his writings to be variously "full of hear," "brilliant," and "amazingly beautiful." The reality of *Plainclothes Naked* is somewhat different than these accolades lead you to believe. The book is by no means the great underground American Novel, a comment on anything in particular, or the career launcher for a writer who's had his various ups and downs. But it is, if nothing else, a very fun read. Stahl's turn toward the Ellroy style crime-novel is a semi-logical progression from his previous work. He uses the same sort of twisted and depraved outlook on life to fuel the absurd adventures of his various characters that informed his earlier work. He does this with a kind of mad scientist ferocity and it is hard to imagine another author who could make a book that centers around a photo of a smiley face tattoo on George W. Bush's nuts work. To pull the whole thing off, Stahl essentially borrows the Elmore Leonard formula for snappy dialogue, convoluted plots that you know are going to work out in the end, point-of-view chapters through multiple characters (each with his/her own peculiar set of neuroses), and no pretensions to make any sort of grand statement about life, humans, or anything else. Stahl does this without Leonard's almost prudish sensibilities (i.e., don't read this book to your family over Thanksgiving dinner) but seems to lack some of Leonard's genius for dialogue

and pacing. For all that, it's unlikely you'll put *Plainclothes Naked* down once you pick it up. The book is, by leaps and bounds, more impressive than his lackluster *Perv* but perhaps not as scary, funny, or engaging as *Permanent Midnight* (after all, I'll take real life stories of writing *Alf* through a drug haze over traditional Gumshoe any day). **Jason Cons**



ROBBERS

by Christopher Cook; Carroll and Graf, 2000

Eddie and Ray Bob are social outcasts who are bound in an unholy union when trigger-happy Eddie kills a 7/11 clerk who refuses to sell him a pack of cigarettes for a penny less than his asking price. The two hit the road and wait for the consequences of their actions to catch up with them but their *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* act only lasts a short while before their friendship is threatened by the arrival of a woman who is also on the lam. Cooperation between those on the side of the

law becomes similarly fractured when detective Rule Hooks has an affair with the estranged wife of a crime lab liaison. Ray Bob and Rule face peril in isolation but the existentialist burden born by characters who reference Jean Genet and Nietzsche is offset by the easy going naivete of Eddie, a musician who indulges in the music of Robert Johnson, Percy Sledge, and Howlin' Wolf. On the surface the Texans who populate *Robbers* couldn't seem more different than the characters in Genet's prison novels, but both Cook and Genet tackle philosophical issues involving ethics and moral standards without getting heavy handed.

Jeffrey Herrmann

ROCK SALT AND GLISSANDOS: STORIES AND POEMS

by Steve Fisher; Synaesthesia Press, 2001

The late Steve Fisher was a mass of clichés and contradictions. He was a drug addict, a prisoner, and a writer. He was a piano tuner by trade, one who did too many drugs and wound up in prison. He got clean, slid back into addiction. OD'd. Probably on purpose. He owned very little, but bought, sold and traded books with other collectors. He developed a large and somewhat valuable collection of Bukowski, Harry Crews, and Nelson Algren.

In the last years of his life, he gained some notoriety and racked up an

impressive list of publishing credits in such respected journals as *TriQuarterly* and *Shenandoah*.

And now, ten years after Steve Fisher's death, Synaesthesia Press has released this chapbook of his poetry and fiction about the prison world. It proves his talent.

Barry Gifford, author of *Wild at Heart*, called Fisher a "flaming angel genius," and if that sounds like a bit of high praise, you need to read his work. It's possible his oeuvre may prove to be more than just another tragic footnote from the literary canon. *Trinity C.*



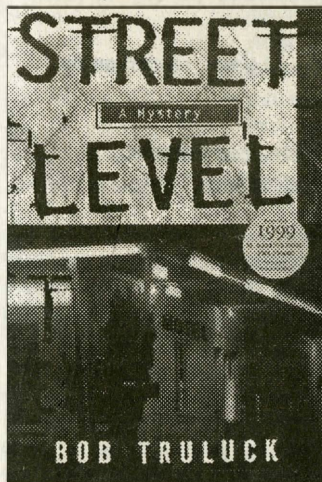
SCORCH

by A.D. Nauman; Soft Skull Press, 2001

Scorch is a dystopian novel set 30 years in the future. A totalitarian "corporocracy"—composed of three mega-conglomerates—rules every aspect of life, and consumerism is promoted as the route to happiness. People who buy the right products triumph as Horatio Alger once did—against all odds.

Arel Ashe, a 30-ish female, works two jobs to afford her tiny Chicago apartment. By day, she works as a junior assistant in an Adstory Department, which produces movies that exist exclusively to sell products through the use of sex and violence. At night, she works as a library clerk. In Arel's world, libraries don't carry books anymore, but videos. But when she discovers real books, like *The History of Labor*, Arel is inspired to rebel and save the world.

Fans of dystopian fiction will certainly recognize Nauman's theft from her literary predecessors like Orwell, Huxley, and Bradbury. Unfortunately, Nauman tells more than she shows, and the book suffers from that, and her narrow Marxist agenda, pedantry and simplistic fictional world. *Trinity C.*



STREET LEVEL

by Bob Truluck; Thomas Dunne, 2000

The premise of Truluck's debut novel is unique; the deposit of a wealthy gay man is stolen from a sperm bank and used to impregnate a trailer-park queen in Florida. But shortly after the cast of oddball characters is fully introduced, the plot stalls and *Street Level* becomes a routine, hard-boiled private-eye story. The lead character, Duncan Sloane, and a bevy of local authorities vie for the inside track in their quest to solve a case of kidnapping and extortion but the logistics of their

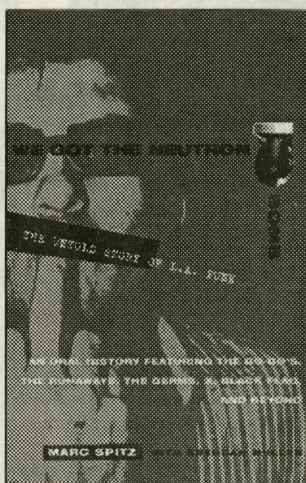
struggle for jurisdiction take precedence over the story itself. Fortunately Truluck has plenty of palpable reasons to insert the riveting interrogation scenes that are the strongest part of his book. Plenty of tough-guy action and the omnipresent threat of violence make *Street Level* a page-turner for those who prefer their stories hard and fast. *Jeffrey Herrmann*

SYNTHETIC BI-PRODUCTS

by Sparrow L. Patterson; Akashic Books, 2001

Usually, an author's first novel is a coming-of age story and Sparrow L. Patterson's first offering is no different. Set in the late '80s, the story recounts the development of Orleigh, a bored 18 year old Illinois suburbanite, from a tough high school senior to a tougher and wiser

adult. It's nothing too original, but rather an honest portrait of youth on the verge of adulthood: *Trinity C.*



WE GOT THE NEUTRON BOMB: THE UNTOLD STORY OF L.A. PUNK

by Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen; Three Rivers Press, 2001

Had Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain written this, it would've been called *Please Kill Me II: Los Angeles*. I mean no disrespect to the authors; it's just that that's exactly what this is—a narrative, compiled of snippets of interviews from the bands, the managers, the club owners, the groupies, the zinesters and others who played a part in the very important but all-to-often overlooked Los Angeles punk scene. (Just cuz the weather's nice doesn't make their punks any less legit.)

Marc Spitz, a writer for *Spin*, and Brendan Mullen, the founder of the legendary (and long-defunct) Masque in Hollywood have done a terrific job piecing it all together. The book is loosely arranged in chronological order, beginning with the fall of the glam scene and punk's rise in response to the wretched singer/songwriter schmaltz that dominated Los Angeles in the '70s. And later, the inevitable and depressing death of the scene (thanks to heroin, violence, and MTV) is covered.

Straight from the mouths of the people who lived it—creepy Kim Fowley, Rodney Bingenheimer, Joan Jett, John Doe, Claude Bessey, Lisa Fancher, Tomata du Plenty, Exene Cervenka, Pleasant Gehman, Jane Wiedlin, Kid Congo, Keith Morris, Gary Panter, and many others—*We Got the Neutron Bomb* fills a gaping hole in a category containing books on virtually every scene, movement, and band. Up until now, the only book I've come across that is similar is *Forming: The Early Years of L.A. Punk* (Smart Art Press, 1999). It's good, but it is just a collection of photographs loosely tied together with a couple of fairly interesting essays from a couple of the major players. Actually, *Forming* makes a great visual companion to *We Got the Neutron Bomb*, which could've used some more photos.

The book is not without problems. The most glaring and particularly hideous of them is the Cast of Characters section at the back of the book. It seems to be missing about a quarter of the speaking characters and virtually all of the characters that are merely referenced. So, unless you know of absolutely everyone involved in the late '70s early '80s L.A. punk and new wave scene and are just reading this to rehash old memories and good times, you will be lost on several names. Hopefully, this is a mistake that will be remedied by the time of the second printing. The book, clocking in at fewer than 300 pages, could've been a little longer. It would also benefit from a few more entertaining anecdotes—goofy, funny, and/or disturbing stories about drugs and debauch in general. *Please Kill Me* had plenty of those and they really added to the over-all enjoyment of the book.

A related beef is that many bands aren't discussed as much as they should be—particularly, Youth Brigade, Social Distortion, and some of the other beach and Orange County bands. Although, in the authors' defense, this could have something to do with a publisher trying to keep the book under budget.

These are minor quibbles. *We Got the Neutron Bomb* (the title is taken from a song by the WeirDOS) is entertaining and informative and certainly anyone reading this magazine is sure to find it interesting.

A side note: the introduction mentions that Pat Smear, Lorna Doom, and Greg Ginn were not willing to work with the authors on this project. I'm curious as to why because it seems that everyone else (who is still alive) was happy to assist. *Adam Miller*



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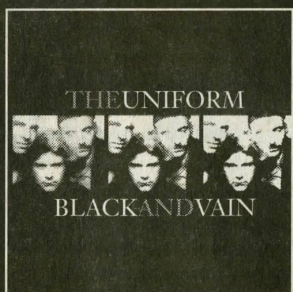
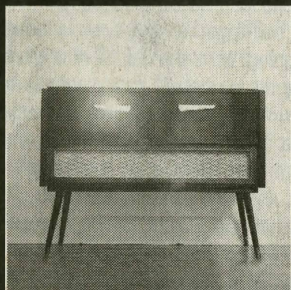
"[X] took rock-n-roll and, years ahead of their time, created a unique hyper-charged sound that still hasn't been bettered for power and pure grunt." - Matt Dickson, 'Spiral Scratch', 1997

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Video *drone*

THE ANIMAL directed by Luke Greenfield; Columbia, 2001
JOE DIRT directed by Dennie Gordon; Columbia, 2001

I don't get how you could sit your ass in front of the television and watch films by Godard, Truffaut or Cassavetes. How boring. Give me lowbrow humor and pizza. Throw in a twelve-pack and there you have it; instant Neanderthal bliss. The humor that I refer to would be the summer not so blockbusters that you pass over to see the high art of *Gladiator*. Fortunately for me, today's double feature stars former SNL alumni Rob Schneider and David Spade. *The Animal* features Rob Schneider as a happy-go-lucky, bumbling idiot with an overbearing desire to prove he's something. He longs to serve law enforcement and fantasizes about the overnight leap from 98-pound weakling to Johnny Weissmuller. When evidence clerk Marvin Mange (Schneider) decides to be a hero, his life takes an unexpected turn. A freak accident leaves Mange in need of several organ transplants, only to have animal parts used to replace his damaged body. What comes next is a Six-Million Dollar Man meets Dr. Doolittle comic explosion that, believe it or not, won't lower your intelligence any more than a few bong hits. Not quite as funny as the gut busting *Deuce Bigalow*, and no where near the brilliance of Adam Sandler films, *The Animal* does rise above the drek that passes for juvenile humor these days.

Speaking of middle school mentality, David Spade stars in *Joe Dirt*, a highly underrated comic tale of what happens when white trash grows up and falls in love with an out-of-his-league hottie. Joe Dirt is prodded into telling his life story to a talk radio host, played by Dennis Miller, and thousands of listeners. We watch the pathetic life of Joe Dirt unfold as a tale of abandonment and rejection, spiked with a ton of bad luck, only to discover that Joe's inner spirit outshines his dejected personality and you just can't help but fall in love with the guy.

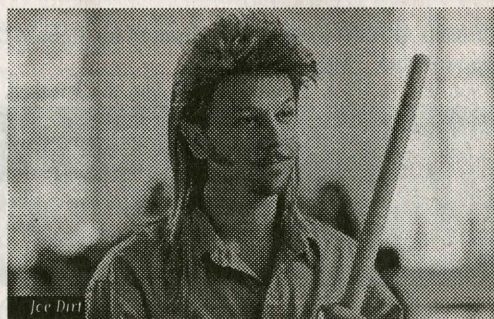
These movies are based on the simple premise of the underdog achieving the impossible in the end. It ain't easy, but he gets his reward in the end for basically being a nice guy. This type of good-natured storytelling sure helps your girlfriend stomach all the cheap fart jokes. Maybe you should save these two for ladies' night out. *Troy Brookins*

BROTHER directed by Takeshi Kitano; Sony Pictures Classics, 2001

"Beat" Kitano has made his first film set in the United States, and the now customary tale of a stone-faced yakuza dealing with death and honor makes the transition to America just fine. Kitano is one director whose best work thrives within the limitations of genre, and the general plot direction of *Brother*,



The Animal



Joe Dirt

though familiar to anyone who has seen *Fireworks* (yeah, almost everyone dies in the end), holds up well. There are enough nods to the ethnic diversity of L.A. here with Mexican gangs, the Mafia and local L.A. Japanese gangsters for Kitano's character of an exiled yakuza to deal with. And some great scenes set in Japan as stage setting and plot details. In a lot of ways *Brother* is a gangster movie in the old style: like *Little Caesar* it is the story of one man's rise and fall. Like most of Kitano's films it is alternately frantic and contemplative. Kitano has a gift for slowly developing scenes that are almost purely observational, focusing details on setting and physical details that would not be out of place in a movie by Ozu. The tension between the two and the story of one character's grim destiny as he tries to carve an individual place out in a strict hierarchical social order (a longtime theme in Japanese literature) drive this movie. While I would recommend *Fireworks* as an introduction to anyone who has never seen a "Beat" Kitano movie, *Brother*, is a must for fans of hardboiled crime drama and followers of Kitano's work. I hope he gets to make more movies in America. *Bruce Adams*



DONNIE DARKO written and directed by Richard Kelly; CBS/Fox Home Video, 2001

If you liked movie X, then you'll really love this knockoff.

Video drone

You see this sort of logic all the time coming out of Hollywood. It seeps into the making and marketing of movies and creates a rigid mind-set: if we haven't seen it before (preferably in some cash cow) it can't be good. Well, *Donnie Darko* is a film you haven't seen before—or at least, you haven't seen all of this in one film.

The directing debut by Richard Kelly is like a 1980s John Hughes teen flick that has been possessed by alien cheeseballs and psychotic superheroes. In other words, it's a collision of opposites that leaves a heap of messy wreckage, but is worth seeing, nonetheless.

Set in 1988, in an upper-middle-class suburb, it focuses on what seems like the average American family. Unlike most teen or horror flicks, however, this film's portrayal of suburbia is neither giddy nor mocking. It's just wacko.

Enter Donnie (Jake Gyllenhaal), a brilliant but disturbed teen who suffers from delusions. The latest occupant in his mind is a 6-foot-tall rabbit named Frank who informs him that the world is going to end in 28 days. He also instructs Donnie to commit a series of bizarre acts. What ensues is in effect two worlds—Donnie's and everyone else's—closing in on one another.

Cataclysmic events abound: a turbine from a plane mysteriously crashes into the Darkos' home, the school is flooded, a local new-age preacher is exposed as a child pornographer. And the eye of the storm is in Donnie's head. At one point, his girlfriend Gretchen (Jena Malone) asks, "What kind of name is Donnie Darko? It sounds like some kind of

superhero." She might be right, and it's that possibility that turns what could be standard horror plot into an intriguing head-scratcher. Is Donnie a sex-obsessed psychotic? A time-traveler? Or a superhero of the mind reduced to flesh and blood, confronting a world he never made?

You never really know.

But, then again, if you want to see a film where everything is spelled out, go see X or Y or Z. *Donnie Darko* resides in another world. *John Petkovic*
FRIEND directed by Kwak Kyung-taek; South Korea, 2001

Long after the gangster has been carved up like a turkey or blown to bits, the gangster myth lives on. It comes dressed in sleek, dark suits. It's surrounded by sex, money and power. And it's immortalized in movies. Think "gangster." It's just as likely that the first name that comes to mind is De Niro, not Gotti. That's what makes a mob flick such as *Friend* so interesting. Set in South Korea, far, far away from Hollywood, Kwak Kyung-taek's autobiographical film offers a gritty take on a much-romanticized lifestyle.

Spanning three decades, South Korea's biggest box office hit ever follows four friends who play, study, fight, and grow up together, and grow apart. Two—Joon-suk Lee (Yu Oh-seong) and Dong-su Han (Jang Dong-Kun)—become mobsters and, later, mortal enemies.

In *Friend*, becoming someone's enemy always means having a knife waved in your face. Throughout, director Kwak is fascinated with hand-to-hand violence, the most passionate and personal variety. That's nothing new, especially in gangsterville.

But *Friend* explores such brutality—the epiphanal murder scene is a sadistic stabbing spree—in such a way that it transforms anti-heroes back into thugs.

There's nothing heroic about these gangsters. And while that might not be as chic as Humphrey Bogart, that's the point. *John Petkovic*

GRATEFUL DAWG directed by Gillian Grisman; Sony, 2002

This documentary focuses on the musical friendship between Jerry Garcia and David Grisman. Their friendship blossomed in the late '50s because of a common love for bluegrass, particularly Bill Monroe. Both friends floated in and out of bluegrass bands while finding their own way. Garcia went on to become a hippie superstar while Grisman kept to his roots developing his trademark "dawg" sound. Both men, respectful of each other's music, often collaborated in intimate settings far removed from the enormity of the Grateful Dead. These collaborations would often lead to live performances that took place in the Bay Area. Grisman's daughter sought to capture the bond between her father and his friend, on stage and off, that often showed a more open, relaxed, and comfortable Garcia. *Grateful Dawg* has an obvious built-in audience, but Gillian Grisman manages to capture a story that should appeal to a wider market, especially those with a taste for old-time music. Garcia's life was wasted and here's the reason why. *Troy Brookins*

HOW HARRY BECAME A TREE directed by Goran Paskaljevic; Paradox Pictures, Ireland, 2001

Most people couldn't relate to Harry.

The lead character in Goran Paskaljevic's fable *How Harry Became a Tree* is nasty, loathsome, and mean-spirited. He drives people away. He even has dreams that he's a tree—a hardened object that doesn't need anything save the cold, muddy earth to survive.

A Chinese fable set in Ireland in 1924, it focuses on, yes, Harry (Colm Meaney), a cabbage farmer who determines that hate is the prevailing force in the world. Accordingly, he attempts to elevate his lot by setting out to destroy the most powerful man in town, an innkeeper named George (Adrian Dunbar).

Harry is no match: He lacks the finances, brains, and allies to bring down his foe. But he has the will, which drives him to more radical and irrational measures—from trumpeting a scandalous affair to arranging a suicide and a murder.

Pathetic, yes. But what's touching about *How Harry Became a Tree* is that by the end of the film any honest person will start to feel pity for, and even relate to Harry.

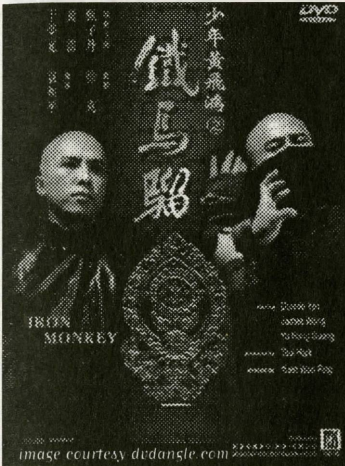
Played cunningly by Meaney, Harry explores the bitter streak in all of us, mixing looks of sullen despair and jutting determination on his Robert De Niro-

like face. Paskaljevic is as cunning. Rather than condemn Harry, the Yugoslav director allows Meaney to transform the contemptible into the pitiful.

Scenes are set amid the dreary backdrop of mud, cold, and rain, as if Harry were literally an outgrowth of some larger force that makes us hateful in the face of powerlessness.

By the end of *How Harry Became a Tree*, you get the feeling that what seemed like an absurd dream has become a tragic reality, barren branches and all. *John Petkovic*

IRON MONKEY directed by Woo-Ping Yuen; Tai Seng Video, 2000



So, how is it that a movie review ends up running in a newspaper on the day it opens? It's a simple process, actually. A few days before a movie opens, a studio representative or proxy will host an advance screening. A handful of reviewers show up in an empty theater to watch the film, take notes and formulate a review.

What's wrong with this picture? It turns the movie-going experience into something akin to watching a videotape alone at home. You end up missing out on that physical and emotional experience that

occurs when you have images on the screen interacting with a theater full of people.

On a recent Tuesday, I went to an advance screening of Hong Kong action flick *Iron Monkey*. But unlike most, it was open to the public. And that made all the difference.

You see, this isn't the kind of film you take notes on or think about. (Full disclosure: I did none of either.) Rather, it's a rush of adrenaline that will spin your head dizzy.

Iron Monkey is set in the mid nineteenth century in Eastern China, where a corrupt governor (James Wong) exploits a people living in misery and starvation. Their only hope is a masked marauder, Iron Monkey (Yu Rong Guang), who steals from the rich to feed the poor.

The Robin Hood-like story is nothing new or special. It does little more than to set up a series of god vs. evil kung fu duels between Shaolin monks. But the action is enough to keep you squirming in your seat and "oohing" and "ahing" for 87 minutes.

Directed by Hong Kong action master Yuen Wo Ping, *Iron Monkey* features footage that makes the scenes he staged for *Crouching Tiger*, *Hidden Dragon* and *The Matrix* seem like your everyday chop-socky.

Fight sequences defy gravity, à la *Crouching Tiger*. Monks climb and somersault over walls, balance on sticks and fly from rooftop to rooftop. Every object, meanwhile, is used as a weapon. Bags of wheat, barrels, twigs, even shoes are hurled to hurt and used to shield.

The real kicker, however, is that the battles in *Iron Monkey* exist on scales and speeds grander and more blazing than anything since Jackie Chan's 1970s Hong Kong heyday.

Throughout, Iron Monkey and his nemesis-turned-accomplice, Wong Kei-Ying (Donnie Yen), take turns dueling with bands of bad guys who come off like bruising brutes from some evil ballet company.

The battle comes to a head in an amazing finale in which the Iron Monkey and Wong battle a nasty Royal Minister (Yen Yee Kwan) by high-kicking and tip-toeing like Olympic gymnasts over burning branches.

But don't let me spoil it by explaining what happens. After all, action, energy, and adrenaline cannot be explained. They have to be experienced. *John Petkovic*

MEMENTO by Christopher Nolan; 2000

This film, along with "The Limey" give me hope that amazing Noir films can still be made. When I first saw the previews for *Memento*, I thought it was going to be a cheap rip-off of Richard Neeley's book *Shattered*

which had already been made into a fairly crappy film starring Tom Berenger. It turned out that I was wrong, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that *Memento* surpassed *Shattered*.

It wasn't until my second viewing that I began to notice the unique and complex structure that the film takes. A mystery told backwards, the viewer watches things refold instead of unfold. But things are much more cyclical and complex than that.

A man, Leonard Shelby, has lost the ability to form new memories after the rape and murder of his wife. He has devoted his present, or rather series of presents, to avenging his wife's death. In order to make some semblance of forward progress in his investigation Leonard has devised a system of tattoos, polaroids, and written notes as a sort of "Cliff's Notes" of his discoveries to date. Guy Pearce, of "L.A. Confidential" fame does an excellent job as Leonard, both convincing and comical when the script calls for it.

One of the most unique elements of *Memento* is the ability of characters to mutate throughout the course of the narrative. Just when you think you have a character pegged as good or evil, or think you understand their motivations in the film those assumptions are undermined. It is rare in filmmaking to succeed in surpassing simple narrative yet avoid being overly formalistic or experimental. This film explores unreliable narrative and the way stories are told and retold in an accessible way. Like any great film that breaks new ground I'm sure there will be lots of films that follow that try to mimic or copy *Memento*. Trust me, you'll want to see the original. *Eric Frost*

METROPOLIS directed by Rintaro; Columbia Tri-Star, 2002

Metropolis is set in a futuristic utopia, where technology and culture unite to create the sci-fi equivalent of the city of Babylon.

The movie is itself like that biblical city: it reaches for the heavens, but speaks in many voices.

The latest effort by Japanese movie master Rintaro (X) cross-pollinates cultures, genres, eras, and styles to create an expansive film that resonates on multiple levels.

Sure, the hero and heroine look cute and innocent and have big, bulging eyes. Sure, the animation ping-pongs between mechanical violence and painterly poeticism. Sure, the man vs. machine themes are all there.

But there's so much more to *Metropolis* that goes beyond the confines of Japanimation.

Imagine a JapaniFrankenstein assembled in some sci-fi junkyard. The twisted angels of German expressionism are connected to the comedy of 1920s silent movies are connected to the lonely city and detectives of film noir are connected to the biting satire of Stanley Kubrick.

Based on a comic by manga pioneer Osamu Tezuka (*Astro Boy*) and inspired by the Fritz Lang sci-fi classic, *Metropolis* envisions a futuristic city-state inhabited by humans and robots. It's an apartheid state: the robots work for chump change, while the oppressive humans use fascist methods to keep the mechanical proletariat down.

Amid the chaos rises Duke Red. A power-drunk ruler, he intends to usher in a new world order by installing a humanlike robot queen, perfectly modeled after his deceased daughter, to rule over all of Metropolis. So he summons a mad scientist, Dr. Laughton, to build him one. You know how those mad scientists are, though: they always get it a little wrong. Dr. Laughton is no different. His creation is a sweet-looking robot girl. But she was "born" a tad early, leaving her torn between human and robot states—an A.I.-like crisis of being that drives the central theme of the film.

The humans, though, see her simply as a bucket of bolts that must be liquidated. Not Kenichi, though. The innocent boy helps the robot girl evade humans through the tunnels and skyscrapers of "Metropolis."

Like the city in Lang's 1926 film, Rintaro's *Metropolis* is a multi-tiered monstrosity that's visually stunning. Imagine if Las Vegas were to create a mega-resort based on Hitler's Nuremberg, grand scale and all. That isn't the only distortion in *Metropolis*. Most of the characters are a composite of ethnic types. Some aren't even human: With their plumes of hair, they look like mischievous bird men.

Rintaro, meanwhile, is just as adventurous with the film's soundtrack.

Rather than relying on the same cheesy techno-pop music we've seen all too often in Japanimation, he digs deeps into the twentieth century for sounds. Frenetic swing music is used to punctuate the chaos of a building catching on fire. It also turns a dancing robot scene into what amounts to a hilarious nod to the California dancing raisins. And, just as Kubrick did at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, Rintaro employs a reassuring ditty—Ray Charles's "I Can't Stop Loving You"—to provide an ironic counterpoint to doomsday.

It has the effect of making the destruction seem all the more jarring, since it depicts it as something infinitely poetic, even glorious. In the hands of Rintaro, it is. Out of many tongues, the Japanimation master has concocted one monster of a film. *John Petkovic*



MULHOLLAND DRIVE directed by David Lynch

While it may be 2001, it is still a near-landmark achievement when pairs of female heroines figure prominently in two of the year's best movies; even more remarkable when neither bear even a passing resemblance

Video drone

to *Thelma and Louise*. While Terry Zwigoff's hilariously cynical *Ghost World* may still be floundering at select movie houses, David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* is only now making the rounds after well-received engagements at Cannes and the Toronto International Film Festival (you will recall his *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* was bombarded with a chorus of deafening boos at Cannes some years back). As with most of Lynch's oeuvre, *Mulholland Drive* makes most sense when you stop trying to make perfect sense of everything. While sweaty logicians frantically work their thumbs blue rewinding and pausing *Lost Highway* in a vain effort to pinpoint the exact moment where linear plot dissolved, more astute viewers have given up such workouts to surrender complete confidence in Lynch's artistic/directorial abilities.

The movie sets off normally enough, as daft aspiring-actress Betty arrives in LA from Deep River, Ontario, with nothing more than two suitcases of luggage and rose-tinted optical lenses for eyes. Her situation turns doubly interesting upon finding herself paired with a voluptuous, amnesiac femme fatale who gives herself the handle of Rita. While the two arduously work to uncover her true identity, Rita and her fair-haired Florence Nightingale surrender to passion in one of the more tender love scenarios Lynch has conjured, as Betty presses her bare body against Rita's, whispering in uncontrollable breaths: "I'm in love with you!"

Beneath this plot waft others, involving Mafioso forces coercing a movie director into casting a talentless blond as his lead, as well as a killer for

hire with perpetual bad luck. It is here where Lynch provides the anchor of humor that will prove especially comforting to novice Lynchians, and by no means does he limit himself to the ultra-ironical, tongue-in-cheek variety employed to such great effect in *Blue Velvet*.

During the film's last half-hour, however, all bets are off, as Lynch yanks the carpet from beneath and navigates the film into its alternate universe, significantly altering the meaning of everything we've seen up to this point. Divulging any further information would only detract, and while it's difficult to even begin to understand the film's intended purpose, any potential meaning this viewer extracted revolved around: the different trajectories life can take, nightmares, truisms about the movie industry, self-deception/delusion (see also *Lost Highway* and *Memento*), the thoughtless cruelty in human relationships (by recasting the condition of the emotionally rattled as seen in Bergman's *The Silence* into a modern, noir-ish context).

Add to that Angelo Badalamenti's pointed ambience, the resounding dreamlike quality exemplary of all which bears the Lynch imprint, and you have exactly 2.5 hours of some of the finest in contemporary film. *Armen Svadian*

PANIC ROOM directed by David Fincher; Sony Pictures, 2002

Are plausibility, plot twists and character development three things you require from a film? Then don't rent *Panic Room*. The suspense thriller, which hit theaters this past April, has little of each. But if you're in the mood for a whole lot of yelling, arguing, and thumping—and campy bad guys to boot—you'll go bonkers over this flick.

It centers on Meg Altman (Jodie Foster), a divorcee who moves into a spooky Manhattan townhouse that happens to have a "panic room"—a steel-reinforced shelter in which one can hide from prowlers. Yep, and here they come: three boneheaded prowlers, played by Forest Whitaker, Jared Leto, and Dwight Yoakam.

They bicker, mess up the house and make fools out of themselves in an attempt to get at something hidden in the room. "Open the door!" they yell.

"No, I won't," says Jodie. "We'll break it down!" they yell. "Get away," she growls. And while the banter—or shall we say dynamic—gets tedious, *Panic Room* has its moments. Whitaker is good as a reluctant thief; Foster is convincingly frantic; Leto and Yoakam are ridiculous enough to make their most sadistic stunts somehow seem like slapstick.

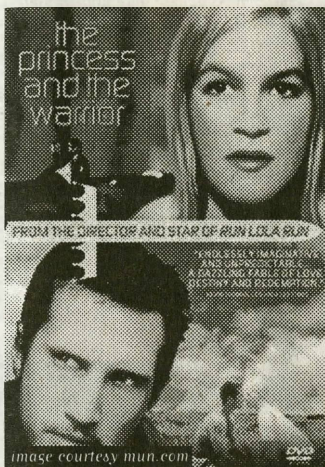
John Petkovic

PARADISE LOST 2—REVELATIONS directed by Bruce Sinofsky and Joe Berlinger; HBO 2001

Paradise Lost 2 is a follow up to the 1996 documentary *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*, and things only get stranger in this one. Alleged ring-leader Damien Echols has turned from a Metallica lovin' Wiccan into a full-fledged half-assed Buddhist. Damien has also achieved a sort of cult status as a result of the first documentary, including a small group of zealots who have raised money for his legal defense. The Damien devotees also protest outside of the grand parade of mediocrity that the state of Arkansas has seen fit to call an appeal hearing. Beside the fact that this film and its predecessor scare the shit out of you by proving how anyone can be wrongly accused of anything, the most compelling and entertaining element to these documentaries is the freak show put on by the father of one of the murdered boys, Mark Byers. Not only is Byers an antique-revolver-toting mullet-wearing boogie man, but in the first movie he gives the directors of the documentary a questionable weapon—a hunting knife with blood on it. If this wasn't enough to arouse suspicion, Byers's wife dies under mysterious circumstances between the time these two documentaries take place. Byers does nothing to dispel any suspicion in this second film, on the contrary, he steps the freak show up to epic proportions. Aside from his frothing at the mouth, cussing like a sailor, losing his false teeth in bar fights, robbing his neighbor's house, and being a compulsive liar, the man appears to be an upright citizen. This documentary lacks some of the initial direction of the first and falls back upon previous footage, but is still well worth a viewing for those who saw the first. *Eric Frost*

1999 directed by Nick Davis; First Rites Films, 2000

Sometimes movies are so bad they are funny. Sometimes they are so goddamn bad and such a waste of time that they are not worth the space the DVD would take up on your bookshelf. This movie is so bad it is not worth the space it would take up in one of those Case Logic CD holders. *1999* is a horrible end-of-the-millennium party movie in which Amanda Peet does not get naked. *Eric Frost*

**THE PRINCESS AND THE WARRIOR directed by Tom Tykwer; Sony, 2001**

On the heels of Tykwer's break out hit *Run Lola Run* comes this twisted tale that explores the fine line between fate and coincidence. Franka Potente (*Run Lola Run*) stars as Sissi, a mental ward nurse whose beauty mesmerizes the patients into an adoring frenzy. Imagine throwing Jenna Jameson into the mix of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Sissi's life is changed forever when she's struck by a large truck and saved by an elusive hero (Benno Fürmann) with an uncanny ability to perform an

emergency tracheotomy. Sissi's mystery man turns out to be an emotionally unstable formal soldier and part-time criminal who lives with his brother on the edge of town. What follows is a desperate attempt to connect with the man who saved her life only to stumble onto a botched bank robbery that unites the strangers and begs the question: fate or coincidence? Tykwer slows the pace of things down, reminiscent of his two pre-*Lola* films, and as a result *The Princess and the Warrior* didn't set America on fire. But that's just typical American reaction when it comes to digesting foreign films, since most folks have the patience of a two-year-old. Too bad, because this film is as good if not better than *Lola*. The plot is more complex with greater depth, it's a very sensuous film, and the acting is superb. *Troy Brooks*

THE REAL CASINO directed by Joseph F. Alexandre; JFA Films 1998

A 30-minute investigation into the personalities and activities behind the composite characters in Martin Scorsese's *Casino*, conducted through interviews with seven anonymous associates, grunts, family members, and peripheral characters from the neighborhood "back home" in Chicago. Director Alexandre, a hulking but nerdy Italian with a prominently displayed golden crucifix pendant, steps in front of the camera to narrate the proceedings, weave together anecdotes, and participate in needlessly hokey reenactments. He's also made a conscious decision to play around a bit with Scorsese's stylistic choices for both *Casino* and *Goodfellas*, splicing in clips from both (as well as films like *Donnie Brasco* and *Thief*) and replicating their soundtracks (late '60s Stones material and The Ronettes, most prominently). There are moments when they work, playfully jabbing at how Scorsese's films tend to glamorize the truly unromantic and brutal behavior at hand; at other points, however, the execution is poor, with badly timed and frustrating edits (a clip from *Thief* is included with dialogue, drowning out a far more interesting and relevant interview snippet). As for the interviews themselves, they're by far the most worthwhile component. A good deal of time is spent revealing exaggerations in the on-screen version of Tony "The Ant" Spilotro and his brother Michael, as well as the murder of Alan Dorfmann (Alan King's *Casino* character); a great explanation of the "street tax" (the mafia's shakedown of neighborhood businesses) is given by those who witnessed it first-hand; and there's a succinct rundown of how various Midwest mob families conspired to purchase the Stardust and Fremont casinos in Vegas. Still, things just feel flat. None of the interviews, although personalized and interesting, could really be considered staggering, and I doubt most people need to be informed that Scorsese took liberties with character development. A

much longer film that took its time and really delved into creating stories around its subjects, perhaps disregarding *Casino* as its focus, might have been far more engaging. *David Wilcox*

ROLLERBALL directed by John McTiernan; MGM Pictures, 2002

Finally, we've found the ultimate stumper for *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. "Name one redeeming thing about the remake of the sci-fi cult classic, 'Rollerball.'"

Tick, tick, tick...uh, duh, uh...ugh...It doesn't matter how long or how hard you think—there's nothing redeeming about this piece of garbage. The remake of Norman Jewison's 1975 film is set in the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan, where the Russian Mafia runs the most extreme of the extreme sports, Rollerball.

As in the original film, the game is basically an ultraviolent hodgepodge of roller-derby, rock-'em-sock-'em robots, demolition derby and hockey. But as *Plain Dealer* sports department staffer Tim Bennett said when we saw the film, "The game is just a big ball of confusion."

The film is way, way, way worse.

It focuses on a skate-board dude named Jonathan Cross (Chris Klein), who leaves the streets of San Francisco for the tracks of Central Asia. There, he becomes the king of the game, pulverizing and maneuvering around opponents like a Harlem Globetrotter on skates.

But who is this American who thinks he is king? ask the big bad Ruskies who run the league. The Mafioso, Petrovich (Jean Reno), will have none of this. He wants to increase the violence in order to get ratings up so he can land an American cable deal.

To that end, he tries to stomp on Jonathan's spirit and face. He even has his sidekick, Marcus Ridley (LL Cool J), assassinated and teammate/sex-kitten Aurora (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos) traded.

But the skater—played with maximum blandness by Klein—suddenly discovers his American values: whoa, dude, it's life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness! This of course, poses a threat to the Russian mob since Jonathan is a hero to local miners, who are on the verge of revolting against their oppressors.

What is revolting is this film—a wretched mix of vulgar propaganda and way-beyond-boneheaded violence. (And to think, this movie was made in the pop cultural heart of the free world, Hollywood.) It's too bad, because there is potential in the remake. The original, as campy as it was, explored ideas—world corporatization, violence as spectacle, a jaded popular culture—that are more timely now than ever. The remake, on the other hand, revels in the idiocy the original railed against. The only redeeming thing about *Rollerball* is that it's so wretched, it almost makes you forget how bad of an actress Romijn-Stamos is. But, then again, I wouldn't exactly call that redeeming.

Full disclosure: After seeing the original film, some friends and I would dress up in football and hockey gear to play rollerball in the backyard, with hockey sticks and a croquet ball. After seeing the remake, I've decided to retire from the game for good. *John Petkovic*

WILD FLOWERS directed by F.A. Brabec; Czech Republic, 2000

Karel Jaromir Erben's fairy tales aren't bedtime reading. They're enchanting little dreams that turn into wicked nightmares.

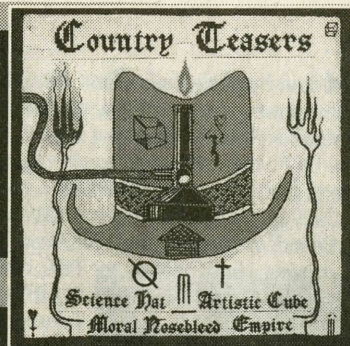
Wild Flowers brings those nightmares to living glory. F.A. Brabec's film is based on seven tales by Erben, a nineteenth century Czech poet who often has been compared to Edgar Allen Poe. Like past interpreters of Erben's works—romantic composer Antonin Dvorak and surrealist animator Jan Svankmajer—Brabec is more interested in the poeticism of the haunting stories than in literal interpretation.

"Waterman," about a maiden who follows a red scarf to the bottom of a lake, where she meets an enticing lover, flows with sex-and-death imagery, shadowy cinematography, and buckets of water. "Wedding Shirts," an impressionistic story about a soldier who returns from battle to claim a bride, mingles virginal innocence with death. "Golden Spinning Wheel," meanwhile, looks like a Bergman flick as directed by Fellini. It's as playful as it is procession-like with its prince, maiden and band of evildoers, all scheming in a magical, mysterious forest. It's in scenes such as this that you forget that *Wild Flowers* is in Czech with English subtitles. It's so poetic, you don't need to know the words. *John Petkovic*

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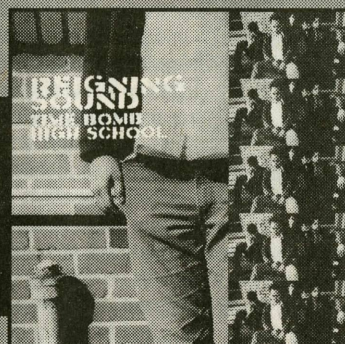
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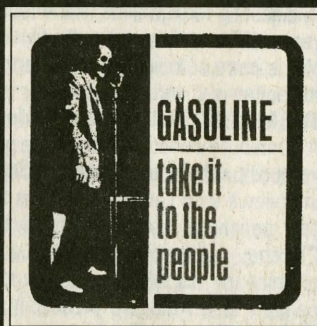
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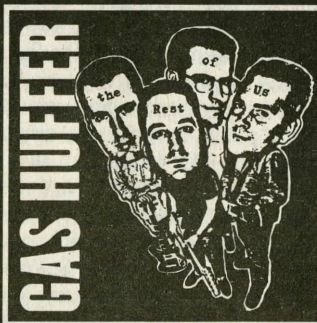
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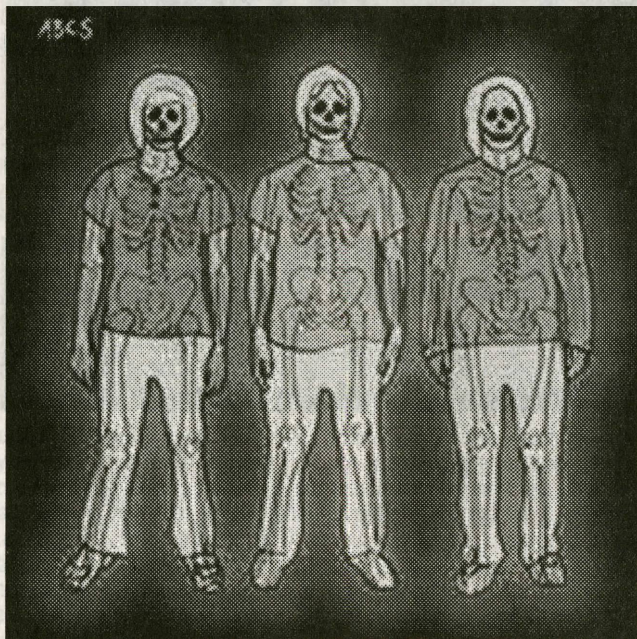
Audio *reviews*

ABC'S CD

I don't think anyone has made such a fantastic racket with just saxophone, accordion and drums before. The first track kicks things off immediately with maddening looping rounds of accordion and sax triplets over a 3/4 time drum beat. Elsewhere, the sax dips into the skronkonias and the drummer locks onto cool drone grooves with the accordionist. From time to time, it gets a bit too jazz-hole for my tastes. But for the most part, this album has the same hyper pace and musical rounds that Danny Elfman employs in all his soundtrack scores. Very cool, and a refreshing, creative, and clever endeavor. [Troubleman Unlimited] *Dave Clifford*

AEREOGRAMME *A Story In White* CD

From the ashes of Ganger rises a mighty Phoenix. Guitarist Craig B found the Tortoise-y nature of his previous outfit too limiting for his explosive playing, so he hooked up with two mates who were more in tune with his volcano-like sensibilities. The band's sound has the quiet outward presence of a glacier, tamed and glistening, waiting for the right moment for an earth-shaking explosion of sound and movement. There are many bands working the "soft/loud" territory, but Aereogramme does it deftly with grace and style where others are ham-fisted and clumsy. Also contains the previous effort, "White Paw." Excellent. [Matador] *Les Scurry*



ACID MOTHERS TEMPLE *New Geocentric World of...* CD

Japan's prolific Acid Mothers Temple embrace the keystone elements of psychedelic music but, discounting the abundance of synthesizers, overdriven guitar solos, crosschannel panning, and facial hair, *New Geocentric World Of...* is as over-dilated as it is trip-inspiring. Alternating between densely layered selections that sound as if they required the involvement of the entire twelve-piece ensemble, and psyched out hymn-like folk ballads, the record provides enough aural stimulation to shatter even the most focused of attention spans. The group invokes interplanetary space travel without leaving the planet (particularly on "Occie Lady," an in-the-red excursion into Hendrixian

heaven) but the orbits they establish aren't close enough to the sun to cause temporary blindness let alone fry a drug-softened cortex. [Squealer] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

ALAN SILVA AND THE SOUND VISIONS ORCHESTRA CD

Alan Silva, better known to most of us jazz dilettantes as the phenomenal bass player on Albert Ayler's Greenwich Village concerts, offers his leadership (via synthesizer and "conduction") to a feisty crew featuring the likes of Raphe Malik, Roy Campbell, Jr., Sabir Mateen, and Wilbur Morris. The first half of the first third of this program assaults you with a vehemence missing from most of my listening these days—you



alta may - glazed records

Audio *reviews*

can practically see the floor roiling under poet Steve Dalachinsky's feet as he shouts of storms and spirits. Still, the shrill reedy snits and brassy fits ebb and flow enough during the course of a challenging 50-plus minutes to temper the aggression—the musical seas may churn, but a persistent piano steers the waves away toward some softer solos. Section two sees the earlier rumbling and howling sliding into massed ascending scales and solos from instruments usually left out of the spotlight (bassoon, bass trombone, French horn). Silva's keyboards come to the fore in the final installment, as well as a plaintive, songlike tenor solo by Kidd Jordan that in turn leads to whimsical group asides that then end in a dissonant dead stop. Whew. [Eremitic] *Cecile Cloutier*

ALTA MAY *We As In Us* CD

The teaser here is the return of Garrett Shavlik, former drummer for The Fluid (best goddamned band ever) and Spell (ho hum). Garrett can still create a righteous thunder on the kit, and has found himself in Seattle with a pair of refugees from Cold Crank and Anodyne. Naturally, they're cranking out the sort of heavy-as-fresh-concrete, molar-rattling crunch that fell out of public favor seven or eight years ago. And there's nothing wrong with that—just because A&R-types stopped combing the

Northwest looking for Marshall stack-kicking longhairs to grace the cover of *Rolling Stone* doesn't mean loud guitar rock suddenly became a bad idea. Hell, we've still got Mudhoney to kick around, and all those greasy stoner rock groups (Fu Manchu, Queens of the Stone Age, Nebula, et. al.) seem to be really making a go of it. Alta May would like to be held in the same regard as those bands, but they've got some work to do. *We As In Us* certainly has its moments, mostly at the beginning where the heft and crunch are buoyed by well-crafted melody and intricate, soaring vocal harmonies (see the title track, "Last Call," and "Moving Target"). The pop-heavy "Crown Yourself" integrates some folk strummings into the thunderous ear-crunching format to create a likeable, radio-friendly cut. However, what would have made an enjoyable, respectable EP soon devolves into half-baked clichés and gratuitous Nirvana sound-alikes. It would be great if the flash-in-the-pan hype of Seattle guitar rock reformed into a steady, below-the-radar genre filled with creative, work-a-day acts. With some focus and fat trimming, Alta May could help the situation along. [Glazed] *Bo Pogue*

THE AMERICAN ANALOG SET *Know By Heart* CD

They're from Austin, but, to get comparisons out of the way, they would probably be comfortable in Chicago, laying down with some of the moody atmospheric creators that were popping up on dimly-lit stages during the early/mid '90s. Yes, the sound is mostly of the delicate variety, but AmAnSet is by no means background music, as these expertly-arranged melodies envelop the listener and command attention. They used to lean heavily on farfisa, which, after line-up changes, has been replaced with a variable set of key and synth sounds that offer a deft counterpoint and complement to equally-nuanced (mostly clean/acoustic) guitar work. The hero of this latest effort is drummer Mark Smith, who employs sharp taps, smooth brushes, and stalled beats to lay down a solid foundation. Smith's expert pacing adds anticipation to the already-strong compositions. Rounding out the sound are plenty of add-ons in the percussion department, gorgeously understated vibraphone, and a warm, steady vocal track. What's more, the song selection makes the disc a solid listen from start to finish, refusing to stagnate as it switches from sweet, airy, sometimes-sparse Low-pop melodies to oscillating, driving instrumental ("Like Foxes Through Fences") to near-side, wheezing-synth rock ("Million Young"). Anyone who says *Know By Heart* is boring needs immediate evaluation for possible attention deficit disorder (and I recommend intensive drug therapy). [Tigerstyle] *Bo Pogue*

AMOR BELHOM DUO CD; *Wavelab* CD

The Amor Belhom Duo (consisting of two Frenchmen transplanted to Tucson) bill their music as "avant-French pop." The term's new to me, but from listening to these two discs, I would describe it as a scattershot approach, at different turns, ambient, raucous, seductive and so on. It's not badly done, but ultimately, the constantly shifting nature of the music requires a level of concentration that the quality doesn't inspire. [Carrot Top] *Brett Horn*

ANITA LANE *Sex O'Clock* CD

Anita Lane dated Nick Cave for a very long time. That is a loaded statement, because it implies that she is an untalented hanger-on to a famous performer. As documented by many of his contemporaries, Cave borrowed many of Lane's ideas in his songs and eventually he gave her credit as a Bad Seed in the backing band's formation. However, her contribution to his muse has long been ignored. But, over the years, Cave and Mick Harvey have given her credit due in various duets and guest spots on their recordings. This album is produced by Harvey and features his multi-instrumentalist talents on most of its tracks. However, the album itself is really quite bland. Sure, the lyrics are clever and the music toys with cute '60s pop style, but nothing seems to stick out in any manner. Lane's wry humor is well suited by Harvey's imitations of the Serge Gainsbourg catalog, but all told, none of the songs embody the same clever contradictions and oversexed confidence of Gainsbourg's great songs. The ideas are definitely there, but the music and delivery aren't. [Mute] *Dave Clifford*

ANITA LANE *Sex O'Clock* CD

In her own ignorance, Lane records two songs by famed DC crackhead Gil Scott-Heron, a loser of enormous proportions. The good news is that

his royalties will be meager because this is one bad release, a massive disappointment. While *Dirty Pearl* was an uneven but eccentric collection of songs that each had merits, *Sex O'Clock* is cohesively tepid, a cloying and self-conscious stab at sexiness, bad r&b, and pop. Lane's voice is still the coquettish squeak, sans the touches of irony from *Dirty Pearl*, which includes the masterpiece cover of Nancy Sinatra's "Boots..." done with Barry Adamson. How the fuck did she fall so far? From Nick Cave collaborator to this requires some seriously bad advice. Take it back. But in the meantime pick up *Dirty Pearl* the first chance you get. [Mute] *Miller*

ANNIKA BENTLEY With Leak, Blink, and Breath CD

Um, how do I say this nicely? I guess I don't. It sounds very artistic and all, obviously "finely wrought" and emotive and stuff, and Ms. Bentley's obviously got a bunch of talent (and a kickass voice)...but this is absolute pretentio-meander. Rotten fruit from the Kate Bush tree. Guess I'm just not a "sensitive guy." Awwww. [Billy Likes] *David B. Livingstone*

ANTHONY BRAXTON & ALEX HORWITZ Four Compositions (Duets) 2000 CD

The very idea of pairing forward-thinking, chart-devising avant-hero Braxton with a 21 year old standup comic / actor from New York seems ludicrous from the outset. The plan was for Horwitz to read and comment on a variety of subjects while Braxton "interacted" on reeds. Megaphones, cue cards, books, newspapers and percussion were all used as "props."

With Braxton in the left channel and Horwitz in the right, the two collaborate in a variety of ways. Horwitz begins by verbalizing his bewilderment with the concept of a DVD, using absurd personification to add humor, while Braxton improvises somewhat half-heartedly. Horwitz makes fun of Allstate and Dominos commercials like the guy at college who was far less clever and witty than he believed his Mystery Science Theater-Fan-Club-member self to be. The piece is endless, aimless, and most definitely UN-funny.

Horwitz goes on to read headlines, mock cultural constants, read texts dealing with things such as global warming and "urethral eroticism," and generally wax intellectual, while Braxton continues to squeak his academic squeaks. Picture someone setting up in your house and saying "I'm going to randomly read things to you about Freudian Diagnosis and Valvoline while I play one of Anthony Braxton's boring solo records in the background. Hope this cheers you up!"

I admit that I've never enjoyed stand-up comedy, and that I've always found Anthony Braxton's brand of luddite jazz terribly dull, but even I was surprised at how relieved I was when this record's seventy-four minutes was finally over, feeling as if I'd just gotten rid of an unwanted guest. Maybe I just don't "get it." Or maybe it just sucks. [Creative Improvised Music Projects] *James Jackson Toth*

AROVANE/PHOENEM AER(Valid) CD

You've got to give the musicians involved credit for a new approach. In lieu of splitting this CD, Arovane and Phoenem literally decided to meet in the middle. Both groups (or both guys, geez who can tell these days?) got together to record the first three tracks, then each peel off to add two individual tracks before uniting again on the final cut. An interesting concept, but unfortunately it takes place in the Faceless World of Post-Techno where computer programs have more personality than individuals do. So while there are plenty of pings, blips, pops of hiss and swaths of white noise there isn't much to distinguish Mr. Arovane from Mr. Phoenem or to enlighten the listener as to when they are working together. The cooperative track "Valid Fard" transitions well from clouds of static into crisply reverberating drums while a melody drifts somewhere in the background. And I guess it's to everybody's credit that breakbeats generally are kept to a minimum. Phoenem's "Neyem" oscillates nicely between the sound of air escaping a tire and wind chimes. It's all very nice, very tasteful, and seldom dips into powerbook skippy-a-dee-doo-dah. But I am profoundly unmoved. [Vertical Form, PO Box 29511, London N1 6WY, U.K.] *Bruce Adams*

ASS PONYS LOHIO CD

If anything, you have to give Ass Ponys credit for keeping that awful name for all these years. Once you get past the ridiculous handle, the music ain't half bad. Not quite as instantly catchy as *Some Stupid With*

a Flare Gun, this time choosing to embrace a blend of down home quirk with Chuck Cleaver's twisted tales. *LOHIO* fits perfectly into a neighborhood bar with familiar faces. Music for working class folks with a serious bent on life. Too old and too clever for radio, Ass Ponys are destined to grow roots in the space reserved for much-beloved cult bands. The life of Frank Black set in Ohio. [Checkered Past] *Troy Brookins*

ATOMBOMBPOCKETKNIFE God Save the ABPK CD

Atombombpocketknife's second LP, *God Save the ABPK*, rocks suitably hard from beginning to end but is a few wild hairs short of fulfilling the perennial craving America's heartland has for smart, noisy rock bands. Frontman Justin Sinkovich and guitarist Che Arthur volley guitar parts back and forth, entwining blurrily strummed whitewash with short repetitive chords that insinuate themselves into the forefront. The lateral movements in Allison Hollihan's basslines are ingratiating and steer the band into instrumental breaks that are often catchier than the choruses that follow. The cadence of Justin's talk-song vocals becomes commonplace after awhile but Atombombpocketknife's purpose can be found in the wood and wires that make sounds that hark back to a time when the sky was the limit for bands like Hüsker Dü, Dinosaur Jr., and Poster Children. [Southern] *Jeffrey Herrmann*



atombombpocketknife - claire mcneely

ATOMBOMBPOCKETKNIFE God Save The ABPK CD

Chicago's super power pop outfit Atombombpocketknife packs sonic dreams that skip infectious from track to track. Think DEVO meets Bitch Magnet. All the elements are there: whip smart hooks and instantly memorable lyrics. This is one of those records that gets buried under your skin and you find yourself humming the tunes down the street. You can't resist. [Southern] *Troy Brookins*

AWOL ONE AND DADDY KEV Souldoubt CD

A surefire way to turn your party from a bunch of mama-joke-snapping thugs to a roomful of crybabies hating on the perpetrators of childhood trauma X: take off that Jay-Z record and slip *Souldoubt* onto those 1200s for just one side.

This is as dark as a hip-hop record gets, and Awol One's gruff vocals are perfect to deliver lines like "Money changes humans / the ATM spits out blood." There are no guest spots, skits or interludes on this record. Even on more upbeat numbers, such as "Solitude," Awol raps an entire verse about mutilating his mouth to avoid "saying stupid shit," all the while trying not to wake his family and daughter. This is on some ol' sorry-Miss-Jackson-I-slit-my-wrists-in-your-bathtub type shit.

There are a few moments where the clouds do part, as when Awol One gets almost tuneful on "Feel," name-dropping his favorite groups of hip-hop past and generally waxing nostalgic, but overall, the vibe is heavy and foreboding, with beats to match.

If it is indeed true that "music is the weapon of the future," as Awol sermonizes on "Demolition," this MC is armed with some heavy artillery. Keep your eyes peeled. [Meanstreet] *James Jackson Toth*

THE BAD WIZARD Free And Easy CD

From the first glance at the cover, there's no question that this is a throwback to all that rocked Michigan circa 1969. However, The Bad Wizard is from New Jersey circa 2001 and th' Wizard's stance is pointed



squarely at the rawk of the MC5 right down to the get-down, non-stop, free-love-for-all boogie cranking. It's really a pretty simple formula and pretty damn cool to boot. [Tee Pee] Wm. Christman

BASTARD NOISE *Throne Is Melting* CD

John Wiese and Eric Wood are at it again. Their groovy Bastard Noise jazz-cum-noise combo spit out a bit of ye olde noise annoyance through a few different channels. There are collaborations with some of the usual suspects who are up to their old Merzbow-ian tricks of brash, in-your-face distortion-fests as well as some quieter, poetry-laced "think-pieces." They also tack on two 20 minute long Windham Hill-like pieces both of which sound like listening to the ocean. Gnarly. [Helicopter] Wm. Christman

BEACHWOOD SPARKS *Once We Were Trees* CD

Beachwood Sparks's first record for Sub Pop had me and the other fellas at the record store I work at going bananas. We were in the midst of one of our never-verbalized but eerily simultaneous Burrito Brothers kicks, and Beachwood Sparks was just the thing to keep us doing the old county waltz long enough to keep our minds off of murdering clueless customers and bumming on how there were often no customers at all. My interest dwindled after seeing them live, during which time they hit the correct notes exactly twice.

The unfortunately titled *Once We Were Trees* reminds me of the first time I heard Beachwood Sparks. While somewhat more morose than it's predecessor, *Once We Were Trees* is not short on songs that you'd swear are outtakes from *The Notorious Byrd Brothers*, such as the wistful "Your Selfish Ways," and "The Sun Surrounds Me," which could easily accompany a narration by Kevin Arnold without sounding anachronistic. There's also an abundance of country-flavored numbers, such as "You Take The Gold" and the banjo-led campfire lament "Old Manatee" which, if less Gram than McQuinn, is only due to the less than perfect voices and perhaps less than distinct personalities of the collective 'Sparks. Still, the spirit remains. While the psychedelic "The Goodnight Whistle" is the sound of Poco at Terrastock, "By Your Side" (a reference to fan Chris Robinson?) sounds like something you'd hear at Jimmy Carter High's senior prom.

If only for signaling a definite end to the dreadful bands from whence they individually came, or just for helping to make straw hats fashionable again, Beachwood Sparks remain just alright with me. [Sub Pop] James Jackson Toth

BERNARD DONZEL-GARGAND *Toile de Sons* CD

Now this is cool. Atmospheric electronic weirdness with lots of ambient recordings—water, crowds, whatever—that seem to take the form of a

But now, with the reissue of both albums on New York's Rubric label, the wait has paid off. And paid off well, my friends: superior sound, great notes by Nick Saloman (Mr. Frond, himself), and—between the two—a total of thirteen bonus tracks.

Nice as *Inner Marshland* now sounds to these (much wiser) ears, *Miasma* is a far better—and more representative—intro to the world of The Bevis Frond. Hints of the cerebral journey and medieval, acoustic touch of *Marshland* are there, but this album overflows with brain-scraping guitar, haunting Farfisa, and tight, melodic songs. Saloman's liners amusingly recount his innumerable "close calls with success" during the twenty-six years that lead up to Frond's vinyl debut. Being a psychedellic warrior, he had mixed feelings about punk: admired the attitude, not so the low standard of musicianship. Still, he clearly found it inspiring, and the resulting psych-punk fusion is beautifully evident on tunes like "She's In Love With Time," "Need All Your Loving," and "Maybe" (which is nearly identical to—but, suspiciously, pre-dates—Neil Young's "Rockin' In The Free World": wouldn't be surprised if ol' Neil's a fan). Another previously unreleased gem is "High Wind in the Trees," which sounds like something that was left off Love's first album. The first time around, I hastily dismissed *Inner Marshland* as early Genesis pap, but back then my head was more like a cinder block, instead of the thirsty sponge I currently maintain (held onto all of my 999 LPs; go figure). How it really is: Saloman takes the sound and style established on the first album and uses it to great effect, weaving an aural fantasy film. Disturbing characters worthy of Lewis Carroll himself poke their snouts in and out of reverb-soaked segues between songs about swamps and "Defoliation" (parts one and two, even). It all serves as a parable of paranoia, with musings on erosion of the soul. Then again, maybe it's just the acidic rambling of a hippie who missed the last boat out of Canterbury. Either way, it's worth the trip. And many thereafter. [Rubric] Peter Aaron

BILL HICKS *Philosophy: The Best of Bill Hicks* CD

In 1997, three years after his sudden death from cancer, Rykodisc released four CD titles by the notorious comedian Bill Hicks. Two of these were reissues of long-unavailable independent releases, *Dangerous* (1990) and *Relentless* (1992), which document, in formative, general strokes, the attacks on mediocrity, hypocrisy, and American anti-intellectualism that were forever the thrust of his material; both bitingly funny and insightful, but truthfully, merely top-notch exercises in "edgy" comedy. Released simultaneously, however, were two new collections: *Arizona Bay* (a "concept album" about the serenity that would accompany California's inevitable collapse into the Pacific, complete with musical interludes, and which Hicks had recently completed at the time of his death) and *Rant In E-Minor* (a maniacal posthumous collection of Hicks's last performances), both more direct in their targets, unflinchingly honest in their disgust and hatred, and, collectively, two of the most daring and inspirational hours of comedy ever laid to tape. There are, of course, equally valiant and important recordings by the likes of Richard Pryor, Lenny Bruce, and George Carlin, names with which Hicks is often grouped as the standard-bearers for comedy as Art, but to fully grasp the true singularity of Hicks among them, it's important to realize that he never reached the public stature of those three in his lifetime. There was no Carnegie Hall to vault him into respectability; no starring role in a Hollywood feature film to dull his bark and make him lovable, and not necessarily because he rejected or didn't want these things. His act, though classically embraced by Europeans, was simply not appreciated in this country in the wake of the Reagan/Bush years. Instead he spent well over a decade having entire appearances on *Late Night With David Letterman* excised before airing, being intimidated and physically attacked by club patrons in the Deep South, and openly airing his anti-child, anti-Christian, Chomsky-inspired tirades against government, the military, and capitalist culture to whatever random yahoos (who he'd often attack personally; who else screams "You Fucking Morons!" to a paying audience?) happened to attend the Laff Stop on any given night. It was, as he was known to call it, the "Comedy of Hate," yuk-yuk misanthropy. Perhaps that's why Ryko's new "Best of Bill Hicks" collection, *Philosophy*, rubs me the wrong way. It's not that Hicks has been sanitized by this compilation; his

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narrative if you listen for a while. Unlike a lot of so-called "experimental" stuff that spends a lot of time wrapped up in self-worship or musical academe, Gargand creates soundscapes that seem infused with meaning—even if that meaning is not readily decipherable or apparent. The result is music that envelopes, evokes, and occasionally seems to suffocate. Very cool indeed. [Platelunch] David B. Livingstone

THE BEVIS FROND *Miasma* CD; *Inner Marshland* CD

Fired up by flowing raves in *Forced Exposure* (or was it *Bucketfull of Brains*?), I bought *Inner Marshland* (The 'Frond's second LP) when it came out, in '87. Reviews had been along the lines of "acid-mind-fuck-extraterrestrial-freak-flag-flying-jams" (or something), but to me the record was more Bilbo Baggins than Spacemen 3. I sold it.

Mistake.

In later years, I'd hear bits of Frond and the stuff actually sounded cool: yeah, plenty of early Floyd/Barret/ fairy tale whimsy, but also a surplus of sublime, rec-room Hendrix guitar excursions. I'd obviously missed something, and I wished I'd held onto that record (and had even picked up The Frond's 1986 debut, *Miasma*). Woe, was me. I scoured the "reasonably-priced" bins, to no avail.

bits are what they are, no matter how they're sliced. And some of his most pointed material was of a particular moment in history, so their exclusion due to dating is somewhat understandable (even if her progeny still dominate our televisions, I guess the anti-Debbie Gibson rants aren't essential). But this is supposed to be his "best" work, which was decidedly negative; and to not include his analysis of the Rodney King trial, or condemnation of the ATF raid on the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, or his bits of "dark poetry" about Jay Leno shoving an uzi in his mouth and splattering his brains into the shape of an NBC peacock on the wall (portions of which are reportedly so vicious they *still* haven't seen the light of day), and Reagan, Newt Gingrich, and both Barbara and George Bush Sr. indulging in a round of scatophilia with Rush Limbaugh, seems almost criminal. Such is what happens when you attempt to condense a man's life's work into 60 minutes. In the future, here's hoping Ryko tries in earnest to piece together a brand new release from the vault of unreleased Hicks material that still collects dust nearly a decade after his untimely departure. That being said, *Philosophy* is fine for what it is: an introduction. But as its producer, Jeff Rougvie, attests in his liner notes, "If you like what you hear...you should really listen to Bill Hicks's complete albums. There's plenty more dark stuff where this came from, my friend." I second that. [Rykodisc] *David Wilcox*

BILLY MAHONIE *What Becomes Before* CD

I've come to recognize that while instrumental post-punk *should* be one of the most difficult hat tricks to pull off, it is often rendered quite nicely. Billy Mahonie is yet another excellent exponent of this somewhat rarefied, severely challenging genre.

The starting point of most tracks is an intricate clockwork of intermeshing multiple guitar parts: contrasting yet complementary arpeggios, tightly wound rhythm guitar figures, spiraling lead lines—gorgeous as a hand-braided rug of green-patina copper, stainless steel, and gold lanyard. These movements alternate with brief and brutal massed riffing, sometimes in a heavy metal style—at other times more rustic, rusty-stringed blues hiccuping. On some tracks, the two are intercut, a good example of the group's superb use of dynamics. Make no mistake, Billy Mahonie's ability to impart narrative flow to lyric-less songs is mighty indeed. This stuff will put you in mind of Felt doing an impression of Television's interpretation of King Crimson MK V. Amazing! [Southern] *Howard W.*

BLACK DICE *Cold Hands* CD

More sublime racket from the band other bands want to beat up. *Cold Hands'* first track is a very atypical, reserved (they'd probably want me to call it a "piece" but it's just a) track (really), that sounds like a stoned someone playing a deranged music box. Nice touch. From there it's business as usual. "Smile Friends" and "The Raven" basically sound like most other Black Dice tracks you may have heard, while "Birthstone" is a feedback tone poem reminiscent of Whitehouse (without all the for-real scariness, of course). Get this now before they stop using guitars altogether. [Troubleman] *James Jackson Toth*

BLACK LIPSTICK *The Four Kingdoms of Black Lipstick* CD EP

Yeah. This is exactly the correct shit. No more, no less. Austin's Black Lipstick has a sound that is founded on savage rhythm guitar "rinnngggggg," aortal drum-bumping, and zigzag wandering fuzz guitar leads; it's all lovingly cribbed from *White Light/White Heat*. And this is topped off by vocals that are pure Tom Verlaine. A potent mix to these ol' ears.

Black Lipstick then proceed to extend their aesthetic conceits with strong original compositions (OK, "White Jazz" is pretty much the non-jam part of "Sister Ray" with a tumbling piano figure stuck on top). Some of the chord progressions are just what you'd expect while others are unexpected but apt departures—usually found in the bridges.

So you got a nicely unpolypurethaned tough and tangled sound, pointed yet loose song shapes written in, cool conjunction of one classic undie influence (VU) along with one of its most notable acolytes (TV). And Black Lipstick lives up to the standards of these sources. It sounds simple enough but it's tough to get it right and it rarely happens. [Peek-A-Boo, PO Box 49542, Austin, TX 78765] *Howard W.*

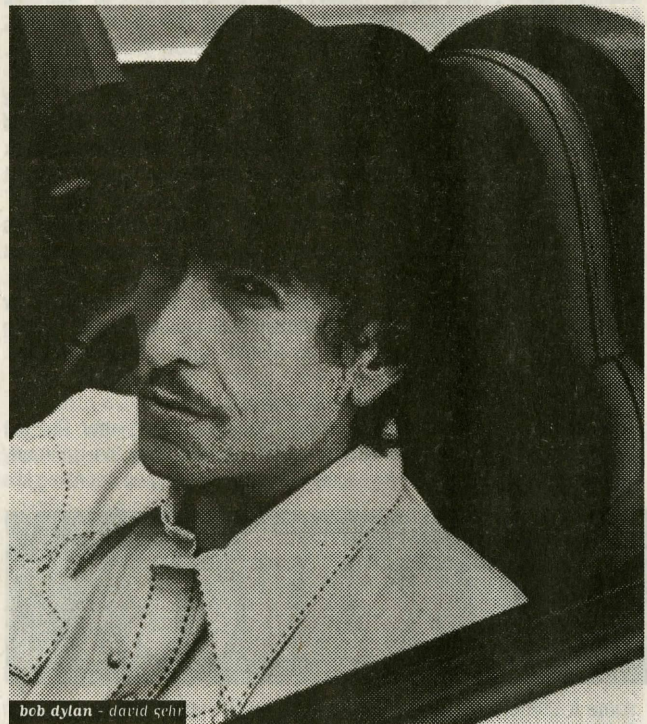
THE BLACK WIDOWS *Arocknaphobia* CD

Formed like a secret society, The Black Widows are five masked

marauders who dare you to call them a surf band. These rock 'n' roll rabble-rousers have set out to conquer the world with their patented "All-original anti-clambake spider rock." Mean as hell are eighteen instrumental tracks that burn hot and cool up and down the asphalt and leave both Link Wray and Dick Dale with their thumbs out. A sinister blend of leather, unfiltered smokes, and '60s drag strip mayhem. *Arocknaphobia* is thee definitive soundtrack of debauchery. [Vital Gesture] *Troy Brookins*

BOBBY CONN *Golden Age* CD

It took a few listens before I made up my mind on this one, but consider me completely sold. This is post-rock (if that term has any meaning) at its best. On this release, Bobby Conn crams all of his musical influences into his head, mashes them up and spews them out again to create his own inimitable style. All the familiar elements are there: funk, punk, pop, glam, etc., but slapped together in a way that sounds fresh and engaging. The disc is chock full of sublime moments that will have you scratching your head, wondering "where did he lift that from?" Monica BouBou deserves much of the credit, as her violin lends the creepy atmosphere that puts the best songs over the top. Sure, some of this is terribly self-indulgent, but that's just part of the deal (just as a cheeseburger is nothing without the grease). [Thrill Jockey] *Brett Horn*



bob dylan - david sehn

BOB DYLAN *Love And Theft* CD

I've never been much for Bob Dylan. Never bought a single recording. Until the day I got this album for that special lady in my life, who is an acknowledged Dylan nut. We played it and lo and behold; I liked it. A lot. Enough to get myself a copy. Recorded by Dylan in a two week session with his touring band (that's practically punk rock?!), *Love And Theft* ought to be seen as a warning shot in the direction of every band trying to peddle some musical form of Americana. Blues, folk, foxtrot, '20s radio ballad, not only does Dylan and band know how to play the stuff but the album's songs are imbued with a momentum, edge, and humor that I find sorely lacking on the No Depression circuit. Having never been particularly appreciative of Dylan's wordy style on the "classic" stuff I must have gone through a serious suspension of disbelief when I first played this album. Because lines like "there's a rustling in the woods and things are falling off the shelf" strike me just right; an echo of trad blues phrasing and just the right touch of self-knowledge. From the opening shuffle of "Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum" Dylan lays it down fast and

accurately with the band spitting and lashing out while lyrically Dylan is a silver-tongued devil. There is impressive lead and rhythm guitar work across the album, with some biting leads and great interplay—all signs of a road tested band caught at their peak. A hat is jauntily tipped toward John Fogerty with a familiar riff on "Honest With Me." Dylan can even put on the old soft-shoes and croon at the moon in June on "Moonlight," a song Bing Crosby would have been happy to mumble out. What sealed it for me was the bad ass descending riff on "Lonesome Day Blues," a piece of rhythm guitar as nasty and swampy as you're likely to hear for a long time. It goes without saying that Bob Dylan has forgotten more about blues and its musical descendents than most country insurgents will ever know. Given the raw urgency and drive of this album who would need anything else?

[Columbia] *Bruce Adams*

BOB MOULD *Modulate* CD

An embrace of advancing forms in modernity for the sake of an updated image can be a slippery slope. Few come to mind who have managed to navigate the incline gracefully. Most artists would be best suited to play to their strengths, doing what they do best. This, of course, means more bang for the buck, thank you. And when Bob's name comes up I think it's fair to say we're all expecting something good, right? I don't consider this unfair, but I honestly don't understand or see the investigation of modern electronic technology (computer sampling, synthesizers, and so on) in Mould's case as a worthy time investment. In fact, the returns here are so greatly diminished from the what-could-have-been I can only scratch my head and ask, why? I see the name Bob Mould and I expect raging guitars, roaring chords, overly saturated stereo chorus, meaty distortion that vaguely hides the pop-hook mentality...and all that introspective angst and ennui he's never in short supply of. Much of the latter remains, and in a song like "Semper Fi" there's no mistaking the chops are still there to craft songs as good as his legacy would lead one to expect. I can understand anyone's interest in learning another language, and I for one can only say enjoy, dabble, expand, have fun, whatever, but when you can't communicate fluently with the same kind of impact, why bother? I still hold out hope, trusting that the next modulation in the Bob Mould cannon isn't so diluted.

[Granary Music] *Peter Davis*

BOXCAR SATAN *Crooked Mile March* CD

The deconstruction of American roots music is nothing new. But the thing about San Antonio's Boxcar Satan is that they do so many styles—blues, jazz, country, gospel, exotica—and end up sounding like

In each selection, all of these elements gently and gradually ooze forward like a large, particularly coherent cloud bank. If you watch any of them closely, they may not appear to move at all, but if your attention waivers and suddenly returns, they'll have progressed a good mile. If you try to take 'em in as whole units their mass seems stolid and unchanging. If you concentrate on small sections, you'll see they're constantly roiling. An occasional vocal presence is dropped in, but it functions as an afterthought and doesn't really impact the processes described above.

Most tracks are long, as pop songs are measured, most clocking in around seven minutes. And the length plus the limited vocabulary deployed makes it all seem deceptively samey and repetitive—it actively forces your attention away. Given time, you start to notice the nuances: different rhythmic emphases (tho tempo on all of the tracks consistently hovers around the same plod/drift pace); varying stacks of elements—some selections have a core of ambiguous pink noise, others are nothing but melodic bits. There are some "dubwise" stratagems at work from time to time where the bass and drums are jerked out from underneath the overall body of the composition. Percussion figures differ and textures are also manipulated; the strings sound authentic and orchestral on one piece and totally like cheap Korg samples on another.

Patient listening is rewarded on *Drawn from Life*, though perhaps not to the degree as it is on old school shit like *Shutov Assembly*, say. But that was then and this is now. [Astralwerks] *Howard W.*

THE BROUGHT LOW CD

Southern-fried rock served up Big Apple-style. Formed in 1999 by a trio of Brooklynites, the Brought Low honed their style by playing with the likes of Sweet Diesel, Murphy's Law, and the Voluptuous Horror of Karen Black. The Brought Low, however, are more southern rock than punk rock, so if ya like yr Ronnie Van Zant and ZZ Top 'n' Skinnard played by Northernuhs, with a vocalist reminiscent of Mick Jagger and Chris Robinson, dig in. [Tee Pee Records, 136 Lawrence Street, #3A, Brooklyn, NY 11201] *Trinity C.*

BUDDY LESTER *Their Favorite Joke* CD

Exhausting compilation presided over by Rat Pack-associate Buddy Lester, who chimes in for mechanical introductions to the "favorite jokes" of celebrities from a bygone era: you get Moses jokes from Telly Savalas and Red Buttons; Buddy Hackett on homosexuals; Joan Rivers on boobs; go-nowhere stories from Peter Lind Hayes and Sammy Davis Jr.; failed attempts at humor by Anson Williams and Maclaine Stevenson; a brief, indecipherable bit from Redd Foxx involving cops, auto-pedestrian accidents and turkey shoots; and faaaar too many golf jokes. Liner notes give a fairly brief "greatest hits" account of Lester's career but fail to give any useful information as to where these tracks are culled from, although they sound like they were maybe a recurring radio feature. Not exactly a total waste of time, but not quite as entertaining as sucking air through a straw either. [Laugh.com] *David Wilcox*

THE BUFF MEDWAYS *This Is This* CD

Renaissance man Billy Childish has successfully managed to stay one step ahead of notoriety by putting out blistering garage rock under a host of names. The garage rock stalwart, sometimes blues man, painter, author, and poet has fronted such acts Thee Headcoats, Thee Mighty Caesars, and Thee Milkshakes (to name a few) for a couple of decades now, and to add confusion to the mix he's now shape-shifted into The Buff Medway Fanciers Association. And just what the hell is a Buff Medway? Funny you should ask, as the liner notes describe the rise and fall of this strain of hearty domestic chicken, as well as efforts to revive the breed. And what is the modus operandi of these fowl enthusiasts? In a nutshell, shanghai-ing the ghost of Jimi Hendrix and dragging him into Childish's loud, ramshackle garage. Yes, it's an old conceit. Everyone from Lenny Kravitz to Junior Brown to the Chili Peppers wants to lay claim to channeling even a little of the spirit of Jimi, or at least be on record for paying musical homage to the man. Childish's stab is definitely of the homage variety, and Childish makes no bones about his reverence for Hendrix. A couple of tunes on *This Is This* skate pretty close to actual Hendrix songs ("Into Your Dreams" being akin to "Foxy Lady," and "Cross Lines" sounding suspiciously like "Crosstown Traffic").

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some hybrid of Jesus Lizard, Silverfish, the Birthday Party, and Captain Beefheart. Indeed, lead singer Sanford Allen has that Don Van Vliet gruff (and a good dose of Tom Waits, as well) in his voice. The band switches from the beat jazz of "Best Be Gone" to the Slavic-tinged country of "Palm Psalm" and the Waits-ish spoken word on "Ghost of a Chance" with backing that sounds like *Lucy Hamilton*-era Lydia Lunch. My favorite song in here—one of the least derivative—is the take on gospel in "John the Revelator." [Dogfingers, PO Box 2433, San Antonio, TX 78298] *Trinity C.*

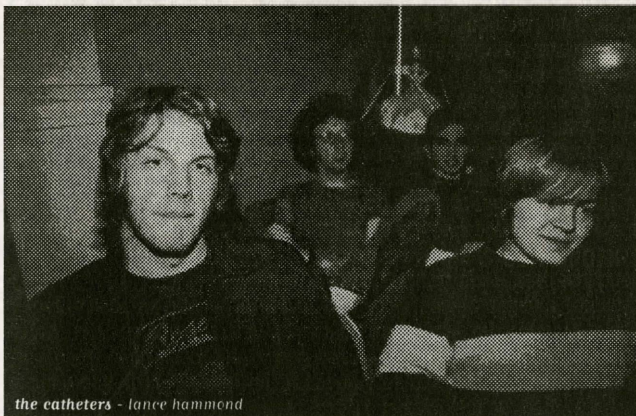
BRIAN ENO AND J. PETER SCHWALM *Drawn from Life* CD

Drawn From Life takes considerable time to reveal its working principles and subtle charms. Its basic palette is simple and proscribed: all the songs are propelled forward by large, simple bass lines that purposefully clomp along in a straight line, with no obvious, particular destination. Cushy banks of strings provide support, sounding a series of plaintive chords that set emotional tone rather than definitive melodic structures. In between, various electronic and acoustic keyboards plink or bleep out euphonious little doodles that stubbornly refuse to resolve into distinctive tunes.

The band has also released a 7 inch covering "Fire" and "Manic Depression." But this is no straight-up, one-trick tribute band. First off, Childish doesn't rely on guitar wizardry to get his point across (although his chops are get-up-and-shake-a-fist good, they're just not overly showy); he's more interested at getting to the heart and soul that informed his fallen hero. The rawness and gruffness that Billy has always brought to the table is still front and center as well; the Medways' rhythm section is simply a stronger, cleaner recitation of the efforts of earlier Childish-fronted bands, giving the project a crispness and vitality above and beyond that of the Headcoats. And Billy still sounds like someone's demented former flat-mate who now lives down by the tracks in Wycombe when he steps to the microphone. Hopefully he can keep this act together for a while, because it's his best yet. [ASK/Vinyl Japan] *Bo Pogue*

CAMERA OBSCURA *To Change the Shape of an Envelope* CD

This should appeal to fans of keyboard-infused fractured angst (90 Day Men, VSS, etc.) and art-punk (Unwound) alike. In short, a nice blend of mathy creativity and aggression. Camera Obscura is dialed in, mostly, on full-speed-ahead, with alternating contemplative moments. A driving rhythm section, featuring treble-heavy bass work, backs jagged keys and squalls of guitar and a compressed, tsunami-like, scream of a vocal track, which is often countered by the salving vocals of keyboardist Michelle Maskovich. The concentric circles continue to radiate outward from the Jehu big bang. [Troubleman Unlimited] *Bo Pogue*



the catheters - lance hammond

THE CATHETERS *Static Delusions and Stone-Still Days* CD

Hi, I'm in a band that's signed to Sub Pop, as are the Catheters. That's both a cynical caveat devised to disarm any suspicion of log-rolling, as well as a free plug for my own band. Now then, as I've assured the folks at Sub Pop, if they put out a record that I think is crap, I'll say so. If they put out a mediocre record, I'll say so. And, if they put out a fantastic classic masterpiece, I'll say so. No one there is paying me to like the label's other releases. So, now that we've reached an understanding, let me tell you about the Catheters. They exist in some sort of time warp of noisy, feisty punk rock unheard since the early '90s. Vocalist Brian sounds a lot like a cross between the screamers from Olivetown and the Dummies, mixed with the emotive and charismatic caterwaul of Clawhammer frontman, Jon Wahl. The band's powerful blend of clean guitars with distortion-soaked ravaging and a pummeling rhythm section recalls the late, great Lollipop, Poison 13, Halo of Flies and Didjits. Here and there, songs lean more into bluesy noise similar to Zen Guerilla. But, chances are good that they probably haven't heard any of those bands. Not only are the Catheters capable of kicking out a mighty jam, brothers and sisters (as well as the random motherfucker among you), this spry young group—not even every member being over drinking age yet—writes great pop-laced tunes too. The standout song, "Nothing" features chiming guitars and a catchy chorus of wailing desperation, "when I feel like shit/Nothing cures like this/Nothing fits like this." It's quite refreshing to discover that a few bands still can pull off this style and it still sounds fresh and exciting. [Sub Pop] *Dave Clifford*

CHAMPAGNE KISS *Dancing in the Pockets of Thieves* CD

I imagine that Champagne Kiss are incredibly loud live and can get by on the way people respond to overwhelming volume. On record, however, they are a weak, jumbled mess of distortion, flat drum sounds, and generic pitch-shifted scream-guy vocals. On the plus side, they've got a fairly interesting keyboard sound, the same buzzing phase tone John Carpenter used on his early soundtrack work. But they also happen to have pretentious and silly tracks like "Deconstructing Genius" that you'd expect to hear during some faux-industrial/goth night at an '80s club. And just try telling me that doesn't sound like the title of a long-lost Ministry album. [Troubleman] *David Wilcox*

CHAO *Hitthemiss* CD

Clean swipe of Lisa Germano-esqu sadness, bolstered by Goth-acoustic fury. *Hitthemiss* is a sometimes melancholy, sometimes Stereophonic effort. Thank you. [Last Beat] *Miller*

THE CHARGERS STREET GANG *Holy the Bop Apocalypse* CD

The debut album by this young Cleveland quintet sports the classic Motor City rock and post-punk influences—the MC5, the Stooges, and Pere Ubu. But as we all know, those are some pretty powerful forces to align yourself with, and not everybody succeeds. There are some very enjoyable moments here—mainly because of the interesting mix of Detroit's baddest and post-punk tweak—and some good songs, but somehow the gestalt doesn't get across on record. The Chargers Street Gang only seem to get at those bands' music, and energy on "Twisted & Old." And, at least on this disc, they seem more like a live experience. [Get Hip] *Trinity C.*

CHARLES DOUGLAS *31 Flavors* CD

31 Flavors collects the first two albums from Dayton-born DIY formalist Charles Douglas. Both *Minor Wave* and *The Burden of Genius* comprise down-the-center bedsit boogaloo. All of these performances are polemically undercooked and unfinished, each having had one or more normally essential element subtracted. One track lacks drums or bass with rhythm and lead guitars, synths and vocals trollying along merrily without 'em. Other selections have just throbby bass and bobbling drums supporting vocals without the benefit of even a hint of guitar or keyboard. And so on.

These studied deletions throw the sounds that are there into higher relief than they'd enjoy otherwise. In addition the empty places put the listener off-guard, calling attention to themselves and the song in question in the bargain.

The main focus, however, is always on Douglas's shaky, strained singing—the essence of *de rigueur* naivete, spontaneity, and intimacy. Notwithstanding, each tune is pegged to shiny, balloony melodies. You should all be familiar with how this works and how you feel about it. The kick is in the tension between pseudo-sappy tunes and the raw vocals, in tandem with the ramshackle playing, each balancing the more irritating qualities of the other. If you collect this sorta thing, by all means add this to yr cache. [No. 6 c/o Enabler, 300 Elizabeth Str., NYC 10012] *Howard W.*

CHECK ENGINE CD

Five blokes big on chops and down on steady time signatures. Classic Fugazi emulation in the vocal phrasing (Guy Picciotto in particular) and few real surprises to be found elsewhere. Their song titles are long-winded (only two consist of less than six words) and at least a couple of said titles reference television shows (*The Simpsons* and *Love Connection*). The inclusion of a saxophone (played by a member of Sweep The Leg Johnny, so now I'm officially drowning in clever mass entertainment-referencing kitsch) in their line-up feels like little more than the tacking up of a Coltrane poster on the wall of my ear to make sure I can *dig* where the band's comin' from. The promotional one-sheet posits that Check Engine sound like "Big Star if Alex Chilton had grown up on Tangerine Dream and Drive Like Jehu." I shall not dignify that with a witty retort. [Southern] *David Wilcox*

CHICAGO UNDERGROUND QUARTET CD

The Underground Duo's *Synesthesia* album was really the first recording from Rob Mazurek and Chad Taylor that I thought pulled together the band's interest in jazz playing and electronic textures successfully. The final quartet recording (final for a while at least, Mazurek has moved to

Brazil) extends and refines the strong points of *Synesthesia*. Jeff Parker's nuanced guitar riff begins the album on "Tunnel Chrome" and along with bassist Noel Kupersmith he gives the album something of a rhythmic and melodic grid around which Mazurek's cornet and electronics can move. The appearance of synthesizers especially come off as less jarring and pasted in. You could, if you were so inclined, criticize Chicago Underground Quartet for its restraint and overall good taste. The spiky exchanges between Parker and Mazurek on "A Re-Occurring Dream" are kept in check, and Parker's Sharrockian lead into "Welcome" plays well with Chad Taylor's rumbling drums, but it doesn't reach a level of overkill. I guess that's what some folks refer to when they mention a "free jazz" feeling to Chicago Underground Quartet, in fact this band does not let things get out of control and the flavoring of improv here is just that, a little spice to clear the sonic palette. The little synth bubbles that introduce "Total Recovery" before Parker's pointillist rhythm guitar and Mazurek's smeared cornet work their way in are another bit of sonic spice. The album is all about balance and proportion and when taken as such it works very well. The playing is excellent and the album does not overstay its welcome. There is a taste of jazz improvisation, but discordance never overcomes harmony. The real question in evaluating *Chicago Underground Quartet* has to do with long term durability: whether or not the album is a document of its time and hence reflective of our "it's all good" hybridizing times or an album that will stand the test of time on its own terms. Time will tell. [Thrill Jockey]

Bruce Adams

CHIMAIRA *Pass Out Of Existence* CD

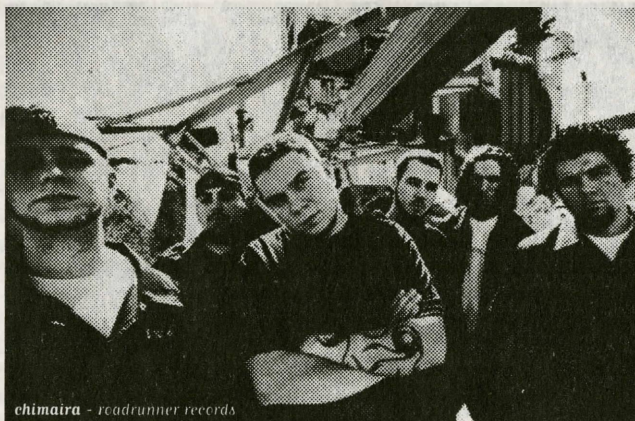
This music is made for initiates not cowans. You submit to acclimatizing, absorb the conventions of stylistic alphabet into your blood till you cease to note 'em and only see the words and sentences they form. Outsiders hear "hwuzza hwuzza hwuzza chunka chunka chunk!" or "chunka chunka chunka WAH!" And someone gutturally yowlerin'. Connoisseurs appreciate the different sequence constructed of same, the various dynamic strategies employed just as readily as a old fucker can discern between "Maybelline" and "Sweet Little Rock 'n' Roller" or "Blitzkrieg Bop" and "Rockaway Beach." All cases of having internalized the cipher and not focusing on each damned letter. Seeing the whole sentence i.e. overall structure erected.

Adopting a temporary approximation of this mindset, I gotta say Chimaira are pretty bitchin'. Solid sonic wallop like smackin' a locker door with a burlap sack o' concrete fragments. Articulate distinctive writing and you'll either love or hate occasional lapses into Alice In

across this record and find that someone in the independent solo artist category was doing something interesting. McFarland has a powerful voice that is capable of both subtlety and powerful screaming. The lyrics on this record are above average, and phrases like: "If you need a punching bag I don't think I'll volunteer. Just give me one chance to get us out of here," end up working with the backing guitar parts that make up the overall composition. The one drawback to the record was some very average drum and bass. I not only found some of the backing instrumentation predictable and trite, but wishing that it wasn't there. Watch out for Chris McFarland, he's certain to do good things moving forward. [In Music We Trust] *Eric Frost*

CIRCULATORY SYSTEM CD

This new collective (there are a whole bunch of people involved) contains most of Olivia Tremor Control, and owes a great debt to the hallucinogenics dropped circa 1970. It's the sound of Pink Floyd teaming with the drug-addled fallout of The Beatles and hitting the road with a gypsy caravan. Formula: splice together a few well-formulated, often minor-key, pop shards; liberally sprinkle layers of exotic instrumentation, including mandolin, accordion, strings, a few bits of brass, and the moaning and klesmer-like wailing of a clarinet; dab a few fuzzy psychedelics here and there; overlay with doubled, airy vocals and a warm bath of backing chorus; enshroud the whole thing in a feel good-yet-mysterious fog; repeat. The resulting orchestral meanderings are equally intriguing and intoxicating. I'm sure there's a trippy, futuristic,



chimaira - roadrunner records

Audio *reviews*

Chains' signature vocal harmonizing. Never hurt Creed. Or STP. Don't think non-converts'll geddit tho. [Roadrunner] *Howard W.*

CHINE NUAL *Tomorrow's Leaders Are Busy Tonight* CD

The brainchild of Rick Kitch, with the contributions of some the sound's more adept manipulators: Jeph Jerman (Hands To), Randy Greif and Steve Brand (Augur). A combination of field recordings, guitar, computer wonkery, old-time keyboard effects, and massive amounts of mixing and equalization that are intended to be emotionless fields in which the listener is intended to interact with and use for contemplation. A mix of a latter-day ambient feel with intrusions by the less technological past. This is background music at its most wallpaper. Time drifts by without notice of the sounds emanating from your speakers. If you forget it's on, then it has accomplished its mission. [Plate Lunch] *Les Scurry*

CHIRS MCFARLAND *As If I Lay to Rest* CD

These days it is a difficult task to be a singer/songwriter and avoid being overly sentimental or cliché. Most indie rock artists that I hear have obviously never heard of the so-called Confessional school of Poetry, because they can't do half as well what their predecessors have done in a much less emotionally dynamic medium. I was happy to stumble

full-length cartoon somewhere that this disc could be paired with. It's rich, luxurious, a mile deep, and tickles the ears—and I'm just beginning to peel away the layers. [Cloud Recordings] *Bo Pogue*

THE CLEAN *Getaway* CD

The Clean are the kind of mainstays of Kiwi pop you can set your watch by. A new album by the seminal New Zealand band rarely fails to deliver the goods, and *Getaway* is no exception.

While the longer tracks here tend to drag on a bit ("Jala," "Aho"), there are some truly irresistible moments, such as the infectious "E Motel" and "Complications." Whether the boys from Dunedin are joined by the married portion of Yo La Tengo on two mostly instrumental tracks, or on more abstract numbers such as "Reprise 1, 2, 3, 8, 4," The Clean still give the impression that anything can happen.

Infinitely better than 1996's *Unknown Country*, *Getaway* shows The Clean as vital as ever. Tally Ho! [Merge] *James Jackson Toth*

cLOUDDEAD CD

ANTI-POP CONSORTIUM *The Ends Against the Middle* CD EP

Two approaches to a new hip hop equation, with both groups sharing a link of sorts (some Anti-Cons show up on the cLOUDDEAD tracks). cLOUDDEAD attempt a thickening of the soup with layered sounds and samples that are equivalent to the first Flying Saucer Attack album. Beneath the wash of sounds and over the muffled beats are real rappers, prone to the tricks of the trade including Beastie/Cypress Hill-style whines and the rapid-fire emission of lyrics. But it would be a gross simplification to call cLOUDDEAD some sort of post-rock hip hop equivalent; well into the album the mix gets clearer and some of the

source material becomes a little more insistent. Given that the CD is a compilation of a series of 10 inch EPs recorded from 1998-2000, the stylistic consistency plays off well against the gradual development that the group demonstrates. It doesn't really matter if this is some bold new step or a highly idiosyncratic statement. What does matter is that cLOUDDEAD have come up with something new, beyond mere novelty. What they do with it will be very interesting to watch.

The Ends Against The Middle lacked the immediate appeal of cLOUDDEAD. In fact, in a lot of ways I'm still trying to assimilate it. Anti-Pop Consortium work from an instrumental base of pure electronics. These guys must have more than a few Mantronix releases in the house; the EP is chock full of crisp, detailed beats and shards of melody. There are no turntables or scratching to be found, leaving the burden of inventiveness and variety up to the rappers and the programmer. It works most of the time. The lyrics are delivered with panache and never dip into cliché. There are enough skips and jumps in the electronic backing to make things interesting, but not too wacky. Associations between Anti-Con and the Warp label and the presence of the band on one of those Mille Plateaux "let's invent a genre" compilations had me worried about a possible wacky factor. I mean, these days you have to worry when you see a song title like "Dystopian Disco Force." And to their credit the band balances carefully and falls into neither hip hop thugishness nor techno-boffin tomfoolery. Take, for example, "Perpendicular," which starts out something like Depeche Mode warming up before a beat kicks in that has a fine head-noddin' quality. Or the way the overlaid vocal choir of "Splinter" ally themselves to a beat-electric piano combo before the first rapper kicks in and a sparser, more insistent cadence takes over. Moments like that overcome my squeamish feelings and draw me back to this music. [Mush; Warp] *Bruce Adams*

COCK ESP *The Pride of North American Noise CD*

Like Masonna with more lulls. Put it this way, it is not a pleasant listen on headphones—enough high frequencies to rip through synapses like butter. Aimless, reckless, cold, filled with feedback and meaninglessness that would have thrilled the Futurists to no end; this is just the sound of the blunt end of technology striking your cranium with great force. Again and again. All you can do is feel really, really sorry for their equipment. [Ecstatic Peace/Smells Like] *David B. Livingstone*

THE CONVOCATION OF *Pyramid Technology CD*

I have no problem with punkers trying to go prog, even have a little bit of a soft spot for it. Freed from hardcore's two-minute rock blocks, the youth usually come up with some righteously snarly riffs. But geez, good singers are sure at a premium these days because the vocals are usually sub-par in their attempts to avoid overheated vocal clichés. With this crew, I can't decide which annoys me more—their lead guitarist's painfully overreaching one-note solos or those tentative vocals (so thin

as to make Eric Bloom sound like Phil Anselmo). Epitonic.com notes that the TCO are "a punk rock trio unlike any you've heard before. This band is immediately set apart by the quality of its musicianship and the sophistication of its members' instrumental interplay." Well, I'll wager you a stack of *Gone* records that their sludgy, wah-wah driven meandering has been done before and better, probably by Robert Fripp's left toe in a hot shower somewhere. And speaking of the terrifying father figure of the prog band it's still OK for most hipsters to dig, phooey on dropping a Crimson reference ("Crimson King's Deceit") if you aren't going to deliver. [Tiger Style] *Cecile Cloutier*

THE COUP *Party Music CD*

Easily the best hip hop record of the year, The Coup's *Boots Riley* drops serious political rhymes, a la Chuck D, backed by hardcore funky beats and turntablist Pam the Funktress. The shit is straight outta Oaktown, birthplace of the Black Panther Party—influence to nothing less than the title *Party Music*. Blasted for the use of an exploding World Trade Center for the original cover (designed prior to the events—how were they supposed to know?), Riley's message is loud and clear. You've fucked with us for too long, unite to stand against oppression, and time to get yours, whitey. Riley's words are intelligent among a plethora of uneducated rappers, too many to choose from, who couldn't form a sentence to save their lives. Even the crazy shit that comes out of Kool Keith's mouth makes more sense than half the latest Def Jam crew. Unfortunately The Coup seems destined to suffer the fate of Public Enemy; who missed their target and ended up educating thousands of white college boys. Word to yo mutha. [75 ARK] *Troy Brookins*

CRAMPS *Re-releases Sampler CD*

Cheap fuckers won't give up the real thing so they dump out these samplers of their extensive re-releases. I can't tell you what the packaging of these six albums will be—they include "Smell of Female," "A Date With Elvis," and "Stay Sick." Sound is good, of course. But the Cramps are one killer band, even though their star has fallen in recent years. I went to see them in Dallas in 1997 at a barn called Deep Ellum Live, awful place, full of jocks and terrible sight lines. And from where I was initially, the Cramps were bad. But I got curious and drunk and began to move closer to the stage until I was almost on it. And the heat they were generating—literally—was enormous, and the noise was fat and the show was killer. And many can still remember the late Bryan Gregory and his bizarre tenure. And Congo. Legends are really OK. [Vengeance] *Miller*

CRETIN 66 *Demolition Safari CD*

Cretin 66 hail from Kansas City, Missouri. They draw inspiration from the same sources as bands like the Supersuckers. But what distinguishes this band from the crowd is singer/songwriter Mike Campbell, who has an uncanny ability to write fast, hooky material, and with consistent ease. Campbell also manages to coin one clever lyrical line after

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another—like so many hidden cards up a sleeve—while seamlessly avoiding clichés and pretentiousness, and never sounding contrived or forced—just fun. Campbell bridges it all together with a vast quotient of memorable, catchy vocal choruses, somewhat akin to that of The Ramones or even Naked Raygun, though here you'll chant "dunce" instead of "whoa-e-oh" or "hey-ho..." Maybe more appealing to the lower common denom. Goes well with a six or two, but high-brows may find every reason to like it, too. [Steel Cage] *Peter Davis*

CROWNS ON 45 *Not On the Menu* CD

Crowns on 45's first national exposure came in 2000 when they appeared billed as The Crowns on a compilation released by the Mr. Lady label. There, in the company of other bass-less bands like Sleater-Kinney, Le Tigre and Oriflamme, their energetic contribution seemed anonymous. Similar aspersions can't be directed towards *Not On the Menu*, their 12-song, full-length debut. Yes, the songs with both male and female vocalists are reminiscent of Sleater-Kinney, but the judicious use of keyboards and the addition of a bassist give the band an instrumental muster that few trios would be able to manage. Most Crowns on 45 songs contain fiery lyrics that suggest the use of exclamation points but lead vocalists Chris Ohnesorge and Heather Hellskiss also tackle ballads that are peppered with question marks. "Mouth to Mouth," "Favorite Sin," and "Love Songs (are for losers)" are songs that present the pleasure and pain of personal relationships but "Walk in the Park," the record's most issue oriented song, is more ambitious. At 33 minutes *Not On the Menu* isn't the hardest of records but its savory portions are deserving of attention. [Heartcore] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

CYPRESS HILL *Stoned Raiders* CD

You can't blame them for their success. But, Cypress Hill—and most particularly, the annoying twang of the "how I could just kill a man" rapster guy—will always remain etched in my mind as the requisite rap CD to be played at every shitty keg party I had to endure during college. Nonetheless, for what it's worth, these guys really played a big part in initiating the hip hop crossover (and to some degree, the rap metal phenomenon) and they've always had a penchant for great loops and clever, melodic backing tracks. But on the whole, I don't like their voices, and their lyrics tend to be exceedingly banal. While this album doesn't seem too far out of the ordinary for them, it does seem much more "rock" than rap. For my money, that's a good thing. The production is the saving grace of an album filled with Cypress Hill's typical platitudes of bad-assedness, weed smoking, and "survival" in the music industry. [Sony/Columbia] *Dave Clifford*

Audio *reviews*

DAMIEN JURADO *I Break Chairs* CD

There's something intriguing about the paradox that a Christian rock band is led by a guy named Damien. Regardless, Jurado has built a name for himself (that has little to do with religion) in the indie-folk singer/songwriter genre, and has been lauded as one of the best songwriters of his generation/era. What I'd heard previous to this album was good, but nothing really outstanding or compelling. However, now with a full band behind him, it all makes sense...and yet, I find myself wishing he'd recorded these songs unaccompanied. He is indeed a consistently good songwriter, with the same clever/eager/bitter edge that Evan Dando once had in his songs. And, like the Lemonheads' later material, these songs sound as though they were intended for acoustic guitar, but "fleshed out" with a full band just to shake things up. However, the dynamics and modification that a band can bring to songs is absent. Instead, Damien's backing band, Gathered In Song are simply following Damien's lead and adding filler sounds to songs that probably are stronger when he performs them by himself. The musicians are skilled players, and the songs sound flawless and catchy. But, the obvious passion and intensity of Jurado's singing and performance

seems smoothed out and sterilized by the presence of the full band. More often than not, the catchy choruses of songs like "Paperwings" and "Dancing" end up sounding like second rate Tom Petty or later Soul Asylum when the melodies and lyrics themselves seem to convey much more. Perhaps those with an affinity for the likes of Wilco and Richard Buckner would appreciate *I Break Chairs* on the whole. There are definitely moments on here where it all comes together nicely—like the sublime "Inevitable" and "Air Show Disaster"—but for me, Jurado's band just gets in the way. [Sub Pop] *Dave Clifford*

THE DAMNED *Grave Disorder* CD

It's hard to believe that it's been 25 years since The Damned, the first of the original British punk bands to record an album, released their classic debut *Damned, Damned, Damned*. Despite countless lineup changes, record labels, breakups and reunions, the band has consistently remained true to their original ideals, never succumbing to the pressures of the commercial marketplace, always creating their own inimitable sound.

While *Grave Disorder* doesn't quite live up to the glory years of 1978-82, when The Damned released their three masterpieces, *Machine Gun Etiquette*, *The Black Album*, and *Strawberries*, it's still an inspired if uneven effort. The strength of the band has always been the creative mesh of Dave Vanian's melodramatic, horror sensibilities and Captain Sensible's psychedelic-tinged guitar virtuosity. This is really the first time the two have collaborated in the studio in nearly twenty years, since Sensible was booted out of the band in 1984.

The current lineup features Vanian's wife Patricia Morrison (a founding member of early LA punk outfit, The Bags, and most recently, The Sisters of Mercy) on bass, keyboardist Monty the Moron, a veteran of Captain Sensible's band Punk Floyd, and newcomer Pinch on drums.

Starting off with "Democracy," a classic Damned style rocker which borrows the basic guitar riff from the band's early anthem, "Smash it Up," *Grave Disorder* moves from the sublime ("Absinthe," a terrific Vanian mood piece; "Amen," a typically scathing Sensible indictment of organized religion) to the absurd (the tepid "Until the End of Time" and Vanian's embarrassingly corny "Beauty of the Beast"). Some of the song ideas, such as

"Neverland" and "W" seem better suited to Sensible's experimental solo albums, and sound awkward sung by Vanian. Such quibbles aside, *Grave Disorder* has enough of the old magic to satisfy long time fans and newcomers alike. [Nitro] *Patrick Milliken*

DAN BLUNCK AND MIKE BISIO *Concerted* CD

Here I prefer Seattle reedsman Dan Blunck playing soprano saxophone rather than tenor. On the former, he has a fluttery, airy touch, on the latter he seems harsh and burry in comparison (though not in comparison to most of the reed-based noise I listen to). Yet, it's on that big horn (burs and all) where he turns in the marvelously nuanced tribute "Ayer's Lament," which, incredibly enough, manages to honor the fallen free-jazzer without resorting to mimicking Ayer's trademark quavery tone. Muscular, tasteful, intuitive (and criminally underrated outside of the Pacific Northwest) bassist Mike Bisio tails Blunck's salty runs with sympathetic rumbles of his own on the foghorn-loud opener "Blast Off" and the cacophonous closer "Ole." That's when he's not oozing unctuously into every unfilled sonic crevice like he does on the duo's gritty yet sultry reading of "Harlem Nocturne." [Cadence] *Cecile Cloutier*

DAVID KILGOUR *A Feather In the Engine* CD

These songs hang in the air like thousands of twinkling lights on the night sky's horizon.

A stunning new work by The Clean's main man (and recent recipient of the New Zealand Order of Merit), *A Feather In the Engine* conjures a glimmering mood that is both intimate and epic. Full of quiet layers of fuzzy, wavering electric and softly-strummed acoustic guitars, it floats you downstream to a swirling pool of Big Star's prettiest moments, Syd Barret's wistfulness, and Joy Division's somnambulism.

Joy Division's influence looms large over all contemporary NZ artists: back in the day, "Love Will Tear Us Apart" even made the Kiwi Top Ten. But on this album, Mr. Clean (sorry, couldn't resist) has, thankfully, keyed into Ian Curtis and Co.'s wounded introspection, rather than the more widely emulated, "morose" aspects.

As with most instances of a group member making a solo recording, the sound of Kilgour's own band is not far away. But there are, of course, some tangents: the wafting, eddies of the instrumental opener, "Sept 98" recall "Milky White Entropy" by New York's own Poem Rocket (a band that, perhaps unsurprisingly, has long held the work of Kilgour and his old Flying Nun label-mates in high regard), while "I Lost My Train" brings back the heyday of The Church's shimmering pop. And the album's most rocking track, "Today is Gonna Be Mine," is an uplifting gem that brilliantly places the baroque, choir-like sweep of The Left Bank atop the insistent, clanging drive of Bowie's "Heroes." The rest of the album, using only occasional percussion and some textural devices—tinkling piano, distant, female backup vocals, jingling bells—is still mainly Kilgour's voice and a few guitars. Like other good minimalists (Dirty Three, for example), he uses the negative space to create enough atmospheric sprawl to fill a hockey rink. But unlike most artists operating in bare-bones settings, Kilgour is able to maintain a paradox of both cold distance and confiding intimacy, not just one of the two. It's like you're sitting in the middle of an open field, watching a storm rage on the horizon while someone sits at your side, speaking softly into your ear. If you find yourself looking at an all-night, solo drive to some far-off locale, this will fit the occasion better than a warm thermos and a pack of smokes. In fact, *A Feather In the Engine* is reason enough to plan such a journey. The stars are out tonight, grab your keys. [Merge] *Peter Aaron*

DAVID SHEA *Tryptich* CD

Shea's specialty is the use of the sampler as an instrument. His career began using other people's works as a basis of his creations; this is his first attempt at scoring material for live performers, then sampling those performances to create his sound. The sound of these pieces is so organic that it is impossible to trace them to their computer-organized nature. "Sita's Walk Of Fire" takes its Bollywood roots and turns them into an epic spectacle. "One Ride Pony" was composed for a short film. To my ears it sounds like an existential detective story. Shea tells me it's about a woman who dreams she's a horse. Okay. "Satyricon 2000" could be a new soundtrack for Fellini's film, full of devious plotting and intrigue. Shea has always had interesting ideas about how to combine sound. Now he finally reaches out into new territory with great success. [Quartermass] *Les Scurry*

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE *The Photo Album* CD

People keep telling me about their disappointment over Death Cab records, but the records they are talking about are never this one. I keep telling them to check out *The Photo Album* before they call it quits with Death Cab for good.

The Photo Album is solid without a bad song on it. From the opener, "Steadier Footing," which is about meeting a girl at a party and the failed relationship that results, to "Why'd you want to live here" about the urban sprawl and spew of Los Angeles, these tracks hold your attention and beg for multiple listens. The excellent recording quality allows you to further appreciate the superb instrumentation and vocals that will have you alternately tapping your foot and quietly aching. Of particular note is the song "Styrofoam Plates," which is an honest and angry song about the death of an absent father. Somehow Death Cab pull off lyrics and song subject matter you'd never think possible. I'm sure people would like to categorize them as indie rock for lack of a better term, but I think they easily transcend any popular notions of that genre into an unnamed category that is much more substantial and timeless. I haven't heard any of the other Death Cab albums that others are so quick to dismiss, but *Photo Album* will be in my CD player for a long time to come. [Barsuk] *Eric Frost*

DEEP REDUCTION 2 CD

Deniz Tek is overrated, and I never understood the appeal of the first Birdman album. I grew up with MC5 and Stooges and a host of lousy but loud guitar bands in college town USA. But the idea of these guys sitting in Mechanicsburg, PA, recording this is refreshing. Oh yeah, while we're confessing, I never liked the Scientists either. It was like underground music snobs had to dig it, cuz it was inside cool. Sorta like the *Rolling Stone* jerkoffs loved Elvis Costello, whom they said was "deep." Well, he was just lame. [Get Hip] *Miller*



DEFACTO *Megaton Shotblast* CD

Putting out singles by bands like De Facto, it's no wonder Grand Royal went under. Officially an album of experimental dub and Latin from Omar Rodriguez and Cedric Bixler (two core members of At The Drive In) and friends, *Megaton Shotblast* is an organic (no samples!) chilled out, stripped down soundtrack to blunt-rolling that, Jansport punks be warned, is more Scientist than The Scientists.

At The Drive In went on indefinite hiatus just when their hype started to become monstrous. Was this due to an inherently reclusive, Fred Neil-like distrust / fear of fame? Upon hearing about the band's noble but detrimental decision to take a break, I'd have initially thought so. But the first full length from De Facto tells a different story.

Hinging almost entirely on dub reggae (but also relying on a great number of bleeps, blips and otherworldly sounds to remind the listener that they're listening to something modern), *Meagaton Shotblast* is the sound of Ennio Morricone as mixed by King Tubby. Sometimes, as on the eight-minute "Descarga De Facto" I can't help thinking that there's one hell of a kick ass Muslimgauze drum track underneath all the ethno-patter.

But there is a feeling of authenticity and urgency here that cannot be faked, which just might explain why this labor of love has become a full time concern for Rodriguez and Bixler (who are joined by Jeremy Ward and Isaiah "Ikey" Owens of Long Beach Dub All Stars). You can tell they are just loving this music.

The imminent identity crisis most bands like At The Drive In go through once on the epilogue side of the "careful what you wish for" story may be reason enough for most bands in their position to hang it up, but in this case, it seems obvious there's more to the story. Surprising. [Gold Standard Laboratories] *James Jackson Toth*

DEL REY *Speak It Not Aloud* CD

Instrumental psych-jams with two drummers. It rocks and grooves pretty well throughout, and doesn't get as pukey emo as your June of 44's, H.I.M.'s, Orsos, Letter E's, or Tristeza's. Plus, the rhythmic pulse underlying the two guitars and bass twists and turns enough to keep it all interesting. But, the whole instrumental thing always comes across as an incomplete thought—like a film searching for a plot. [My Pal God] *Dave Clifford*

DESAPARECIDOS *Read Music/Speak Spanish* CD

Led by Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst, Desaparecidos is decidedly less confessional and more concerned with issues beyond the personal. *Read Music/Speak Spanish* is littered with lyrics attacking such things as corporate culture and public schools.

Desaparecidos music is faster than Bright Eyes, and Oberst's passionate emo vocals over the indie rock compositions are harder, often screamed. But for all the group's concern with the political, the album sounds just as personal as if they were laying their hearts and souls bare with every chord and every note. Which creates a turbulent, socially conscious, if sometimes overwhelming album. [Saddle Creek] *Trinity C.*

DETROIT COBRAS *Life, Love And Leaving* CD

The Detroit Cobras, like their comrades on the Detroit scene, The Dirtbombs, make their living covering '60s and '70s r&b tunes. The key consideration in this type of exercise is the choice of covers. On that front, you can't criticize the Detroit Cobras, as they manage to find great



songs that are still obscure (at least to me, but then I might just be exposing my ignorance). Vocalist Rachael Nagy's voice is absolutely killer and she is wisely put way out front in the mix. The only negative is that they are a little too well-mannered for my taste, I'd like to see them dirty up their sound a bit and cut loose every now and then. Nonetheless, you can definitely put me down as a yes. [Sympathy For The Record Industry] *Brett Horn*

DIANE CLUCK CD-R

Diane Cluck played last year's anti-folk festival with the Moldy Peaches, but if you're expecting something similar to MP, you'd be wrong. Call it anti-folk, if you will, but that doesn't quite fit this beautiful, haunting album. Her evocative, poetic tunes create a sound from the amalgam of her influences—Kate Bush, Chopin, and Eric Satie. Plus, Cluck is a multi-instrumentalist, using everything from piano—which is the basic instrument for every song—to harmonium, organ, guitar, and a hand-made xylophone. A good album for rainy days and dark night rural drives. Just don't listen to it when you're depressed. [cluckfemme@aol.com]

Trinity C.

THE DICTATORS D. F. F. D. CD

The Dictators first album in 23 long years, *D. F. F. D.* is easily best since the band's 1975 debut, *Go Girl Crazy!* And, no, I'm not exaggerating. This is really fucking good. From outstanding anthems like, "Who Will Save Rock and Roll?", to ferocious punkers like "I am Right!" to poppy numbers with wonderfully catchy hooks like, "The Savage Beat" this is solid through and through. Other numbers like "It's Alright" have solid AC/DC-influenced riffs, yet they sound fresher than anything those Aussies have put out since *For Those About to Rock*. "In the Presence of a New God" just rocks, plain and simple and reminds me of "Two Tub Man" (off of *Go Girl Crazy!*).

I would've enjoyed a less-slick sounding treatment but that's just a matter of personal taste, I guess. And now for the big finale—who will save rock n roll? Who knows? Maybe The Dictators. [Multi/Media] *Adam Miller*

DILUTE The Gypsy Valentine Curve CD

Crystalline guitar parts tumble giddily. Blunted Memphis blues-arpeggios interlock with stabbing contrapuntal chordings and loopy lyrical lead lines. Drums and bass lope along in decisively loose-limbed fashion.

Much acknowledges love of later Minutemen, flRHOSE as well as Meat Puppets from all phases. Where Dilute differ distinctly is in consistent ploy of pre-emptorily climactic shifting of rhythmic gears. Like a big-rig truck driver gone halfway through Nevada when the PCP starts to kick in—the two shots of tequila didn't hurt. Vocalizing is predictably shaggy

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dog spaztastic. In fact, this is very much comfort food for old school undie stalwarts.

Toward end of the album they indulge themselves in extended pieces with lots of empty space that they poke into with practiced, highly deliberated "spontaneity." Perhaps this is meant as expressionism. If so, it's proof that their chops and diligence outdistance their powers of innovation. If you were a-pin' for a new Agitpop, this'll scratch the itch nicely. [It's Like False Advertising, 4021 Elisa Commons, Fremont, CA 94536] *Howard W.*

DJ SWAMP Never Is Now CD

DJ Swamp, perhaps best known for his roll as DJ in Beck's band, is not a terribly gifted rapper. Luckily, a good deal of *Never Is Now* relies not on vocals, but on adept scratching and inventive samples, as best displayed on "Worship the Robots," which is what Kraftwerk would have sounded like if they had Stephen Hawking MCing over "Trans Europe Express."

Looking past the vocals proves a difficult task, though. Kool Moe Dee at his cheesiest could rip Swamp to shreds, and the nine-minute "Malakai" could be Vanilla Ice (with whom Swamp has worked) and is thus, pure

torture. Elsewhere Swamp sounds like one of the morbidly untalented members of Ice T's Syndicate Crew. Donald D anyone?

There are some truly sublime moments on *Never Is Now*, and "Worship The Robots" will most likely lead off any mix tape I make this year. Pair DJ Swamp with some eccentric rhyme-spitter with a ton of ready-marketable personality for the next record and you may have something palpable, but left alone at the mic, Swamp is ass. [Lakeshore / Decadent] *James Jackson Toth*

DOMINIC DUVAL QUINTET Cries and Whispers CD

TRIO X On Tour... Toronto/Rochester CD

With the bonanza of CIMP and Cadence releases the YF editor has to choose from, attempting to write about these albums presents a challenge. And although I may shortchange individual instrumentalists, it makes sense to at least organizationally present some releases based on the common membership on several albums. And Dominic Duval is a great musician to start with; as a bassist he is beginning to get the notice he deserves. On both of these CDs of live recordings, Duval is joined by Joe McPhee.

Trio X is McPhee and Duval's longstanding group. The Rochester and Toronto recordings are from 2001 and are notable for the trio's reliance on standards for source material. "Blue Monk" and "Send in the Clowns" are the jumping off points for "Monkin' Around" and "Trail of Tears," respectively; and the trio takes on "Try A Little Tenderness" and "My Funny Valentine" as well. I've written before that anything Joe McPhee records is worth obtaining. The beauty of *On Tour... Toronto/Rochester* is that it documents him playing with a longtime band and working his way through and around some standards and improvisations inspired by standards. With Duval's deep and melodic playing holding the center, this format especially, gives McPhee time to shine. I would call it a must have.

Cries And Whispers begins with Duval bowing and then plucking his bass and with Jason Hwang and Tomas Ulrich in the band on violin and violin cello, this is a string-powered thing. McPhee and Mark Whitecage are on reeds and there is no drummer in the quintet, so the music here is intricate and melodic. After the strings bring in track one (each selection here is titled "Cries and Whispers"), the second track begins with the horns whirling around each other. The lasting impression of *Cries And Whispers* is the care and tenderness with which the quintet plays. Without the usual engine of rhythm section powering things along, it seems as though the players have to focus even more keenly on what they're doing together. And the caliber of musicians involved combined with their experience playing together makes this great album. [Cadence Jazz Records] *Bruce Adams*

DON DILEGO The Lonestar Hitchhiker Volume One CD

"The worst shit you can do to somebody in a review," someone once said, "is compare them to Beck."

Troubadour Don Dilego mixes folk guitar and woe-is-me vocals with beats and programmed drums on *The Lonestar Hitchhiker*, his first proper album. Slick production (the record was recorded at the famed Electric Lady studios) mars otherwise decent attempts at songcraft more than once ("The Vegas Man," "Nicotine Prom Queen"). Think Jim White without the gothic surrealism or Greg Garing without the gumption.

The Lonestar Hitchhiker is not without its peculiar charm. The entire conclusion of "Goodnight, Aliens" climaxes with the sound of honky-tonk interpreted through a bent carnival mirror, and the ominous "Texas Motel" wouldn't sound out of place on a John Lurie record.

The worst shit you can do to somebody in a review is compare them to Beck because Beck comparisons are lazy and obvious. Sadly, however, they ring true more often than not. Don Dilego, the bell tolls for thee. Nobody's fault but your own. [Kingcut] *James Jackson Toth*

DOUG STANHOPE Something To Take The Edge Off CD

The influence of Bill Hicks on the comedy of Doug Stanhope is apparent: there are the smoking jokes (although Hicks' cigarette bits have become such the industry standard over the last 10 years that it's hardly worth getting indignant about anymore); the whiny, exaggerated "stupid person"-character drawl; the predilection for morose source material (and dedicating long runs of colorful adjectives to its *most* unsocial aspects); and the open discussions about personal vice preferences (both men share a soft spot for pornography and at least the *idea*, if not

the actual use, of drugs). But Hicks's was an outright advocacy of vice and pleasure, promoting them as the path to actualizing Heaven; Stanhope seems more interested in their consequences, in the idea that for every act of vice "the punishment is inherent in the act." And that's really the key to what works in his routine: Stanhope has a firm grasp on the way people degrade, flagellate, and otherwise willingly fuck themselves over, and a fond appreciation for their right to do so, as on the track "Suicide" ("If you've sat through half of a movie and every second of it has sucked so far..."). Now, that's on the high end; sadly, Stanhope frequently sees his more articulate observations run into impassable walls and reverts to tired old references to eating ass, masturbating, fellatio, etc., that wouldn't be so damn frustrating if he weren't capable of so much more. Still, there's enough funny here to warrant some future consideration. (Ismist) *David Wilcox*

DRAG CITY SUPERSESSION *Tramps, Traitors and Little Devils* CD

Royal Trux are my all-time favorite band. Their second major label fiasco/masterpiece *Sweet Sixteen* sold about three copies, and two were to me (at retail, no less). So needless to say I eagerly awaited this record, which is the brainchild of Trux's Neil Hagerty (who produces, plays and contributes songs), and features Bill "Smog" Callahan, Edith Frost, Rian Murphy, Jim O'Rourke, and Tara Key, among others.

Nobody plays their best on soundtracks, compilations, benefits, telethons, "special appearances," etc. Add to this axiom the pervasive suspicion that the folks at Drag City think that they can get away with releasing anything with the name "Palace" on it somewhere, and, well, you get the idea.

On *Traitors, Tramps and Little Devils* (which features a very eye-catching front and back cover (get the LP version), Hagerty's songs are exceptional. His "Everyday," alone, is more than worth the price of admission. Hagerty, like Thurston Moore, never allows his ever-apparent uber-intelligence to get in the way of writing a great numb-skulled rock tune.

Newly-goateed Callahan is equally superb on the rollicking cover of the Haynes / Mills truckstop bargain cassette classic "The Girl On The Billboard" (which seems to require no less than five guitars if you believe the credits). The ever-laconic Callahan effectively sounds like a disenchanted balladeer at the horse's end of a crank binge—think Stephen Wright doing Marty Robbins or Pussy Galore taking the piss out of Lee Hazlewood.

On *this* particular Supersession, though, Edith Frost is the Stills to Hagerty and Callahan's Kooper and Bloomfield. A friend wisely remarked that all Edith Frost songs sound like Smog songs before the vocals come in (and then they sound like Liz Phair). You could have told me that Frost's "Leaving The Army" was an old Spinanes B-side and I'd have been so convinced that I'd have lied to you and told you that I remembered it. "The back of 'Spitfire', right?" A-doy.

The Hagerty-led version of the still-to-be-inducted-into-the-Rock-And-Roll-Hall-of-Fame-despite-three-inductions-for-Clapton-(let's-boycott) Sabbath classic "N.I.B." here is by far the worst version of the song ever recorded. I don't remember being quite so taken aback by the overt lousiness of a track by one of my favorite artists since the Butthole Surfer's "Pepper." Think bar-band reverence, indie-rock proficiency, add fucking VIOLINS, and, lo and behold! — a piece of garbage that would have been the low point of even The Drag City Hour a few years back.

Often, when it comes to a lot of Drag City stuff, I feel like Frank Grimes on the *Simpsons* running around the power plant trying in vain to convince everyone how lazy and useless Homer Simpson is. This track, my friends, is baaaaaaad. And if I have to electrocute myself to prove that, well, just you wait.

Still, *A Drag City Supersession* is as frequently rewarding as it is off-putting, so program your CD player and you've got a fine EP here. (Drag City) *James Jackson Tolt*

EASY ACTION CD

I've waited many a year for the return of John Brannon—and it finally arrives. He hits the road a runnin'—with the aid of former Laughing Hyenas partner Ron Sokowski and ex-Gravitar guitarist Richardson and Thrall member LeMay on skins. The Action rocks just as hard as the Hyenas, but just in a slightly different direction. Where LH were visceral, soul bearing, and raw, Easy Action plays it a tad cooler, more

straightforward, and garage-based. (Reptilian) *Les Scurry*

EASY ACTION CD

Detroit scumfuck John Brannon—there has never been a better rawk screamer—unleashes the flamethrower for another round of knee-buckling fury. The spirit of fuck shit up has never left this boy's soul. Drop the needle and the hairs begin to rise. And it only gets better. A wanting-more, thirty minutes of grab it and go that reeks pure, relentless momentum and begs for spin after spin. Kicking pussyfooters to the curb, Easy Action ain't no pansy-ass affair. In the spirit of for-the-throat rock, these boys don't play show and tell, they live and breathe it. It's an everyday affair, a reflection of the gutters where these boys call home. This is the moment where everything that was bad felt good like the peek you took when your sister's girlfriends came over for a swim party. You know the feeling and you like it. (Reptilian) *Troy Brookins*



EINSTURZENDE NEUBAUTEN *Strategies Against Architecture III* CD set

I had an English professor who once recommended one of his mentors to me, but with a caveat. "He's getting up there in years," he said. "He's not the guy he used to be. When I had him as an undergraduate he was so young and charismatic, just like *Jack Kennedy*." (Since he was old enough to remember the dude, I gather that this was a big deal. Kidding!) So, of course, pessimistic me expected the guy to be in a wheelchair with a tube up his nose pontificating on Shakespeare in a phlegmy croak. Of course that wasn't the case—he turned out to be a rigorous but approachable advisor and one of the few truly honest teachers in my college tour of duty. This is a roundabout way to say that after loving Neubauten's recent *Strategies II* compilation, and seeing them in their noisy prime at least twice in the mid-80s, catching them a year and a half ago doing what seemed to be a Germanic New Wave cabaret act was a *big* disappointment. And my first response to this collection gathering up tracks from 1991-2000 was hardly exuberant. But after several listens, I see what they're trying to do. Like an aging athlete, or even an English teacher, Neubauten can't really rely on sheer physical presence anymore. So, they lean toward skeletal melodies, meticulously placed silences, improvisation, and quite a bit of camp to get their points across. "Zentrifuge" commences to bashing with finesse and fury while "Silence is Sexy" and "I Wish This Would Be Your Color" are sultry, menacing and gorgeous. Still, I get the feeling that I'd like this a whole lot better if my timeline crossed theirs a bit later than it did. You know, if I could reframe them as crafty forefathers to Trent Reznor rather than metal-bashing, fire-breathing young Teutons. (Mute) *Cecile Cloutier*

ELDERS OF ZION *Dawn Refuses to Rise* CD

Dawn Refuses to Rise is a protest record, melding hip hop, dub, dark ambient, and noise with leftist politics. The group, which includes Joel Schalit (*Punk Planet* editor), Vance Galloway (Asphodel Records engineer), and Luis Illades (Pansy Division/El Vez), uses traditional instruments and cut-and-paste methods, interspersed with samples

ranging from IMF demonstrations and Israeli children fighting over toys, to French Maoists. Politically-inclined hipsters into the above-named genres may dig this. Call me old-fashioned, but I'll take punk protest music instead. [Incidental Music] *Trinity C.*

ELECTRELANE *Rock It to the Moon* CD

I'm saying, "I need another droning dreamscape band like I need a hole in my head." Then along comes the spooky-sultry drone and lull of the British all-girl multi-instrumentalist quartet Electrelane to delicately and methodically drill a trepanation hole in our skulls. The dream-like Farfisa drone and pitch-tweaked childlike vocals of "The Invisible Dog" launch *Rock It to the Moon* over what sounds like a whirring dentist's drill. Elsewhere, squealing guitars meld into chiming hums and surf-style organs are smeared over delay-drenched guitars. Each song section segues into another in a seamless wash of atmospheric sounds that, the group claims, takes inspiration from "Nina Simone, the Stooges, and Puccini"...and I can actually hear it in their beautiful and epic music. The more immediate reference points would be Stereolab, Sigur Ros, Velvet Underground, Ennio Morricone, and Le Tigre—but that could just be the hole in my head talking. [Mr. Lady Records] *Dave Clifford*

ELECTRIC COMPANY *Greatest Hits* CD

Despite the title, this is not a collection of EC tracks, but a remix record that stands above most. With a list of transformers that includes Kid606, Timblind, Leafcutter John, Blectum From Blechdom, U-ziq and Jasper, I expected mind-fuckery of the highest order. The Electric Company's "songs" are amorphous to start with. Now they are taken apart sound by sound and beat by beat. One can sense the X-acto knife cutting into the tape and being pieced back together like a gigantic puzzle. Most go into glitch and skitter, with a few side-trips into old school melodic mixing (U-ziq); head nodding beats (Jasper), and loop overload (Tom Recchioni). Gotta say I enjoyed this turntable wrecker immensely. [Tigerbeat6] *Les Scurry*

THE ELECTRIC EELS *The Eyeball of Hell* CD

Before punk was offered, digested, and popularized in the second half of the 1970s, there was the Electric Eels. This Cleveland proto-punk terror cell operated from 1972 to 1975 and, although they only actually performed live five times, provided a vital link between the MC5s and Stooges that came before and all the raucous energy that would follow. They must've turned at least a few heads, because they've now got a 24-song retrospective CD (also available as a 27-song gatefold LP) to accompany an earlier Scat release of Eels material (*Those Were Different Times*) and a raft of websites recycling stories and minutia

through a clarinet (probably borrowed from his sister) here and there. The disc includes extensive liner notes from band members. In terms of music history, this package isn't exactly the Robert Johnson box set, but it's an interesting document from an age when punk was still incubating. [Scat] *Bo Pogue*

ELECTRO GROUP *A New Pacifica* CD

These so-called electrodes sound a lot like Lush, but they probably imagine that they sound like My Bloody Valentine. That is, there's plenty of guitar strumming with the whammy-bar in hand—like Kevin Shields always did to create that pitch-shifting drone—and distorted bass with ethereal female vocals slightly buried in the din. But, there's more jangle and harmony to the songs, which push the Electro Group over into Lush territory. It's all well and good...the songs glide by and seem to be well-crafted and moderately catchy. However, it's just not distinct enough, nor is it delivered with the passion of their predecessors. [Omnibus Records] *Dave Clifford*

ENGINE DOWN *A Sign of Breath* CD EP

Engine Down? Well, let me know when you get it back up, because it's not going anywhere. But, at least while the engine is down, they got a Washington, D.C. validation stamp by recording at Inner Ear Studios with J. Robbins. As you'd expect, it's full of emo-melodi-yawn, but at least the tech-flexing is kept to a minimum. Check out some of the better releases (Sunshine, Lumen, et al.) on this cool Czech record label instead. [Day After] *Dave Clifford*

ENON "Listen (While You Talk)" / "By-ways and Oddities" 7"

Two brief songs by this band which comprises ex-members of Brainiac and Skeleton Key.

"Listen (While You Talk)" pairs menacing vocals with groovy bass, drums and keyboards. Add a little distortion and you have something that sounds a lot like Karp or a groovier Couch.

"By-Ways and Oddities" is made up entirely of synth-buzz and noise over a sample of a radio broadcast that eventually decays and is drowned out entirely by the noisy rumbles, climaxing in the sound of screaming crickets falling from a waterfall to their imminent death. Gorgeous.

Cover art by Seth Jabour of Les Savy Fav, if that means anything to ya. [The Self-Starter Foundation] *James Jackson Toth*

ENTER MY SILENCE *Remote Controlled Scythe* CD

This fantastic Finnish melodic death metal band is one of the coolest debuts in the genre in years, combining the grated-throat grunt of Carcass with the soaring drop-tuned guitar harmonies of Amon Amarth. Not only do the guitars harmonize throughout nearly every song riff, the guitarists actually have a strong melodic sensibility and write catchy parts without relying on solos to create melody. Plus, the vocalist's guttural wail is actually quite well trained—he hits all the notes thrown down his esophagus. [Mercenary MusiK/World War III] *Dave Clifford*

ERASE ERRATA *Other Animals* CD

An interesting all-female quartet from San Francisco, Erase Errata have a firmly tribal throb. Jagged, jerky, and treble-tinged guitar, which sometimes sounds like the second coming of The Bush Tetras' *Pat Place*, winds in and out of some pretty convincing tub thump and croon-screach. Heck, there's even some nasty trumpet thrown around with careless abandon. The whole EE package is a throwback to a no-wave space in time where it simply wasn't cool to be nice sounding and everything was an adventure in how to twist the most out of your set. Very cool. [Troubleman Unlimited] *Wm. Christman*

EVERYTHING MUST GO *Apocalipstick* CD

THE UNSEEN *The Anger and the Truth* CD

Ben Z. Dreen is a damn good alias, so EMG gets a nod right away. Now then, some Wattie wannabe from the Unseen flashes his middle finger gang sign on the Unseen cover, which means, I think, "I'm a fuckin' idiot and too punk to care." So they drop in the punk-o-rama sweepstakes. And then Unseen have a song titled "Give in to Hate." Sorry guys, another point taken away. EMG have a song called "Don't Touch My Glue Bag," and it's even fun as hell, what with erratic guitar swipes and all. All this hardcore reminds me that staying power is available and some bands still swoop down and grab it. Sense of humor is big these days. Get one. [Dead Teenager/BYO] *Miller*

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about the legendary band. Most flameout punk bands don't get this sort of attention, especially 27 years after disbanding. Legend has it that Stiv Bators picked up his stage mannerisms by aping Eels lead singer Dave McManus. Legend also has it that Eels guitarist John Morton, while being led away in handcuffs after a violence-marred Eels show, booted a cop in the testicles. Naturally, Cleveland's finest responded with decisive force and overwhelming numbers, and Morton played a subsequent Eels show with a wrench taped to his broken left hand that enabled him to play guitar. Material on *The Eyeball of Hell* comes from recordings made during the waning days of the band's existence, and features a two-guitar assault (no bass) and the drumming of future Cramps pounder Nick Knox. The guitars are on overload and drip with fuzz, but the riffs are much more informed than the typical "three chords and a cloud of fuss" that mark most primordial punk efforts. In fact, brash, ass-kicking aggression aside, the Eels actually aim at arty, free-jazz pretense on some of these tracks, albeit a gutter-level version of it. Singer McManus seems to have created (or at least perfected) the snotty, nasally punk vocal styling that became a mainstay after filtering through more popular acts such as Black Flag. McManus also blows

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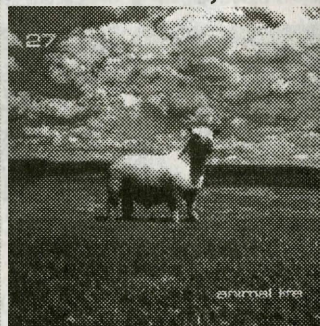
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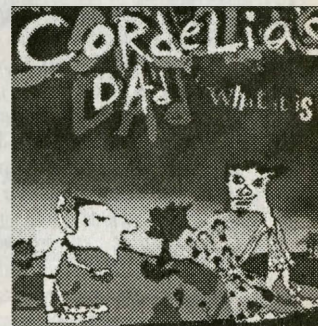
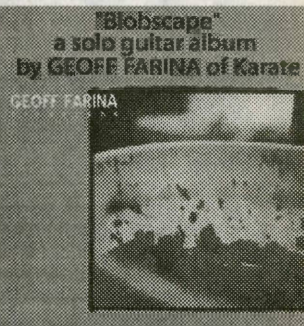
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EX-MODELS *Other Mathematics* CD

Twent-four minutes of sideways and upside-down jams, with little to hold on to. More confession: I never dug the Minutemen and most of this math rock never cut it. I had to cheat in Miss Taylor's algebra class when I was in seventh grade. Got the answers from a smart girl, faked like I was ciphering, and turned it in. Got a "B" and never could figure out what $a^2 + 48 = 57$ meant. Later, I had a tutor through the school, some guy who went on to be a big guy at NPR. He was a hippy who loved the Beatles even though they were dead in 1975.

All this shit about signatures and timing and Mothersbaugh. Can't we all just get along—without Ex-Models? [Ace Fu] *Miller*

EXPLOSION: CEREBRAL CD

The self-released debut from Ann Arbor-based improvisational jazz trio *explosion:cerebral* is an aggregate of incongruent fragments. The musicians use tenor sax, double bass, and drums to create an inventive array of sounds that fluctuate between throttled screams and somnambulant pulses, but they are presented with an abstractness that makes their order incidental. The fissures and rifts are never jarring and each piece contains compelling sections. In sum, however, the results are often not as rapturous as the peaks indicate. The three selections composed by percussionist Eric Roth stand out in comparison to the longer pieces that are credited to the complete ensemble. Of special note is the cover of "Rosmosis," a Roswell Rudd composition that was first performed by the New York Art Quartet on their 1963 recording for the 1963 ESP-Disk label. [RosCo c/o esroth59@hotmail.com] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

EYEDEA & ABILITIES *First Born* CD

If Guru was correct in his summation that it is indeed "mostly the voice" that makes a good MC exceptional, DMC regional champ and 1200 Hobos member Abilities will find himself a new partner. Sure, Eyedea is a contest-winning emcee (most recently taking the prize on *The Blaze Battle* on HBO), but his lyrics are lackluster when they are not downright grating. This makes for yet another dull hip hop record that is far longer in minutes than it is on anything closely resembling any of the great things the genre is capable of.

I kept hoping for an instrumental track from the obviously talented Abilities (there is only one, the tempo-shifting "Well Being") but what I was subject to for seventy-two minutes was Eyedea, at all paces, rhyming badly.

Not all of the beats here are exactly top-notch either. You can sing "Kashmir" over "Eyes Of Today," and "Blindly Firing" all but jacks the beat from Jeru The Damaja's masterpiece "Come Clean," over which

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Eyedea, in a rare moment of poignancy, rhymes "I guess I don't know what's dope from the viewpoint of a listener." Guess, shit. Maybe next time, he'd do better to open his ears before opening his mouth, because if a hip hop album drops and no one is there to want to listen to it, those props can be very hard to earn, indeed. [Rhymesayers Entertainment] *James Jackson Toth*

EYESINWEASEL *Live in the Middle East* CD

This is another Tobin Sprout product (the other incredibly prolific songwriter from the first incarnation of Guided By Voices), and the band is by far his best post-GBV project to date (not counting his unbelievably life-like photo-realist painting side gig). Sprout and Co. laid down a full 27 tracks in rapid-fire succession at the legendary Boston club in late 2000, including tunes he penned for GBV. The live setting is a huge asset for Sprout, as it allows him to strip away the curtain of production and let the unfiltered song shine through. The songs are stark, simple, minimalist pop with an '80s college-rock jangle feel, and the obvious mark of years of tinkering in the basement for pure self-satisfaction. Sprout has never had an especially strong voice (more of a midrange drone with a few harmonic lilt), but the vox track seems particularly on-

the-mark when blended with the live sound of these intimate lo-fi ditties in a club atmosphere. By the sound of the audience reaction, Sprout has cultivated a loyal cult following, as a corps of know-it-all rock fans screams requests in the foreground. Good show. [Wigwam/Recordhead] *Bo Pogue*

FAD GADGET *Best Of 2x*CD

Strange to hear this singles collection in the age of the Faint, Bis, Orgy and perhaps hundreds of bands aping the analog synth saturation and artfully distant vocals of Fad Gadget and its '80s ilk. But, as always, the rehashed versions lack the cohesion and earnest intensity of something being created off the cuff—as Frank Tovey, the mastermind behind Fad Gadget (along with Mute Records president, Daniel Miller at the band's beginning) most certainly was working. Equally strange is that this sounds much better today than it did at the time. I recall hearing some early Fad Gadget as a youngster in the '80s, and was unimpressed with it in comparison to Bauhaus, Birthday Party, Suicide, Cabaret Voltaire, Soft Cell, etc. Fad Gadget just seemed too poppy for electronic music. Now, with the perspective of much more time, Fad Gadget sounds incredibly timeless. The singles collected on this double CD are a nearly seamless flow of catchy dada-influenced bleak synth-pop hits. Disc One contains 18 songs, including the "goth night" faves, "Ricky's Hand," "Love Parasite," "Life On the Line," and "Saturday Night Special." Tovey's pastiche of dada fashion, swing-noir songs, black 'n' white design, surrealism, and modernist art suggest considerable similarity to Peter Murphy's signature aesthetic. And, certainly, Murphy's output is considerably more extremist and challenging. But, Tovey doesn't seem to be trying so hard to impress us, as much as he is referencing tokens of his own influence without expecting us all to recognize his artistic footnotes. At any rate, this is a comprehensive collection of singles, B-sides, and alternate 12 inch mixes that, thankfully, separates the hits from the dreck, unlike most of such releases. Includes detailed liner notes, cool live photos, and discography information. Those of you unfamiliar with the Fad Gadget releases, I'd recommend digging into this collection before drooling over the latest batch of 20-something synth-rock light-show phantasmagoria. [Mute] *Dave Clifford*

THE FAINT 12"

Nebraskan indie-cum-retro band The Faint, despite being a bunch of skateboarding posers aping a style that was dead on arrival, almost won me over with their cover of what is perhaps Sonic Youth's most overlooked great song, "Mote." Instead of creating a straight rendering of such a masterpiece, The Faint attempt to do with synths what Lee and Thurston did with guitars. Of course, they fail miserably, but that's not the point. The disaffected vocals and disco beat actually bring out the song's melody, and, by making it their own, "Mote" is a rare slice of cover song potency.

Elsewhere, The Faint attempt cut-up glitch collage (The Lack's remix of "Victim Convenience") and G-funk reverence (Psyrendust's "Passives" remix), neither to any spectacular effect. "Dust," a collaboration with Bright Eyes, doesn't sound unlike any other track by The Faint, save for Conor Oberst's distinctive tortured whine on the chorus, and a rather nice, if out of place, lap steel.

Experimental not quite. Flash and no stars. [Gold Standard Laboratories] *James Jackson Toth*

FAUST *BBC Sessions + CD*

BBC Sessions + comprises Faust's 6 core members recorded in their prime, after *So Far* but preceeding by a few months their masterpiece, *Faust IV*. First broadcast on January 3, 1973, *BBC Sessions +* once again proves that Faust did it all, Faust did it first, and Faust did it better. There is the obligatory bliss-out of "Krautrock," a blueprint for all that is good about German music if every there was one, followed by tracks such as "Do So," which attains the goofiness that would pave the way for "The Sad Skinhead" a year later. "Party 9" is Neu's first album reimagined as an orchestra of crickets and stoned guitar, while "(360)" is all telephone conversation and drum spatter. Picture the first incarnation of Amon Duul having a worldless argument during which time djembes are flung in disgust, upsetting the commune dogs, who bark in protest. Other tracks, previously unreleased and recently unearthed, include the morphine catterwaul of "We Are The Hallo Men," a stream of

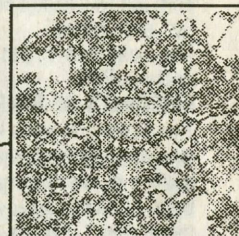
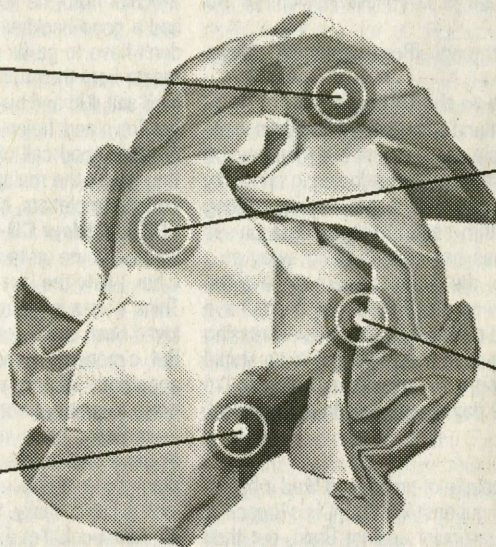
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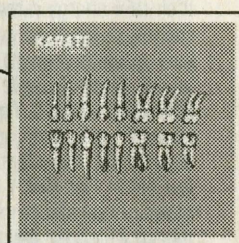
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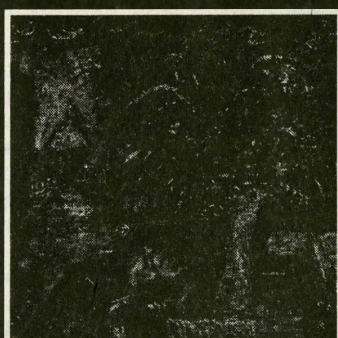
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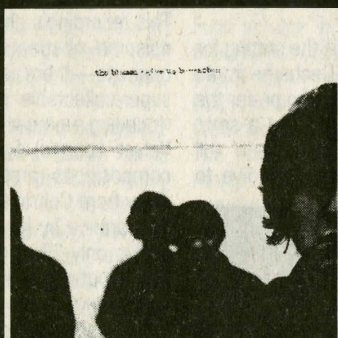
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MEWITHOUTYOU
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In the now saturated post-hardcore scene new T&N band MewithoutYou shows why this sound is truly revolutionary and how it is able to reinvent itself time and time again. Drawing inspiration from bands like Fugazi, Radiohead, and the Refused, mwy create intelligent, emotional, and downright rockin' music!



THE BLAMED
GIVE US BARABBAS

The Blamed play creative and gripping post-punk rock from Chicago that corrupts the standard. They return to Tooth & Nail with their most crucial album yet, filled with deep lyrics and raw power. For fans of Hot Water Music, Fugazi, and the Who.



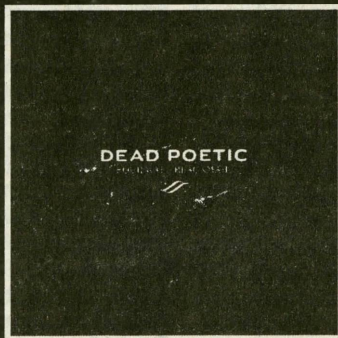
HAVALINA
SPACE LOVE & BULLFIGHTING

Space, Love And Bullfighting takes fans in a fresh new direction with songs that carry strong sing-songy tunes and irresistible pop hooks. Havalina manage to challenge the listener intellectually by throwing avant-garde curveballs subtly into the sonic mix.



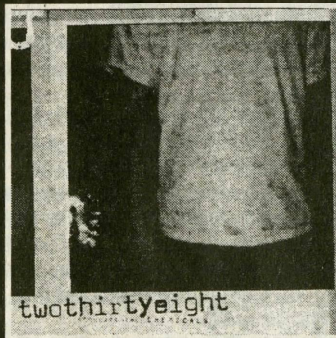
SIDE WALK SLAM
GIVE BACK

Side Walk Slam's sophomore T&N release finds them continuing what they do best - creating pop punk songs that stick in your head for days! It has been a year of growth for the band and the new songs reflect a higher quality of punk, which producer Bill Stevenson has captured on this solid set of 13 songs!



DEAD POETIC
FOUR WALL BLACKMAIL

Deep in the heartland of Ohio a band named Dead Poetic has put together a sound that's both hotly current, and a taste of what's to come in rock and roll. With a sublimely melodic yet passionately intense style, as diverse as Thursday, Poison The Well, Zao, At The Drive In and Embodiment, Dead Poetic present their Solid State debut, "Four Wall Blackmail."



TWOTHIRTYEIGHT
REGULATE THE CHEMICALS

Regulate the Chemicals marks the bands growth in songwriting and a movement into a sound that is all their own. Comprised of songs that challenge the listeners pre-conceptions of classic indie rock, this is the band that will be bringing all the goods to the table in 2002!

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consciousness rant of epic proportions, the drum-dominated "Party 1" from the *Munic and Elsewhere* LP, as well as alternative versions of "So Far" and "Meer."

The Beeb never had it so good. Achtung! [Recommended] *James Jackson Toth*

FIREBALLS OF FREEDOM *Welcome to the Octagon* CD

The quavery, anxious lead singer of Portland's Fireballs of Freedom wails over arrangements that seem to crumble one moment but then bounce back to crush all comers the next. The two guitars dribble big fat sticky trails of blues jam over the songs (when they're not arguing among themselves) and are guided by a rhythm section whose bass pulses resemble the sounds made by a tennis ball cannon firing away at a trampoline. Yet, for all their adrenaline, the Fireballs seem to have the same ambivalence many nouveau, non nu-metal hard rock bands have about craft: In a laudable effort to avoid cliché, they focus on expressing their raw energy rather than expending it on songwriting. So, no stupid clichés, but also no good hooks. Avoidance = integrity, an equation I'm less and less likely to get behind these days, especially in matters rock 'n' roll. [Estrus] *Cecile Cloutier*

FIREBIRD BAND *The Drive* CD EP

I listened to this strong debut single a couple of times, and liked it before discovering that it featured former Braid guitarist/vocalist, Chris Broach at the helm. Not that I had anything in particular against Braid, but their brand of melodic emo-punk left me cold. So, it was quite a surprise that this cool blend of electronic loops and beats, crossed with distorted bass and guitars and catchy vocal harmonies sounds really unique and interesting. There's nothing "trip hop" about it. There's nothing remotely retro, or remotely contemporary about it. The songwriting is solid and filled with an intriguing blend of ominous, delayed layers that lend a sense of yearning optimism at the same time that it sounds bleak and hopeless. Check out such catchy anthems as "The Drive" and bleary ballads as "Distance" packed concisely into this little 5 song EP. I'd imagine the full album will be even more impressive. [Cargo] *Dave Clifford*

THE FLAMING STARS *Ginmill Perfume* CD; *A Walk on the Wired* Side CD

A suave mixture of crushed velvet jackets and darkness is the setting for The Flaming Stars. Former Gallon Drunk and author Max Decharne fronts like a carny Sinatra with a golden arm, crooning for those who prefer the back alleys of Vegas to the tube-top Strip. Decharne delivers a sexy, smacked out Bryan Ferry and the rest of the boys play rock 'n' roll mambo-swank, keeping it real cool. Take a ride on the slow dive to

Audio *reviews*

despair that comes with receiving a fucked up lot in life. Give-it-to-me straight type stuff that makes you want to wipe the wry smile off some poor bastard's face. It doesn't crawl like this anymore and The Flaming Stars have nailed it in full get-yr-rocks-off swagger, stinking of testosterone, whiskey, and cheap cologne. These are the fuckers that have no problem swiping your date. [Alternative Tentacles; Vinyl Japan] *Troy Brooks*

THE FLESHIES *Kill the Dreamer's Dream* CD

Simply put, the Fleshies are bunch of punk goofballs from Oakland, CA. They could easily end up in the funny-core bin but they fit all too perfectly with the now-trademark Alt. Tentacles release M.O.: left-leaning political punk rock smirk. And there's plenty of *that* going on here. However, it all ends up being pretty droll. But is it "entertaining" enough to "smash the state"? Probably not. But if yr a "fan" of the "genre" then you won't be disappointed. [Alternative Tentacles] *Wm. Christman*

FOETUS *Blow* CD

The other side of the coin to Jim Thirwell's welcome reappearance—the heads being *Flow*, an album of new material (the first in four years) tails being this remix companion. A fine document it is, with some top names

here: Kid606, Amon Tobin, Charlie Clouser, DJ Food, Panacea, Franz Treichler from the Young Gods, etc. All quality acts. Thirwell has always had a good backbeat to his work, even at his hardest, so these artists don't have to go far to get some funk into it. While some don't venture too far from their norm (Clouser with his NIN rock-isms, Panacea with the hard sell, Kid and his spazz drill and bass), no one comes off bad. Others like Tobin and Treichler change the originals completely in form and feel. Another good call was that the entire album of *Flow* was remixed, so they aren't the multiple versions of the most "popular" track. This might be for completists, but it's damn fine. [Thirsty Ear] *Les Scurry*

FOETUS *Blow* CD

He turned me on to the word "Dipsomaniac." How can I hate him? Still, when I saw the last thing, *Flow* on the stands, I was less than excited. Think it was in Detroit, May, 2001. I saw it, and I didn't jump. Fuckit, I loved *Gash* and no one else did. I did my fuckin' part to keep his art alive. But c'mon, how much more of his crabby angst do I need? More, apparently. This is a friendly remix of *Flow*, which means plenty more noise to great effect. Remixes here by Amon Tobin, Pan Sonic, Kid 606, Sean Bevin, et. al, and I'd say go ahead. Okay, I even went to see him at Black Cat on the tour. It was good, but those guys, his band, really didn't scare me, even though their shaved head/black tee/engineer boot look is killer. Really, they looked like they were right out of the industrial gig handbook. I'm a sucker for loud trucks too. [Thirst Ear] *Miller*

FONDLE 'EM FOSSILS *Fondle 'Em Fossils 12"*

From the *Farewell Fondle 'Em* compilation, "*Fondle 'Em Fossils*" is an all-star track featuring DJ Eli, Breeze, Q-Unique, Godfather Don, J-Treds and MF Doom. While Eli's original mix is superb (and the highlight of the compilation from whence this track comes), the El-P remix is a different track entirely. Sci-fi undertones, abstract drum programming and electric guitar samples make this just another bold-lettered masterpiece on El-P's already impressive resume. The remix is only available on this 12", making it far more essential than the CD. What are you waiting for? [Def Jux] *James Jackson Toth*

FRED ANDERSON *Dark Day* CD

This recording's charms are still eluding me, though it's not the kind of noisome abstraction that justifies a healthy skepticism. Quite the opposite—there is so much worthy about it. Mass dissemination of super-collectable recorded during a period when Chicago mainstay (founding member of the AACM and current owner of the much-revered Velvet Lounge) Fred Anderson wasn't working all that much. Real compositions (pretty scarce in the waning days of '70s free jazz) that draw from Coltrane and Coleman without copycatting. Early impressive appearance by longtime collaborator, percussionist Hamid (then Hank) Drake, only 23 at the time. And yet, and yet, and yet...I've listened to this about seven times, but it still feels like it only snaps to life when Anderson gets an especially biting solo in, or when Drake steps to the fore (listen to him egg-on bassist Steve Palmore in the waning minutes of the first version of the title track). And that doesn't seem to happen nearly enough. Like I said, it has to be me. I'm going to have a nice lie down now. [Atavistic/Unheard Music] *Cecile Cloutier*

FRED ANDERSON *On The Run* CD

Fred Anderson has to be the most lyrical free jazz tenor working today. While other, current geniuses of the t-sax (Ware, Gayle, Brötzman, Evan Parker) tend to play with a more violent, bleating edge, Anderson's style is languid and flowing, with a tone closer to Lester Young's. In addition to Pres, his roots stretch back to include the strongly detectable influences of Gene Ammons, Coleman Hawkins, and local, Chicago hero/Anderson mentor Von Freeman; the rest of the field tends to get its juice exclusively from the more recent Trane/Shepp/Ayler axis. Yet, despite its beautiful, fluid sound, his technique never lacks the aggression or exuberance of the best of his contemporaries. Anderson has also been active in the Chicago scene since the mid 1960's, helping to found the vital Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians collective—or AACM, which birthed the legendary Art Ensemble of Chicago—and has managed two key performance spaces; The Birdhouse and the Velvet Lounge (he took over the latter in 1982 and has run it ever since). He's been a heavy influence on many of today's musicians, the great Ken Vandermark among them. But, for

some reason, Fred Anderson's work has been criminally under-documented on record. Thankfully, labels such as Atavistic (check 2000's excellent *Milwaukee Tapes, Vol. 1-1980*), Asian Improv, Okka Disc, and Delmark (this one) are working to change that.

This set, recorded live in the relaxed, home environs of the Velvet Lounge, is by a trio which also features bassist Tatsu Aoki (founder/director of the Chicago Asian American Jazz Festival) and, perhaps the baddest drummer on the scene today, Hamid Drake. Proceedings commence with a lengthy solo piece by Anderson, the gorgeously unraveling "Ladies in Love"; this is a beautiful bit of breathy romance that befits its title and serves as a fine intro to both the album and the basis of this man's style. As the gig unfolds, the intensity mounts, and the players waste no time in stretching out and speaking their piece. The 16-minute title cut follows, spotlighting emotive solos by both Aoki—who *really* gets down on track four, the aptly-titled "Tatsu's Groove"—and Drake, who virtually grew-up jamming with Anderson (the two have been working together since Drake was a teenager). Telepathy abounds! And the three really revel in the open space, lazily volleying their barbs back and forth, across the room like a lopsided tetherball. Now and then, somebody gets a bug up his ass and decides to *mobilize*; usually it's Anderson who spurs things on, but on "Smooth Velvet" (not a Dave Koz-ish "house theme"), Aoki comes dramatically up from below, charging ahead and raising the stakes—to great effect.

Wonderful as this disc is, I harbor one grievance: thin sound. Especially on the drums. It sounds as though Drake keeps his snare drum wound extremely tight, allowing for a very short decay and lacking the normal "smash-punch" of a traditional snare (at times it sounds closer to a tom). To be fair, due to mic-ing considerations (i.e., "bleed"), this must make the *true* sound of his kit extremely difficult to capture. Or maybe they wanted it to sound like this. Either way, the drums sound thin and flat—disappointing, especially when such a titan plays them. With the trio format, one hopes for fidelity that will capture a more spacious, layered (read: "3-D") dimension than found here.

But, hey, "Live" means what it implies and, sometimes, ya gotta just go with what's there. By the second spin, any issues of sonics will evaporate, so transcendental is the nature of this music and its creators. [Delmark] *Peter Aaron*

FRØDE GJERSTAD TRIO *The Blessing Light: For John Stevens CD*

I've always been impressed by saxophonist Gjerstad's clarity. He is capable of focused simplicity and when he decides to cut loose every note in every cascade is well placed. Very little squonk for the sake of squonk. This trio is Gjerstad's first all-Norwegian group after years of playing with the late English drummer John Stevens (hence the title). And the live recording indicates how well the partnership with bassist Øyvind Storsund and drummer Paul Nilsen-Love works. The trio handles three long compositions by Gjerstad (the shortest tracks at 17:10) with a flair that points to considerable improvisatory leeway and familiar interplay. Storsund is especially adept at strategically placing himself between the horn and drums and draws attention to the bass without being overactive or retreating into simple back up work. Gjerstad balances between a slowly developing melodicism and toe-curling freeform blowing. Another excellent document of a player you should get to know if you are interested in free jazz saxophone. [Cadence Jazz Records, Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679] *Bruce Adams*

FUGAZI *The Argument CD*

Depending on who you talk to, the extra-musical factors that surround these beyond-stalwart veterans—the refusal to turn over their careers to corporate hacks, their lefty politics, their, er, healthful lifestyles—do and don't matter. Personally, I'm not going to chew over those factors right now because musically this is as fine a distillation of post-punk, hard rock, and indie pop as I've heard in a long time. The rigor and precision with which it's put together reminds me of purveyors of technically perfect power metal, but of course the Fugazis use a more varied and subtle palette than those gear heads. Just witness that beautiful, ascending, Beatleseque countermelody threaded through "Cashout," or the completely haywire guitar solo atop the chicken scratch riff mountains of "Full Disclosure." Still, yet another Fugazi release that I

occasionally enjoy but never really warm to beyond enthusiastic intellectual appreciation. The band's well-crafted earnestness doesn't really make up for a distinctive absence of absurdity, pathos, or unfettered joy—all qualities unfortunately some of the worst opportunists, dilettantes, and showboats in rock can limn for memorable music. Life's a bitch that way, sometimes. [Dischord] *Cecile Cloutier*

FUGU *Fugu 1 CD*

Exhuming and conserving the elements of style that earmarked Brian Wilson's high-water marks *Pet Sounds* and *Smile*, and then extrapolating those into an ongoing genre has been a popular pursuit for a worldwide cult of musicians for at least a half decade now. The results are always handsome because of the plush 'n' flush nature of the source materials. But they can be airless, hermetic, and wind up as kitschy bric à brac. Pursuing the basic trail Brian blazed too faithfully leads to solipsism. Adding inappropriate elements dilutes the charm, impact, and artistic ambitiousness at the core of his original vision.

Fugu are Frenchies who successfully avoid both pitfalls and produce a sumptuous, subtle restatement of the oeuvre. Make no mistake, *Pet Sounds* is a central text and *Fugu 1* opens with plucked Fender bass notes that were so characteristic of it. Elsewhere a lot of the basic vocabulary of instrumental voices—playful Hawaiian slide guitar, French horn choirs, high-stepping organ chords—as well as overall composition all hearken straight back to that remarkable album.

They depart from it by researching music Wilson drew on in the first place, as well as some that he had a subsequent influence on or harmonized with contemporaneously. So, Fugu proceed to blaze by ways that Brian *might have* explored if his sanity had held and he could have actively exploited the various possibilities inherent in the amazingly rich synthesis he'd created. Fugu grace songs with lovely baroque-pop vocal harmonizing—a bit more European and classically-oriented than the Beach Boys managed. They give greater emphasis to Latin-jazz and spaghetti western soundtrack undercurrents. They visit the spots where Brian shared turf with *Loaded*-era Velvet Underground (think "O Sweet Nothing"), or the Beatles (Harrison's "It's Only a Northern Song").

Fugu indulge in forthrightly retro stylings, but those that no one ever actually got around to. If the last two High Llamas albums let ya down, this is what you're waiting for. [Minty Fresh, PO Box 577440, Chicago, IL 60657] *Howard W.*

GEM *Sunglare Serenades CD*

The prime movers in Gem, Doug Gillard and Tim Tobias, are more recognizable from their day jobs in the most recent incarnation (and arguably the best incarnation) of Guided By Voices. GBV is chock full of songwriting talent (hell, Bob Pollard is three or four bands unto himself), so naturally side and solo projects abound. Gem has actually been around since 1992, and despite a comparatively anemic discography, has managed to offer several smartly-crafted pop jewels of its own (GBV's smash hit "I am a Tree," which appeared on *Mag Earwhig!*, is actually a Gem tune that Gillard brought with him when he joined GBV in 1996). Gillard and Tim Tobias both man guitars and vocals (Tobias' brother Todd and Eric Vogt round out the band) and share songwriting duties. The guitars are fairly clean on most tracks, with some crunch and distortion found on bridges, and the sound steers into classic '80s jangle-pop in a few instances. Gillard's delicate fingers and trademark riffs are in abundance and the harmonies are effective. Comparisons to recent GBV product are inevitable, and this effort stacks up nicely, albeit neither of the fronting vocalists for Gem has Bob Pollard's cascading, melodic timbre. Put this one into rotation with the rest of your greater Ohio-based pop favorites. [Pitch-a-tent] *Bo Pogue*

GILLIAN WELCH *Time (The Revelator) CD*

On her third album *Time (The Revelator)*, Gillian Welch makes a decisive and wholly unexpected change of course within the unmistakable signature oeuvre she's marked out for herself.

Her first two albums were strange little miracles. Welch had clearly invested considerable time and effort acquiring and assimilating the aesthetic and thematic vocabulary of rural Americana from the '20s and '30s (as epitomized most poignantly in Harry Smith's awesome *Anthology of American Folk Music*). This in turn hearkened back to still older stylistic currents: centuries-old European hymns, love ballads,



funeral laments, and chronicles of supernatural happenings on one hand, African ritual chants and work songs on the other. Over time, these had evolved in isolation from their original sources in the old worlds into powerful, unique styles in their own right and then cross-pollinated in the U.S. Welch had considerable success crafting original compositions entirely faithful to those influences down to the smallest niggling detail. *On Time*, while the musical elements are much the same as on previous outings, she's using them to make more personal statements that could well depict her own experiences or at least her ruminations on situations she might have or might yet find herself in—she's started actually inhabiting her songs rather than remaining the omnipotent narrator.

But she's retained the moral stance, and sense of the spiritual/supernatural planes overlapping and intersecting our material world and thereby produced a fresh perspective on what might otherwise be predictable, trite subject matters. Add to that the intimacy and immediacy of the musical style she's already synthesized and you're looking at a substantially original art form arriving with this album. Powerful, lovely stuff. [Acony Records, PO Box 40100, Nashville, TN 37204] *Howard W.*

GLOBAL UNITY ORCHESTRA *Globe Unity 67 and 70 CD*

Formed by Schlippenback in 1966, this group contained, at the time, practically every European and Western free jazz player of note. Parker, Brötzmann, Schoof, Niebergall, Bailey, Bennink. The list goes on to include 19 players in total. These two lengthy pieces admirably showcase both the individual players and the very idea of such a large improv ensemble. The sound is crisp—despite the flurry of activity and the amount of musicians, all contributions can be heard. "67" starts off with just cymbals, with the sound growing piece by piece until a sweet, joyous cacophony is reached with players dancing in and out. "70" is less playful; once momentum is attained the group fights hard to keep that level from diminishing and for the most part is successful. Neither of these two pieces sound dated in the least. Fantastic aural snapshot of the time. [Unheard Music/Atavistic] *Les Scurry*

GOODHEART ALLEN POWELL TRIO *I Can Climb A Tree I Can Tie A Knot I Can Have A Conversation CD*

The word I keep returning to here is *equilibrium*; Matthew Goodheart (piano), Josh Allen (tenor saxophone) and Garth Powell (percussion) seem very mindful of it on this, their debut collaboration. At the heart of it all is space, an intangible center that can only be preserved with an approach both steady and patient, an approach executed beautifully on the eight tracks collected here. This is not a recording of excess, of

GORILLA CD

In the liner notes of their debut, this UK trio goes out of their way to make it clear where they're coming from: "... The Who, Blue Cheer, Grand Funk Railroad, MC5, etc." but with "a little modern twist ..." Being so up front about your band's influences might be the inverse of pretense but is not necessarily the best idea. Not only do you paint yourself into a corner, but you very likely give yourself way too much to live up to: comparing your drummer to Keith Moon is a tad audacious, no?

The needle on Gorilla's style-o-meter spends most of its time on the stoner/sludge side (early Black Sabbath, in particular) and doesn't linger too long in the zones of anthemic (presumably, early '70s), Who-style rave-ups or the Motor City getdown, to which the group so earnestly aspires. Captured in requisite analog at London's esteemed Toe Rag Studios, this is a band that *riffs* far more than it *boogies*. Singer/guitarist John Redfern is adequate on his instrument (along with the almighty wah-wah), but he's lacking as a vocalist. I'm all for—you know—punk rock n' all, but one has to have the power, or at least, the style, to *convey*. Not being the possessor of a strong (or interesting) set of pipes and competing with loud (and predictable) music, Redfern is usually too hoarse to deliver the message. Hopefully, more time spent behind the mic will alleviate this. The buzzing overdrive of the band's vintage amps does, however, approximate Mr. Townsend's Hi-Watt stacks on *Live at Leeds*, so I guess someone deserves a little star for that.

I also believe in grabbing the mojo's of your heroes (especially ones as great as the above) and yes, putting a "modern twist" on 'em. But I don't hear that happening here. What I hear is a band that started out by learning some covers, dropping 'em after they figured out how to string riffs together, and deciding that that was enough. Which would be fine if it was 1977 and they were whipping up a single for Raw Records. A quarter of a century later, however, and the stick has been lowered: we are now required to rock in a way that's *interesting*, not merely inoffensive. Few attempts are made at personalizing the template here; this album is loud, noisy, and recalls some cool vintage sounds, but that's about as interesting as it gets. You'd never consider trading in your copy of *Paranoid* for it, but that St. Vitus record you haven't spun since '85? Go ahead, you can have mine.

Don't get me wrong, though. I'm sure I could have a good time hanging out with these guys, spinning hard rock obscurities like Three-Man Army or Elderberry Jak. But I think the irony of that might be a little lost on them. [Lunasound Recording, Sjöholmen, PL 4118, 731 97 Kping, Sweden] *Peter Aaron*

Audio reviews

players chasing each other in a frenzy of volume and might. Rather, it is restrained, perfectly balanced, each man consistently finding just the appropriate sound. There's Goodheart, who switches between dulcet, lullaby phrasing (the mid-section of "Waiting for Our Careers to Take Off"), pounding simplicity ("Accumulation #1"), and ringing layers of prepared piano ("The Water is Wet"); Allen, with a warbling, full reed sound perfectly complementing Goodheart in both tone and volume at every step; and Powell, eschewing a steady skin beat in favor of a vast array of textures and accents, which he coaxes from cymbals and assorted toys. A beautiful and tasteful effort in every regard. [Road Cone] *David Wilcox*

GOOD RIDDANCE/KILL YOUR IDOLS split CD EP

Jade Tree starts off its new split single series with a pairing of East Coast and West Coast punk with exclusive tracks. Good Riddance, who are known as Fat Wreck Chords' hardest working band, play melodic punk and hardcore in the traditional Cali-style. New York City's Kill Your Idols are more on the hardcore side of things, and on this release, infuse a bit more melody in their songs. Overall, nothing too groundbreaking but enjoyable nonetheless. [Jade Tree] *Trinity C.*



GRAFTON CD

Grafton is a gift from the backwoods of Nowheresville, U.S.A. Three lads who soak up Southern fried rattle and shake, spitting it out like a Tennessee hustler. Okiecore that should be on every jukebox in middle America. Nearly 30 minutes of the kind of trailer-trash rock that makes you want to shoot speed and gulp whiskey by the gallon. [Deraileur] *Troy Brooks*

THE GRANNIES CD

I expected a lot more crazy stupidity than I got with this disc. This SF Band is gussied up with old hag masks and thrift store clothes like a group of old bats on a bender. Upon listening I discover that the band is pretty damn straightforward in its punk, with a dash of boogie thrown in. Hell, this is even melodic. I can't even detect a tongue in the cheek. Not a bunch of no-talents, but nothing rises above the standard rawka. [Dead Teenager, PO Box 470153, San Francisco, CA 94147] **Les Scurry**
GRAVITAR Freedom's Just Another Word for Never Getting Paid CD
 Five guitar-based songs in almost 62 minutes either means a transcendent psychedelic experience (Wayne Rogers, Fushitsusha) or the pained meandering of stoned freaks (early Bardo Pond, most LPs that come in white silk-screened jackets). Thankfully, Gravatar's latest, the cleverly titled *Freedom's Just Another Word for Never Getting Paid* falls closer to the former.

The instrumental Michigan three-piece often recall local buds Universal Indians (with whom they shared an excellent, ear-shattering split in 1995), with their excessive (and surprisingly adept) soloing and power-chording, not to mention use of horns. Lots of effects and guitar overdrive here. Noise-fusion, if you will.

As you might have guessed, variety is sorely lacking here, with each track an indistinguishable jam most likely culled from the same sweaty session. Often it sounds as if the (competent) jazz-inspired drums are the only thing that varies from track to track, hence their separation. Still, as far as a trance-inducing guitar psyche record goes, this is as good as any other, save for the ones on PSF or Twisted Village, to say nothing of the many first-generation giants to perfect the style from Blue Cheer to The Human Instinct.

Incidentally, if this record was recorded and mixed in the first half of 1997, why is it just seeing the light of day now? [Enterruption] *James Jackson Toth*

GREG KELLY Trumpet CD

The first thing I hear when I play Greg Kelley's latest (released on out-jazz label Meniscus) is a small drone behind an agonizingly slow but strangely beautiful trumpet honk, which sounds like one of Kaoru Abe's solo records if you slowed the speed down.

Things just get crazier from there. Kelley constantly coaxes new sounds from his trumpet — big sounds, tiny sounds, and everything in between. A solo record of this kind had better possess some serious magic at the risk of becoming a grating and self-indulgent fiasco (see some of Arthur Doyle's less than sublime solo ventures). But there is magic all around Greg Kelley, who has seriously raised the bar for every bearded academic with respiratory uber-prowess on *Trumpet*.

While the indecipherably titled seventh track is the sound of an amplified buzzing insect from beyond the grave, you may have to strain to hear the two untitled tracks which follow. The ten-minute long and curiously titled "I Am Not About To Rip Masks Off Anyone" combines a lot of what Kelley does best on *Trumpet* — quiet ruminations of an old reed dictating it's last will and testament, interrupted by trumpet squawk. That spit valve could probably fill the Grand fucking Canyon.

The cat who lives in this house, who enjoys lazily lamp-bathing atop the stereo speakers, received her much-deserved comeuppance today. What a great record. [Meniscus] *James Jackson Toth*

GREG WEEKS Awake Like Sleep CD

For all of Greg Weeks' Nick Drake worship, the young New York singer/songwriter's talents betray his apparent aims to emulate England's legendary troubled troubadour. That is, although Weeks can easily be categorized—let's call it a Nick Drake-n-Zombies sandwich—he's got the songwriting skills to prove that it's not simply formulaic. Even though his latest release is only his second album, Weeks seems to be quickly fashioning his own signature sound and style. He's heavy on the claustrophobia-inducing whispered vocals and in-your-face Mellotron drone and organ whine, but his songs and tastefully sparing instrumentation are quite compelling. Overall, this is a pretty great album of somber chamber pop that replaces Nick Drake's early, heavy orchestration with the simple and powerful funereal harmonium and organs of Rod Argent (as heard on much of the Zombies' *Odyssey and Oracle* album). Cool self-murder cover concept too. [Ba-Da-Bing!] *Dave Clifford*

HAIRY BUTTER CD

Nuttiness for its own sake, done under a pseudonym by the usually reliable Richard Thomas. Some portions of this CD are enjoyable on their own terms, but so much of it is overly dominated by distorted break beats and collaged nonsense that, I'm afraid, it instantly dates itself. The problem with the record-at-home freedom digitalization has brought us is that the all-important editing button in the musician's head cannot be updated accordingly. The plethora of side projects, pseudonyms and collaborations that have come out in the last eight years really makes me question the judgement of most musicians. Quantity has far outstripped quality and the willingness of labels to release virtually anything adds to the problems. Rather than focus on one project and integrate their various tendencies and interests into one strong body of work under one name (whether a band or solo project), many musicians seem to fragment into multiple identities, all of which end up lacking something. In Thomas's sake, his work under his own name is so far superior to this *Hairy Butter* CD (and has plenty of room to absorb Thomas's nuttier tendencies) that the Hairy Butter stuff doesn't even rate a listen. Instead, seek out the excellent *Shoes and Radios Attract Paint* CD on Lo Recordings to hear what Richard Thomas can do when he focuses. [Lo Recordings, distributed by Dutch East India] *Bruce Adams*

HAMMERLOCK Barefoot & Pregnant CD

The Dogwood groves are probably the best part of that awful, third-world hell that is the South. Hammerlock celebrate Dixie with zeal, and fuck if it isn't a damn blistering revelry. "Whiskey Rebel" a cover of Charlie Daniels' "Long Haired Country Boy," indeed. The Southern-accented shout that is the voice is a ball-grIPPING presence, and the mid-tempo is both thuggish and anthemic.

And Hammerlock have a damn right to be pissed even though they are from SF—I'm still trying to figure that out. Try to find a decent place to eat in Macon. Or a non-shitkicker bar in Columbia, SC. It really gets ya. [Steel Cage] *Miller*

HANDSOME FAMILY Twilight CD

The Handsome Family is back with another batch of country dirges. The combination of Brett Sparks's deep, monotone voice and Renny Sparks's melancholy, prozac lyrics remains compelling, the perfect soundtrack for an introspective Sunday afternoon. At this point, they have the formula down pat and very little has changed from previous releases. The only noticeable difference is a more obvious sense of humor on a few of the songs (although, and I admit I could be wrong, I've always taken their songs as somewhat tongue-in-cheek). While the song "So Long" is hilarious, the subtler humor they've used in the past is more effective. Bottom-line, if you dig their other stuff, and I'll put myself on that list, you'll dig this. If you're unfamiliar, this is as good as any other place to get acquainted. [Carrot Top] *Brett Horn*

HAWD GANKSTUH RAPPUHS MC'S (WID GHATZ) Wake Up and Smell the Piss CD

Load Records of Providence has a track record of bankrolling the creative activities of some of societies more obnoxious, sugar-crazed perpetual adolescents, from the Casio-fueled Nintendo punk of Gerty Farish to Ohlneyville Soundsystem. Now, with the discovery of Hawd Gankstuh Rappuhs, Load is in the rap game. Or rather, they're in the game of deconstructing hip hop to a brain-damaged, base form of lo-fi sampling, tinkering, and blathering. The MCs consists of three nontalents (whose names escape me because the Load website crashes my computer on a consistent basis) whose *Beavis and Butthead*-like scatology, noisemaking, and rudimentary rhyming makes head cases like Ol' Dirty Bastard, Dr. Octagon, and Flavor Flav seem like the Rotary Club. Imagine the sound of a busload of teenage schizophrenics being turned loose on a beatbox, a keyboard, turntables, and household appliances before shipping off to their scheduled electroshock therapy sessions. That's roughly what you'll hear when spinning the group's all-star collaborative hit "Monster Manual," and I defy you to listen to it in its entirety on headphones without driving knitting needles through your eardrums at song's end. What's more unusual, the MCs actually drop an old school-type bomb track ("Oompapa") with a P-funk backbeat and some palatable rhymes that betray some hip hop skill. Stick to a brisk Thorazine regimen, fellas, and you could go places. [Load] *Bo Pogue*

HELLSPAWN *Lords Of Eternity* CD

Black Metal from Australia? Well, you got it. Stylistically they roam the same ravaged fields as Cradle of Filth and Dimmu Borgir, the massive riffs intermingling with orchestral and keyboard passages. On vocals, the daintily named Nekroslayer (aka Matt Sanders from the hate-core band Damaged) leads the rest along for some typical anti-Christian rants, spitting a throat-lozenge-needing attack. Nice heavy production helps the crunch that satisfies between the speed breaks, which are thoughtfully introduced and purposeful. Enjoyable for your run-of-the-mill Black Mass, but nothing that stands higher than the bands mentioned above. [Rotten] *Les Scurry*

HERB ROBERTSON & PHIL HAYNES *Ritual* CD**PAUL SMOKER, BOB MAGNUSON, KEN FILIANO & LOU GRASSI *Large Music 1* CD****NILS WOGRAM, KONRAD BAUER & DOMINIC DUVAL *Serious Fun + One* CD**

Any of these great discs will serve as an ear-opening intro to the vital Creative Improvised Music Projects (CIMP) label and its vital Spirit Room Series: unrestrained, free jazz nirvana, effortlessly carrying the overwhelming feeling of possibility. Most recordings of this kinda stuff (even the acknowledged classics) either force the listener to wade through crappy, live sound or became "tainted" by the mixing process itself. Not so, the releases in this series. What you hear is, indeed, what went down. Going live to two-track, producer Robert Rusch and his engineer brother Marc simply throw up a couple of mics, get levels, make sure everyone's comfy, and hit "record." It might not work as well with a big band, but on the duo/trio/quartet configurations found here, the method yields results of organic beauty, with a wonderfully intimate, "room" vibe. The label could use some help in the graphics department—the booklet covers look like the work of an art class at a retirement home. But the music is great, so look long and hard.

The Robertson (trumpet) and Haynes (drums/percussion) disc is a four-part suite recorded on the heels of the lengthy, quintet sessions for 2000's *Brooklyn-Berlin*. Noticeably wound-up and confident, Robertson and Haynes have a heck of a rapport; and one can easily speculate that a larger group would've only squelched the magic. Fraught with prolonged, merciless tension that recalls the Art Ensemble of Chicago's *Tutankhamun*, this is the first of the three that I spun. And the one I keep going back to.

The Smoker-Magnuson-Filiano-Grassi quartet's *Large Music 1* swings extra-hard, driven by Lou Grassi's excellent drumming. While always

rapid-fire lines of Johnson's bop period, however, are a pervasive influence on almost every subsequent trombonist, and neither Wogram nor Bauer prove exception to this legacy. During the album's aggressive moments, they flutter all over, colliding like pterodactyls in a cage, while Duval lays the jagged pavement beneath. But it's not all chest-beating. There are prime periods of somber mood; on "Guelphian Ballad" the horns float like winter's breath, groaning to each other with the sad beauty of old men on a dirt road.

Someone once said that the best jazz is really just a conversation. Grab yourself one of these winning discs and pull up a chair. [CIMP, The Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679] *Peter Aaron*

THE HIVES *Veni Vidi Vicious; Barely Legal* CDs

The word I get is that between The Hives, the Strokes, and White Stripes, rock and roll is born again and pissed off as hell. Sure, I read it in the dubious waste-of-tree glossies, but misguided people read them as well, and actually buy their corporate line. The reality is that the Hives were doing this in their Copenhagen garage five years ago, when *Barely Legal* was released and while labels like Crypt were essential to any noisemeisters and hype was still being foisted on Seattle rejects and Touch and Go bands that could barely tread water. New Bomb Turks worship went far for the Hives, and while the dullness of the Strokes is coma inducing, White Stripes have some songs that shine, even though the two-person rock group is beyond minimalism, it's silly in its anti-rock. So here it is: rock 'n' roll, whatever that is, is not back since it never went away. The Hives, et. al., offer nothing new. I can't vouch for the rest of the pretenders, but the latest thing is usually not using a sound that is the latest. [Burning Heart; Gearhead] *Miller*

HOPE SANDOVAL AND THE WARM INVENTIONS *Bavarian Fruit Bread* CD

The household of which I am a member contains three fervent Mazzy Star fans: myself, my wife, and our cat, Anita (as in Pallenberg, not Bryant). Although all of us admire the complete discography of said ensemble, my wife and I lean more toward the droning, distorted lurch of the band's first two LPs, 1990's *She Hangs Brightly* and, especially, 1993's *So Tonight That I Might See*. The kitty, on the other hand, vastly prefers the final album by Hope Sandoval's ex-group, *Among My Swan* (1996). Anita's afternoons tend to consist of lots of laying around on the living room flokati, eyes half shut, catching the daily rays. The lazy, acoustic guitar-dominated presence of *Swan* is tailor-made for these kinds of activities, so she says. My wife and I, on the other hand, maintain that even while Mazzy Star's swansong (heh) is a fine-sounding record, the songs are not all that memorable. Anita counters that she couldn't care less about "songs," she just doesn't wanna hear anything that makes the floor vibrate.

Regardless, we're all pretty pleased with this, the full-length followup to 2000's *At the Doorway Again* EP, by Sandoval's current outfit, The Warm Inventions (the band also features her new collaborator, ex-My Bloody Valentine drummer, Colm O'Ciosoig). *Bavarian Fruit Bread* is the glorious realization of what was only tenuously begun on *Swan*. But while that album's similarly laconic content is often meandering and lacking in hooks, the tunes on *Fruit Bread* are arranged with the most learned of skill. Again, Sandoval's timid, yet sultry voice wafts its way over sparse, tender textures, but these songs end just as one begins to wish they'd go on forever (on *Swan*, the situation is quite the reverse). The best sampling of this impeccable craft is the opener, "Drop," which unexpectedly cuts off at 2:30, when we'd be quite happy if it were to last another six or seven minutes. How many songs can you say that about? One might argue that Hope and friends sure don't fuck with the formula. *BFB* is yet more slow, sad, pretty songs. I agree that most artists are far too predictable. But in this case, so what? Sandoval is truly alone in her field, a field that *she* created. Artists who use a more stylized language (pure blues, country, garage rock, whatever) as their foundation damn well *better* be attempting to reinvent the wheel, or they're wasting everyone's time. But a maverick like Sandoval is, despite the relative shortcomings of *Swan*, entitled to write her own rules and travel at her own (in this case, slow) speed. She's put together a style that's light years ahead of the pack, which makes her exempt from having to genre-hop in order to remain relevant. Hers is a style that *will* reflect change,

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keeping the pot boiling, Grassi knows when to lay back from his hypnotic rolling and let the music breathe. Standout composition is Paul Smoker's "Up in Evan's Room," which has all the menacing, dramatic flair of a Lalo Schiffrin score—with some well-placed, blue notes. Smoker's trumpet and the tenor and alto reeds of Magnuson always punch through, though Filiano's bass gets lost when the album is played at lower volumes. But if you heed the CIMP Statement of Purpose (on the back cover of all of their releases) and adjust your rig to mid-level, it'll all be there. The notes make it clear that the recording—as well as the music—is demanding, and that you should set aside some time to give it a full ear; "CIMP records are not intended to be background music." Amen.

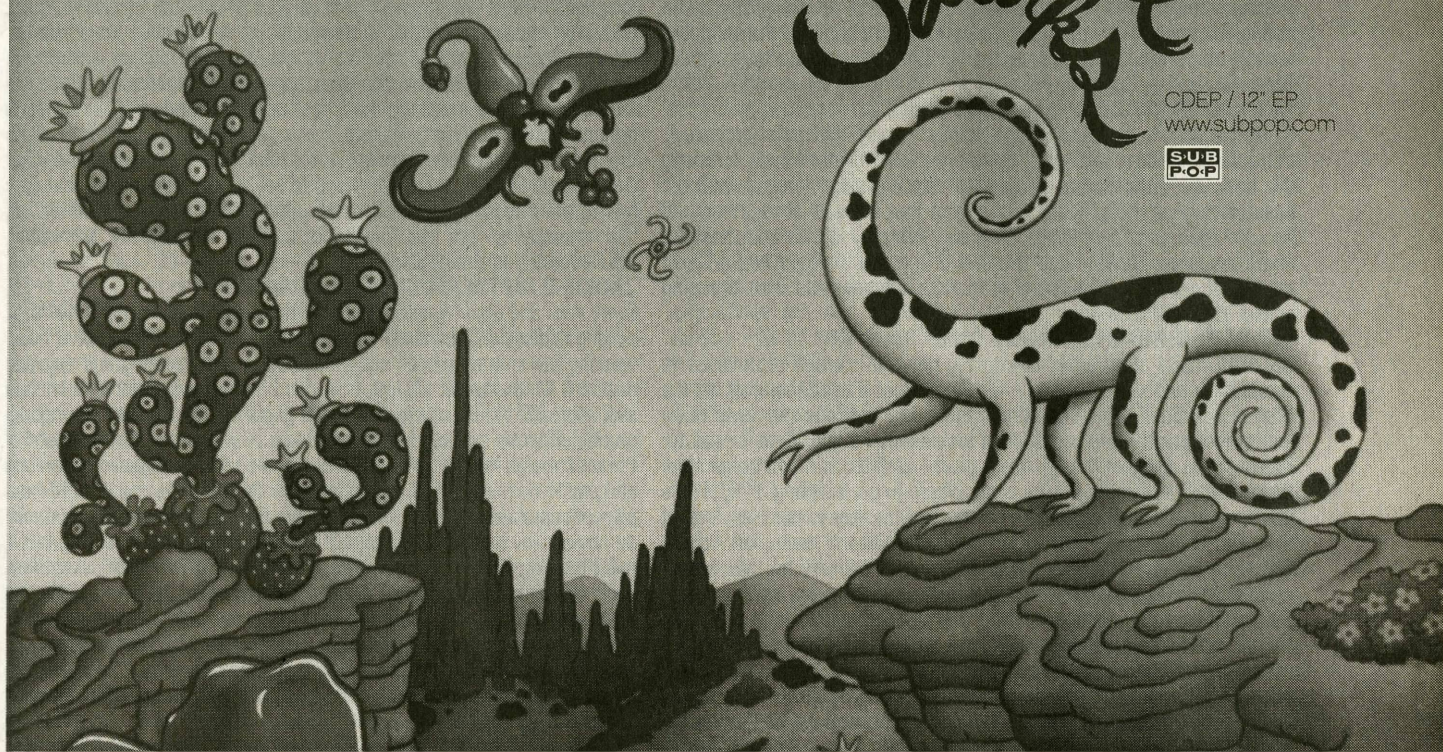
Serious Fun + One utilizes the highly unusual combo of two trombones (Wogram and Bauer) and bass (Duval). After digging the naked splendor of the above CDs, I was caught off guard by Duval's use of a delay unit and other effects. But he's a man of taste, wisely applying his gizmos as only an occasional seasoning to this earthy brew; the low-frequency swells on "Dark One" fitting the mood like bubbles in a cauldron. The dual-trombone setup invites comparison to the cool-era Kai Winding—J.J. Johnson band, but the two groups have little else in common. The

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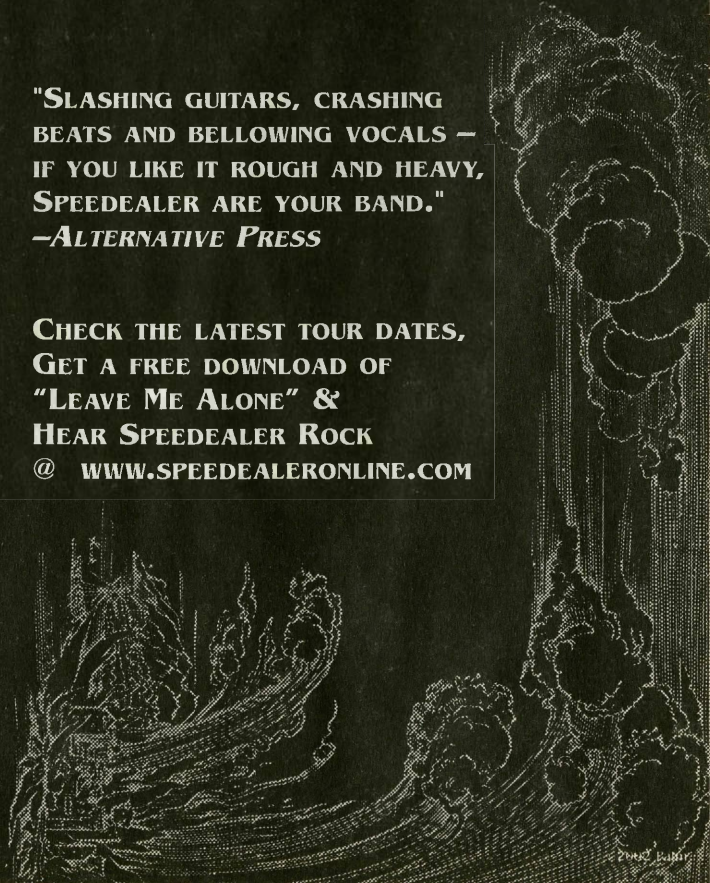
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but only with extreme subtlety. And if that doesn't fit the aesthetic of her music, what the heck does?

She may have one trick, but it's a good one. When any other artist attempts music with a similar feel, the result is usually pretty damn boring. This album is a triumphant return to form and, like the vanguard work of her former band, *far* from boring. The kitty agrees. [Rough Trade] *Peter Aaron*

HOT WATER MUSIC *A Flight and a Crash* CD

Of all the post-hardcore/emo-type bands around right now (and aren't there, like, a million of them?), Gainesville's Hot Water Music is among the best, and continue to get better. Jason Black's forceful, melodic bass playing seems to really be the glue that holds it all together, and Chuck Ragan and Chris Wollard's guitar interplay is also quite tasteful and impressive. However, at the end of the day, *A Flight and a Crash* mainly succeeds on the basis of the band's tightness and keen arranging sense. [Epitaph] *Che Arthur*

INSIDE FIVE MINUTES *Stately Chaos* Home CD

DETROIT—God, that fuckin' Olympia is gone. It is weird to drive down Grand River and see it is history. The Red Wings played there, as did the Stones in 1969. Glad to see Wayne State and the Cass shit never really left, even though the place doesn't look nearly as gutted as it used to. Detroit. I get there at least twice a year, usually to work on some story or another. They send me cuz I know where to go. In spring, 2001, I was at this serious mansion in Palmer Park, and the guy says, "Hey, look at that place next door—that's Berry Gordy's." When I was a kid, Palmer Park was not even an idea to me. Oh, and a culinary tip: Mr. Mike's restaurant on Woodward Avenue just north of downtown, a place where the eager parking attendant greets every patron with "Good afternoon Mr. VIP, how are you doing today?" Pull right in, drop him a five, and go in and have some wine and a Greek salad.

All you hear about it is Kid Rock when you don't live there. I know Easy Action still rule the place with they destroy ethic and the bad habits. So when Inside Five Minutes come along and want to cop that bag, I kinda wish they would go away. Blaring voice with no tone at all, which fails to discourage him from being a Brannon hopeful. Ten songs, two guitars, and a decent wall of sound aside from that singer. Hey, it's for the kids. [Makoto] *Miller*

(INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY *A New Morning, Changing Weather* CD; *Capitalism Stole My Virginity* CD EP

Sure, it's easy to criticize this band for picking up the torch that the Make*Up would never have delivered all the way to the MTV masses.

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And who gives a fuck about the "message" that either the Make*Up or (I)NC have to deliver? I sure don't. All I know is, the (International) Noise Conspiracy are *far* better at the Make*Up's shtick than that band ever was. They're better looking. They're better musicians. They write catchier songs. Their stage show is as tight and slick as a Vegas revue. Their videos are inspired and stylistically innovative. They've got it all down cold (even though they didn't think of it first). Call it cynicism or call it Darwinism, this band—just like lead singer Dennis' former band, Refused, which capitalized on the Nation of Ulysses aesthetic—is bound for the big time. And, I'm all for it. Not that I have a vendetta against the former bands, but because it's intriguing to see a group so brazenly borrow a complete aesthetic and actually make it something tangible for the pop mainstream. Granted, that's been repeated numerous times in the music industry, but (I)NC seem quite genuine and open about their inspiration and like many European and Scandinavian bands, don't see wholesale imitation as something to frown upon.

Anyway, (I)NC write really catchy songs even though the lyrics are filled with pedantic neo-Situationist sloganeering. The obvious nod to Blondie's "Hanging on the Telephone" guitar hook drives the standout

track, "Up For Sale" but the song is a tight, sharp pop tune on its own merit. "Bigger Cages, Longer Chains" leans into the white funk thing, replete with a punchy horn section. And, the first single/first video, "Capitalism Stole My Virginity" (which was all over the European music television networks last fall) is an infectious, new wavey would-be hit. Clearly, Dennis earnestly believes in notions of revolution and draws significant inspiration from the best aspects of Situationist angst. He wants to deliver a message that most of us in "the know" about such notions would consider trivial, but the target of (I)NC's attack is to reach the mainstream teens who might never think on any terms beyond what Limp Bizcuit and Britney Spears have to say. I'd hazard a guess that very few of them would give a shit about what (I)NC have to say either, but the attempt to get the message through is certainly admirable. [Epitaph/Burning Heart] *Dave Clifford*

JACKIE-O MOTHERFUCKER *Liberation* CD

Every now and then I hear a recording that makes me wonder why I took so long to discover a particular band. Right now I'm wondering what I was wasting my time on while I could have been accumulating and enjoying Jackie-O Motherfucker albums. This band manages to balance a kitchen sink approach to instrumentation and a guitar splurge style to playing in a greatly effective manner. We live in times in which the advancement of the rock music form is seen as an academic task, reacquiring a cerebral and sterile combination of influences properly identified and derived from a list of approved classics. Thankfully there are still bands like this that take an obvious joy in producing both an audible squawk and in locking into a mind-blowing drone. Do I need to emphasize that *Liberation* is not Pro-Tools incubated and does not have to be studied by the listener? No, no dear reader you need only sit back and enjoy. Imagine a group of individuals playing together in a room, reaching for some instrument at an opportune moment just to hear how it sounds alongside what someone else is playing. So guess what—at some times this album will not remind you of a chrome-coated Eames chair. It is not shiny, smooth, and symmetrical. It is often wobbly, dusty and rough. A song like "Tea Party" with backward vocals, off-kilter bells and a droning throb is definitely not some chin-scratcher's post-grad dissertation. The grit and noise and repetition are the attraction here, they work together and draw you into an actual listening experience. So dig in already. [Road Cone, PO. Box 8732, Portland, OR 97207] *Bruce Adams*

JEMEEL MOONDOC VTET *Revolt of the Negro Lawn Jockeys* CD

Jemeel Moondoc ascends again, this time with a quintet in tow. Recorded live at Vision Fest 2000 in New York City, these four original compositions feature succinct themes that are referenced eloquently in solos that overflow with soul. While reminiscent of Ornette Coleman's records of the early '60s, Moondoc's ensemble plays with a bodily earthiness that ruts more deeply than Coleman's classic quartet with Charlie Haden, Ed Blackwell, and Don Cherry. Drummer Cody Moffet and bassist John Voight are emotionally demonstrative, even as they vigilantly maintain peace during Moondoc and trumpeter Nathan Breedlove's melodic ventures. Khan Jamal provides warmth on vibraphones and skirts unobtrusively between basic accompaniment and incisive countercurrents. Without screaming or shouting Moondoc's Vtet lay claim to one of the most exuberant records of 2001. [Eremite] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

JERK WITH A BOMB *The Old Noise* CD

Consisting of two knuckleheads from Canuckia that crawl around in dirty dungarees on the outskirts of *No Depression* territory. They arm themselves with just guitar and drums (and some keyboards), dosing folk, country and rock with a tired-eye feeling of melancholia. I swear I hear bits of the Archers Of Loaf in here, without the broken strings and cracked ideas. The band doesn't wail so much as sluggishly moan its songs for the everyman. While the general overall atmosphere of a grimy Guthrie wandering the fields remains throughout the CD, the duo manage to stay astray of tedium by keeping the songs loose and fresh. I can't say that all the tracks picked my corn, but I'll give them loads of credit for trying something different. [Scratch] *Les Scurry*

JESS HOLZWORTH & JUTTA KOETHER *The Outer Sound Project* CD

Riding the bus to and from work this week, I was treated to an impromptu prayer meeting, a heated debate about affordable housing,

and scabrously potty-mouthed teenage mating banter of such quality that it deserved an HBO special. And this is straight in the mildly palpitating heart of Dullsville. So, you'd think that two enthusiastic young artists set loose on endlessly fascinating NYC with a tape recorder and a desire to use the fruits of their labors as (quoting from the liners here) "sensual, variable tools towards a personal and thoughtful art/action" could top anything I stumble across here in the comatose Midwest. Nope. Instead they come up with a nondescript audio scrapbook of muddy found sounds, street performers, and snippets of pop music that's supposed to document the summer of '99 (As in everyone else's '99, "La Vida Loca" figures prominently). And to think that all of this could have been avoided by a cursory listen to a Moondog record, or even one of those half-whispered NPR documentaries on olives, pandas, blacksmiths, or whatever. Zzz. [Ecstatic Peace] *Cecile Cloutier*

JIMMY EAT WORLD *Bleed American* CD

With each record, Jimmy Eat World move farther away from their "pop-punk-emo" origins and entrench themselves more firmly in the mainstream radio-ready world. *Bleed American* shows the band to be proficient and savvy pop songwriters, with huge, impeccable L.A.-type production icing the cake. There's definitely some potential Aaron Spelling-primetime-soap or bittersweet-twentysomething-relationship-comedy-soundtrack material, some of which isn't my bag. But I've gotta hand it to someone who can write songs as absolutely infectious as the title track or "Get It Faster." [Dreamworks] *Che Arthur*

THE J.J. PARADISE PLAYERS CLUB *Wine Cooler Blowout* CD

Okay, the name bothers me. It's probably some kind of inside joke that I would think was funny if I knew the joke, but I don't, so it bothers me. The band, though, I like. It's a "supergroup" of sorts, comprised of members of Unsane, Glazed Baby, The Kill Van Kull, and Kiss It Goodbye. As one might expect, it's a loud, heavy, sludge-fest reminiscent of Neurosis, Unsane, Mountain, *Stoner Witch*-era Melvins, and a lot of other good heavy shit. [Tee Pee] *Che Arthur*

JOE MCPHEE *Underground Railroad/Live At Holy Cross Monastery* dbl CD

CLIFFORD THORNTON *Freedom & Unity* CD

Long recognized as a tenor sax paragon, Joe McPhee began his artistic life at the age of eight, on trumpet. He plays both instruments, along with pocket cornet, on this, his first record as a leader from April of 1969. Although he'd obviously mastered the trumpet by the time of this recording, one listen to *Underground Railroad* is the all the evidence one needs to hear that McPhee found his true vehicle in the tenor. His trumpet style and composition is clearly in the linear, Miles vein, but McPhee—doubtlessly inspired by Coltrane—really burns on tenor. This becomes even clearer upon hearing the previously unreleased bonus session, *Live at Holy Cross Monastery*, recorded one year prior. Here, we find McPhee in the setting of his Contemporary Improvisational Music Ensemble sextet instead of his later quartet, and in his first public appearance on what would become his signature instrument. On a version of Monk's "Evidence" (retitled "Justice"), he's audibly fired up by the open doors that Coltrane had so recently kicked off their hinges, attempting to apply that inspiration to his more familiar horn. And that's so telling of what makes this such an exciting document: it captures the period where McPhee has reached the turning point of his career. We're able to bear witness to an artist discovering that his given instrument is no longer the ideal means of expression. We're *there* as he makes the supremely bold choice of trading the familiar for the unknown—and all of the adventure that it holds. Ernest Bostic—by far one of the most underrated jazz drummers, ever—is worth the price alone. One can hear the precision attack of Max Roach in his carefully-considered whacks, and he even lays down some tight, Meters-style funk on "Windy City Head Stompin' Blues." As this and other titles suggest, the underlying theme here is one of revolutionary consciousness, and McPhee and his passionate comrades take no prisoners. Put on either of these two CDs, and all of the rage, despair, and tense, brooding menace of late '60s black America comes flying out of your speakers with the force of a

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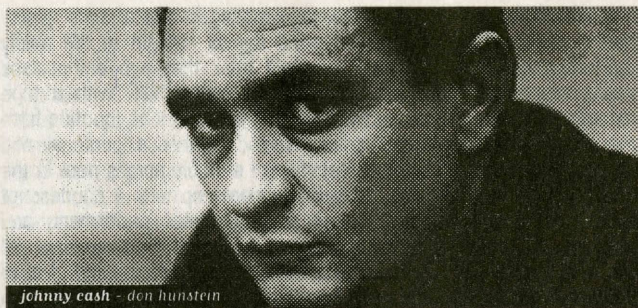
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wayward hurricane. Rhetorical Zeitgeist? Insurgent nostalgia? Not on your life. This is emotionally timeless, incredible stuff.

McPhee made his recording debut in 1967 on *Freedom & Unity*, as a member of his mentor (valve trombonist) Clifford Thornton's New Art Ensemble. Still on trumpet, he's just finding his feet, and it's no coincidence that the 13 minute opener, "Free Huey," hits on all of the themes McPhee would soon tackle on his own (also of note that Thornton himself was once denied entry to France, on suspicion of being a Black Panther). As befits a larger band (five to nine pieces, depending on the tune), this stuff is somewhat arranged. The excellent section work, which blends Thornton's and McPhee's horns with Sonny King's alto, is occasionally (and wonderfully) comped by Karl Berger's vibes. But what really splits your noggin is the stellar heaviness in the bass department: the awesome Don Moore, Tyrone Crabb (later of McPhee's quartet), and none other than Coltrane bassist Jimmy Garrison (reminiscing in the liners, McPhee refers to this brush with greatness as "beyond the pale"). The foundation here is always solid, but in continuous, shifting motion and it's quite impossible *not* to be both lulled by the music's tranquil space and swept up in its cathartic cacophony. Reprinting the original notes by Ornette Coleman and Archie Shepp, this sharp package adds an alternate version of McPhee's frantic "O.C.T.," along with the out-take "Babe's Dilemma." But the real prize here is the complete version of "The Wake," previously chopped down to fit on LP. This track, recorded the day after Coltrane's funeral, makes it obvious how much he was missed. [Unheard Music/Atavistic] *Peter Aaron*

JOEY RAMONE *Don't Worry About Me* CD

This is easily the best thing Joey Ramone (or any Ramone, for that matter) has done in 20 years. *Rocket to Russia* it ain't, but I'd say it's right up there with *End of the Century*. Certainly not a bad place to be. *Don't Worry About Me* is a collection of 11 songs (2 of which are covers) recorded since the Ramones break up in 1996 right up until early last year, a couple of months before Joey succumbed to lymphatic cancer. The album opens with a terrific, heart-felt, and slightly ironic cover of Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World*. The next several songs rely heavily on two of Joey's biggest influences—The Who and Motown, sounding a little more like the former. "Mr. Punchy" in particular, is outstanding—a mod/punk rave-up with guest vocals from Captain Sensible. It features Who-esque vocal harmonies and some great, frantic Keith Moon-style drumming by Marky Ramone, who appears on several of the tracks. Other players include The Dictators' Andy Shernoff on bass, long-time friend and producer, Daniel Rey on guitar, and Frank



johnny carson - don hunstein

this. It's a great final release from a true rock and roll legend. Adios, amigo! [Sanctuary] *Adam Miller*

JOHNNY CARSON *On Comedy* CD

JERRY LEWIS *On Comedy* CD

Since 1968, humorist Larry Wilde (the author of more than 53 joke books with total sales of over 12 million; a selection of titles: *The Official Golf Lovers Joke Book*, *The Official Redneck Joke Book*—you get the idea) has recorded interviews with a cross-generational sampling of the biggest names in comedy: everyone from Milton Berle to Dick Gregory to Woody Allen to Jerry Seinfeld. Snippets of these interviews were made available on Wilde's 6-hour cassette program *The Gift of Laughter: Dialogues With The Great Comedians* (a small by-product of his burgeoning Motivational Speaker enterprise), but Laugh.com (a website, with a paid endorsement by George Carlin, that seeks to become the internet's "official home for comedy," and also peddles a catalog of mostly dreadful comedy recordings) has recently made 16 of them available in their entirety on CD, two of which feature Johnny Carson and Jerry Lewis. I've always held a small degree of respect for Johnny Carson; not only for hosting a circus-act television program for more than two decades with some degree of class (in much the same way David Letterman has in the time since), but also for the fact that when he retired from show business, he actually *went away*. Carson hasn't been a vain, aging celebrity with desperate need to have his public acceptance reaffirmed every few months; he's been self-assured and dignified, as he comes across in his Wilde interview—a well educated, articulate man with a great understanding of the psychology of comedy. He did, of course, forge his skills in the era before Gregory, Bruce, Pryor, and Hicks; for the medium of television in its still-young days, before it became the vehicle for all that is ugly in the world; as such, his material feels dated in its naivety. But to just listen to the man speak for an hour, his command of subtlety and nuance, and his dedication to craft, become abundantly clear.

By contrast, there is nothing in the comedy of Jerry Lewis that could be confused for subtlety, dignity, or nuance. The man's shtick is buffoonery, spastic humiliation, the burial of wit and reason in a bottomless pit covered by banana peels and rubber chickens. Lewis is a man who achieved unparalleled success as a skinny, young punk Jew in a world of unforgiving nightclubs lorded over by the Italian mafia, and did so by acting like a monkey. His arrogance, on full display in his Wilde interview (and, in light of his history, actually quite understandable), surpasses even his material gain: he makes endless comparisons between his act and brain surgery (specifically, that he could perform it himself just by watching a surgeon do it once); he reveals that he rejected Billy Wilder's offer of a part in *Some Like It Hot* because he "doesn't do drag"; he indulges in tons of braggadocio about having never read a book and, further, not needing to (referencing his tenure as a college professor as proof); not to mention the overall contemptuous and bored tone with which he answers each question. Yet, despite his ego, this is a man who willingly slapped himself in the face with his own dick night after night, not simply for money, but to actually make people *like* him. Owing up to it, Lewis says, "An audience is nothing more than 800 mommas and poppas going 'good boy, baby.' You'll find that people who had enough 'good boy, baby' from their actual parents rarely turn to comedy." True to the man's style, this 70-minute document is short on insight, long on spectacle. [Laugh.com] *David Wilcox*

Audio reviews

Furano (Del Lords, Cracker) occasionally fills in for Marky on drums.

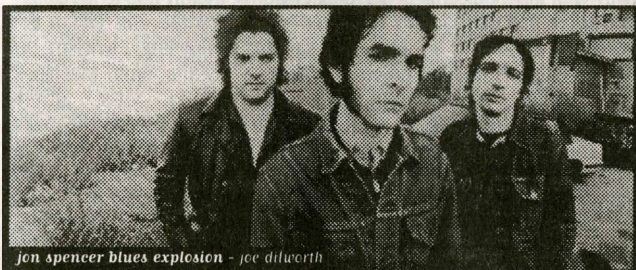
Another standout track is "Maria Bartiromo," an ode to CNBC's smart and gorgeous anchor and financial reporter. It's light-hearted, funny, and, well, stupid—in the way a lot of the best Ramones songs are. Maybe she's the grown-up, more mature counterpart to Sheena, Judy, and Little Ramona. The song also reflects Joey's growing interest in the stock markets over his last few years. Apparently, he found the pits very entertaining to watch. Sort of makes sense, I guess.

A couple of the songs deal with his battle with cancer. "I Got Knocked Down (But I'll Get Up)" is about a strong-willed man, pissed off, but determined to beat his illness. However, the final song (and title track) feels more like a good-bye. On the surface, "Don't Worry About Me" is an angry break-up song. That said, the sneering, sarcastic refrain seems to take on an altogether different meaning. Joey sounds jaded and he's got a right to be—knowing you're going to die young has got to suck, plain and simple.

The album is pure Joey Ramone—always upbeat, at times thoughtful, occasionally funny, sometimes angry, and always catchy. If you appreciate the Ramones at all (and why wouldn't you?), you will enjoy

JOHNNY CASH *The Essential Johnny Cash CD*

In February of this year, Johnny Cash turned 70. This two-disk collection was released to coincide with that milestone event. Since there's not much point in discussing the importance and worth of Johnny Cash's music here, (he's a national treasure, for chrissake), I'll just discuss the specifics. This 36-song package includes highlights from the various labels—Sun, Columbia, and Mercury—that he recorded under during his legendary four-decade career, organized in chronological order. It relies heavily on his output from the '50s, '60s, and '70s output with only two (very worthy) offerings from the '80s—a number by the Highwaymen and "The Night Hank Williams Came to Town," featuring the late Waylon Jennings. (I could've used a few more tunes from this period, actually.) Thankfully, though, there is only one song from his at times embarrassing "comeback" in the '90s. All of your favorites are here—I don't need to list them do I? Basically, this is just an edited down version of the 1992 box set of the same name with much improved sound quality. If you don't already have a good collection of Johnny Cash music, this would be a fine package to pick up. Just don't expect any surprises. I should also mention that many of Cash's best albums are scheduled for CD re-issue this year. [Columbia/Legacy] Adam Miller

**JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION *Plastic Fang CD***

So it's been four years since the release of *Now I Got Worry* and the band's still sticking with the cobbled pastiche of ideas strung together—a big sticking point with song purists who want their beginnings, middles, and ends all neat and tidy. But having enlisted big-time producer Steve Jordan means they received some real guidance, and the benefits are evident. Consequently the proceedings are gussied up just so, with each and every song possessing a lot more heft as it uncoils, better concealing the band's shortcomings as true song craftsmen, superceding it with an infectious keg party frat-style that's too exuberant to be denied.

Honestly, this should have been the follow-up to *Orange*. There's little question this one would have sailed out of the ballpark back when momentum was on the band's side. These days there's competition aplenty, most notably the White Stripes...so it is likely JSBX will have to contend with the sturdy foundation of a not-so-bad career all ready laid, and maybe with time and perspective truth will tell who's worthy of that there brass ring.

Plastic Fang's opening track's the only one I would have dispensed with (oh, and the testicle withering lyrical couplet, "I'm gonna slip it in/Like Black Flag..."). The song title at the moment escaping me but *ugh*), compared to 6 or 7 on *White Blood Cells*. Yeah, I like the Stripes just fine, but from what I hear, *Plastic Fang* certainly has a better hits-to-misses ratio, making it just as worthy—or more so—and deserving of at least the same amount of media saturation. "Killer Wolf," "Midnight Creep," "Mother Nature," and "Mean Heart" are red hot beacons that detonate the pleasure center. Straight up rock and roll tunes delivered with a killer instinct and hooks that don't fade. There's not much here that's forgettable. *Plastic Fang* is a classic and should go down as one years from now. [Matador] Peter Davis

JUDAH JOHNSON *CD*

On Judah Johnson's debut, the Detroit five-piece captures expertly the same sort of classic '70s pop feel that Jeff Buckley's records captured, recalling at times John Lennon's post-Beatles records and David Bowie's early '70s work. Each musician plays thoughtfully, realizing the

value of understatement in building a musical foundation that conveys emotion without trampling the plaintive vocals. Few bands spring forth fully realized, but Judah Johnson seems pretty close to the mark. [Flameshovel] Che Arthur

KELLY HOGAN *Because It Feel Good CD*

The last time around it was Kelly in Memphis, but this time she's left the rodeo for the velvet touch of torch. Her voice seductively whispers you to your knees. Listen to her take on Smog's "Strayed" and turn it from Callahan's cold admittance to a seduction of forgiveness. Hogan's depth and soul resonates throughout *Because It Feel Good*, but her finest moment comes in the form of "Please Don't Leave Me Lonely," a King Floyd cover that simply smolders hotter than Miss Peggy Lee. [Bloodshot] Troy Brookins

KAHIL EL'ZABAR/BILLY BANG *Spirits Entering CD*

Occasional Ritual Trio collaborators Billy Bang and Kahil El'Zabar renew their musical conversation on this stripped down recording. The first two numbers are the most frenetic. Bang skitters and scrapes through the upper registers of his acoustic violin while percussionist El'Zabar adds further sizzle on trap drum kit. Here solos and point/counter-point exchanges are favored more so than on the remaining songs which are grounded in simplicity and warmth. On "Sweet Irene" and the folk standard "Old Time Religion" Bang (a founding member of String Trio of New York and collaborator with the likes of William Parker, Frank Lowe, and Sun Ra) plucks and bows bittersweet melodies. At the same time, El'Zabar's thumb piano and hand drums provide an unassailable depth that counterbalances the vulnerability of Bang's violin. Despite the limitations of the violin as a lead instrument in jazz, Bang and El'Zabar appropriate their skills inventively and maintain a fresh dialogue over the course of this hour-long disc. [Delmark] Jeffrey Herrmann

KRAYZIE BONE *Thug on Da Line CD*

You might know Krayzie Bone as a prime mover from Cleveland's melody-laced gangsta rap group Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, who were selling millions of records, grabbing Grammys, busting charts, and ruling hip hop radio during the mid '90s. This is Krayzie's second solo release, and he's covering much of the same territory that he helped pioneer with Bone Thugs: laying down complex, melodic r&b tracks with soaring melodies, soul-rich samples, and well-dispersed rap stanzas, mostly of a grim, self-serious, "life is a struggle in the hood"-type nature. Krayzie has lined up a team of producers whose dossiers include work with Snoop, Jay-Z, and Mariah Carey, so the production is slick as ice. There are also innumerable cameo appearances from rappers, crooners, and divas. Krayzie can certainly turn a phrase and make the lines flow, and has a strong singing voice as well. However, this work suffers from the same maladies as Bone Thugs—it's sing-songy as hell, reeks of bubble gum, devolves into embarrassingly sappy pretense in areas, and rehashes some extremely well-worn subject matter (although it is interesting hearing Krayzie reconcile his religious piety and thug background). This is not an indictment of the idea of blending melody and the more hardcore elements of rap, as folks like Outkast do so with creativity and panache. Mr. Bone is now launching his own record label (Thugline), so expect more of this sort of annoying pap to be flooding the airwaves in the future. [Thugline/Ruthless/Loud] Bo Pogue

THE LACK *CD*

This two year old Columbus, Ohio quintet share a kinship with newer Troubleman bands like The Champagne Kiss and Song of Zarathustra, mixing hardcore and industrial. Makes sense given that the members of The Lack came of age in the Columbus hardcore scene, but also had an appetite for Ministry, Skinny Puppy, and Nitzer Ebb.

The Lack are compared to Throbbing Gristle and Ministry because they integrate electronic music and have two drummers, and early Skinny Puppy and *Movement*-era New Order because of their dark elegance. The lead singer sometimes sounds like the late Rozz Williams of Christian Death. The Lack's depressive hardcore-industrial assault is a bit hard to take for a full album, but if you're undaunted by that, you'll probably enjoy this just the same. [Troubleman Unlimited] Trinity C.

LAMBCHOP *Tools In the Dryer CD*

Presenting a smattering of Lambchop's A-sides, B-sides, live tracks and remixes out of chronological order is sure to confound even the most



assertive listener. Charting the not entirely gradual metamorphosis of the band from quirky bedroom rock de-constructivists to prodigious lush country-souldiers is a daunting task.

A lot of Lambchop's finest moments are conspicuously absent. "My Cliché" or "Playboy, the shit" could have (and should have) replaced some of the stuff here that dates back to 1987, such as the unending "All Over The World" and the amateurish "Style Monkeys." While these older tracks may offer some perspective, revealing a sort of playful naiveté we don't often see from Kurt Wagner and his fourteen-piece band, they suggest little indication of the majesty to come. And when Lambchop push their luck on more drastic experiments, such as the Doppelganger remix of "Give Me Your Love" (more Neil Tennant than Neil Young), the results are often less than sublime.

All pardonable oversights, if only for the gorgeously expansive Vic Chesnutt-penned "Miss Prissy," or for Mark Robinson's clever remix of "The Militant" (which synthesizes two different versions of the song to create a seamless musical think-piece that far eclipses the original). No subject matter is taboo on *Tools in the Dryer*—odes to Whitey Ford (the "Oklahoma cowboy," dontcha know) rub shoulders with songs about Ku Klux Klan graffiti.

Lambchop has many more tools in the dryer than they're letting on here, but since they chose to forsake palpable continuity for a legitimate, warts-n-all history lesson, this noble effort seems sadly inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. [Merge] *James Jackson Toth*

LANDING Circuit CD

In the first few seconds of *Circuit*, Landing's second release, Missing Foundation-like noise erupts. But the distortion gives way to the perfect disc to daydream to, get stoned or go to sleep to. On this mostly instrumental album with occasional male and female vocals, Landing's sound perfectly illustrates nature—like a leaf floating down a river on a summer day. New Age for the indie kids. [Music Fellowship, PO Box 9325, New Haven, CT 06533-0325] *Trinity C.*

THE LANGLEY SCHOOL MUSIC PROJECT Innocence And Despair CD

This is the best album I've ever heard! Okay, well, maybe not, but people tend to get breathless when talking about this record. Or they can't stop laughing and want to buy a copy. And believe me, all those reactions are correct. This is one of the most special records I've heard in a long time. Or ever. It's like being a kid and discovering Devo, the Ramones, or Cheap Trick, or whatever you're favorite poison is, and just being blown away as only a kid can. But this is different. This is a record *sung* by kids.

Audio reviews

Kids in Canada.

The honesty, lack of agenda and quirkiness that is the hallmark of the work that WFMU deejay and writer Irwin Chusid champions and reissues (Raymond Scott, Lucia Pamela, The Shaggs, Esquivel) is in overdrive here. Songs like "Desperado," "Band on the Run," "The Long and Winding Road," "Help Me Rhonda," "Rhiannon," and "Space Oddity" are rendered heartbreaking, fun, hysterically funny, and innocent, and full of charming off-beat cymbals, by a group of Canadian schoolchildren and their inspired music teacher on this re-issue of the original 1970s vanity release.

If you count yourself as a music fan, than you can't do without this. I guarantee you'll be running out to catch junior high school bands all over town. [Bar None] *Trinity C.*

THE LEAVING TRAINS Emotional Legs CD

I saw Tex and the Horseheads summer of 2001 at Linda's Roadhouse in Anaheim. It was a chance encounter, me out of the solitude of the mountains for something, anything. Dusty hot, a June evening with a beautiful breeze. I watched the trucks go by on Interstate 5 before the show, drinking down beer and drinking in nostalgia. Tex sucked, she was

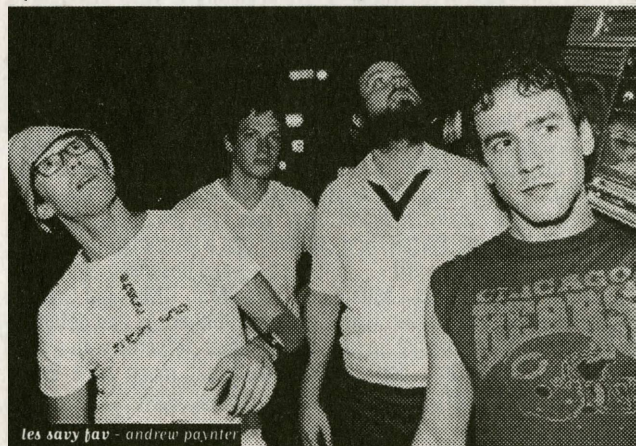
old, the rest of the band looked like it had eloped with Betty Ford and come back with a minivan and a tract home. I still had a great time.

This is something close to that era, minus the wreckage. And fuck that Paisley Underground misnomer, this is wildly alive, smart, tight, laden with middle-finger attitude. "Emotional Legs" is a document, a piece of L.A. music that will likely go undiscovered because it is too late. It is, but fuck, man, better late than never, far outdoing the mess that was. The guitars are propulsive, the voice as pissed as any 40-year old should be. "Capricious" is as stupid p-rock as it comes, and captures 1980 with abandon and zero pretension. The cover of the Urinals' "Black Hole" is both interpretive and reminiscent. Other ideas, not so—see "Never Say Die" from the forgettable Black Sabbath era.

I can guarantee that if you went to see the Leaving Trains, they would demolish the place. That is the order of the pro, and they realize it here. I should also point out the number of women I've known who have been linked with Falling James, which makes me think he is working on at least number eight hundred. Bless him and his guitar as well. [Steel Cage] *Miller*

LEONARD COHEN Ten New Songs CD

The Holy LC deigns to bequeath unto us 10 new songs, and...wait, should Cohen (and Bob Dylan, for that matter) really be allowed to get away with the mediocrity of his recent albums, merely due to his classic early work and consistently masterful lyrics? Granted, this album is a wellspring of Cohen's signature hari-kari self-incriminating lyricism, but the music is yet another batch of cheeseball synths, drum machines, and vapid adult-contemporary songwriting. It's utterly unlistenable...embarrassing even. The drum machine sounds cheap and thin. The sparse instrumentation sounds sterile and canned. Producer, backing vocalist, arranger, and performer of all songs on the album, Sharon Robinson seems intent to imbue Cohen's beautifully descriptive and simply self-deprecating lyrics with a soulful world-beat flavor crafted on synths and samples. As a result, the album sounds like Leonard Cohen sing-talking over the soundtrack music from Northern Exposure. What a disappointment, because these ten new songs feature some of his best lyrics in decades. Take for example the simple imagery of deceit, addiction, perspective and self-respect in the lines, "I fought against the bottle/ But I had to do it drunk/ Took my diamond to the pawnshop/ But that don't make it junk." He still knows how to paint complete pictures with only two words, and there are great stories contained within the many lines of this album. However, musically, this album is the type of bland New Age bullshit that you'd expect musically illiterate Baby Boomers to appreciate (ooh, that keyboard sample fretless bass sound really speaks to my chakras). I wish the music could be ignored, because Leonard Cohen is one of the great poets of the twentieth century, and it's a shame to see such talent and intelligence squandered on car commercial muzak. [Columbia] *Dave Clifford*



LES SAVVY FAV Go Forth CD

What the hell's up with punk rock these days? Clearly, the field is made up of acts that are—at best—negative space. Bands that are too lazy, too retro, or (worst of all) too much of both.

Not these guys. In the '00s, this is what a punk rock band should be: "modern"—sounding, yes, but also undeniably passionate and self-challenging in both songwriting and musicianship.

That's not to say that Le Savy Fav (or any band, for that matter) is working from a blank palette. The skewed, epic sweep of The Pixies (especially on the more melodic numbers) is readily apparent, along with the disjointed spazz-out of Brainiac, and the whole picture is framed in an odd melancholy that recalls The Buzzcocks. Not sure how these angles can coexist, only that they do. Further reference points are Pere Ubu, Gang of Four, Devo, Wire, and lesser-known artpunk outfits like The Proletariat, Essential Logic, or even Josef K. Seth Jabour's guitar alternates between the razor-sharp, precision runs of The Ruts and the outer-space surf lines of 9353 (remember them?) or the DK's East Bay Ray, while the rhythm section's stop/start grind brings back moments of The Jesus Lizard. Yet such name-dropping is only a faded roadmap. Les Savy Fav have somehow managed to pull off that most deft of all musical stunts: sounding familiar but sounding like no one.

When you dig it from a distance, singer/synth player Tim Harrington's wordplay is merely clever spiel, free-riffing on modern consumerism and the human condition. Take a teeny step forward, however, and you're instantly sucked into a claustrophobic conversation with a paranoid time bomb. Here's a soul who's so at a loss as to how to exist within the information overload that he's given up the fight. His mind and spirit now behave with the sound-bytes and rhythmic tics of that which has pushed him over the edge. There are tales of burning bushes, seamstresses for strippers, and cheap sex with discount brokers. This aesthetic can easily flop, veering into the realm of the self-consciously wacky (witness Soul Coughing, the Ivy League Dead Milkmen), but Harrington is convincing in the role: "What we don't know/could fill a truck/What we don't know cannot hurt us/Well is that so?/We'll have to deconstruct/Prepare the isolation chamber/I'm going in" (from "Tragic Monsters") is the greeting to this album; "This giving in/Is wearing thin" ("Bloom on Demand"), its coda. To wit: In an effort to medicate itself, society is swallowing its own tail. And, somehow, this band never sounds pissed off, only high on its own inertia.

The heavily-delayed, helium-infected vocals on certain tracks are treacherously close to Perry Farrell-territory, but hang in there: misgivings will fall by the wayside as you get used to the whole package. And though the shiny, streamlined production may be off-putting at first, it actually fits like a silk suit. Muddy, garagey sound would only mask the tense, layered interplay of this fine band.

I'm not saying you'll throw out every rock record you own once you hear these guys. But as a band trying to do something different in such a tired genre—and succeeding, at least artistically—they deserve your applause. And your support. [Frenchkiss, 111 East 14th St., suite 229, NYC, NY 10003] *Peter Aaron*

LE TIGRE *Feminist Sweepstakes CD*

I am, as I imagine lots of people are, usually in polar disagreement with a great deal of what Kathleen Hanna says. Still, she has become quite good at what she's been doing these past few post-Bikini Kill years—touching on a great number of "hip" things, lining them with blatant sloganeering, and making it groove better than any pile of shit the Beastie Boys have ever been responsible for.

Feminist Sweepstakes continues where the self-titled LP and subsequent EP left off. Lots of funky, self-consciously retro beats, samples, and keyboard lines providing the backdrop for call-and-response vocals about dyke marches, sexism, equal rights, and asshole males who, god help them, just don't get it. Sure, bad puns abound ("RU-486 if we suck your fuckin' dick?") but, remember, this is the same woman who authored "Suck My Left One" and "Thurston Heats The Who."

Of course Hanna's politics are often an impediment, but when I remember that not everyone always agreed with some of my punk rock heroes, with all of their drinking, fighting, fucking and beating on brats, I can admit that Hanna at least remains a true punk, and, in doing so, continues to lead the only band "for the ladies and the fags" that I'll always lend an ear to. Coming soon to a bumper sticker near you. [Mr. Lady] *James Jackson Toth*

LIARS *They Threw Us All in a Trench and Stuck a Monument on Top CD*

Is "like the Fall meets Gang of Four" the most common description in music today? Or is that just the most common style of music coming from bands on the East Coast today? I can never decide. Liars are at least really talented musicians, so they sound great doing it. Plus, their songs are never derivative—unlike most of the new post-proto-retro-new-wave bands waxing Andy Gill at the moment. Plus, this album boasts the excellent production of Steve Revitte (who has also fondled knobs for JSBX and Beastie Boys recordings) that really pulls all the elements of their talents to the forefront. It's a solid debut, but there isn't much that stands out on the album aside from chops to set the group apart from all the other bands doing the same thing in the same place at the same time. [Gem Blandsten] *Dave Clifford*

LIVING LEGENDS *Almost Famous CD*

Right off the bat I am thoroughly annoyed at how all sixteen tracks on this CD are blemished by some idiot's sampled voice screaming "Living Legends—the album—almost famous—for promotional purposes only—hahahahahahahaah!" I don't know how any DJ will be able to play this on the radio or anyplace else, nor do I know what makes Living Legends think for a second any buyer at any used CD shop would be the slightest bit interested in buying an overlong and dull CD of second generation West Coast hip hop, with no art, cover, or information to speak of.

That said, Living Legends is a West Coast crew made up of nine similarly sounding MCs. There is some real Freestyle Fellowship-worship at work here, and the MCs that don't sound like Del (Bicaso, Scarab and Grouch) sound like other Heiroglyphics MCs (mostly Casual).

Watered down beats containing dismal and obvious samples (The track "Rabbit Hole" samples "White Rabbit") make this the most tedious record of it's kind since The Pharcyde's grim second album, *Labcabin California*. [Outhouse / Revenge Entertainment] *James Jackson Toth*

LOCKGROOVE *"Something To Give" / Basement Songs" 12"*

More pop songs drenched in organs and guitar effects from this Boston band. Side two offers two very cool lock-grooves, a device of which I have always been a huge fan, but aside from such gimmickry, I can't find much to recommend this. [Sharkattack! Music] *James Jackson Toth*

LOIS MAFFEO AND BRENDAN CANTY *The Union Themes CD*

Singer-songwriter Lois Maffeo has been making understated, poppy post-folk-revival with a pungent aftertaste since the mid '90s. She has often, as on this recording, been aided and abetted by Fugazi Brendan Cauty.

On *The Union Themes* she's still doing it well, and with obvious gusto. These songs are all breezy, muted, and tuneful without being too fucking eager to please. There's a nice blend of influences from *bossa nova* to baroque-pop to old school Merseybeat-isms. Most selections are built outta strum-d-dum acoustic guitar and Lois's voice—more sucrose than glucose, more cantaloupe than rock candy. Cauty's production and playing is restrained and unobtrusive, lending strategic support rather than adding any outstanding elements—hot licks, stylish flourishes, or such.

The lady's words delve behind the bi-polar facades of romance: the shiny, happy, gooey clichés of it all going right and the black, bleak apocalyptic episodes of it falling apart. She examines the complexities and contradictions, the flies that compromise the otherwise silky, aromatic ointment. Most especially, she lays bare the glints of sunlight peeping through the clouds that keep you sitting at the beach shivering in hopes that finally the sun will prevail so that you can finally relax, bask, and enjoy.

This was never intended to be a Next Big Thang. Lois works on her own terms for returns that are meaningful and fulfilling to her. And that's more revolutionary than 100 Nu Metal front men cheerleading a packed house of fans in their disdain of the Backstreet Boys, dreaming of the day they replace them on TRL. Meet the new boss. [Kill Rock Stars] *Howard W.*

LORAXX *Yellville CD*

Puts me in mind of long, long ago Babes In Toyland, which is a compliment; some of the more enjoyable shows I attended in the early '90s were those of that intriguing Minneapolis proto-grrl ensemble. This disc is all howl, shout, screechy guitar, jagged off-kilter rhythming, and stridently hoolless

instrumental lines. Chicago sturmy-drang, oozing from the same rotting rustbelt sensibility that gave us all those '80s-'90s boy-led angst-bands who all looked like warehouse workers (which they usually were). Favorite cut: "22," a tense and barely-contained little number that just spits self-hate. [Automatic Combustioneer] *David B. Livingstone*



lost kids - sold standard laboratories

LOST KIDS *Belle Isle is on Fire* CD EP

Unfortunately, the stellar rock/soul throwback Starlite Desperation has disbanded. After flirting with several home base and lineup changes, the fallout from that band (namely vocalist Dante White and bassist Yasmine Smith) seem to have planted stakes in Cali and are finally prepared to do their thing. Their thing being a blaze of garage, psych, and other '60s influences (Stones, Them, Animals, etc.) punched up with a little Motown and roots punk aggression. It follows roughly the same route as Starlite Desperation, but some of the varnish has been rubbed off to

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expose a rougher surface. The blues flourishes on guitar are razor-like, and Dante's ass-shaking, soul-inflected take on vocals propels the effort. Clap tracks and other subsurface percussion add to a driving mix that's damn hard to sit still to. For those who appreciate Estrus but are tired of the garage sameness, and are worn out by the smug irony of Blues Explosion and Make Up-types, this is your new home. No winks, no camera-mugging, just straight-up soul-driven rock. [GSL] *Bo Pogue*

LOST SOUNDS *Black-Wave* CD

There is a difference between new wave as a marketing tool—and the weirdo new wave perpetrated by Catholic Discipline, the Screamers, Tuxedo Moon, and Suicide. This is weirdo new wave.

On Lost Sounds' sophomore release, the vibe is all retro, totally San Francisco or downtown NYC, when punks ruled Soho and there weren't posters on telephone poles advertising accent reduction for all the rich Eurotrash. There's traces of Berlin, Josie Cotton, and Devo here, too. Unfortunately, for me at least, the album is kinda long. It's still charming, but it would've been a great new wave thang as a shorter album or an EP with songs like "Plastic Skin" and "Heart Felt Toys" being the keepers. [Empty] *Trinity C.*

LOVE AS LAUGHTER *Sea to Shining Sea* CD

...upon returning. Sam Jayne's Love As Laughter takes a giant step back to punk rock precursors, recombining key elements to produce a subtly unique, unquestionably striking mutant-oeuvre. He's backtracked to isolate bravura moments from crucial players. There's the roundhouse wallop of MC5's rhythm guitar onslaught—all gunmetal "kurrnngh." Elsewhere the Velvet U's crafty gambit of burying harmonic structures—built outta and into chord inversions—deep within seemingly monolithic powerdrones. LAL evokes the Stooges' shock tactic of occasionally throttling down into mid-tempo acoustic moves. At times overt reference is made to Sonic Youth's signature redaction of all of the above via Glenn Branca (a synthesis so powerful that they've not moved beyond it in 20 years and counting).

There're a lot of *long* songs here though, thankfully, none seem over lengthy. You'd probably have to check album credits before you were hip to the fact that 4 out of 6 clock in at 6 minutes or better. That's coz it's all time well spent. There is a canny use of dynamics. Numbers shift through varying stratagems: some explorative guitar soloing here, pure building of texture effects there; orbiting back through refrain to keep it focused, motile, properly punctuated. So the longest songs (8 and 10 minutes) don't feel any longer than the VU's "New Age." Dig?

There's a lot of honestly exciting rock and roll here. Love As Laughter build from same elements as the Strokes but actually achieve much more than that outfit's theoretical embrace of all these right moves and manage to outright own 'em and use them as their own. [Sub Pop] *Howard W.*

LUPINE HOWL *The Carnivorous Lunar Activities of Lupine Howl* CD

Lupine Howl consists of two of the former backing members of Spiritualized. With this band, they've taken Spiritualized's trademark brand of psychedelia and mixed it up with more traditional rock sounds. On the best tracks such as "Vaporizer," the shift pays off and they strike a nice balance between spaciness, hooks, and driving beats. The rest of the disc is a bit more hit and miss. They haven't completely thrown off their old style, and there are some passages that just sit there, droning on for far too long. As a side note, the artwork on this thing is fantastic, a collection of seeing-eye type bondage shots that are well worth the headache they induce. [Beggars Banquet] *Brett Horn*

LUTHER THOMAS HUMAN ARTS ENSEMBLE *Funky Donkey* CD

The Human Arts Ensemble, an outgrowth of St. Louis' 1970s Black Arts Group, has recorded occasionally under the lead of drummer Charles "Bobo" Shaw, but nothing from their sparse catalog prepared me for this 1973 concert document. Convened for a Lester Bowie visit to the Gateway City by saxophonist Luther Thomas, *Donkey* is a loose program, that often treads into free territory, but never loses its sense of swing. Its mix of hard rock, swaying funk, and squalling reeds bonded with samba and second-line rhythms pulses with a limber intensity—the electric guitars and a horn section a half-dozen strong clinch in a rough embrace. The program's three cuts flow into each other with little pause, but maintain their discrete moods. "Funky Donkey" sounds like the studio musicians from Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" sitting in with Albert Ayler and Sly Stone, while Shaw's "Una New York" is a Latin-flavored piece that stomps along *con gusto*. "Intensity," the Oliver Lake-scribed closer, meshes the gleeful funk of earlier proceedings into slowly driving space jams that build to a delightfully discombobulated New Orleans stagger and stop in a group bawl. Here's hoping in the rush to re-evaluate the '70s, the right sets of ears will be inspired by this mix of free blowing, funk grooves and meandering guitar all at high, high volumes to go onto some creative boundary-busting of their own. [Atavistic/Unheard Music] *Cecile Cloutier*

MAHARAHJ *Repetition* CD

Pretty uninteresting Death Metal-meets-John Zorn type of quirky grindcore. The rhythm section is bland and flaccid, the guitar parts are way too typical and the growling Cookie Monster vocals do nothing to salvage the proceedings. I say, skip this and get the Dillinger Escape Plan album on Relapse. Now, that's a quirky, spastic and rocking combo that mixes intelligence and crafty songwriting. [Now or Never] *Dave Clifford*

MALACHI THOMPSON *Talking Horns* CD

The recent commemoration of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the AACM,

along with the preservative efforts of the Delmark label, have helped to maintain the esteemed reputation of the Chicago based jazz collective. A Midwestern organization with a lesser-known legacy is the Black Artists Group. Founded in St. Louis in 1967, BAG was not active for long but founding members Julius Hemphill, Hamiett Bluiett, Bakaida Carroll, and Oliver Lake revitalized jazz throughout the '70s with their recordings and performances in New York City and Europe. The AACM and BAG shared sensibilities and the Chicago-St. Louis connection endured into the 21st century when AACM member Malachi Thompson invited Lake and Bluiett to participate in the recording of *Talking Horns*. The guests from out-of-town bring four compositions that constitute most of the first half of the record. The Chicagoans on piano, bass, and drums provide conventional backing to standard bop arrangements that are made distinctive by Lake's edgy soloing and Bluiett's bawdy baritone and contrabass clarinet lines. Three lengthier pieces penned by Malachi Thompson close the record and are more reliant on the free energy that is associated with vintage recordings from the AACM and BAG. While this interstate reunion might seem overly well behaved to some, it spans time and distance to recognize a lifetime of vital activity by these under-heralded jazz veterans. [Delmark] **Jeffrey Herrmann**

MAMIMILIAN HECKER *Infinite Love Songs* CD

Maximilian Hecker's *Infinite Love Songs* is pretty damned pretty. Structuring is melodic to a fault without resolving into very many hooks *per se*. Hecker's voice is pleasant: soft, and breathy, dispassionately tuneful. The music is pretty charming: acoustic guitar driven, augmented strategically and unobtrusively by conventional rock instrumentation—tastefully done. There's nothing to dislike. Nothing to displease, offend, provoke—or move you. If you're looking for gentle, neutral noise to fill your kitchen on a Sunday morning while you're making omelets and mixing Mimosas, this is da shit. No undercurrent of transcendental sadness like you'd find in Nick Drake. No occult agenda as with Incredible String Band. No stylistic boundaries besieged like Lisa Germano's output. Pretty nice. [Kitty Yo] **Howard W.**

MAN *Arthur* CD

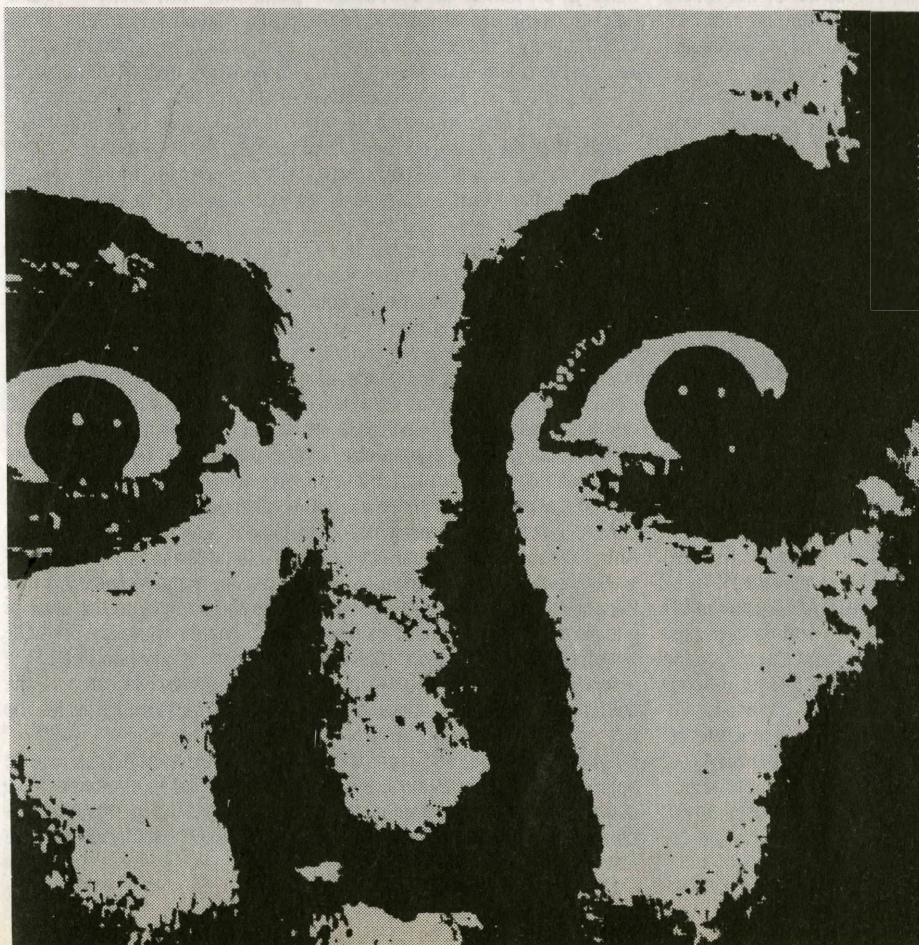
This French duo originally recorded *Arthur* as a growing "work in studio" improv piece that they would record over at a later time. The resulting work came out so well to their ears they never added anything else. All instrumental, this is a look back to Prog's more "classical" days, with a heavy soundtrack-style influence. *Arthur* is a delicate, quiet work with a sometimes-somber tone. Maybe a tad too soft, in fact. Interesting, but slightly one dimensional in its approach. [Les Disques Du Soleil] **Les Scurry**

MAN OR ASTRO-MAN? *Beyond the Black Hole* CD

It seems that M or A wasn't cranking out spaced out, b-movie surf product in their usual assembly-line manner, so they resorted to beaming up a dozen tracks from another time and place for their latest release. Most of the tracks for this disc initially appeared on the out-of-print *What Remains Inside a Black Hole* LP (Augogo), along with some other goodies from M or A's formative years (1993-1996), before the driving surf rock format was opened up to allow the docking of other styles. Versions of a couple of these songs have appeared on other releases, but it's mostly virgin territory for those who weren't there to grab the original when it was hot. More powerful than a particle beam, scarier than an H.G. Wells radio broadcast. [Estrus] **Bo Pogue**

MANOREXIA *Volvox Turbo* CD

Jim Thirlwell has decided to focus his proven talents on a selection of purely "ambient" tracks, and by gum he succeeds pretty well. Thirlwell's previous efforts in genre-splicing and dicing ought to be familiar to most readers, with Manorexia he has steered away from cartoonish exaggeration. The emphasis is on mood here, and Thirlwell steers clear of both cloying new age-isms and ethnic grab bags. Still, while Manorexia avoids most of the common clichés of electronic ambient music, this is hardly an essential purchase. Little of it is genuinely memorable or strikes any emotional resonance. *Volvox Turbo* is probably left best where it is—a fanclub release for the Foetus completist only. [www.FOETUS.org] **Bruce Adams**



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MARCHETTI / VOICE CRACK / NOE Double Wash CD

Long-running Swiss duo Voice Crack team up with Frenchmen Lionel Marchetti and Jerome Noetinger (founder of excellent avant label Metamkine, home of the 3" CD) on this collection of collaborative improvisations that employ microphones, speakers and tape recorders as sound sources, though you'd swear there was turntable fuckery in evidence. Brutal noise outbursts are punctuated by sudden silences, as orchestral found-sounds compete with reverb rumble in a war of frequencies that very rarely grows boring. Sure, most of the tracks sound identical, but development isn't exactly the forte here. Rumors of an uncredited cameo by R2-D2 yet to be corroborated at press time, though wholly probable. [Grob] *James Jackson Toth*

MARGO GURAN Take a Picture CD; 25 Demos CD

Margo Guran could be long-lost godmother to the thousand sensitive but no-fi, indie gal artistes of recent years. Mary Timony, Chan Marshall, et al. If ya told me this was a solo effort from the lead lady singer outta MBV, I'd bite.

Guran was a songwriter with background in classical playing and jazz composition who opened up to pop after hearing "God Only Knows." Her songs were covered contemporaneously by Oliver (his big hit was a cover of "Good Morning Starshine, Spanky & Our Gang (Mamas & Papas knock-off), and Jackie De Shannon—recently covered for bonus track on Japanese release by Linus. Vinyl copies of her sole commercial release go for \$150 (collector geekism is 4ever). Yeah, thin pretenses for the amount of undie/indie/alt media kerfuffle raised in behalf of the exhumation of her 30-40 year old tapes—eloquent testimonial to the power of good flackery—but ultimately it's nice stuff.

There're two albums. One is a re-issue of her one '60s release, *Take a Picture* with three bonus cuts added. The second, *25 Demos*, is just that, her songwriting demos, cut to circulate to artists, managers, and A&R folk in hopes of winning a recording deal. A lot of the repertoire on these respective releases is the same, and in fact, the productions are pretty much indistinguishable. One suspects that the commercial release was comprised of demos in the first place, lightly retouched by the record label releasing them. Picking up already finished stuff like this for release, especially when some of the material was a hit for someone, was standard biz practice in those days: found money.

Her songs are consistently charming, well written, highly melodic chamber pop: Faberge eggs. The lyrics blend dewy-eyed naiveté with the gloom that comes from the first collision with the real world. This is OK. Creditable baroque-pop's a genre that's always in too short supply

more energetic improvisations before returning to and ending with the elegant theme. According to Crispell's notes, each player arrived at the session with compositions and then improvised on three tracks. The entire album is proof, if you need any, that improvisation can result in slow, sparse, and beautiful music as well as in frantic, energetic music. [ECM] *Bruce Adams*

MARK KOZELEK White Christmas Live CD

Drifter, actor, and front man for the much lauded SF sad-sack outfit Red House Painters, Mark Kozelek has been on a bit of a comeback lately. After a 4AD hassle that left Kozelek with a bitter horse pill to swallow, he basically disappeared from the music business for a while and hid out in Hollywood, turning up in Cameron Crowe's *Almost Famous*. Someone at Sub Pop had the sense to cash in on the recent success of bands like Low and made sure that Red House Painters material was going to make it out of the basement. So with Kozelek back in business, Sub Pop has released this mail-order-only solo live performance that captures interpretations of a few AC/DC songs, some originals, and an Irving Berlin Christmas standard. This is Kozelek stripped down, naked and raw with only an acoustic guitar to keep him company. Everything is simply stated, pure coffeehouse calm. [Sub Pop] *Troy Brookins*

MARK OF CAIN This Is This CD

A triumvirate of singe 'n' snarl, hard, heavy, tense and intense. Only a three piece? Amazing, really. Or not: consider that the drummage is courtesy of one John Stanier, formerly of the late and lamented Helmet, for starters. Comparisons to that quasi-legendary, tight-as-shit foursome seem apropos here: The same nearly martial, lockstep crunch groove holds sway, but vocal stylings and detail touches range a little further afield than Page Hamilton's militia: Plenty of bark and bite, to be sure, but with—dare I say it?—a measure of subtlety and emotive range that weren't exactly Helmet's stock in trade (not that they were ever inclined to try). Very smart, very cool, very rocking. [rooArt] *David B. Livingstone*

MATHIAS RISSI, GUERINNO MAZZOLA & HEINZ GEISSER Tierra CD

HEINZ GEISSER-GUERINO MAZZOLA QUARTET Heliopolis CD
Tierra is presented as a traditional piano trio, with drummer Heinz Geisser joining pianist Guerino Mazzola and saxophonist Mathias Rissi. With the very first track, "Bubastis," it seems as though Mazzola is the least active member of the trio as he lays down big melodic statements on the piano while Rissi energetically meanders around a melody, and Geisser works his way around the kit. Mazzola begins "Ara" with a nice melody that initially would sound like Paul Bley. As he elaborates on the theme, however, his playing becomes more complex though always related to the melody. Mazzola is obviously in debt to the clustered playing of Cecil Taylor and the European improvising pianists like Fred van Hove or Georg Grawe, but there is a leaning towards melody in his playing that is pretty unique. Rissi can also draw on some tuneful sources and the last track here, "Edfu" where he begins a nice duet with Geisser is downright pretty. So *Tierra* is a well-balanced trio recording that introduces me, at least, to three new jazz musicians.

Heliopolis widens the ensemble to include guitarist Scott Fields and violinist Mat Maneri, both of whose presence always make an album worth listening to in my book. Like *Tierra*, the basically melodic instincts of Mazzola hold the center around and under that which the other instrumentalists are arrayed. Ben Watson's liner notes refer to a tension here between a form resembling the chamber quartet and all four players' jazz and improvising instincts. And if I knew all that much about Anton Webern's string quartets (and I will, someday I will...) I might be in a position to agree or disagree. What I can say about *Heliopolis* is that the collective improv on the title never tilts too strongly to the favor of one player. Especially with two stringed instruments, there is a potential here for things to get shrill. That never happens; not only because of the restraint of Maneri and Fields, but also because Mazzola can hold the center and Geisser's drummer powers things forward as he provides the odd emphasis.

Overall I prefer the trio recording as it gives me a better chance to appreciate Mazzola, who really does have a unique approach to improvising on piano. The quartet recording has its merits and the presence of Maneri makes it work a listen if nothing else. [Cadence Jazz Records] *Bruce Adams*

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if ya ask me, so the addition to the canon is welcome. Her recordings are notable for their sparse, unpolished production: her dbl-tracked vox, a keyboard, rhythm section, and the odd string instrument or horn are all that's utilized. Also noteworthy is the fragility and unpolished quality of her voice. Both of these temper the sweetness and plushness of her writing, perfectly.

It ain't genius but it's genuinely strong, delicate stuff. [Franklin Castle/Oglio, PO Box 404, Redondo Beach CA 90277] *Howard W.*

MARILYN CRISPELL, GARY PEACOCK, PAUL MOTIAN Amaryllis CD

Pianist Crispell is placed here in the sympathetic trio setting of bassist Peacock and drummer Paul Motian and the result is most pleasing to the ears. Although she made her rep as a Taylor-esque banger, Crispell began to show her more restrained, melodic side with a Coltrane tribute in the mid '90s. Peacock and Motian each have done too much to list here, but both have work that can be roughly aligned with the ECM cool euro sound. The jaw-dropping title track is the centerpiece of the album, it turns around a Crispell melody that sounds like a slowed down, twisting variation on something Thelonius Monk could have composed. The trio each step out with variations on that theme and then cut to

You know that Mellencamp video, where he's down by the railroad tracks with his wife beater on and looking all blue collar lonely? That vision of Americana always swept me up, the kind with the train ambling down the tracks through the small towns, where a copy of *The New York Times* is a rumor and the tattoos are mostly vintage, only they stain the arms of WWII kinda guys, not droopy trousered 7-11 clerks. For these reasons, Matt Marque is a good idea, with a tidy look at his concept of life in a little place and his sadness about wishing for more, a more that won't satisfy, but with that trembling acoustic guitar and the crying pedal steel, it doesn't even matter. Marque almost stutters his words in a mock falsetto that would be Tiny Tim-ish if it weren't so damn earnest.

[Truckstop] Miller

Ah, the infamous Mayhem. The band that, for the most part, started "Norwegian Death Metal." Well, lead singers get killed and bass players get arrested for killing them and the pretentious Goth level increases. Years later, we get a *third* live album. Compared to the studio material, the live takes are shallow and contain little of the energy needed to put the songs over the top. The guitar lacks depth and the drumming tries to impart heat with needless fills and hyper doubling bass. The pre-production versions (from *The Grand Declaration Of War*) contained as bonus tracks present the material a lot better, not as crisp and hard as the fully produced versions, but certainly not the near-laughable takes that the "legions" got to hear. [Renegade, PO Box 29364, Philadelphia, PA 19125] *Les Scurry*

While *Monster Magnet* blast away at stadium-style heavy, stoner rock is cool enough to hold the small room. The *Medea Connection* is a smooth-as-stoned freaker trio that dig more Hawkwind and Bloodrock than their counterparts, i.e. Queens, Fu Manchu, Nebula, etc. They have the bag of red bud, the corresponding red eyes, the necessary in-the-red decibels. "Part the Sky" thumps as opposed to rawks, which is the

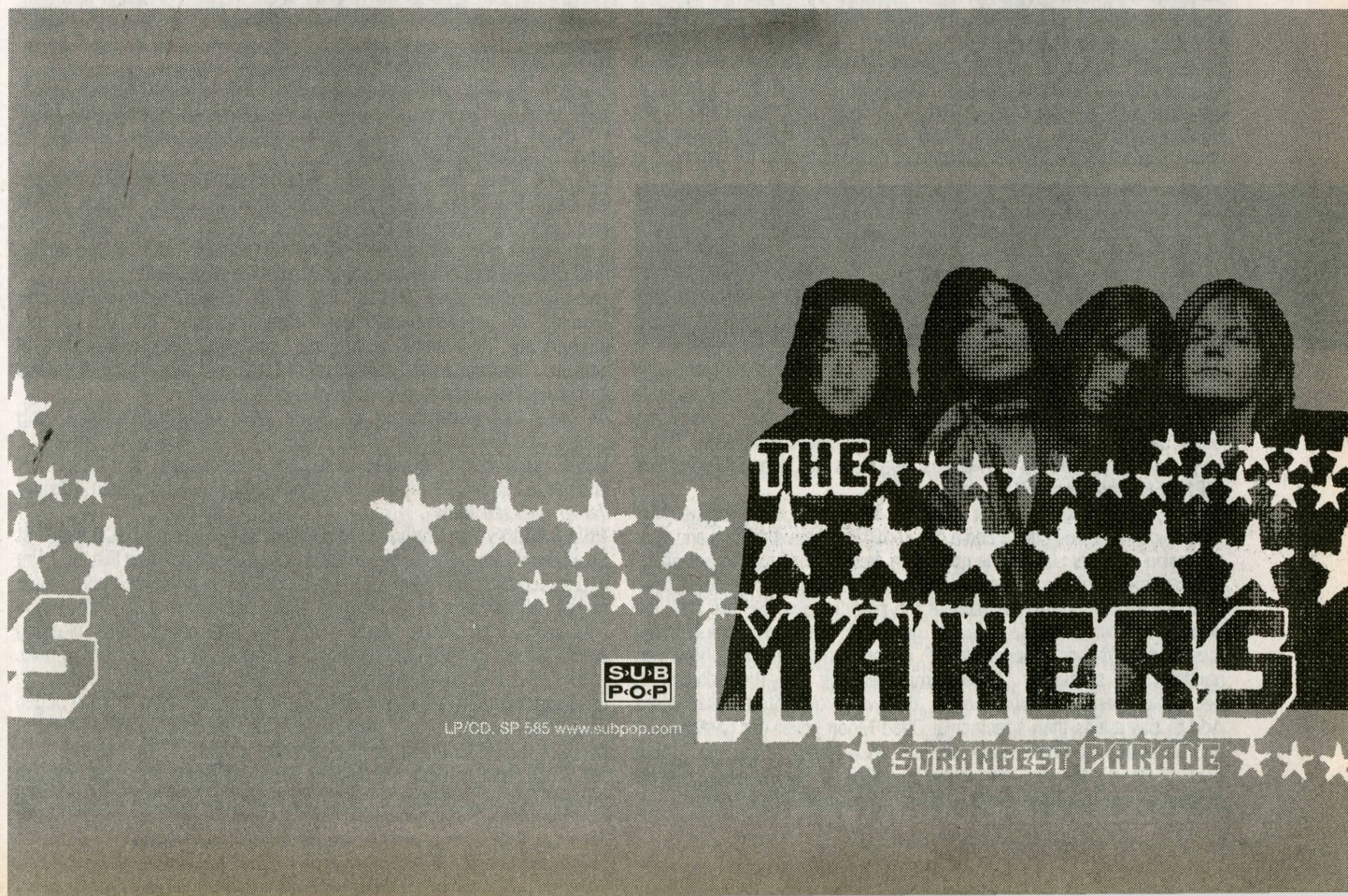
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concept here—SG-driven thump, not rock. The Boston band's second release is 74 minutes worth of thud. Fuck the pop, let's roll. And after you've rolled, check the Roger Dean-hopeful cover art. And don't play the big halls. [Planetary] *Miller*

MELVINS *Electroretard* CD

Okay, I have to admit I've never managed to hear a Melvins record all the way through before. Too dense, too sludgy, wrong time in my life, whatever. But this is offilter enough that I got through the program of covers and refurbished oldies without major incident. And the former are pretty great—their jittery, elongated cover of the Wipers' "Youth of America" pretty much checkmates the old winner (the Spikes' "This is Australia" if you're keeping track at home) and their drowsy take on the Cows' "Missing" is equally inspired. The old stuff is leavened by loopy singing and screwed up guitars that makes it more palatable. I like the whirl of "Shit Storm's" backwards and sped up tapes, and the jack-hammer-precise drumming on "Gluey Porch Treatments." The rest of it, well, it's pretty badass stuff that I can appreciate on one level or another, but will make the set who dig the chopped up lambikins and the Hitler Bunny on the cover do handstands. Or something. [Man's Ruin] *Cecile Cloutier*

MELVINS *Hostile Ambient Takeover* CD

It's hard to say something new or fresh about a band that has been so thoroughly dissected and ultimately lauded in these pages for so many, many years—indeed longer than any other existing publication. And done so by a variety of contributing voices—including my own when conflicts of interest permitted. In fact it would be disingenuous of me to not point out that once upon a time I had the privilege of representing the Melvins booking affairs in North America. So, I believe I'm more than qualified to say this publication was among the first to recognize the band's genius in print.

Certainly no more so than ever, I see no lack of ingenuity in their recent offering, *Hostile Ambient Takeover*. The Melvins continue to titillate and amaze and as such remain a steady constant. An omnipotent entity capable of little else but good. As is always the case, I prefer them best (and most of their constituents will agree) when there's a showcase of strengths at play. A minimum dispensation of their by now patented studio tomfoolery, which *Hostile Ambient Takeover* also contains, goes a long way too. And this go 'round it makes for an album that is only one song over the necessary requirement of Melvins perfection (bleh to the whack incongruity of "Dr. Geek" I say). After all, the Melvins' middle digit throbs hardest when they're not making much of a case for waving it in

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the first place. However, in their world—the only one that matters by the way—the blessing *and* the curse is their incessant need to cleverly state "fuck you" in as many different ways as possible. In the hands of any lesser band this is a near-impossible goal to achieve repeatedly. This is why, in a nutshell, they're the Melvins. God bless 'em. [Ipecac] *Peter Davis*

MENSEN *Delusions Of Grandeur* CD

Boy, oh boy. We need another band like this like we need another Mad Cow epidemic: three chicks and a guy in matching cowboy hats and faux-snakeskin trousers playing the most rote, benign punk rock imaginable. I bet they live for the days when The Donnas or Nashville Pussy hit town so they can get on the bill. Rest of the schtick goes like this: they hail from Oslo, Norway and feature two giggly, cig-smoking, bottle-blondes; their handle means "menstruation" in their native tongue (how very naughty, yet somehow "female-empowering"); they're endorsed by fellow Scandanavian dunderheads, the wildly overrated Hellacopters. Add to this a less-than-spectacular Dead Moon cover (for garage cred) and an outright embarrassing "Jumpin' Jack Flash" (What, no "Cherry Bomb"? Oh, it's the vinyl-only track, by golly!) I'd say the album title fits at least as well as those pants, children. [Gear Head] *Peter Aaron*

THE MIDNIGHT EVILS CD

In the land of loud-fast-rules punk (of the drunken, maximum-rock, power-garage variety) there are very few bands who can communicate subtlety and nuance in song without a diminished return due to wanting to swing the big, bad bludgeon, but somehow or other Minnesota's The Midnight Evils pull it off like a \$1,000 Exacta. Hardest record I've heard by a newcomer this year. Unquestionably they've managed to set the bar pretty high for themselves, so the questions that remain are whether or not they can pull the same two-fer off live, and/or whether or not they can match the intensity and craft here on a sophomore outing. It'll be a tough rabbit to pull from the hat—though not impossible—so get this if all else fails! [Dart, PO Box 1843, Fargo, ND 58107] *Peter Davis*

MIKE LADD "Activator Cowboy" / "Foxwoods" / "The Worst Element of Hip Hop" 12" EP

Allow me to gush. Mike Ladd is to hip hop what John Cage is to potato chip commercial jingles.

"Activator Cowboy" is atypical of Ladd and features no rhyming at all. Instead, Ladd confidently sings, over a beat that sounds like it could have been made entirely using a Casio SK1. The track is electronic hip hop dance with a decidedly 80s feel, and while it's not the track I'd play to convert those in the dark, it oozes with the usual wit and bounce I've come to expect from Ladd.

"Foxwoods," taken from his recent *Vernacular Homicide* EP, is the most traditional sounding track, with it's straight hip-hop beat and lyrics that invoke *Critical Beatdown*-era Kool Keith.

"The Worst Element Of Hip Hop" should have it's own side of a record. While still maintaining something of an 80s feel, it's a little closer to the Mike Ladd of "Foxwoods," if only for the scratching and old school reverence. The traditionalism ends there, though, as a chipmunk voice reflects on the four elements of hip hop (sample dialogue: "So yo, yo. What's the second element? B-boyin' / B-girlin'? You must be out of your mind. They invented that shit at UCLA to keep white girls in shape! Mmmm...white girls...").

If every MC were half as original, interesting, and pragmatically topical as Mike Ladd, I'd apply for a job at *The Source* tomorrow. [Ozone] *James Jackson Toth*

MIKE LADD *Vernacular Homicide* 12" EP

It's only fair that I start by saying that Mike Ladd's *Welcome to the Afterfuture* is one of my ten favorite albums of the decade, and while *Vernacular Homicide* fails to measure up in many ways, I thought I'd admit my biases before proceeding.

Very well, then. "The Last Word" combines spoken word with the vibrations that Prince used to make his stock and trade. "Cookie Jar" is a smooth 80's slow jam in disguise, while "Music For Tanks" begins with a drone that gives way to hard hitting beat, only to return to the drone, then dissolve into orchestral samples and whistles. Neat.

The only unnecessary track is "The Art of Timing (Freestyle Poem for Moms)," an unaccompanied vocal delivering lines like "if I tell my mothers age, I will never be forgiven / and never get one free drink in heaven." The track seems tossed-off and lazy, and shows little of the wit and grace I've come to expect from Ladd's lyrics.

As I've stated elsewhere in this issue, Mike Ladd is an artist among artists, and *Vernacular Homicide*, while not his finest work, serves as further proof that a jack of all trades can master them all if he's smart enough to know his strengths. Another triumph for eclecticism. [Ozone] *James Jackson Toth*

MILES DAVIS *The Complete In a Silent Way Sessions* 3CD Box Set

So where do you begin with a multi-course musical banquet like this? The entire recording that went into *In a Silent Way* is presented here which makes the task a bit more daunting. That's because *In a Silent Way* was conceived as an album. Much in the way rock bands were releasing studio albums in 1969 and the notion of "album rock" was taking hold, Miles Davis and producer/editor Teo Macero were looking beyond the usual procedure in jazz of releasing recording sessions on LP. They began considering an album as a free-standing unit designed and arranged to be more than a document of one particular studio visit by a band.

For those familiar with the original album release, the main item of interest on this collection of studio recordings is the title track. On the



miles davis - don hunstein

original album, as a result of Macero's extensive editing of several performances the same piece of recorded music was spliced into "In A Silent Way" twice by Macero. The box set gives you three versions of the song to compare: a rehearsal take, a take, and the final LP version. You could listen to all three for clues as to where and why Macero made the edit that he did and (more importantly in the long run) the over all feel Davis was going for on that track and the album. The liner notes provide excruciating detail on the album recordings (which covered six months), and how Davis went about choosing the players and the live performances that went into forming the music. They are as complete as one can hope for and provide enough of a general background on Miles Davis circa 1969 to help you figure out how to approach the album.

And in many ways, this is an album that should be examined. Although *Bitches Brew* is often cited as a massive influence on rock music and the fusion-tinged instrumental rock that clutters shelves these days, *In A Silent Way* may have a more lasting influence. For all of the influence r&b was having on Davis in 1969, it's the limp melodies and watery rhythms of the album that seem to resonate with me. Brian Eno is on record as having been influenced by *In A Silent Way*, and the interworking of electric piano, Davis's muted trumpets and John McLaughlin's precise guitar playing is what draws me in to the album. In 2002 the use of computers to camouflage and transform "organic" instruments and to edit and arrange music bear a direct debt to the collaboration between Davis, his band, and Teo Macero. This box set, to the extent any collection of recordings can, breaks that collaboration into smaller pieces that a listener can analyze and enjoy at length. [Columbia Legacy/Sony] **Bruce Adams**

MILLENCOLIN The Melancholy Collection CD

A slice of annoyance from that yawning skaterock chasm that lies between the bleating, paddle-beat agitprop of Bad Religion and the big-money contract of Blink 182. Yup, four fresh-faced youngsters cranking out the limpest of double-speed kiddie rock (spliced with equally-annoying-but-ever-popular suburban ska sounds). Only they're not from Orange County but from Sweden, and they're not really youngsters, as they've been perpetrating this unholy crime for over ten years and should probably know better by now. This disc is a collection of singles and 7 inches from a five year span, highlighting a remarkable lack of artistic growth. Apart from the originals (favorite lyric: "Stranger in a strange land, that's what I am/You turn away from me, it's like 'boom' and 'bam!'"—something must've been lost in translation), the collection

includes a Descendents cover and covers of "Every Breath You Take," "9 to 5," and Desmond Dekker's "Israelites." As can be expected, the covers segment does to the stomach what an open casket funeral for a skydiving accident victim might. Once again, we've got a whole cottage industry of tiresome skate twaddle right here in the U.S., so there's no reason to go farming it out to other countries. [Burning Heart] **Bo Pogue**

MINK LUNGS The Better Button CD

Mink Lungs' debut comes with a "Fresh Outta Rehab!" sticker attached to the CD case and their live shows have been known to feature a hula-hooping chick (coincidentally named band member Jennifer Hoopes). These sort of insipid last resorts would be clumsy and transparent in the hands of most Brooklyn-based indie bands (and brother there are quite a few these days) but Mink Lungs often have enough going on in the center ring to more than make up for the obligatory sideshow antics. Catchy, if obvious, Pollard-style melodies are sung over tracks that vary from New Zealand-style pop ("Silent Sex" could be The Clean's *Compilation*, digitally remastered) to that of the cheap American variety. I bet they're big Cars fans.

Mink Lungs are best when they deconstruct their own pop and circumstance, like when "Synthesizer Baby" gets all tweaked, burying a perfectly good melody in stereo junk pastiche, ala The Fall's brilliant "Bonkers In Phoenix." Also, on "Widths and Lengths," the tape speed varies, mini-songs are presented in fragments, and chaos reigns.

"Blue and Crème Car," a song about "God's audio/visual aids" is equal parts Mekons circa *Rock And Roll* and Stephen Merritt on a bad trip. "Watch Yourself" concludes with an answering machine message containing the most pathetic kiss-off in history. "Best of luck with the apartment hunt"? I'd hate to have been on the receiving end of that one.

Wham-o! [Arena Rock] **James Jackson Toth**

MOGWAI My Father, My King CD EP

I must admit to having never been very impressed with a Mogwai record; I've seen them live a couple of times (a good friend was their sound engineer for the last year) and enjoyed both shows as "events," but still remained unconverted. Now I'm faced with this, Mogwai's interpretation of the High Holidays prayer *Avinu Malkeynu*, literally translated as "Our Father Our King" but de-pluralized in the Mogwai version. So I put it on and almost immediately recognized it as the one song that really stood out to me in their live set, and my expectations rose a bit; then, they sunk. Though for seven minutes it sounds great, sadly the recorded version shows very little threat of becoming anything more than a standard-issue guitar-band instrumental, with a coy psychedelic bent and tidy quiet/loud/quiet dynamic structure. Which would be fine, except "My Father My King," the only track on this disc, is still nearly 15 minutes away from completing its unfortunate but apparently inevitable descent into the void between history and memory, where moments of slight importance politely bide their time. Oblivious to the futility of their endeavor, Mogwai continue to do as they should; a whisper of a thematic change thickens bit by bit until it begins to resemble what in bridge parlors and nursing homes is commonly defined as a "racket." Then something unexpected happens: the floor begins to shake. It quivers and yields to waves that soon numb your feet and jolt up your thighs, burying themselves in the back of your gut. And carried along is the low, unmistakable growl of substance, of frequencies becoming three-dimensional, and demanding. It's the bass—one of the most ungodly, relentlessly physical bass sounds I have ever heard committed to tape, echoed repeatedly by a single piercing guitar sound, that of a note not so much being bent into another octave as being broken. And for five minutes those sounds circle, devouring and begetting one another in a fit finally respectful of their inspiration, finally mindful of their source and its words of worship, words of dust and annulment, submission and mercy, vengeance, salvation...and then suddenly, it's gone. No decrescendo, no mixing board fade out, just a sudden, total silence. Oblivion, if you will. And now I get it. For one day at least, I get Mogwai. I do not join the legions of those who feel they are the Second Coming. But I do await their future heralding with high hopes. [Matador] **David Wilcox**

MR. AIRPLANE MAN Red Lite CD

This is a real nice piece of ultra lo-fi. The production and the artwork



suggest that this thing cost about five bucks to put together, but spending any more would have been a waste. This two-piece band, at their best, sounds like a female Lou Reed singing through a tin can. That might not come off as a ringing endorsement, but believe me, it works. The ambitions here are modest, but they are fully met. They even throw in a cover of "I Wanna Be Your Dog" (a song that has been flogged to death) and manage to do something interesting with it. [Sympathy For The Record Industry] **Brett Horn**

THE MURDER CITY DEVILS *Thelma* CDEP

It's too bad The Murder City Devils ended on this sour note. Three great records, each one better than the next, and then they leave us with this disappointing effort. *Thelma* is one of many red flags that signaled something was amiss in the MCD camp. The synergy had been absent for some time, and now we know why. The boys have all allegedly gone on to greener pastures and time will tell whether the parts of the sum can live on. If I was a bettin' man I'd lay odds on a reunion real soon. [Sub Pop] **Troy Brookins**

MUSE *Origin of Symmetry* CD

On first listen, Muse might sound like a Radiohead knock-off. But not for long. Listen carefully. Muse admit to listening to Berlioz requiems, and it sounds like it. But I also detect hints of ELO, Giorgio Moroder, and the *Xanadu* and *Flash Gordon* soundtracks. A bit of soul, some Lee Hazlewood pomp on "Megalomania." It's all meshed into a synth/rock format. There's one out and out rocker, and it's not the strongest track here. But most of this disc is so infectious and epic, I have to recommend it. Classical music for an Aquarian age. [Taste Media] **Trinity C.**

THE MYSTICS *Remnants of a Lost Culture* CD

Here's a first—a promotional sticker boasting about who *mixed* this friggin' record (FYI—it's the guy who mixed *The Chronic*) as well as the usual cameo appearances—and no mention of a producer anywhere. This is another in a long line of barely memorable, long-winded, West Coast hip-hop albums. It's littered with cameos by Rahzel (who offers a fifteen-second interlude), Black Eyed Peas, The Pharcyde, and Supernatural, among others. If this sounds like your cup of tea, by all means, check out *Remnants of a Lost Culture*. As for me, well, don't think me mean-spirited, but I resent any record that makes my job seem as dull as that of your average migrant worker. Tedious. [Meanstreet] **James Jackson Toth**

NECTARINE NO. 9 *Received Transgressed and Transmitted* CD

A sweet and tangy pop confection. Dave Henderson, many years ex of

convince me that even though they may look like suburban zombies, there is a spark in their plugs that keeps them alive. [Reprise] **Miller**

90 DAY MEN *To Everybody* CD

It's refreshing to see a band take that big leap from potential to fulfillment and the 90 Day Men have made the jump on this album. *To Everybody* is an album that defies attempts to categorize it by genre or geography. This is partially due to keyboardist Andy Lansangan taking his place as a fully integrated member of the band in writing and performance after being an add-on on the *(It Is) It Critical Band* recording sessions. It's also due to the other players settling into more defined roles musically, resulting in a greater reliance on groove. With the exception of the opening track, "I've Got Designs On You," 90 Day Men have abandoned the jumpy, near-spastic rhythmic attack that defined their earlier recordings for a tight groove where drums, bass, and guitar play together and off of the baroque melodies of Lansangan's keyboards.

I saw a 90 Day Men set in Sept. 2001 where the band previewed album material just before they left Chicago to go to record this in Texas. The real knockout song in what was a jaw-dropping set shows up as the centerpiece of this album: "We Blame Chicago." Combining a head-nodding rhythm with razor-sharp guitars and overlaid with keyboards that spiral off into little melodic curlicues, this cut is both a humorous satire of the now petrified Chicago post-rock sound and nod to purveyors of classical-rock interbreeding like Deep Purple. 90 Day Men walk that line carefully, when you listen to the ponderous and melancholy piano melody that begins "Alligator" you can sense the risk of ELP-style sophisto-balladry hovering in the air. No style violations are committed, though. And I think to myself, maybe this band's apprenticeship in math rock has served them well. Because the 90 Day Men retain that love of angling guitars and time-change mastery that balances against the new found melodies. When the drummer gets some to start off the concluding song, "A National Car Crash," it's pretty clear that 90 Day Men are not about to fly off to some castle floating in the clouds. With the exception of the out of place opener, all six tracks on the album are fantastic. Songs that were powerful in the live setting have been tempered and seasoned in the studio. *To Everybody* has the potential to be one of the best records of the year and maybe even one that will hold its own in years to come. Whether that happens or not, 90 Day Men have definitely risen beyond the confines and clichés of this here Chicago scene. How much credit they get for that will really depend on who is paying attention. [Southern Records] **Bruce Adams**

Audio *reviews*

the glorious Fire Engines, takes his skewed pop outlook and somehow *relaxes* it into a big comfy chair. The feeling is cool and laid-back, no matter if the area being tackled is dissonant pop, sluggish reggae, or neo-psychedelic. At times this reminds me of what Robyn Hitchcock *should* have become. This is cerebral without being pointedly so, romantic without the cheese, adventurous without the need for roadmaps. Songs are decorated with obtuse bits of weirdness that never become stale or stick out awkwardly. Ex Pop Group genius Gareth Sager helps out the band this time around for additional tomfoolery. The band's fourth release, so I gotta get huntin' [Victory] **Les Scurry**

NEW ORDER *Get Ready* CD

For a band that has since the mid '80s embraced a world of money and clean living, New Order, it could be said, has now arrived. Ten songs, all solid as the day their first, *Movement*, was released, from the rambunctious dance to the clanky guitar. The single "Crystal" is as hot as the band's biggest hit, "Blue Monday," and the poorly titled "Slow Jam" is really just a good four-minute pop song with a roll of guitar and lively vocal. That a band can take a decent hiatus and then come back with this, minus Gillian, one source says—is impressive enough to



90 day men- mark williams

90 DAY MEN *To Everybody*: CD

Until recently, this Chicago four-piece's diced rhythms, obtuse lyrics and expansive instrumentation brought comparisons to no wave and angular post-punk bands. However, the second album from 90 Day Men, *To Everybody*, presents a refreshing new sound that discards the guitar skree of its earlier efforts in favor of a lush layering of melody and considerably relaxed rhythms. The 90 Day Men seem only now to fully utilize the talents of keyboardist, Andy Lansangan, added to the band just prior to the release of the first album. *To Everybody*: sounds like a major departure from the group's former no wave tendencies, but is

really a sonic restructuring, as the band replaces guitar layers with different instruments. Chiming hollow-body guitars, grand piano, synths, syrupy bass lines, oddly-syncoated drum beats and clever vocal tricks abound throughout the album. Sure, the influence of Radiohead and similar epic electro-psych groups weigh heavily on 90 Day Men, but the personality in its clever musical quirks and caffeinated lyrics set the group apart. [Southern Records] *Dave Clifford*

THE NOMMONSEMBLE *Life Cycle* CD

Yet another powerhouse ensemble makes its debut on the Aum Fidelity label as altoist Rob Brown, violist Mat Maneri, and pianist Matthew Shipp join percussionist/composer Whit Dickey's latest project, The Nommonsemble. *Life Cycle* consists of six movements that simultaneously favor the sounds of strings, woodwinds, piano, and percussion. Without relying on a dominant motif or recognizable theme, each piece gradually unfolds to present a musical representation of its singularly named title. "Love" and "Acceptance," for example, are comprised of contemplative phrases that are more extensive than the outbursts that constitute the more turbulent "War" and the climactic "Transformation." In the hands of less attuned musicians, this sort of improvisation might sound cluttered or unfocused, but Dickey's longstanding colleagues have invested their talents to record music that is cerebrally cohesive. [Aum Fidelity] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

NO ONE CD

Passable nu-thrash. Singer sounds a lot like Tommy Victor of Prong, but No One's schizophrenic genre-hopping (Alice In Chains meets Pantera meets Soulfly boasts the presskit, accurately, although Pantera would eat these guys for lunch) grows tiresome, as do the typically horrendous lyrics ("Am I wrong to feel / Such bliss that ain't real"). Not much rapping, though, which is refreshing, but I can never help wondering what bands like this are so pissed about. They've got a brand new super-glossy CD out and a PR person named Lisbeth — what's the problem, fellas? [Immortal] *James Jackson Toth*

OCELOT *The Quiet Storm* CD

Two guitar/bass/drums instrumental quartet from Atlanta. They don't steer too far away from quiet/loud dynamics territory, and the distinctly Chicago-sounding production choices (a la Dianogah or Don Caballero) do little to set them apart from the countless other bands mining the same, but there's a nice feeling of spontaneity in the proceedings that keeps things from getting dull. *The Quiet Storm* does have its surprises (the all string reprise of "Tear You Down Build Me Up" and the focused sound-layering of the title track), which, while still nothing to get overly excited about, make them a small glimmer of hope in an increasingly bland genre. [Moodswing] *David Wilcox*

OLIVIA BLOCK *Mobius Fuse* CD

Recorded over a span of almost three years and lasting only 32 minutes, *Mobius Fuse*, the latest from Texas-based composer Olivia Block, requires careful, repeated listens, for which there is great reward. While not exactly as self-consciously quiet as say, Sukora or Bernhard Gunther, Block's penchant for embellishing field recordings with electronics, tapes, and a host of Chicago notables on brass and woodwinds (the late John Robbins on sax, Ernst K. Long on trumpet, Kyle Bruckman on Chinese oboe, English Horn on oboe, Jason Thor on drums, and Vandermark 5 / Flying Lutenbachers trombonist Jeb Bishop) is often reminiscent of AMM's quieter moments and Alan Lamb's louder ones. Field material here is made up of fireworks, wind, birds, speaker crackles, room sound, and what sounds like a record being played through dust so thick it may have slowed the needle. The musicians don't start until nearly 13 minutes in, droning on a single note, very moving and mesmerizing in the way lock grooves can be if you let them play long enough. Then suddenly, the music subsides and gives way to more found sounds.

Part two begins somewhat more accessibly, with the brass section quoting familiar melodies while firecrackers burst in the distance.

Turn off your dishwasher before you give *Mobius Fuse* a listen. This is power minimalism for silent rooms. Somewhere, Cornelius Cardew is head-banging and throwing up devil horns in delight. [Sedimental] *James Jackson Toth*

ONEIDA *Anthem of the Moon* CD

I wanna wash this Brooklyn foursome out with a swish of my magic stick, seeing their airy-fairy cover (remember Armageddon?) with the Tangerine Dream lettering. But the curious squall, a melding of 1969 Pink Floyd electrolysis and Keith Moon-ish drums, is enough to keep me awake despite the three Xanax I've taken.

By the way, I was at a house in Michigan recently, and a fellow opened his satchel and whisked out a bottle of Oxycontin. An "acquaintance" of mine scored one for \$60 at a little place in Alphabet City last spring, and so I did some quick math: we were sitting on about \$1,800 in that frigid house on Eureka in Lansing that evening.

Which would come in handy right now—I could pay some earless dope to dis this Oneida. It isn't horrible, but it sure is full of fake space sounds. Those drums keep it alive, but you have to go off the respirator sometime. And when they do, Oneida dive too deep for me. [Jagjaguwar] *Miller*

OSWALD-PRENTICE-DUVAL *Bloor* CD

John Oswald is most commonly known for his *Plunderphonics* sound collages yet he is also a composer and alto saxophonist of some renown. *Bloor* is one of the few alto sax projects that appear in his extensive discography, outside of the work he has done with guitarist Henry Kaiser. Oswald declares the tone of the record from the outset with an animated Peter Brötzmann-like solo. Before he loses steam, violinist David Prentice and bassist Dominic Duval join in and the three commence with a lengthy sequence where they flutter in unison until all that remains airborne is the breathless patter of Oswald's keypads. The majority of the pieces are structured to begin with slow moody solos that gradually build in tempo as the other musicians join in convergence toward an apex of braying intensity. Though *Bloor* borders on the methodical, it is an intense and dynamic recording that wields heavy impact. [CIMP] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

PAIN *Rebirth* CD

Better known for his production credits on records by such notable heavyweights as Dimmu Borgir, Dark Funeral, Mayhem and Cradle of Filth, and as the leader of renowned black metal band Hypocrisy, than for his own industrial metal solo project Pain, Peter Tagtgren imagines The Prodigy as church arsonists in corpse paint on his second album, *Rebirth*. "I think I'm coming, get ready to receive" Tagtgren sings on "End Of The Line," one of many joyous lyrical beams of light on *Rebirth*, an album so consumed by it's influences it collapses under the weight of all that has been metal for the past decade. The ideas are half-baked, underdeveloped, and infested with clichés.

Tagtgren is an able singer and a deservedly sought-after producer, but, overall, this *Rebirth* sounds like a pre-mee. [Renegade] *James Jackson Toth*

PATRICK PHELAN *Parlor* CD

This album seems to be more about the instruments than the performers or songs. It's almost as though the record is designed to sell itself to all those who would expect the mellow, somber pop that only piano, cornet, lap steel, violin, percussion and "treatments" can create. The songs are pretty solid and slightly morose in the dressy manner of Tindersticks. But, Patrick Phelan's soft, distant voice seems almost secondary to the bevy of instruments and delicate melodies they create. Phelan is clearly an expert composer, and there are plenty of gorgeously adorned songs on this record, but there is very little character or charm to his whispered vocals and sparing lyrics. The first thing that comes to mind is Al Stewart's album, *The Year of The Cat*, which also made impressive use of instrumentation to bolster a bland vocalist's lacking personality. And, considering how prominently the instruments tread over his singing, no one involved in the project was too concerned with conveying Phelan's persona. But, hey, the instruments sound great, and the lush songs are really beautiful. It's like daydreaming while someone is giving a speech. [Jagjaguwar] *Dave Clifford*

PAUL FLAHERTY/CHRIS CORSANO *The Hated Music* CD

Randall Colbourne sits this one out so the duo can have a havoc-wrecking session of sax and drum. What results should be of no surprise to a well-versed listener of Flaherty: pulsating blasts, hurricane-ferocity screams, and careening volleys of highs and lows. Corsano's arms are windmills of intensity one moment and tenderly caressing the next. Put



the two together and you get a dervish-like frenzy capable of both angry force and poetic symmetry. Both of these gentlemen have been performing for ages on the fuzzy edges of free jazz. Time for them to be recognized. [Ecstatic Yod] *Les Scurry*

PAUL SMOKER, BOB MAGNUSON, KEN FILIANO, AND LOU GRASSI *Large Music 2* CD

LOU GRASSI'S POBAND AND JOSEPH JARMAN *Joy of Being* CD
Lou Grassi is one of those musicians we writing types call a "veteran" when his name constantly shows up on CD booklets. In the case of these two releases, Grassi holds down the drums in a couple of large bands. And with both albums his energetic and grounded play backs up the proceedings strongly. In the case of *Large Music 2*, I should say "large sounding bands," as the basic lineup is a quartet with Ken Filiano on bass joining Grassi in the rhythm section and Paul Smoker on trumpet and Bob Magnuson on saxophones. Grassi maintains a solid, roiling rhythm (check out his sustained rumble on "Gwendolyn the Cat") while the horns duel and duel over the top. The result is hardly freeform. Each of the six tracks on the album are compositions by Smoker, Magnuson, Grassi, and Filiano together and separately. As such, *Large Music 2* is what some folks might call "free bop"; fairly structured forms over which people improvise. Recorded live after the band performed together, this album combines the virtues of coordination and improvisation. Anyone who would like to hear a good band playing together and not a freeform blowout would be well advised to pick it up (or the first volume of *Large Music*). It even includes a ballad.

The Joy of Being has Grassi behind his "own" band with guest Joseph Jarman. Smoker is in the band once more, his interplay with trombonist Steve Swell marking some of the high points of the album. Jarman brings a touch of the Art Ensemble/AACM magic with him (as on the subtle flute that opens the album on "Rhythm Rules") and the way he circuitously moves around a melody works well between the two brass instruments. On "Making Points" Jarman starts the band out while Grassi rattles the kit behind him and the horns enter scattershot. Perry Robinson plays clarinet in the PoBand and his play alongside Jarman brings subtle hints of New Orleans to the recording. *The Joy of Being* ends with a track called "A Quiet Little Bop Piece" that finds Smoker and Grassi starting off the band on a throbbing number in which each of the horn players takes off for a bit of an exposition. It's a nice way to end an album that's strong start to finish and a nice example of how contemporary avant players can comment upon and play with established jazz forms. [CIMP, Cadence Building, Redwood, NY 13679] *Bruce Adams*

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PETER BROTZMANN *Fuck De Boere* CD

This is a fine companion piece to Brötzmann's classic *Machine Gun* (still in print on FMP), showcasing a live version of the title composition recorded at the Wuppertal festival a few months before *Gun's* original 1968 release date. Even though the all-star octet (a Who's Who of the first generation of European free improvisors with Derek Bailey, Evan Parker, William Breuker, and Han Bennick all on board) is augmented with an additional saxophonist, Gerd Dudek, it's a little lighter in texture than its successor. Which is akin to saying that Easy-Off takes longer to raise blisters than pure sulfuric acid when applied to the skin—it's still mighty potent. Big raging screams of Aylerian horns, but with a subtle underlying structure that helps it stand up to repeated listenings. It's paired with "Fuck De Boere," a tribute to South African bassist (and longtime friend and collaborator) Johnny Dyani, who, in Brötzmann's recollections, used to punctuate his tragicomic tales of life under apartheid with the previous interjection. There's plenty of lungbusting screeching, but also little moments of poignancy, whimsy, and swing buried in the maelstrom. Life-affirming in its giddy destructiveness and most necessary in your CD player. [Atavistic/Unheard Music] *Cecile Cloutier*

PETER TOSH *Live & Dangerous—Boston 1976* CD

When Peter of *Your Flesh* asked me if I'd like to review some new Bob Marley reissues, I asked good-naturedly, "where are all the *Peter Tosh* reissues, man?," to which he shuffled some CDs, laughed, and said "Right here!"

I have always been a big Peter Tosh fan. I even enjoyed *Bush Doctor* and it's questionable collaboration with the Stones, and this previously-unreleased seventy-five minute document of Tosh at his peak shows the "Stepping Razor" of reggae as sharp as ever.

Ably recorded live to 4-track, *Live & Dangerous* captures Tosh on his first American tour, peddling his debut album *Legalize It*. His backing band (which would later become known as Word, Sound & Power) is one of universal envy — Sly & Robbie on drums and bass, respectively, Earl "Wire" Lindo and Errol "Tarzan" Nelson on keyboards, and Al Anderson and Donald Kinsey on guitar.

The instrumental introduction is followed by one of Tosh's finest moments, "Igziabeher (Let Jah Be Praised)," worth the price alone. The improvised middle section of "No Sympathy" has Tosh literally looking for love in unlikely places (like his back pockets, which were probably too full of prime ganja to hold any) at the command of his backing band. This verbal participation shows Tosh's playfulness while making a lighthearted statement about the elusiveness of true love. This is countered by protest songs such as "400 Years" and "No Mercy," which are presented in raw form here, while The Marley co-written "Why Must I Cry" is as moving as anything the two had ever recorded together.

Eight of these eleven songs rise above the six-minute mark, and Tosh's showmanship and vocal prowess are outstanding throughout. Detailed and cohesive liner notes by former Tosh manager Herbie Miller round out a document more fitting of your time than anything you're probably listening to right now. [Columbia/Legacy] *James Jackson Toth*

THE PHANTOM LIMBS *Applied Ignorance* CD

For those who prefer a little macabre in their swing, the East Bay has dug up five misspent youths who shake punk rock rhythm and roll like bastard sons of the VSS. Death rock for the post '90s that translates into hell-bent blasts of twists and turns that sweat blood. Played out in gravel screams dragged across pulsating dark carnival keys, punctuated by a marching beat that drags you down, The Phantom Limbs mean business. *Applied Ignorance* is far removed from your standard 924 Gilman fare, these kids have obviously huffed too many Richmond fumes and have come up with something so damaged that it could only have been planned after a long night of bloodletting and speedballs. [Alternative Tentacles] *Troy Brooks*

PHILIPPE BLANCHARD/CHRISTIAN RENOU *Captain Cook/Cuisine et Impedance* CD

I'm sure this is good for something or someone. Although Mr. Renou goes out of his way to state that, because he used "digitally processed" kitchen utensils, his piece is not "experimental," you would be hard pressed not to mutter the word "experimental" even after a minute of listening. And to top it off, it's pretty poor "experimental" at that. Likewise for Mr. Blanchard's "attempt." Like you've got all day to listen to two sad-sack Frogs dressed up like John Cage playing mic'd-up balloon whisks and cast iron sauté pans in their kitchen? I know I don't. [Plate Lunch, PO Box 1503, 53585 Bad Honnef, Germany] *Wm. Christman*

PRESTON SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY *All This Sounds Gas* CD

Preston School of Industry (named after a reform school in California) is the solo vehicle for Scott Kannenberg (aka Spiral Stairs) from Pavement. Everything that you would expect from a former member of that group is here, including beautiful, goofy hooks that seem almost shrugged off and lyrical wordplay that is right on the verge of making sense. Stacking this up against Stephen Malkmus's solo debut (and who can resist the urge?), I'd say that Malkmus went further in trying to differentiate himself from the classic Pavement sound, although still not drastically. In terms of which is better, Malkmus's oh-so-clever pop or Kannenberg's lo-fi, offhand pop, I'll take the fifth and only say that they are both damn good, and better than anything Pavement had done in years. So, with hindsight, the break-up is looking like a very good idea. [Matador] *Brett Horn*

THE PRIMA DONNAS *Drugs Sex & Discotheques* CD

Wherein the '80s and the attendant fetish surrounding its most grievous excesses (shitty fashion, hilarious political posturing, intolerable synth music) reaps a well-deserved backlash. While most of this fetishism is done with a snarky, self-aware, what-the-hell-were-we-thinking wink (we'll discount bands, such as The Faint, who are actually serious about their nostalgia) The Prima Donnas, now defunct (if, in fact, they were ever a truly operational group), go straight to the heart of the matter without so much as a sideways glance. Naturally, the results aren't pretty. All the elements are present: vague homoeroticism; layers of migraine-inducing synth piled atop the most flaccid of drum machine beats; bleeps, bleeps, and other irritations sprinkled here and there; overwrought melodrama; drug references; insufferable harmonies; etc. The disc is a forceful boot to the collective crotch of the most outrageous of the perpetrators of a great musical crime against humanity (Flock of Seagulls, Talk Talk, OMD, Pet Shop Boys, etc.) The jewel case insert contains a rambling, faux-retrospective, faux-history of this project along with equally-absurd comments on the songs. The Prima Donnas have produced a neatly-packaged, allegorical satire of their intended target—plenty of self-importance, Eurotrash preening, an actual decent sound or song fragment here and there. And, most importantly, the entire thing is completely unlistenable. [Peek-a-boo Records] *Bo Pogue*

PSYCHEDELIC FURS CD, *Talk Talk Talk* CD, *Forever Now* CD

If you have some sort of nostalgic brain lock on Molly Ringwald, you might want to begin your acquisition of these fine Psychedelic Furs reissues with *Forever Now*. That's got the new wave hit "Forever Now" that catapulted the band into semi-stardom and began an artistic decay that coincided with the new version of "Pretty In Pink" and the resulting John Hughes film. It's worth noting that of the three reissues here, *Forever Now* contains more extra tracks with six b-sides, rehearsal/demo versions, and two live tracks.

I would rather remember Psychedelic Furs as the arty young alienated band that spit out their self-titled debut and that epic of sour-mouthed condescension *Talk Talk Talk*. Putting tracks called "Sister Europe" and "Flowers" on your first album, wearing shades and black clothes, calling your band Psychedelic Furs, these are all obvious Warhol/Velvets

affectations that the band somehow made into appealing details. For their first two albums, the Furs rode a claustrophobic guitar-sax combo over chunky rhythms to great effect. They even tabbed the dark master, Martin Hannett, to produce some of the debut album before settling with Steve Lillywhite who worked all the details into a one-dimensional, but effective sound on the second album. To top it all off, Richard Butler mastered a detached, nasal style that hooked up perfectly with relentless songs like "Into You Like A Train" and "I Wanna Sleep With You" on the second album. He was one disgusted guy, lyrically looking down his aquiline nose at all who came short by his estimations. *Talk Talk Talk* is a hymn to disgust and let me tell you, at the time I was all about it. Once the band tried to open up the formula they gained greater commercial success, but examining these reissues the single-minded approach worked best. The first two albums, despite pretensions that veer toward the comical, still pack a punch. The extra tracks are reserved for non-LP singles (the enjoyable psychedelic swirl of "Susan's Strange") and make up for screwy original American pressings that skipped some tracks from the U.K. albums. I got white label advance CDs, but the promo copy promises liner notes and rare photos. [Columbia Legacy/Sony] *Bruce Adams*

**RACEBANNON *In the Grips of the Light* CD**

A full on assault of pigfucker music. Each song forges into the next one with nary a break. One pundit called Racebannon "an experimental hardcore band," but I would put them more in the category of Jesus Lizard or Scratch Acid. Singer Mike Anderson's grating screams and vocals can be annoying, but the music—heavy, kinetic, and yes, experimental—rocks. This album was recorded in Lincoln, Nebraska, with Mike Mogis at the controls (production credits include Bright Eyes and Lullaby for the Working Class, and assistance on several songs here). What Mogis and Racebannon have crafted is 56 minutes of controlled chaos. [Secretly Canadian] *Trinity C.*

RADIOINACTIVE *Pyramidi* CD

First of all, this record sounds like it was mastered from a third generation dub of an old Fuji cassette tape. Lo-fi may be entirely acceptable when you're listening to Sentridoh (god help you), but bedroom aesthetic tape hiss is just not conducive to the brand of abstract hip hop Radioinactive make their stock and trade.

That said, while it's not always clear what Radioinactive (a collective headed by prominent members AntiMC and Radio) are talking about, *Pyramidi* features some rather notable hooks. Complex, yes, but not in an esoteric jeep-beat, Company Flow kinda way, but more akin to the postmodern hip hop stylings of Freestyle Fellowship (who's classic "Inner City Boundaries" is all but pilfered on Radioinactive's "Una Cosa"). "Mud" features a sparse beat that's little more than a distant bass line and a sampled hand drum.

Thirty tracks long, Radioinactive's complex / nonsensical verbal interplay grows exceptionally thin, especially without solid production to ground it. Still, *Pyramidi* gets originality points for making a very atypical hip hop record. These days, that alone and a token will get you on the bus. And have you *been* on one lately? Jesus. [Mush] *James Jackson Toth*



presten school of industry—peter ellenby

RAH BRAS *Ruy Blas!* CD

I love a band that holds all the cards. The Rah Bras do just that, and with such a poker face that they can be completely absurd and dead serious at the same time. Whether they are serious or smarmy—adorned in neo-Viking gear crossed with cross-dressing—we can only guess what they intend to say, but the music speaks for itself anyway. This album showcases the trio's great, warped electronic goth-punk with an affinity for Eastern European style marches, yet it doesn't take itself too seriously. The music is moreso in the vein of GVS, Laibach, Soft Cell, and Lene Lovich. Using just a couple of analog synths, bass and drums, the group creates totalitarian epics that you can dance to (something I've always required of totalitarianism—a great beat!) Plus, vocalist Isabella Rubella's coy coo adds sensuality to the band's synthkreig assault. Not only are they clever, their songs are incredibly infectious. This is definitely my pick of the issue. If the '80s are indeed back, I'm glad to have the Rah Bras taking me wherever they're going in the time/space continuum. [Lovitt] *Dave Clifford*

RAOUL BJORKENHEIM *Apocalypse* CD

Although he plays everything on here, Bjorkenheim (featured guitarist with Jah Wobble, Bill Laswell, and Henry Kaiser) originally composed *Apocalypse* to be performed at 1996's Helsinki Juhlaviikot Festival—by an orchestra of thirty guitarists, eight bassists, and four percussionists. As you might expect, the sound here is massive: wide, instrumental vistas of truly alien, expansive sound. A nine-piece suite, it plods along with clanking, tribal drums, textured by guitar that alternates between the stuttering crunch of *Ride the Lightning*-era Metallica and the sour, de-tuned style of Marc Ribot. Punctuated by wind chimes, odd, tin-sounding percussion, and some real "Land-of-The-Rising-Sun" gong action, there's the steady flow (within each track and as a whole) of monolithic, well-oiled machinery. Bjorkenheim's solos, however, do occasionally squeal into the unsavory realm of heavy metal bombast. But he still keeps things respectable, using the technique mainly as an appropriate spike to the next level of intensity. A great soundtrack to a sci-fi movie that doesn't exist, this'll make you wonder what it would've been like had Mr. Waits enlisted those Neubaten fellows to compliment Ribot's work on *Bone Machine*. [Cuneiform, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427] *Peter Aaron*

REALLY RED CD

Man, another heavenly blast from the past just too good to be true. Really Red are considered by many aficionados of early American punk rock to be one of the definitive Texas bands of the era, and rightly so. Like

the same people I think are behind the equally relevant breakmyface.com site. I don't want to go on a complete rant here—and I won't—but the argument is worthwhile: sometimes things were better then than they are now. Pick this one up, slip it into the disc player and tell me most kids don't have it backasswards these days. Dare ya. [Angry Neighbor, PO Box 66462, Houston, TX 77266, or better still, order direct from www.undergroundmedicine.com] *Peter Davis*

RED MONKEY *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* CD

Somewhere along the line "artistic maturity" came to be associated with "longer songs and more instruments." Red Monkey could continue to bombard the world with their barbed wire tumbleweeds, instead they've varied the attack a bit on *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* and have managed to develop their sound without diluting its effectiveness. The title of the opening track, "The Jazz Step Forward," hints at and kids with the idea of artistic maturity. The low key guitars that begin the song are as tightly tied to the rhythm section as anything the band has done in the past. Red Monkey are now stretching out and testing themselves and the listener now, though. A band that plays together as well as Red Monkey have no need to lean on extra instrumentation or production tricks—it's bass, drums, and guitar here with an occasional trumpet blat or keyboard wiggle. Red Monkey hit reference points to The Fall, The Ex, or Gang of Four in the past and those influences are definitely there now. They are reigned in a bit more on *Gunpowder, Treason and Plot* and the prevailing impression I get from the new album is of tension and restraint. Red Monkey have proved that they are an airtight band in the past. Now they are working on refining their band, getting closer to the r&b sounds that were the influences of their influences and directing the trio's instrumental tightness towards greater effectiveness. And here I would like to add that Red Monkey's political message aids their aesthetic purpose—it is all about making the music and lyrics work well together in a memorable fashion. When the chorus of "we are the ladies, as butch as we can be, tougher girls than boys ever can be" hits on "Essential Nutrients" you know it and remember it. The handclaps and guitar riffs on "Bloody Mary" lock into a mesmerizing groove. I strongly suggest that if you're looking for good guitar music in 2002 you can't afford to overlook Red Monkey. [Troubleman Unlimited] *Bruce Adams*

RED PLANET *Let's Degenerate* CD

Red Planet is to punk what Poison is to metal: chick rock. If I was 12 and didn't have a mortgage, I'd love Red Planet. As a matter of fact, they'd probably be my favorite band. The ideal soundtrack for girl chasin' and glue sniffin', and it wouldn't make my parents angry. Straight snap-crackle-pop that pogos through 11 tracks; each one sweeter than the next. For those who haven't yet begun to hate yourself, Red Planet salutes you. [Gearhead] *Troy Brookins*

REMORA *Some Past's Future* CD

In the early '90s, Brian John Mitchell holed himself up in his home in North Carolina, and produced a score of tape works under the name Remora. *Some Past's Future* marks Remora's sixth release, but the collection reflects a more intentional approach—a concept album about the struggles of the blue collar worker, illustrated with ambient guitar drone. Somewhat reminiscent of Brian Eno, Throbbing Gristle, Ramleh, and apocalyptic folk, in its energy and sound—Remora takes guitar-based music and alternates between effects and acoustic twelve-string guitar, between haunting, reverie-inducing instrumentals and melancholicly-sung tunes. It's fascinating and beautiful how the album captures the hopes, dreams, and failures of the working class, leaving work late at night and wanting something better, of lucid dreaming or late night drives to clear your head.

Some Past's Future could also serve as soundtrack music for an experimental film set late at night in a factory or abandoned warehouse, or an obscure soundtrack to a weirder, modern version of that classic silent worker revolt flick, *Metropolis*. A sister EP of outtakes and alternate mixes, *Some Future's Past*, will be released on the Italian cassette label, Best Kept Secret. [Silber Records, PO Box 18062, Raleigh, NC, 27619] *Trinity C.*

RESINEATORS Don't _____ *With The Fantasy* CD

A friend was asking me the other day who my favorite local band was and I came up empty. I should have told him the Resineators. These two

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a number of other bands from that time, they were political but in an intelligent, non-confrontational way. Furthermore, each and every release subsequently showed the band maturing, becoming more adventurous each time out, displaying their impeccable good musical taste for those who were ready to listen. An evolution of creativity I find sorely lacking in this new millennium's output. The majority of "chops" supposedly out there today are no equal match to a band with a tremendous work ethic and abundant dedication. All happening back when the only carrot at the end of the stick was making yourself and your friends happy with what you created for yourself, not some illusory brass career ring. This was a band whose evolution bore little to no outside influence other than the immediacy of their surroundings, fully informed by their own genuine experiences, and nothing more. A band with the guts to branch further and further out on an artsier limb. Back when being a punk wasn't about uniformity. Back when ideas were fresh, tangible, and provided a way to balance the mundane. Yes, they were loud and fast but never, ever static. No small accomplishment, really. So here we have an officially sanctioned compilation courtesy of Angry Neighbor Records which contains, from what I can tell, the band's entire discography, issued by

ugly bastards have created a chaos that warms my heart and puts a tingle in my toes. I haven't fallen for something this damaged in years. The perpetrators behind my latest infatuation are none other than David Nudleman and Anthony Bedard (aka Oral B, sometimes in a blue moon *Your Flesh* contributor) an idiot and a savant who serve up nothing less than early Butthole Surfers brilliance. And these guys are basically a two-piece for Christ's sakes. Aided by Nudleman's guitar playing (Men's Club) brother Aaron and Andy Oglesby's keyboards, The Resineators have gathered an unstoppable, cult-like following in San Francisco; a rabid fanbase of undesirables and malcontents who have developed a liking for this acquired taste. [Siltbreeze] *Troy Brookins*

RESONANCE IMPEDERS: BRIGGAN KRAUSS, CHRIS DAHLGREN & JAY ROSEN *At All Costs Unknown* CD

Resonance Impeders are a tight, memorable trio made up of alto saxist Briggan Krauss, bassist Chris Dahlgren and Jay Rosen. It's Rosen that starts the album in a solid groove with "Say Then But The Two Gone" as he eventually takes over the cut with a solid groove that Krauss wails over. Make no mistake about it; this is very much a trio recording. A listener is immediately drawn to the tension and combustion between the players. Rosen can provide a tinkling backdrop of percussive effects, as on "Ant Farming Cousin" or work a funky shuffle on "All That Gladly Dies." Krauss can unleash waves of undulating saxophone or gently touch a melody. Listen carefully for Chris Dahlgren and you will find him moving from rhythm keeping to carefully placing melodic suggestions into play while his more active colleagues play around him. As a trio, Resonance Impeders are memorable; this recording shows them in their best form covering a lot of territory with vigor. [CIMP] *Bruce Adams*

R.L. BURNSIDE *Burnside On Burnside* CD

Sticker on the front says it all: "LIVE, The way he was meant to be heard." The overall greatness of his prior (studio) output notwithstanding, a more apt summation could not be made. Let the glossy mag's and "The Blues, Today" tag-on segments of PBS documentaries blow seed over watery drek like Keb Mo' or Robert Cray. Anyone reading this rag knows the blues—*really the blues*, to borrow a phrase—when they hear 'em. This is. And, at 74 (maybe 75, by now), R.L. Burnside does his job with more fiery passion and reckless zeal than all of the short-pants, kiddie-punk bands on this label's parent label.

Opening with a barbed-wire flagellation of "Shake 'Em on Down" (no doubt culled from Mississippi Fred McDowell's famous template of this trad standard), this disc is a solid blast straight through to the end—with a couple of spooky-sparse detours along the way. R.L.'s between-jam banter is priceless; full of the genial, rustic (notice I did not use the phrase "down-home," thank you) humor that makes me wish he lived on my block—just so I could sit on the porch and listen to him talk.

It does occur, from time to time, a genuinely tangible paradox between the humane demeanor of an artist and the undeniable otherworldliness of his/her creations. Where, in witnessing their creative process, one gets the chilling feeling that the artist is actually a conduit, finely tuned to fields of emotion with which he/she is seemingly unfamiliar. Such is the case here. The earthy cadence of R.L.'s personality is a full spectrum away from the fire-red and pitch-black hues that pass through his throat and fingers. This man is most certainly a *medium* of some sort. He doesn't sound like he has a choice in the matter. He just is. A lot of lip service is paid to artists who supposedly illustrate this phenomenon, artists who go their whole careers trying, vainly, to connect those elusive, metaphysical dots. If we're lucky, their work might just catch a *hint* of whatever it is that lies behind the drape. This guy's older than your dad, and he does it with less thought than he probably puts into tying his shoes. Figure that one out.

If you haven't heard any of his other stuff, go for this first; you'll come away a fan. If you already are, *Burnside on Burnside* is what you've been waiting for all along. [Fat Possum/Epitaph] *Peter Aaron*

ROBBIE FULKS *13 Hillbilly Giants* CD

As the author of such classics as "She Took A Lot Of Pills (And Died)," "Roots Rock Weirdoes" and "Fuck This Town," Robbie Fulks has long relished the role as alt-country shit-disturber, a combination comic maverick and heady traditionalist. Like Ted Nugent and Alan Licht before him, Fulks never lets the self-conscious seriousness of music that should

be anything but get in the way of a good satirical jibe.

That said, on the Steve Albini-produced *13 Hillbilly Giants*, an all-covers record, Fulks plays it pretty straight (excepting some raucous screaming on Jimmie Logsdon's "I Want To Be Mama'd").

Porter Wagoner and Dolly Parton's classic tear-jerker "Jeannie's Afraid of the Dark" gets a respectful rendition, while Gordon Terry's "Lotta Lotta Women" gets a clever rave-up treatment. Along with tunes written by the genre giants (Wynn Stewart, Jean Shephard) Fulks renders songs of more obscure origin (The Carlisles's "Knot Hole," on which Fulks sounds *exactly* like Peter Stampfel and is joined on vocals by his very able-voiced wife Donna), admirably tipping his hat to the lesser-known craftsmen of the genre.

These are songs obsessed with despair, God, and lunacy, and Fulks is consistently clever enough to portray the craft and beauty within them. [Bloodshot] *James Jackson Toth*

ROB ZOMBIE *The Sinister Urge* CD

The bombast continues, Scary Rob may be Hollywood-like latter-day Cooper antics, but the fire-breathing music remains, toss-em-back metal goth anthems like "Iron Head" and the mind-melting "Feel So Numb." For the first time in a few releases—go back, back to the last Zombie thing—there is a chink in the armor. "Never Gonna Stop (red, red kroovy)" has a verse like a Cars outtake, with a little guitar line squirming around the thunder beats. "(go to) California" is *Sexplosion*-era Thrill Kill Kult, Go Go Girl bleak, but lacking bite. He's gotta stop having those filmmaker lunches at the Palm. [Geffen] *Miller*

THE ROCK*A*TEENS *Noon Under the Trees* CD EP

If this band has made any bad records, they must be buried deep beneath the Cabbagetown shack its members call home. Their bittersweet, inebriated takes on Roy Orbison-derived torch drama, coupled with a winking use of the "Southern Gothic" semantics their locale (Atlanta) would seem to entitle them to is pretty damn unique—especially in light of the nostalgia-obsessed, "garage rock" losers they get stuck playing with. This five-track gem's opener, "These Starving Heartists," embodies all the best qualities—sonically, lyrically, and philosophically—of this terrific quintet (it would make a swell theme song, if bands still did that kinda thing). "To Lady Ben and All Her Friends" bears more than a passing resemblance to Magazine's "Song from Under the Floorboards"—evidence of the good taste at work here. Unlike their peers in the so-called garage scene, The Rock*A*Teens are conscious of the deep canon of emotional tragedy and sadness we all possess, and have opted to spin that awareness into the gold that is their art. Other bands either wanna party like it's 1969 or bash it all out with anger.

But those outfits are missing the point. They're just trading on the outer skin, the identifiable signifiers, of what they only *think* they're playing: the blues. Either angle is a form of release, but also a ducking of the Big Issues. And no one wants to deal with those, lest they be seen as a weakling or a party-pooper.

What the sour laments of The Rock*A*Teens tell us is this: *It's ok to be sad*. Forget the party. Forget the noise. We're *all* sad. So let's just let it run its course, let it flow. Let it run from the tops of our heads, across our backs, down through our arms, and out the tips of our fingers. Because if we don't, sooner or later it will eat us alive.

Noon Under the Trees is a fine illustration of this emotional reality. You can't pump your fist in the air to it, and it's not always pretty. I guess that's why they call it the blues. But don't thank Sir Elton. Thank The Rock*A*Teens. [Moodswing Records Conglomerate Empire, Inc., 3833 Roswell Rd., Suite 104, Atlanta, GA 30342] *Peter Aaron*

ROCKET FROM THE TOMBS *The Day The Earth Met The...* dbi LP

People seem to love this for one reason or another. I count myself as just loving it period without the predetermined, high-minded, sanctimony would-be aesthetes are attaching to it (your arguments are duly noted). Plain and simple, you need look no further than the release's subtitle for further clarification: *Live From Punk Ground Zero, Cleveland 1975*. Yeah, I think that says exactly what needs to be said. Beyond this I'm sure everyone's down with Peter Laughner as the primary reason why they're smitten. Sure then, and why not? The simple, painfully rendered inclusion of his—unmistakably definitive—version of "Ain't It Fun" is alone worth



the price of entry—it is without question the album's centerpiece. But, like a coin there are two other sides of interest which make this album so appealing to people: to one camp it is of great historical relevance that David Thomas, formerly Crocus Behemoth, would go on to form Pere Ubu; the other camp is totally in love with it being the touchstone that spawned the Dead Boys. Either way it's hard to go wrong (and either way you're splitting hairs). The point is, you get the prototype band, the prototype sound, and the prototypes of many of the songs of both. Moreover, being able to look underneath the rock from which it all sprang just might be reward enough. Three cheers to Smog Veil for getting the masters and the acquiescence of the participants to oblige and bless us once and for all. Until now the various bootlegs and sundry cassette tapes circulating all these years were all there's been to go by, and until now all have simply fallen short of conveying the iconoclastic oomph this band possessed in its collective baby finger. Yeah, it was all there, but once and for all we're hearing things better now and here at last, thank you. [Smog Veil] *Peter Davis*

ROSAMUNDE QUARTETT *Joseph Hadyn: The Seven Words CD*
ZEHETMAIR QUARTETT *Karl Amadeus Hartmann /Bela Bartok CD*
HERBERT HENCK *Piano Music: Conlon Nancarrow George Antheil CD*

These days when I'm out and about driving in the city my radio is almost always set to the classical music station. I've discovered that the calming effect makes the drive a little easier. But in the apartment I'm really not interested in hearing "The Blue Danube." That's where the ECM New Series has come in to provide guys like me with a selection of classical and contemporary composed music that sustains interest. You may already be familiar with the New Series' excellent track record in exposing the work of Arvo Part to wider audiences. Here are some new releases on the ECM imprint that contain work from a variety of composers.

The string quartet appeals to me. For overall balance, and interplay it can't be beat. Best of all, from my point of view, the sonic limitations that four stringed instruments leave a composer means that a string quartet seldom delves into the sonic gingerbread that can ruin symphonies. The quartet format is direct and to the point.

Seeing as I'm beginning to delve a bit more deeply into the classical stuff and given my obvious limitations in knowledge and experience with it, I wouldn't even begin to criticize the work of the Rosamunde Quartett on Hadyn's "The Seven Last Words of our Saviour on the Cross." The excellent liner notes replicate Hadyn's Preface to an 1801 oratorio version of the work, explaining how the composer wrote seven, ten minute

Hadyn began the process of changing an eighteenth century novelty into what Conen aptly describes as "a chain of inspiring provocations."

While working in a record store years ago I came across a promo CD containing Bela Bartok string quartets. It was a find. Bartok's focus in his quartet work strikes a chord in anyone who is interested in more "out" forms of guitar rock. The delicate balance of the classical string quartet is often ripped open by plucked strings, slashing rhythms, and jagged melodies. Bartok is famous as a collector and transformer of Hungarian folk music, and the direct, rollicking nature of folk music comes through in this recording of his Fourth String Quartet. Karl Amadeus Hartmann lived in Germany in the '20s and '30s, a time and place that truly deserves the description of an artistic hothouse. As Bartok's Fourth was written in the aftermath of the First World War, Hartmann's First String Quartet on this disc clearly reflects the tide towards war in 1933 Germany. Hartmann refers to older forms of art music like the rondo while integrating folk sources and tipping a hat to the developing Vienna School of Schoenberg and Webern. Balance, contrast, and polyphony all contribute to a feeling of anxiety and dread.

And finally the piano; simultaneously a lead melodic voice and an instrument of pure rhythm. On *Piano Music* Herbert Henck takes on two works that deliberately evoke the first widely available music machine: the player piano. George Antheil composed "Ballet Mechanique," one of the more infamous works of the last century. Originally designed to be played by sixteen player pianos, percussion, sirens, electronic bells, and airplane propellers, it was performed in 1926 but couldn't really be properly interpreted until computers made the coordination of all the instruments possible. Antheil composed a variety of works for piano, which Henck plays on this CD. A work like "(Little) Shimmy," written in 1923, is an obvious homage to jazz music. Antheil was enamored of rhythm and mechanics and lived and performed at the time of the almost exact intersection of these two forms. Anybody sympathetic to Cecil Taylor, for example, will find something of interest in *Piano Music*. Henck has also recorded three works by Conlon Nancarrow, a composer best known for his utilization of player pianos, a body of work that ultimately extended to over fifty works. And in a very serious sense, Nancarrow's laborious punching of holes in piano roles to create music progressions far too rapid and detailed to be played by humans, is a precursor to the programmed electronic music of the postwar era. The five selections on *Piano Music* were composed between 1935 and 1940 and although they were not intended for player pianos, they do reveal the obsession with detail and repetition that Nancarrow would develop in detail in the late '40s. One track called "Slow Blues Tempo" is sufficient proof that as with Antheil, Nancarrow looked to black music forms for inspiration. Overall, this CD is crisp and clear, won't try your patience or seem overly academic and sterile. [ECM New Series/ ECM Records, Postfach 600331, 81203 Munich, Germany] *Bruce Adams*

THE ROYAL FINGERS *Wild Eleki Deluxe CD*

Apparently one of the top surf groups in Japan (and here I thought Terry and the Blue Jeans had the market cornered), The Royal Fingers—Sammy (guitar), Devil (bass), and Mick-O (drums) play it pretty straight here, adequately performing a variety of instrumental tracks dominated by car references ("Bonneville," "Age Of Toyota," "Test Driver," "Wild Datsun"). NME probably won't care, but *Wild Eleki Deluxe* sure rocks a party better than The Strokes. My kind of party, anyway. [Del-Fi] *James Jackson Toth*

ROY CAMPBELL QUARTET *It's Krunch Time CD*

The Thirsty Ear Blue Series gets my vote for the most consistent ongoing project any indie label is running right now. Trumpeter Roy Campbell's contribution is strong and is enhanced by the solid rhythm section of bassist Wilber Morris and drummer Guillermo E. Brown (both of whom should be familiar to anyone into the NY free jazz scene). The x-factor in this equation is the presence of Khan Jamal on vibes. The album begins with Morris's gentle bowing on "Tenderness of Spring" that hints at the morning reveille call before Campbell quietly enters on trumpet, followed by Jamal's watery vibes and some rattles dragged across the drums by Brown. The cut exemplifies the balance that characterizes the entire album as well as the renditions of "Bemsha Swing" and "The Star Spangled Banner" quartet undertakes. As with several of the Matthew

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pieces to accompany a Lent ceremony in the cathedral of Cadiz, Spain. A bishop would pronounce the last seven words Christ said on the cross and each piece was intended to be played in the intervals between the bishop's statements. Uwe Schweikert's notes explain how this particular work was not only one of Hadyn's favorites, but also a bridge between the then old Baroque style and the newly developing classical style of music. A nice explanation for those of us beginning to examine this stuff. And the music itself? Well, you would expect music about the crucifixion to be somber. Hadyn never allows the music to slip into melodrama, there are points where the quartet slashes out rebelliously and where it lingers in sorrow. The overall tone of the music is somber and beautiful. I've probably played this disc as much or more than anything else I've listened to recently. I can't recommend it highly enough.

Take the musical structure and format of the string quartet and move in time to the twentieth century. Hermann Conen tellingly describes the string quartet the "benchmark genre" of classical composition in the liner notes to the Zehetmair Quartet release. By this he means that the structure of the quartet provides for a dialogue between four performers while the instruments mimic the four registers of human voice. Our pal

Shipp and William Parker contributions to the Blue Series, *It's Krunch Time* finds the musicians reinterpreting not only old songs but also the bop legacy in an improvised manner. If your impression of free jazz or its current NYC practitioners is that of hurricane winds or ecstatic excess, you ought to check this album out. [Thirsty Ear] *Bruce Adams*

RYE COALITION *On Top CD*

Steve Albini produced this release and it feels like a natural fit. These guys have obviously spent some time worshipping at his altar and, listening to the guitars, at some points you have to question which side of the boards Albini was actually on. That's not to say that they are mere clones, they're more willing to loosen up and mix in some fun with the vitriol. Rye Coalition isn't interested in post-rock mathematics, they're content to simply rock. They might be informed by the work of Albini and his peers, but they're not willing to carry on its excesses. In my book, that's all good. As a final plus, Rye Coalition has a knack for great song titles, try on "Switchblade Sister: One Tough Nun" or "Honky, Please" for size. [Tiger Style] *Brett Horn*

THE SADNESSES *When You Die, The Prisoners Will Hope No More 10" EP*

Aside from the confounding title, nothing about the appearance of this record — the band name, the day-glo artwork—gives any indication of the sound of The Sadnesses.

Kurt Vile is The Sadnesses, and his *When You Die...* is a quirky, if amateurish, endeavor full of weird samples, distorted vocals, and indistinguishable sound sources. Close comparisons can be made to Glands of External Secretion and Negativland, right down to the indiscernible track separations and light-hearted approach to providing what is, basically, pure annoyance.

What makes this record so strange is not what it *sounds* like (sub-*Bananafish* compilation fodder) but how it's presented. There is no kiddie-porn, no art supply store smell, no bondage, no additional holes in the vinyl, and no Minneapolis PO Box address. In other words, nothing to attest to a style that adheres so rigidly to the aforementioned genre axioms. For sheer ambiguity alone, *When You Die...* is quite a surprise. [Vile Industries] *James Jackson Toth*

SCOTT TUMA *Hard Again CD*

Scott Tuma, late of cracked geniuses Souled American, builds textures that combine simple instruments and multiple generators to concoct nine sleepy and magnificent instrumentals on his first solo outing.

Titles are indiscernible (I count six or seven in the booklet but there are actually nine), and Tuma could have shit out better cover art. But the music is what really matters here, and matter it does. Fans of Souled American's angular stoner-country will be surprised to hear Tuma play long, meditative acoustic pieces that often sound like sonic interpretations of street and traffic sounds. Reverb is the main ingredient in this post-Fahey stew, making for a delightful soundtrack to a Percaset-gobbling Sunday morning. [Truckstop] *James Jackson Toth*

THE SECONDS *Y CD*

What the singer for The Seconds produces from his throat is something to boast of often and exhibit freely; it's pastiche inflection, one part neurotic Midwest yelp and the other a New York bark hinting of spit and insults. He has amazing control over it and executes all manner of swoops and screams and gasps and rockabilly stutters with an intensity that never wavers, desperate and determined like someone shouting down that which they are terrified to know. It alone is reason to listen to this, their debut full-length, but luckily we're not being forced into giving out consolation prizes here, because the rest of the band is pretty damn hot shit to boot. A bass/guitar/drums trio, The Seconds excel at two-minute-long tight, hyper rave-ups rooted by a relentlessly barreling rhythm section that makes for the perfect counterpoint to the jagged, clean and treble-heavy guitar attack. Better yet, their songs are constructed with a healthy dose of free-for-all, leaving ample room for improvisational scrapes and jabs. For the best they have to offer one need look no further than "2 Face Chang," which in 186 seconds (an epic on this collection) breaks down completely, then solidifies via a staccato pattern where each instrument feels like it's a deliberate half-second off from the others, each player seemingly telegraphing what the others should be doing. Only real complaint here is an ill advised and totally

unnecessary cover of Madonna's "Burning Up" that feels like nothing more than a token novelty single meant to amuse college DJs. And, in a more general context, it's a sad state of affairs when a record that sounds like this and clocks in at just over 20 minutes isn't available on LP. [5 Rue Christine] *David Wilcox*



secret machines- sara jayne

SECRET MACHINES *September 000 CD*

Along with the latest album by 90 Day Men, this new disc featuring former members of UFOFU is not at all what I was expecting, but it certainly is one of the freshest and more original records I've heard so far this year. Something of a cross between a very rhythmic oriented new breed of post-rock experimentalism meets *Wish You Were Here*-era Pink Floyd. I know, strange, but it manages to work quite beautifully. Very heavily layered keyboards accentuated with subtle sampling, plaintive vocal accompaniment (the prime source of the Floyd reference), and chillingly distilled rhythms make for a textural listening experience that's distinctly unique. Recently I found that it was the perfect antidote for a long drive on rainy spring evening. [Ace Fu] *Peter Davis*

SENSEFIELD *Tonight and Forever CD*

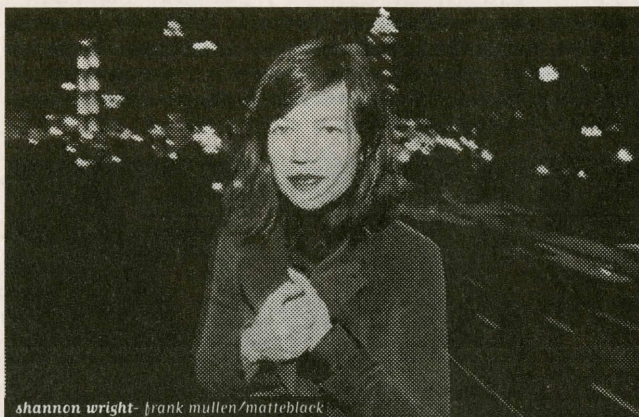
I don't believe in "guilty pleasures." I like what I like, even though it's sometimes difficult to explain the relevance of something so antithetical to all that I hold dear. And, the latest album by Sensefield is exactly one of those confounded works that employs everything I hate, and yet I can't stop listening to it. It sounds like the worst combination of latter-day U2, Pearl Jam, and the Offspring. But, somehow, it transcends all those crappy bands, while embodying their gliding, emotionally eruptive melodies. Plus, the cheesy bullshit lyrics to songs like "Save Yourself" are the most pandering self-help fodder imaginable. But, goddamn it, there's something really annoyingly catchy about Jon Bunch's (who once sang for the OC Hardcore band, Reason to Believe) Bono-meets-Dexter-Holland vocal style and the band's adult-contemporary-meets-alt-rock song structures that sounds impossibly satisfying. It hurts my head to contemplate it, but this is really a catchy and simplistically enjoyable album that reflects everything else you hear on the radio. Maybe I've lost it completely, but this sounds like all the alterna-pap on the radio and MTV is supposed to sound like, but just doesn't come close. [Netwerk America] *Dave Clifford*

THE SHAMS *Take Off CD*

What's up with Ohio? Cleveland rocks and Cincinnati is home to both The Greenhornes and The Shams, the two best rock 'n' roll bands not from Detroit. They're doing something right in the Midwest. The minute *Take Off* tore out of the blocks I knew I was in love. Similar to their highly touted/recommended brethren The Greenhornes, The Shams suck heavily on the *Nuggets'* teat, rockin' it early '60s, r&b-garage-soul style with flavor. Collectively, these kids don't look a minute over 23, yet *Take Off* plays like they've been doing it for years, fitting easily between your Stones and Count Five records. Expect a name change very soon for obvious reasons. [Orange] *Troy Brookins*

SHANNON WRIGHT *Dyed in the Wool CD*

Shannon Wright's third full-length is another great chapter in the evolution of this very talented songwriter. Perhaps due to the large



shannon wright- frank mullen/matteblack

amount of touring Wright has done over the last few years, much of the record has a distinct live-rock-band energy. I'm not sure a recording will ever be able to truly capture the intensity of Shannon's performances, but *Dyed in the Wool* comes pretty close—even in songs like "Vessel for a Minor Malady," on which her voice is accompanied only by a piano and a viola. Here and throughout the record, Wright digs deep and brings forth brilliant capsules of raw emotion. [Quarterstick] *Che Arthur*

SHEILA CHANDRA *This Sentence is True (The Previous Sentence is False)* CD

Sheila Chandra has openly declared *This Sentence is True (The Previous Sentence is False)* a self-therapeutic exercise. After suffering from a serious throat malady, this UK-based experimental composer/vocalist of Indian descent lost the major part of her vocal capacity and was slowly working to recover it, gingerly testing the turf as she went. So part of *This Sentence is True (The Previous Sentence is False)* is the artist experimenting largely to see just what her voice still could or could not do. She's also poking around to see what hitherto untried vocal resources she might tap in an attempt to compensate for some ability irrevocably lost. And she wanted to have fun and feel challenged during these processes.

A song or two are purely "what if" scenarios—i.e., "What if we loop surface noises off of an old LP and lay on a couple three note piano arpeggios. What vocal maneuvers would complement that?" And she tried a couple: tentatively. Playfully. The solutions are ingenious but not

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especially listenable.

On other tracks Chandra works up and toys with extended, elaborated drones; drones are, of course, the foundation of Indian classical music as well as much Western avant-garde music (which in turn was influenced by that music via '60s innovators like Terry Riley and LaMonte Young). What I've always dug about Sheila Chandra is that she evolved from doing "world beat"—ethnic music allied with Western electropop—to something else. She works with traditional form and innovates within its vocabulary. Compositions like "Bonecrownedrone 7" address both Indian and Western avant-garde sound and with breathtaking—if predictable—results. Here, Sheila is reclaiming familiar territory, but without extending the aesthetic terrain.

So *This Sentence is True (The Previous Sentence is False)* is mainly for fans (count me in!). It's a progress report on her recuperation and shows that physically she's mostly recovered and aesthetically she's as audacious and astute as ever. I'm looking forward to hearing her next fully realized work with self-confidence operating at full steam. [Shakti/Naraada] *Howard W.*

SHINER *The Egg* CD

DeSoto Records would like you to know that, after a few years in the desert traveling from label to label, Shiner is back where they belong—on their label. Considering the amount of labor J. Robbins (of Jawbox and Burning Airlines fame) lends to the imprint, I tend to concur. Robbins, whose magic hand in the studio is hopefully beginning to turn heads, is the perfect choice to produce a band with a sound that treads so closely to Jawbox's better moments. Likewise, a lesser man behind the controls could have turned Shiner's rich, intricate, and deep sound into a swamp, or at least would have skimmed on the depth level. That sound has been pigeon-holed as math rock (hell, the band even admits as much), which might have applied early on in Shiner's history, but applies less and less these days. Sure, they've got much of the angular song structure, the gear shifting, the multi-guitar miasma, and frenetic drumming that marks such a beast, but the brilliant songwriting, balanced and focused emotion, and lurking-near-the-surface pop instincts of Shiner set them apart from the intentionally-obtuse aggression that marks the math genre. Frontman Allen Epley has a strong, crisp voice with plenty of range (see him stretch the range to near-cracking falsetto during "Bells and Whistles"), anchored by a nuanced guttural delivery. Producer Robbins makes Epley stand tall, with warm backing harmonies. And this is no one-note band—they shift from guitar heaviness to subtle, delicate, almost Bjork-ish electronica ("The Top of the World") without apologies. One moment it's grit and guitars, the next it's shimmering, flawless melody (see especially "Surgery"). After one listen it's apparent that a great deal of time was spent polishing this disc to perfection. The effort paid off. [DeSoto] *Bo Pogue*



the shins- david ondrick

THE SHINS *Oh, Inverted World* CD

Every year, a diabolical band of villains led by the British press convenes in the Earth's core. They decide which group of artists the world will embrace, hype, and thus destroy, during the course of fifty-two weeks. The game of darts that determines the outcome is broadcast throughout the underground (and in some cases mainstream) media, and any who dare defy tradition is cast out.

This year, as per tradition, the dastardly doom-mongers blatantly ignored the recent efforts of last year's picks, such as Mercury Rev and At The Drive In, both of whom, incidentally, have made records as good as or better than the ones so slobbered upon a year prior.

In their place, a spectacular punk-rock karaoke band (The Strokes), a once-gifted songwriter who has drifted so far into a pitiful Mellencampian abyss that to say he is past his prime is too high a compliment (Ryan Adams), and The White Stripes, whose only real crime is falling short of expectations they never actually promised to meet.

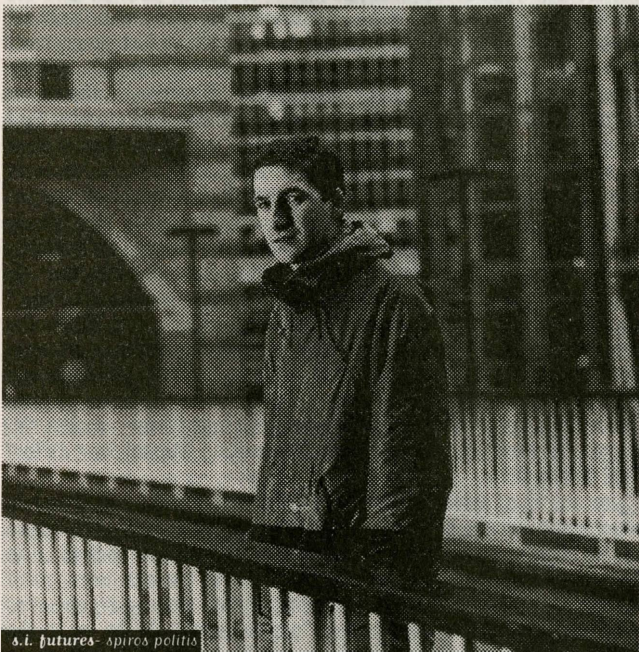
The back-up plan was The Shins (formerly Flake Music, though you'd never know it), the only band even half deserving of the shameless ass kissing the press has been obediently engaging in as of late. *Oh, Inverted World* is as potent and exciting as a pop record can be in these current times when even Ja Rule's albums are indefinitely and inarguably better than Guided By Voices's.

To the untrained ear, Albuquerque, New Mexico may appear an unlikely pot of dirt for a band that were discovered opening for pogo-inspiring bands such as Modest Mouse and 764-Hero, but as the darkness and

doubt in the lyrics becomes more and more apparent, so does the influence of the stark place of origin.

From the infectious "Caring is Creepy" (which will have you singing lyrics like "this is way beyond my remote concern of being condescending") to the Johnny Marr-meets-Colin Blunstone pop of "Girl Inform Me," *Oh, Inverted World* is without a single misstep, a record equal parts tragic, smart and captivating in spite of itself.

Sometimes, even evil gets it right. [Sub Pop] *James Jackson Toth*



s.i. futures - spires politics

S.I. FUTURES *The Mission Statement* CD

S.I. Futures (a.k.a. Si Begg, Bigfoot, CabbageBoy, and Buckfunk 3000) has been a staple of the electro / "fun" techno scene for a few years now, releasing product under different monikers on such labels as Ninja Tune and Tresor. His latest album conceptually observes the corporate world, and, in the process, puts together an agreeable and cohesive work of electronic pop.

Whether making good use of the vocoder on the infectious "We Are Not a Rock Band" or employing vocals and MCs (not bad mic skills for Europeans, I might add) on "All Terrain Aspects," Begg more often than not hits the mark better than most of his contemporaries.

Begg obviously set out to create a thinking-man's dance record, one that equally serves as dancefloor escapism as well as deep headphone listening. Mission accomplished. Smash the state! [Novamute] *James Jackson Toth*

A SILVER MT. ZION MEMORIAL ORCHESTRA AND TRA-LA-LA BAND *Born Into Trouble as the Sparks Fly Upward* CD

I was poised to write this whole review criticizing the enclosed essay, "On The Failure Of One Small Community In Achieving Its Own Ill-Defined Dreams And/Or Goals," but thought better of it. I'll just say it makes those folded, hand-screened edicts that used to come in Ebullition LP jackets read like the collected works of Ezra Pound.

Oddball vocal samples and mournful strings building to predictable climaxes are this Montreal-based six-piece's bread and butter. A Silver Mt. Zion features members of Godspeed You Black Emperor, and their songs have titles like "Sisters! Brothers! Small Boats Of Fire Are Falling From The Sky," and "Take These Hands And Throw Them In The River."

The weepy violins and verbal sound-bites (preaching decidedly leftist but ironically noncommittal pap, ad nauseum) do give out for a few moments, though, and coalesce into something quite genuinely beautiful when they do. "Built Then Burnt (Hurrah! Hurrah!)" lets loose like nothing Godspeed has ever embarked upon. Impassioned vocals are shouted/sung like Robert Smith reading an incantation to exhume Emma Goldman.

Then, quickly, things return to their regularly scheduled banality, with long, lavish pieces that are supposed to sound "epic" or "cinematic" which are really just the indulgent meanderings of a group with nothing to say. Another vocal-heavy track, "The Triumph of Our Tired Eyes," fails to resonate with any poignancy, with its cracked vocals and seemingly self-effacing refrain of "musicians are cowards."

Sure, *Born Into Trouble...* is very pretty, but so is Journey's "Open Arms," and at least with that, you don't have to suffer through pseudo-intellectual ruminations on the evils of our capitalist society or whatever. File under: Rachel's For Squatters. [Constellation] *James Jackson Toth*

SINGLE UNIT *Family of Forces* CD

Anybody can buy a sampler and computer sequencing programs. But few can create really interesting, so-called "IDM" (Intelligent Dance Music). So, it's certainly exciting to find this sonic speed-n-LSD freakout that approximates speedmetal music structures, but replaces the guitar riffs and blast-beats with millions of sampled sounds from keyboards, symphonies, drones, bells, machines, choirs, et al. Some of the samples sound so chopped up and meticulously pieced together, that single sections of what seems like one chugging guitar riff is really multiple fragments of multiple riffs that have been stitched together. And, then while that might be going on over the top, the background music will spill loops of bells or synths, or screams and drum beats blast and shift with precise and deliberate fury. In all, these 16 tracks of manic, almost obsessive-compulsive sound collage are worth the effort to discover and decode. [Jester Records/VME] *Dave Clifford*

THE SIX PARTS SEVEN *Silence Magnifies Sound* CD

A collection of mid-tempo instrumentals reminiscent of Tortoise and Windsor For the Derby, but Six Parts Seven has added a space-rock edge to this offering. Parts of the record sound like some of the better moments of any Spiritualized record, but these guys create the same dreamy atmosphere with more standard instruments and fewer effects. I did find myself wondering if they were ever going to turn off the reverb pedals, but in spite of the reverb overload you just can't deny the excellent composition and beauty of most of these songs. This record definitely grew on me after a couple of listens. There are some outstanding tracks on *Silence Magnifies Sound* for fans of both instrumental and space rock. [Troubleman] *Eric Frost*

SKIN YARD *Start At the Top* CD

Skin Yard read like a Pacific Northwest *who's who?*; a band that featured Seattle's most sought after producer, a future rock star, and a record label mogul. Of course Jack Endino continues to produce, Matt Cameron has his post Soundgarden project—Wellwater Conspiracy, and Daniel House still runs C/Z Records. It has been more than ten years since Skin Yard called it quits and it's about time that this material resurfaced. Released as a collection of singles, rarities, and outtakes, *Start At the Top* runs from their Sub Pop single through the Cameron jazzbo period and on into early unreleased tracks that close the CD. Listening to some of these cuts reminds me how underrated Skin Yard was. Their record *Hallowed Ground* was an immediate favorite when it came out in '89 and still holds up. Frontman Ben McMillan was a great screamer and embodied the return to rock that Seattle championed so well while Endino's guitar work helped set the standard for everything grunge. It remains an influential period and will continue to be regarded with indifference as the time when people who shunned mainstream culture were soon the focal point of everything commercial. It was a time when hair was longer, days were shorter, and rock was once again reborn. [C/Z] *Troy Brookins*

SQUAREPUSHER *Go Plastic* CD

Squarepusher's *Go Plastic* is what everyone rightfully expected Aphex Twin's latest, *Drukqs*, to sound like—a major step forward from an already-legendary artist. But while *Drukqs* is flawed, if only by its lack of evolution, *Go Plastic* burns rickety bridges and builds aircraft carriers in their place.

This, Squarepusher's first album since 1998's fusion jazz-inflected *Music is a Rotted One Note*, is an abstract masterpiece of breakneck beats, dubbed out two-step and laptop agro that couldn't sound less like it's predecessor. From the tasteful vocoder-treated single "My Red Hot Car" to the non-linear collage of "My Fucking Sound," *Go Plastic* is the dream

of one hundred robotic choirs realized by one man.

The CD-skipping paranoia of the spastic "Greenways Trajectory" is almost reminiscent of Kid 606 at his most hopped-up and reckless. Then there is the heavy dub influence that runs through a good deal of *Go Plastic*, as on the rude-boy sample-propelled "Go Spastic," and on the murky final track "Plaistow Flex Out." The uncharacteristically chilled-out vibe of the latter track is occasionally interrupted by a sound that could only be described by imagining what it would sound like if a DJ performed live cuts using a compact disc instead of vinyl.

The only thing not working in Squarepusher's Tom Jenkinson's favor is that, in all likelihood, he'll never top this.

Brothers and sisters, the bar has been raised. Intimidatingly good. [Warp] *James Jackson Toth*

SORRY ABOUT DRESDEN *The Convenience of Indecision* CD

One would be hard pressed to find a better example of a band that satisfies the postulate "geography equals destiny." Only in indie rock music might a hybrid of the cultural influences of Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Omaha, Nebraska produce a recognizable topography. Sorry About Dresden writes rhapsodic epics that are suggestive of Omaha's Bright Eyes (Dresden frontman Matt Oberst is the brother of Bright Eyes' Conor) but with less frenetic vocals that are warm and expressive ala Eric Bachman (Archers of Loaf, Crooked Fingers). Swells of climactically arranged guitar parts coincide with the peaks and valleys of Oberst's dynamic vocals but, taken as a whole, the landscape provides few breathtaking or unexpected moments. Nice ride, but one that might be overly familiar to seasoned travelers. [Saddle Creek] *Jeffrey Herrmann*

SOUL JUNK 1942 CD EP

On Pere Ubu's second LP (1978's *Dub Housing*), the question "What shall we do with a drunken sailor?" was surreally (and rather earnestly) posed. From the enigmatic Soul-Junk, this six-track conundrum arrives, bearing the post-post-ã (add another "post" by the time you read this)—modern update: "What shall we do with a drunken Ubu?" Soul-Junk has, metaphorically, bothered to ask the question—and has even come up with the answer: "Record it."

And you should be glad they did. This is less like the Pavement/Sonic Youth-hybrid of maestro Glen Galaxy's former band, Truman's Water. The mechanized, gargey rhythms, interspersed with passages of squalling clarinet and sprawling electronics, conjure the image of a juiced-up, hoarse David Thomas and Co., tottering down the stairs and into the recording studio—not a bad thing at all; in this case, the basement of

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member Daniel Smith's folk's house. But, unlike the renowned warbling of the former Crocus Behemoth, there's a parched, Royal Trux-quality to Galaxy's vocals, making things even more fucked-up and interesting. There's been some flirtation with hip hop beats and rhyming on recent works by this band, but it's not in evidence here (probably for the better). I've heard debate regarding the sincerity of Galaxy's Christian-oriented lyric content; earlier songs do little more than quote, wholesale, from *The Good Book*. Maybe it is a put-on. But I'd venture to guess that, by this point, he really means it. Hey, fine; whatever he happens to be going on about feels more like incidental rambling than fire-and-brimstone righteousness, anyway. For us non-believers, it just ups the weirdness quotient—which is good. And a lot of us heathens also dig good gospel music, as it has many of the attributes found here: heartfelt conviction, sincerity, and (no pun...) *soul*. A couple of these cuts feature a "men's choir" that sounds like it's found the spot where the sacramental hootch is hidden.

This hit me as curiously bizarre on the first spin, and has grown in appeal—dramatically—ever since. [Soundsfamilyre, P.O. Box 225, Clarksboro, NJ 08020] *Peter Aaron*

SPIRITUALIZED *Let It Come Down* CD

Wow. How simply transparent it all seems. First, Jason Spaceman cuts loose his backing band and they form the talented, but passionless Lupine Howl. Then, Spaceman issues his follow-up to the classic homage to classic rock and drug-induced tribute to drug use, *Ladies and Gentlemen, We Are Floating In Space*, and it sounds like a guy with lots of ideas, but no songs or real band to back it up. And, I don't note that because I already knew that he'd fired his band. I heard the new album before I knew that it was mostly padded with studio-musicians. But, the bloated orchestrations, limp performances and somnambulist songwriting makes it all too apparent that this album just simply can't live up to its predecessor. I hate to say it, because that implies that the album must compare—and, thus remain similar—to the most successful effort. But, really, *Let It Come Down* is just a bland and listless record, regardless of lineage. Sure, there are nice Beach Boys harmonies and references (perhaps too many, really), and some really beautiful parts here and there. However, there's not a single riff, melody, lyric, or rhythm that sticks in the brain. Mr. Spaceman now simply sounds influenced by his own heavily-influenced material. Or, oddly self-referential to his rock history references. Lyrical platitudes like, "the only time I'm drink and drug free/ Is when I get my drinks and drugs for free," sound more like lame bumper sticker slogans than song lyrics. The palpable desperation that had made his unabashedly derivative music in Spacemen 3 and previous Spiritualized releases so clever and endearing is gone, and now all we have to dig into is the music... and, sorry to say, Spaceman's got little to latch onto here. *Let It Come Down* is just a big-budget orchestral production of weak songwriting. [Arista] *Dave Clifford*

THE SPITS CD

There are times when nothing hits the spot like 100% boneheaded, retrocentric, lumpen punk (of all the kinds punk there were/are): three or four chords; that pedaling chord work which hearkens back to Eddie Cochrane's oeuvre, "Summertime Blues" being the exemplar; guitar fried in "fuzz" till it turns to smoke; drums 'n' bass working in concert to yield what can only be described as "tub thumping." All the while, the lead singer declaims in cod-Cockney accent his complaints about not getting gash and how all non-skateboarders suck, and that fugitive Nazis live next door—this last actually being basic reportage, not a pejorative statement. This is *The Spits*.

If you're a devoted punk fan, you probably have dozens of records like this 'un, but none (or at least, few) recorded after 1990. In an age of rampant careerism, making a record as out-of-step with what's viable product—even in the indie world—is an act of anti-consumerist heroism and individuality of which even Zarathustra would speak admiringly. Beyond that, this is just the right stuff stripped of all extraneous matter, impulse, and artistic imperatives. It's played nasty, short, and brutish for cheap thrills. And though cheap, they *are* thrills which little pop, and also little "alternative," "underground," indie rock, metal, or even punk aspires to these days. [Nickel & Dime, PO Box 12171, Seattle WA 98122] *Howard W.*

STARS OF THE LID *The Tired Sounds Of...* dbi CD

A strange title for a record that breaks new ground for the long-time ambient all-stars. Stars of the Lid have been one of my favorite ambient/electronic groups for a long time, and they do not disappoint here on *The Tired Sounds of...* New to these recordings is an almost symphonic composition, evoked not only by use of more traditional instruments like strings, but also with a repetition of musical phrases that brings to mind a complex fugue or a slowed down and tweaked-out waltz. Long time fans will find resonant compositional elements with previous recordings, but in *Tired Sounds* they play themselves out in a more subtle and complex way. Highlights from this two CD set include "Austin Texas Mental Hospital," and "Requiem for Dying Mothers." As with any Stars record, multiple listens are required to grasp the complexity at play, and no one will require any prodding to spin these beautiful tracks over and over. Buy their whole catalog today—Stars of the Lid are undoubtedly the best thing going in ambient today. [Kranky] *Eric Frost*

STEAMBOAT SWITZERLAND *Budapest* CD; *AC/DB* (Hayden) CD

At their best Steamboat Switzerland represent an updating of the

classic Larry Young heavy organ-bass-drums combo. And at their worst they make an ill-advised dip into the remix pond. Because I am a cheery young lad (no angry old men here—really!) I will start with the best. Organs and drums start boiling on *AC/DB (Hayden)*, a great indicator of the juggernaut Steamboat Switzerland can become. On the second track, “DBI” the trio snaps into a shuddering rhythm beneath a blanket of organ throb. This album is chock full of that kind of action, reminiscent of the heavy jams of the early ’70s leavened by a bit of randomness and the stop-start dynamics of recent indie rock. The fact that *AC/DB (Hayden)* was recorded live is even more of a bonus, the CD captures the dynamic of live performance perfectly and Steamboat Switzerland seldom stray into self-indulgence. A 13-track disc doesn’t leave much room for meandering. So who steered the band wrong? I ask because *Budapest* is a complete waste of time. All the strengths of the trio are thrown out the window in exchange for a dubious “remix” ethos that presents shards and snippets of a live performance strung together by one Stephan Wittwer. Taking a recording of a live performance he proceeds to give the listener an aimless disassembly of the band’s music. The conceit that Herr Wittwer can somehow recombine and improve upon the work of what is (on the evidence of the *AC/DB* album) a pretty good live band is really hard to take. Especially when the resulting *Budapest* album is really nothing more than a demonstration recording for a computer program. Go for the recording of the real band, skip another pointless remix album. [Grob, distributed by Dutch East India] *Bruce Adams*

STEVEN R. SMITH *Slate Branches CD*

That El Stoopido early ’70s metal band Mountain once wrote a (bad) song called “Theme for an Imaginary Western.” Title was wasted on the wrong disc. Smith’s four-track recorded, vaguely gloomy and tense instrumental stuff should’ve sported such a moniker; all the cuts here sound like themes for black-as-night road movies where everybody dies in the desert, killed by psychotic truckers or something. This is DIY at its highest and best form: Smith’s brooding tunes, plucked or strummed or flailed on guitar through light washes of reverb, virtually ooze atmospherics. Reference early Sonic Youth (a la “Freezer Burn”) or think of 16-rpm shoegaze, and you might be coming close. Tres bien. [Little Brother] *David B. Livingstone*

STRATFORD 4 *The Revolt Against Tired Noises CD*

The young upstart San Francisco quartet, the Stratford 4 merge the drugged drone of Spiritualized with the chopped histrionics of the Velvet Underground. Although its guitar-effect swirl and laconic rhythms tend to sound like “Britpopmania”—a tribute to our favorite bands from across the pond,” the Stratford 4 is catchy and cute enough to get away with it. But, there’s something weird about vocalist Chris Streng’s imitations of Jason Spaceman’s slurred lullabies. While they’re certainly not living up to the bold assertion of the album title’s “revolt,” they do make good use of tired noises. [Jetset] *Dave Clifford*

THE STROKES *The Modern Age CD EP*

The Strokes were “buzz band” of the year (2001). Look for a year or two of knee-jerk coverage and adulation in *Time Out*, *Spin*, *Flaunt*, *Paper*, and the rest of the “hep” consumer-culture algorithmic series.

So whaddya really got? Singer Julian Casablancas does a good, restrained Lou Reed /Iggy sneer. The band chunders well: all downstroke/no FX rhythm guitar ka-doing-ery support by bass/drum clatter like bingo-tiles in a rotating tin drum. Guitar tends a bit toward clipped pseudo-ska new wave sputtering (bad Elvis Costello=Joe Jackson). Song writing’s not severe or visionary. Some ironic neo-Soul styling. “Last Nite” echoes stinky, late John Lennon.

The singing and instrumental attack ameliorate the weaknesses some. Better writing and slightly more extreme revamping of playing would yield something killer. Of course if Dandy Warhols stopped kidding and quoting they could blow ’em out of the water, toot sweet. [Rough Trade] *Howard W.*

SUFJAN STEVENS *Enjoy Your Rabbit CD*

Although it’s difficult to say this with just two releases to his name, Sufjan Stevens hits upon an updated batch of themes that are as interesting sounding as ’70s classical cum synth pioneer Isao Tomita’s *Snowflakes Are Dancing*. And like Tomita’s very bright and toy-store-like

synth arrangements on his 1974 debut album, Stevens provides plenty of similarly extra-sweet melodies wrapped around the theme of the animals of the Chinese Zodiac. Stevens does occasionally stray into the realm of avant-garde or even prissy techno but those moments don’t take away from animated bird chatter, sutra-like chanting and majestic faux-classical build-ups he manages to coax out of his gear. Nice. [Asthmatic Kitty Records, PO Box 31934, Santa Fe, MN, 87594] *Wm. Christman*

SUN RA *Nuclear War CD*

Atavistic’s Unheard Music Series once again provides a necessary bridge between collector-vermin and cash-strapped music lovers by loosing obscure treasures from their catalog purgatory. *Nuclear War* is splendid Ra, recorded barely before his discovery by the rock world (and grudging acceptance by the jazz mainstream) and saw the light of day for approximately two months back in ’82 on Britain’s Y records as a super-rare 45, and an even scarcer LP. Columbia Records’ initial rejection of the LP was especially heartbreaking for Ra, who saw the title track with its loopy keyboards and earthy refrain (“Nuclear war/It’s a motherfucker”) as a potentially huge hit. (Almost to prove his point, Rockmaster Scott’s underground pre-gangsta hit “The Roof is on Fire” came out a mere year later, its catchy m-f chorus shouted by soused badass wannabes and their sorority girlfriends.) Political profanity aside, this is a sprightly, more straightforward Arkestra offering with a warm, swinging bent. Especially nice is the simmering soul-jazz suaveness of “Blue Intensity” and chanteuse June Tyson’s sunny vocal on “Sometimes I’m Happy.” Good to see this back among the living. [Unheard Music/Atavistic] *Cecile Cloutier*

SUNSET VALLEY / JOHN VANDERSLICE 7”

Sunset Valley’s “Parade On My Rain” (lordy do I hate titles like that) is a nice enough pop song punctuated by keyboards and Cars-style hooks. John Vanderslice (late of emo also-rans MK Ultra), however, is the clear winner here. “My Old Flame” is a beautiful pop song embellished by modest acoustic picking and Vanderslice’s plaintive and natural voice. Strings, drums and harmony vocals are so tasteful that you barely notice them. The more I listen, the more I like. I can see a lot of folks really digging this. [Sea Level] *James Jackson Toth*

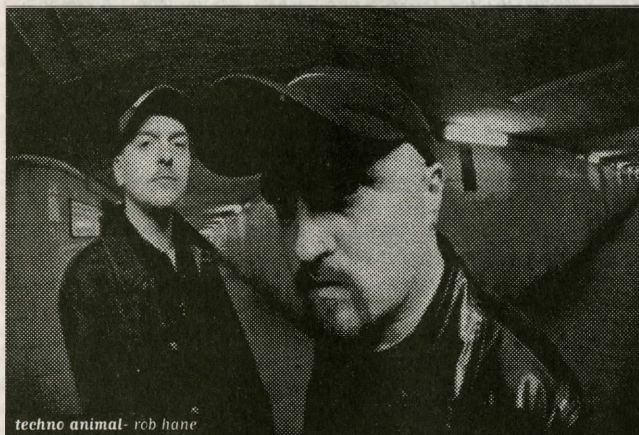
SURFACE OF ECEON *The King Beneath the Mountain CD*

Take Adam Forkner from high flyers Yume Bitsu and join him together with most of the equally floating Landing and you get the *really* expansive sounds of Eceon. The three-guitar attack on *The King Beneath* just soars then falls with a chilly, snowfall-like series of notes. No grand movements or bombast, just the feeling of the tide as it moves over the sand and slowly recedes with the sun sending out shards of light into your eyes. Engulfing and warm like a feather comforter. [Strange Attractors, PO Box 2827, Olympia, WA 98507] *Les Scurry*

SURVIVAL RESEARCH LABORATORIES CD

I’m skeptical that there are many readers of *Your Flesh* who are unfamiliar with the work of Survival Research Labs, but just in case, here’s the story in a nutshell: SRL was founded in 1978 by Mark Pauline as a collective of technicians “dedicated to re-directing the techniques, tools, and tenets of industry, science, and the military away from their typical manifestations.” Over the last 20 years they’ve produced more than 50 performances in the United States, Europe and Japan, involving flame throwers, Tesla coils, corpse/puppet hybrid robots and countless other mechanical devices in massive, seemingly life-threatening exhibitions (many of which are readily available on videocassette, if you’re curious). Since 1992, the group has employed GX Jupiter-Larsen (of the seminal noise group The Haters) as its Chief Sound Engineer, and this hour-long disc is a compilation of five performance soundtracks created during his tenure. The strongest cuts are the two featuring Saturday morning cartoon sounds, with lots of *boi-yoi-yoing* spring noises mixed live into a wash of grinding gears and large explosions, included to accentuate the more comedic elements of SRL and squarely hitting the target. A similar approach was taken in their 1997 exhibition at Austin’s Longhorn Speedway, mixing a pre-recorded car race into the live mix, and while it’s an interesting little drool-inducer on its own, it predictably falls a bit flat outside its intended environment. Also included are the traditional “clici-clic” pre-show track (the sound of an amplified hole-punch) and a recording from 1998 of an amplified funnel dragging

on rotating sandpiper and manipulated through various effects (this was also the only time Jupiter-Larsen has provided live accompaniment at an event). Recording quality is pretty high throughout, and the liner notes, while a bit choppy, are informative and thorough. For the SRL enthusiast, it's a pretty valuable little document. For the rest of us, it's a non-essential, but quality aural cleanser. [Sub Rosa] *David Wilcox*



techno animal- rob hane

TECHNO ANIMAL *The Brotherhood Of the Bomb CD*

Techno Animal inhabits a nice niche for me. Some really pissed-off politically-tinged rapping over severely distorted beats. Some grating, grindy noise that shifts from barely audible to just THERE, right in your face, tickling the ear's sweet spot. Unlike the past two TA releases, this seems to be more power-packed with sound coming at you from all directions. There's the aforementioned anger, depraved beat-throb and some really nice dub sandwiched in the middle that I could listen to *all day*. However, this isn't for everyone. There is much that is very challenging and ugly on this disc that will have weaker-willed people falling away in a dead faint. You have been warned. [Matador] *Wm. Christman*

THALIA ZEDEK *Been Here And Gone CD*

Thalia Zedek has been a presence in the indie kingdom for the last 20 years. She has been a Dangerous Bird, stuck around for Live Skull's second half, and fronted both Uzi and Come; the latter for nearly ten years. Zedek has now taken up residency under the title "solo artist" and has not lost her touch for invoking the spirit of a mainline rush. Thick and

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slow, Zedek's seductive, non-filtered rasp crawls to the beat of a cemetery waltz. While a bit on the quiet side, somewhat of a departure from previous projects, every corner of this record is darker than the next. And darkness is where Zedek thrives, survives, and kicks the shit out of herself. She has built a career on despair and angst—every bit of it real. You can feel it. [Matador] *Troy Brookins*

THA LIKS *XO Experience CD*

Not much has changed besides the name of this West Coast rap collective (they used to go by Tha Alkaholics) who rarely get more profound than "we don't give a fuck about nothin." Still, MCs E-Swift, J-Ro and Tash supply enough intoxicated swagger to keep things relatively interesting for the duration of *XO Experience*.

Tha Liks are wise to open the album with the first of two scene-stealing cameos by Xzibit on "Barcode," an infectious opener that speaks the gospel of alcohol and partying. Other cameos by Shae Fiol, Busta Rhymes (who proves once again he's more than the sum of his Sprite commercials on the album's highlight, "Bully Foot"), Butch Cassidy, Kurupt of Tha Dogg Pound, and King Tee (on whose first single the Liks made their debut years ago) save *XO Experience* from collapsing under

it's own shallow banalities.

The beats are top notch as far as lazy West Coast kick-clap-kick-clap patterns go. Though the formula of a group so short on social commentary may grow a little tired before the album's fifty-eight minutes (mercifully short by hip hop standards) elapse, they never run out of things to say about partying hard. The philosophy is summed up well on "The Bubble," which features lyrics admitting "we act stupid off the tonic and whiskey / smoke so much weed you might think I'm a hippie." Hmm.

KRS One they're not, but whoever said Edutainment didn't let out every once in a while for an Irish holiday? Tap the bottle. [Loud] *James Jackson Toth*

THAWFOR *"Where Thawght is Worshipped 2.2" / "Left Behind" 12"* With "Where Thawght is Worshipped 2.2," you could lose your tongue, hands, and all ability to speak or communicate, and still win an argument in the defense of hip hop by simply playing this 12" for the skeptics.

With cameos that read like a who's-who of abstract hip-hop, including Rob Sonic of Sonic Sum, Slug of Atmosphere, and the always superb Mike Ladd, the two tracks here begin where spoken word and hip hop meet. Over a slow-roasted beat courtesy of The Opus, Chicago's Thawfor proves that he can hold his own on "Left Behind," on which he drops knowledge while an operatic female vocal sample supplies the chorus. [Tri-Eight] *James Jackson Toth*



thelonious monk- den hunstein

THELONIOUS MONK *Columbia Years 3 CD box set*

Much has been said about Thelonious Monk's extremely introverted leanings where he spoke riddles wrapped-up in haikus, if he chose to speak at all. But Monk spoke volumes through his music. He spent much of the '40s and early '50s writing tunes, creating a body of work that would be equaled by few composers in jazz. He recorded countless classics for Blue Note, Prestige, Milestone, and Riverside, and then recorded these tunes again for Columbia in the '60s. The Columbia years were busy ones for Monk, appearing in solo settings as well as in trios, quartets, and large groups. This three-CD set features all those combos and also splits the material between studio and live recordings, with a few unreleased tunes added for good measure. Some have grumbled that much of the Columbia material had already been recorded earlier in

his career, but, to state the obvious, each trip into the world of Thelonious Monk has its merits. Monk's repertoire of originals provides an outstanding program, and some of his covers are so unique that they are standards in their own right. Many of the classics are included here, and, fortunately for us, the sound has been revamped again to make this boxed set a marked improvement from when the material was first digitized in the '80s. In fact, there is only one real gripe: why do a sampler when all the stuff needs to be repackaged and updated? Nonetheless, this is a nice portrait of a true jazz genius. [Legacy] *Tad Hendrickson*

THIRD EYE FOUNDATION *I Poo Poo on your Juju* CD

Reportage: *I Poo Poo on your Juju* is the swan-song from Third Eye Foundation, oddly enough a compilation of early remix work for other artists. These works are quintessential chill-out soundtracks: atmospheric, spacey, moody, and mainly without beats. Not to say they aren't rhythmic as all move in synchronous sympathy to clear cut, if tricksily complicated tempos, but actual drums, mechanized simulacra, and in fact any other percussive presence is conspicuously absent.

Keyboards are the dominant voice. Ver' often grand piano plays elegiac Romantic phrases over and over while washes of more expressionistic sound—usually synthesizer salvos or sustained drones—are popped whimsically in and out of the mix. Some selections are layers of interlocking ticky-tocking electronic melodic lines, a sequence of gorgeously embroidered scraps. These echo Eno's seminal *Another Green World*.

All in all *I Poo Poo on your Juju* is more involved, challenging, and ambitiously written than most of the sonic wallpaper of this genre. [Merge] *Howard W.*



TIGHT BRO'S FROM WAY BACK WHEN *Lend You a Hand* CD

The Tight Bro's continue their balls-out AC/DC-meets-Mötörhead-meets-MC5-meets-alcohol onslaught with *Lend You a Hand*. The record kicks ass in a drinking a case of Shiner Bock at Emo's in Austin, Texas in the middle of July kind of way. There are some distant echoes of Karp (the late, great, and super-heavy Washington band that featured Jared Warren, now the Tight Bro's singer, on bass and vocals), particularly in songs like "Nose In The Corner." But the Tight Bro's take similar classic hard rock influences in a somewhat different direction—while Karp's focus was on heaviness, this band is really about fucking rocking. [Kill Rock Stars] *Che Arthur*

TIJUANA CRIME SCENE *Change of Venue* EP

Names are deceiving sometimes. I thought these guys were from San Diego or something, and played abrasive punk. You know what happens when you assume? You tend to be wrong. Tijuana Crime Scene are from Lawrence, Kansas, and instead of relentless hardcore, you get charming, low-key pop a la Dinosaur Jr. and Ben Folds Five. Not a bad song on the disc, but "Bad Idea" and "Summer of '87" are especially nice. [Arise, P.O. Box 45, Shelbyville, KY 40066] *Trinity C.*

TOBY DAMMIT *Top Dollar* CD

"Toby Dammit" is *ze nom de batterie avec* Larry Mullins, best known for his drumming and percussion work behind Iggy Pop and Michael Gira. *Top Dollar* is a relatively pure work—99 percent driven by and generated by wacking things. No vocals and barely any other instrumental voices.

But that's not so restrictive these days. What with the technology and technique of sampling, tunable electronic drums, and the aesthetic language and prerogatives of avant-garde dance music, Mullins is able to weave a fairly involved and involving sonic text.

First there's the groove—each begins with solid, fleet, articulate but ultimately straightforward, drum beats. Larry then accents and adds overall texture and atmosphere via various electronic effects—often adding simple melody lines—and sound FX (bytes of dialogue, racing cars revving, etc.) Sometimes these are continuous sheets of sound that fade in and out; often they are triggered and function as added rhythmic elements, underscoring or running contrary to the primary pulse. "Modus Operandi" starts with a house beat and runs through various stock dance conventions: filtering, dub-warfare, and so on. This would work on most progressive dance floors.

In the end, *Top Dollar* is an ingenious take on making a pure percussion album but still doesn't transcend the inherent limitations of the format. If you're a fan of songs and involved structures and melody, this is going to wear on you after a track or two. [Omplatten, PO Box 230712, Ansonia Sta., NYC 10023] *Howard W.*

TOMAHAWK CD

With Duane Denison from Jesus Lizard, Mike Patton from Faith No More, John Stanier from Helmet, and Kevin Rutmanis from Cows, the individual talents collected in Tomahawk are impossible to deny. Unfortunately, while Tomahawk's debut release does have a few moments of brilliance, it generally fails to harness the potential. The band members traded tapes back and forth to develop the songs, and it shows. The disc, for the most part, sounds stapled together. The mix is dominated a bit too heavily by Mike Patton (with all the talent here it seems unnecessary for anyone to jump out front) and Denison's ringing guitar doesn't get the attention it deserves. What they really need to do is lock themselves in a room for a few weeks and come together as a band. I'd be very interested in the results of that experiment. [Ipecac] *Brett Horn*

TRISTAN HONSIGER, STEVE BERESFORD, DAVID TOOP, AND TOSHINORI KONDO *Double Indemnity/Imitation of Life* (1980/81) CD

It's difficult to avoid waxing nostalgic about the early '80s; a time when improbable collaborations like the one between improvising pianist Steve Beresford and members of the Slits seemingly happened every day. John Corbett snatched two albums Beresford captained from the jaws of oblivion for his Unheard Music Series and though every minute of *Double Indemnity* and *Imitation of Life* are not life altering, this CD is a pretty vital document. The original vinyl releases were on Dick O'Dell's Y imprint, also home to various Pop Group and Slits-oriented releases back in the day. The music on this CD is definitely of the kitchen sink improv variety. Beresford mans the piano and flugelhorn for his duets with cellist Tristan Honsiger on *Double Indemnity* and then picks up a whole stack of instruments teaming up with Honsiger, trumpeter Toshinori Kondo and multi-instrumentalist David Toop on *Imitation of Life*. Of the two albums I personally prefer the quartet; there are more sounds and variations to cue in on. Both albums are jam packed with grating sounds and flirt with a wackiness that can test the listener's patience. It's this willingness on the part of the musicians to flirt with embarrassment that also gives the two albums their staying power. This is not overly serious or po-faced and (especially on the second half of the CD) the dabs of electronics and dub technique that Beresford still works with give *Double Indemnity/Imitation of Life* (1980/81) some relevance 20 years from now. This is not an easy CD to enjoy by any means, but the moments of exuberant improvisation justify its existence. [Unheard Music Series/Atavistic] *Bruce Adams*

TRISTEZA *Mixed Signals* CD

Mixed Signals is a collection of experimental electronica remixes from Tristeza's *Dream Signals in Full Circles*. Their usual brand of instrumental rock has been transformed into diverse electronica styles—from ambient/ethereal to IDM and experimental breakbeat. The band recruited a slew of musicians, such as Windy and Carl, Scientific American, and Simon Raymonde from Cocteau Twins, and took the best tracks for this album. Some nice results, but I especially like Diagram of a Suburban Chaos' cool remix of "I am a Cheetah"—slow and pretty

with an almost Throbbing Gristle electro-industrial vibe filtered through Jean Michel Jarre and Raymond Scott. [Tiger Style, 149 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10012] *Trinity C.*

VANDERMARK 5 *Acoustic Machine* CD

By now, nobody can deny the ability of the Vandermark 5 to overwhelm an audience with sheer maneuverability and power. So the obvious challenge for the band is to impress us all with their subtlety. This album's title is an indication of the group's intent to pull back on the reins a touch. A weekly showcase at the Empty Bottle in Chicago has allowed V5 to play with Jeb Bishop putting down the electric guitar and opting for the trombone solely and in a small, intimate setting. For my money they've made their best album yet. The impact is still there, the twin reeds of Vandermark and Rempis can rip and tear like they always have. But there is a space and balance on this album that I haven't always consistently heard on other V5 albums. Take the soft introduction into "Coast to Coast," which shows how adeptly the quintet can play it low key and direct. Or the blurt of "Wind Out" countered by Bishop's muffled trombone and powered by a swinging rhythm. Throughout the album the individual players can carry a bit of the listener's focus, and the workings of the band are a wonder to hear. *Acoustic Machine* finds the band working at their best balance ever, with compositions that showcase individual players and allow the band to swing together in concise arrangements. [Atavistic] *Bruce Adams*

VAZ *Demonstration In Micronesia* CD

New sludge from former shit-stirrers Hammerhead, shaved down to two and running under the name Vaz. An unfortunate mixture of Melvins, Hawkwind, and Foetus—call it a poor man's Chrome if you will. Unfortunately, it never gets off the ground. I expected a bit of a rumble and got nothing close to a growl. Recycled AmRep with a mix of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. [Load] *Troy Brooks*

V FOR VENDETTA CD

V for Vendetta boasts of its prog/math-rock tendencies, but the Providence, R.I. duo's recently-released debut album on Mr. Lady Records (home of LeTigre, Electrelane, and Tami Hart) sounds more like a mixed bag of indie rock, than an all out Inna-Gadda-Da-Vendetta. The duo's art-school influences weigh heavily upon its music, but V4V never seem pretentious or particularly arty. Rather, V4V sound simply influenced by too many things at once, and as if they try to embody them all. The result is an occasionally awkward, sometimes inspired cross-breed of genres and styles where the Spinanes play Rush, or Bikini Kill do Voivod. A pretty fair start, but nothing here quite hits on anything

pedantic posturing, perhaps better suited to a label that deals in this sort of thing exclusively (Estrus comes to mind). Still, when Vue aren't trying so hard to rewrite their favorite jukebox hits, they slow things down a bit, often to glorious results. The Stones-y "Falling Through a Window" and back-to-back winners "We've Already Got Our Minds Made Up For You" and "Find Your Home" make up the batch of moments on *Find Your Home* that thoroughly convince and entertain. Elsewhere, there is a pointless tape collage (that's right, *tape collage*) and more than a few unfortunate occasions of Doors-like vocal inflections.

There are lot of bands like Vue right now who are sadly discovering the New York and Detroit "scenes" about 25 years too late. I suppose for those who tenaciously cling to glorified histories they've never experienced save for within the pages of *Please Kill Me*, this type of thing rocks the house. I see dead people. [Sub Pop] *James Jackson Toth*

WATERBOYS *A Rock In the Weary Land* CD

If you look up "hit or miss" in the dictionary, the definitive band would be the Waterboys. Singer/songwriter Mike Scott—somewhat like his idol, Bob Dylan—may be so detached from his audience that every song is a musical roll of the dice. You never can be sure exactly what he's going for—is it country? Is it folk? Is it Beatlesque pop? Sometimes it works, and he'll hit some powerful über-folk vein (i.e. the ubiquitous soaring soundtrack ballad, "Fisherman's Blues"). Other times, it sounds like absolute garbage. I'm still not sure what to make of this after several listens. It's mostly contemporary alternative radio-rock, with those big ultra-compressed rack effect guitars squealing, buzzing, and chunking all over songs that sound obviously like they were written for acoustic guitar strumming. You could blame a producer's meddling for this sonic mismatch, but the record's producer is Scott himself. To his credit, Scott's impassioned singing and clever chord combinations remain intact, and lend a level of warmth to the proceedings. "Let It Happen" starts the album off with an ominous muted string guitar strum and paranoiac lyrics oddly reminiscent of Roger Waters' solo albums. And, that's probably a reasonable comparison for the album on the whole. It—like Waters' stuff—seems self-incriminating and out of touch with current music, but trying to remain commercially viable. There are a handful of songs herein that, production be damned, are quite great ("Is She Conscious" and "The Charlatan's Lament" would've been big hits in a different age, and performed by "cooler" bands). Thus, Scott redeems himself, despite himself. And, that may be one of the most interesting things about the Irish songwriter: he's still capable of writing good material while his intentions are lost at sea. [Razor & Tie] *Dave Clifford*

WAYNE HANCOCK *A-Town Blues* CD

That's Wayne "The Train" to you, pardner. This is Wayne's fourth stab at channeling the spirits of Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell through a guitar, lap steel, upright, and stripped-down trap kit. It's a finger-picking, foot-shuffling recreation of honky-tonk and West Texas swing, with a smidgen of big band thrown in, authentic right down to the nasal vocal delivery, low-budget living, hillbilly English, lyrical odes to road travel and heavy drinking, and no-frills production. There's a sense these days that, having weathered wave-after-wave of cloying retro fads from rockabilly to lounge to swing, the listening public should cast a wary eye on hipster snake oil salesmen peddling roots-influenced retreads with a nudge and a wink. Well, Wayne's recreations are sincere, he doesn't wear silly historical costumes on stage, and, if it helps establish credibility, he doesn't seem to be getting rich off of this shit. Sure, you're more likely to see urbane rockers than actual Gilley's types enjoying his live set, but Wayne comes at you unapologetically with his heritage on his sleeve. Furthermore, the chops on steel guitar are incredible, and Wayne does sound quite a bit like Hank the elder. [Bloodshot] *Bo Pogue*

WAYNE HANCOCK *A Town Blues* CD

For those who think country music, the kind your granddaddy listened to, has come and gone, Wayne "The Train" Hancock is going to convince you otherwise. Raised on a double dose of Hank Williams and Snow, Hancock isn't shy when it comes to placing your finger on the roots of his delivery. The man is definitely the second coming of Hank Sr., full of piss 'n' vinegar and swinging honky-tonk lullabies. *A Town Blues* was the soundtrack that carried me through a two-week summer road trip, looping over and through the Northwest and down and out the

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extraordinary. [Mr. Lady Records] *Dave Clifford*

VIZA-NOIR CD

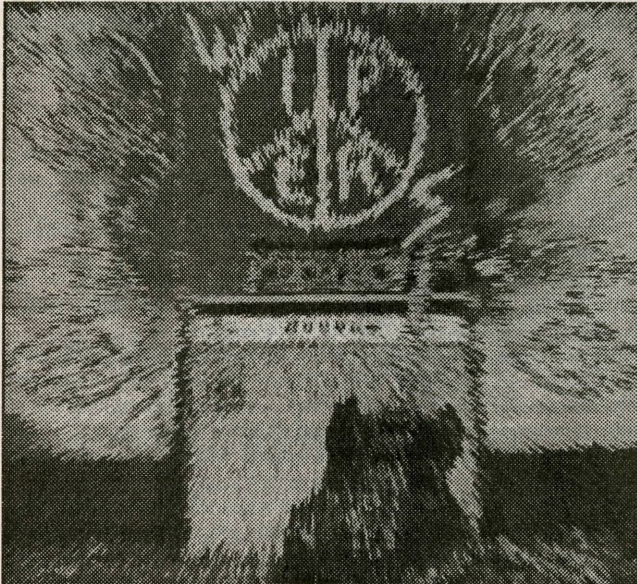
I won't let these Chicago dudes get behind the wheel of any vehicle I'm riding in, because they definitely drive like Jehu, if you catch my drift. And, if you don't catch said veer, let me lay it out for you: they sound like Drive Like Jehu. Oh, they've got some other shit under the hood too, but their overlying rhythms, riffs, and structures all point to head-on collision with the Jehu catalog. Thanks guys, but I'd rather walk. [Flameshovel Records] *Dave Clifford*

VUE *Find Your Home* CD

San Francisco's Vue get dressed every morning to So Alone, fuck to the *Nuggets* box set, and fall asleep every night to *Blank Generation*. Somehow at night, though, the dreams get all confused and they wake up in a cold sweat trying to shake the image of Wayne/Jayne County impersonating Jim Morrison, skin popping and cock-thrusting his way to their Ramones poster wallpapered rehearsal space to walk right up to them and give 'em a great big kiss.

Find Your Way, the bands second LP for Sub Pop, is a reverently irrelevant but occasionally rollicking 32 minutes of idol worship and

Southwest. The music and Hancock's country twang blended perfectly with never ending two-lane blacktop, miles of plain country, and spontaneous thunderstorms. And that's something Nashville's current representatives are incapable of creating. [Bloodshot] *Troy Brooks*



WIPERS CD box set

Back in the very early '80s Greg Sage's Wipers created cerebrally challenging and inventively confrontational guitar-based underground rock music that polarized the concepts of alienation, disenfranchisement, and sociopolitical angst better than nearly anyone else at the time. And with the erosion of some 20 years-and-change it's a marvel how these true testimonials haven't lost an ounce of their original vitality or oomph. Without argument, this stuff sounds as pure and essential as it did then.

Sage and Co. as I still perceive them, mirrored their geographic locale like no one else. Portland, Oregon, with its perpetual canvas of slate gray overcast skies and super-soggy landscape. The city's vivid, eye-piercing greenery pitched against the droning depression of its logging port identity...and that guitar sound: a haunted, distorted, bellowing thrum accompanied by Sage's mournful plaints of outrage, disgust, anger, and alienation. King Buzzo, Kurt Cobain—don't doubt it; tangible signifiers were swiped courtesy of the Wipers.

Sadly, through an assortment of bad distribution deals, a lack of any serious touring regimen to speak of, the Wipers have largely for time eternal remained an obscurity. And, despite the mid-to-late '80s intervention of Restless Records' distro-clout (aka Enigma Records), scads of critical accolades from those in-the-know, etc., it was much a typical case of too little too late.

So, here we are in a new millennium. Not much has changed—the distribution world is still sordid, spotty, ineffectual, disingenuous, and largely apathetic—but then again, thanks to the advancement of communication technologies, the simple click of a mouse and a little plastic goes a long way.

Among the many classic American punk reissues released in the last 12 months, this wonderful 3 disc set is one of the best values for your money. For under \$20 post-paid you get the band's first 3 records: *Is This Real?*, *Over The Edge*; along with the *Youth Of America* mini LP. In addition, Sage salted away 23 alternate recordings/mixes and 6 never before released songs from the same era. This one's nothing but win-win. [www.zenorecords.com] *Peter Davis*

THE WITCHES Universal Mall CD

Detroit's The Witches manage to sound completely original on *Universal Mall*, their third record, despite the obvious influences a band such as this inevitably works into their oeuvre.

Reference points here are Roky Erickson (right down to titles like "We

Got Rats," "Devil Made 'Em Run," and "Demons All Around Her"—The Witches were formed on Halloween, ya know) and Flamin' Groovies at their hopped-up, harmonizin' best ("What It Really," "Keep Me Away"). Still, the charm of The Witches' brand of rock and roll is that it's well-played, well-sung and well-written, while maintaining it's own distinct voice within an overcrowded landscape of feathered-hair revivalists.

The Witches (who seem to have a thing for being photographed with Marlboros hanging out of their mouths) are doing what bands like The Mooney Suzuki and Vue succeed at only half the time.

The most modern they get is on the Westerberg-y "Given Up Girls," but even then, the sound is pure Witches. *Universal Mall* will chase away your blues. [Fall Of Rome] *James Jackson Toth*

WONDERFOOLS Kids in Satanic Service CD

The real thing from Norway. I mean, you have to go to fuckin' Oslo just to get away from the crybaby LA pop that poses as punk? The two guitars are rippling aural biceps of distortion, and the songs are mercifully simple as are the sentiments—"Night of the Dateless Axemen," indeed. It isn't so much an attitude as it is an intelligence here, like the Buzzcocks with a Kiss connection. I mean, I'm sure their van is littered with beer bottles and cigarette butts, and those empty little bindles seem to pop up everywhere after you've licked the last of the blow out of them. And the tape collection on the console is fulla musclehead guitar bands, from Mahogany Rush to AntiSeen. From Gruo to Bergen is a bitch of a ride. [One Way Street] *Miller*

Y@K BALLZ "Freak Show" / "Reign" / "For The Critics" 12" EP

NYC emcee Y@k Ballz plays it a little straighter than some of his Def Jux brethren on this debut 12" (which features one of the best looking jackets I've ever seen, courtesy of the detailed post-graffiti artwork by EwokOne), but the markers of an enlightened and bright emcee are here in spades.

Though the accusation that Y@k Ballz sounds a lot like Cage may not be entirely off the mark, Yak drops enough lyrical gems to make such a comparison moot. On "For The Critics," he boasts "For the virgin ears I pop cherries / then switch my steez like 2Pac to Makaveli." You can almost hear the audience at the Nuyorican hollering "Oh shit." A young emcee with great potential, Y@k Ballz may just be poised for mass appeal. [Def Jux] *James Jackson Toth*

VARIOUS ARTISTS Anti NY CD

Anti NY revisits rare music from the early 80s New York underground with contemporary versions. From the irresistible (the disco punk of Sexual Harassment's "If I Gave You A Party") to the experimental (the repetitive percussion / feedback of Gray's "Drum Mode," the only recording ever made by the group and featuring a young Jean-Michel Basquiat), *Anti NY* is essential listening.

Simply put, Vivien Goldman's "Launderette" is one of the best songs of all time. Pure poetry, and the most brilliantly trivial garment-themed tune since Y Pant's "Favorite Sweater," "Launderette" is a roller skating jam for the ages, and features Keith Levene (PIL) on guitar. Banality is boss!

Also notable is The Del / Byzanteens's funky romp "Girl's Imagination" (which features a young Jim Jarmusch), and Konk's "Love Attack," which answers the question, what if James Chance and Kool Herc produced "Lucky Star" instead of that wack ass motherfucker Jellybean Benitez?

The updated versions and remixes, though not entirely necessary, are also quite affecting. Paul Mogg's remix of "Drum Mode" adds a post-rock electric piano to make it almost sound like something that could come out on Morr Music.

It's not an understatement to consider this one of the most valuable and compelling releases of the year, right down to the Sham 69 graffiti under the CD tray. Way overdue. [Gomma] *James Jackson Toth*

VARIOUS ARTISTS Asian Takeaways CD

Jesus Christ, you let on that you grok and spew a bit of Japanese and you're pegged for life. OK, this 20-track retrospective of lithe and fluffy songs from the '60s and '70s may be just the thing you need or it may completely drive you out of the house. For me, it did both. I ran outside and looked up and down for the freakin' M*A*S*H unit after most of the operatic and syrupy pop music (lots of it coming from Korea, doncha know) but there is some seriously suave spy-movie guitar twang here (from the best places to have James Bond running around in yr crib:

Malaysia and Hong Kong). Then there's Wang-Li from Singapore who stresses that "My Husband Run Away" but certainly doesn't seem very pissed about it. Genius. And isn't Japan part of "Asia"? My adopted homies only get representation through one measly traditional song that is as annoying as trying to speak its title (*Shojoji*) without tying yr lips in to a square knot. This is definitely an acquired taste item. [Normal Records, PO Box 150 117, 53040 Bonn, Germany, distributed by Forced Exposure in the U.S.] Wm. Christman

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Blessed by the Night – The Dark Metal Compilation* dbi CD

As one might expect, pomposity reigns on this exhausting two-disc document of the bright stars of the black / dark metal scene. All the *Terrorizer* pin-ups are here: Tiamat, Mayhem, Dimmu Borgir, Hypocrisy, and Satyricon to name the first-stringers. If you're familiar with this stuff already, you know what you're in for. Lots of echoed female vocals, classically-tinged instrumentation, and darkness, fucking darkness, everywhere.

Dimmu Borgir, typically, offer probably the compilation's finest track with "Moonchild Domain," but many others, new to these ears, are definitely worth your time as well. Tristania synthesize all the best things about black metal, and could certainly give "sell-out" black metal band Cradle Of Filth a run for their money. The Bleeding Light's "Halloween III" is also a favorite, with its mournful choir and black mass organ conjuring voice samples and buried vocals to great effect, like Godflesh, but evil. The tuneful Vintersorg track, "Svaltvinter" begins with an acoustic guitar, then erupts into a melodic track sung in a foreign dialect, backed by some impressive double-bass drumming. Sure, it's melodramatic, but to criticize this type of stuff for being so is like being appalled by a plumber's exposed ass crack, or a monkey playing with his balls and throwing feces. These are the facts of life.

Some of the bands, such as Near Dark, rely more heavily on cheesy synths than others, but all of these bands have in common a histrionic flair and foreboding lyrics that probably wouldn't frighten a six year old. But I'm venting.

Best digested in more than one sitting, *Blessed By The Night* is a nice introduction for the uninitiated and a good enough smattering of unreleased tracks for the diehards to eat right up like so many winged creatures of the night. Let the simian feces fly. [Zoomica] James Jackson Toth

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Embedded 12" EP*

The first 12" from the upcoming compilation CD *The Bedford Files* features three tracks by three different MCs. Embedded is a team of DJs

prog/glam instrumental "Say Your Prayers," and Supreme Vagabond Craftsman's "All My Teeth/North and South" which sounds like a monotonous bastard version of avant-garde Chinese music.

Fans of Badly Drawn Boy take note, the beautiful opener, "Shake the Rollercoaster," originally pressed in Nashville, was until now only available as a 7 inch in an edition of 500. Another BDB gem, exclusive to this comp, is the catchy synth track "Celebrate" with Damon Gough in falsetto. It's easily the best track here, and one of my new favorites. [Twisted Nerve] Trinity C.

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Farewell Fondle 'Em CD*

Between 1995 and 2001, Fondle 'Em Records was one of a few taste-maker labels catering to East Coast independent hip hop. Founder and hip-hop pioneer Bobbito Garcia has decided to go out with a bang, releasing this collection of songs documenting the glory days on one CD, with mixed results.

Heavyweights like Kool Keith appear alongside up-and-coming artists such as Y@k Ballz and MF Doom, as well as Fondle 'Em regulars such as Lord Sear, El-P, and the undervalued Juggaknots.

The lackluster recording quality of some of these tracks (The Cenobites's superb "Kick A Dope Verse" was obviously mastered from a mangled cassette) can be forgiven, as many have been unearthed from long-lost radio sessions. One such relic documents an early meeting of El-P and J-Treds, prior to their collaboration as Indelible MCs a few months later. Another spotlights a much younger-sounding Cage.

Another distraction that must be forgiven is Bobbito's penchant for skits and interludes (anyone who's ever listened to his radio show is aware of his unique sense of humor), which are here in the form of Lord Sear featuring DJ Cucumber Slice's "Turn Up The Fucking Bass" and an Arsonists "freestyle" that sounds like little more than fucking around and making noise.

Overall, though, the quality of the tracks more than makes up for the compilation's few flaws, and it's good to see such a great label go out on a good note. For a lot of up-and-coming-of-age hip-hop heads (and brother, there sure are a lot these days), the artists on *Farewell Fondle 'Em* are the Rakims and Kanes, and in some cases, even the Kool Hercs and Bambaatas. In light of this, nuff respect due. [Def Jux] James Jackson Toth

VARIOUS ARTISTS *The Funky Precedent Volume 2 CD*

The follow-up to the critically acclaimed first volume, (which featured then lesser-knowns Jurassic 5 and Dilated Peoples, both of whom are now on major labels with the latter currently in heavy rotation on MTV), *The Funky Precedent Volume 2* admirably brings over fifty MCs, DJs and producers together from San Francisco, Oakland, and the greater Bay Area, making something rewarding of the often shameless practice of releasing an audio glossary of some distant "scene."

No jiggy shit, here, folks. In fact, Rasco's "Uncut" has the makings of a classic track in the vein of "Mass Appeal," with a simple, menacing beat, and lyrics like "tracks hummin' / making cash like Phil Drummond." Elsewhere, the hip hop "band" (heir to the throne of Stetsasonic?), Live Human jacks Brand Nubian's "One For All" and drops it over bebop samples and cuts. You can almost hear the crowd go wild.

Other notable tracks come from Azeem (formerly of Spearhead) who drops "acts of rapitalism" on "Contradictions," and Pep Love's "Warrior Poet" which is the album's final and finest track. Over strings and single note piano, the Heiroglyphics MC comes off like a slightly less abstract Saul Williams, combining a natural flow with pure poetry.

Though not every track is stellar, *The Funky Precedent Volume 2* contains enough worthwhile tracks to attest to the "Cali hip-hop Renaissance" that the booklet claims is in effect.

Proceeds go to support music programs in public schools. Giddyup. [Matador / No Mayo] James Jackson Toth

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Live At The Masque Volumes I, II, & III CDs*

These beautiful items couldn't have come at a more opportune moment, which was right as I finished Brendan Mullen's *Please Kill Me*-style *We've Got The Neutron Bomb*... A chronicle of the origins of the L.A. punk scene, and, just as an advance reader's copy of *Lexicon Devil: The Fast Times and Short Life of Darby Crash and The Germs* arrived (both reviewed elsewhere in this issue, both of which bear Mullen's fingerprints) which of

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/producers ESE and Hipsta, best known round these parts for their usually excellent *Two 45 Minute Sets* mixtapes.

The only track worth mentioning here is "Tippin' Dominos" by Cannibal Ox man Vast Aire. To be fair to Lodeck and Zion I, who weigh in with quality tracks, Vast could steal the show from any MC. He possesses one of those voices that could make even the most jaded hip-hop head take notice. This, combined with his delivery and (usually) superb lyrics, makes him the MC most likely to, and this 12" completely worth your time. Boom bangin'. [Embedded] James Jackson Toth

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Twisted Nerve but You Were Afraid to Ask CD*

Twisted Nerve celebrates their thirtieth release by issuing this compilation of tracks from original TN acts (most of which are rare and deleted) alongside some of their recent signings. Those expecting bands similar to Badly Drawn Boy will be disappointed. Their diverse roster includes acts like Sirconical, Andy Votel, and Affie playing electronica, "Girl from Ipanema"-style tracks, melancholic indie rock, and catchy alt-country.

But for my money, the most interesting material here is Mum and Dad's electro-goth rock track "Dawn Rider," DOT's toe-tapping slightly

course means the timing of the person who anonymously sent them—apparently some four years after their original release—couldn't have been better. I was stoked. All three are perfect companion pieces for the reading material. Each is well designed and illustrated and include extensive liner notes written by Mullen (original founder of the Masque) who rescued the master tapes himself. These discs were allegedly released with the financial assistance of Exene Cervenca of X. The tale behind the resurrection of the tapes is fascinating, but being able to hear live recorded music by all of these bands—though quality and performances are of a wide, warts-and-all variety—is a treat too good to be true. I suspect there may have been a fourth in the series (and if anyone knows, feel free to tell me) because the catalog numbers here are sequentially 02, 03, and 04, respectively. Between them there's a treasure trove of classic moments: disc 1 features the Weirdos, The Bags, Germs, and Skulls; disc 2, X, The Zeros, Alley Cats, and F-Word; and disc 3, Black Randy and The Metro Squad, The Eyes, The Randoms, and The Dickies. I would suspect a fourth disc probably includes some Screamers, which would be great of course. For what it may be worth, there is an address for the label. Don't know if it'll yield a response but it would certainly be worth your time and effort to investigate. [Year One, 207 Ashland Ave. Santa Monica, CA 90405] *Peter Davis*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Or Some Computer Music 2 CD*

Outre-bleep from master Alberto de Campo, Atau Tanaka/Eric Wenger, Curtis Roads, Farmersmanual, the always-estimable Jim O'Rourke, Phoenecia, and Tom Wallace. Sub-genres in the microchip set have broken down pretty badly these days, so suffice to say we're talking about the beatless, melodyless, seemingly aimless end of the spectrum—the academic/experimental stuff that drives most people completely out of their minds, but that I for one find more to love about all the time. A splendid little limey import from the interesting OR label, which I am anxious to learn more about. [OR] *David B. Livingstone*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *The Real Jamaica Ska CD*

Most of us in the 30+ range discovered ska at the same time, and in the same way: in the early '80s, through The Specials, early Madness, and other, far lesser groups on the 2 Tone label. While that stuff is okay, it isn't the genuine article—more a hybrid of ska and then-current UK punk. Today, most of it sounds like overproduced polka. Especially if one is inspired to dig to the root of the matter and check out the original, early '60s Jamaican product.

I still prefer the old *Intensified! Ska or Club Ska* 67 comps, but this 1964 winner is not far behind. And more easily obtainable, thanks to the good folks at Sony. While it may lack the tin roof-grind of *Intensified!* and the like, the co-production of Curtis Mayfield and local legend Clement "Sir Coxson" Dodd on this record is entirely appropriate, nonetheless: ska music is the natural result of island Calypso players mating their indigenous style to the Motown and soul hits coming out of the US in the early/mid 1960s.

That joyous synthesis really comes to the fore here. If you're having a bad day, spinning this baby will turn you around, guaranteed. Such buoyant lilt, topped by great singers like Lord Creator (who would have shined just as brightly in any genre) and a teenage Jimmy Cliff, is hard to beat as a mood-mender. On shuffle mode, this'll work wonderfully between selections from your Beg, Scream and Shout! and Stax/Volt boxes. [Epic/Sony Legacy] *Peter Aaron*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *RKK13 CD*

New England breakbeat genius Keith Fullerton Whitman, better known as Hrvatski (a man who once dared to cover Pink Floyd's "Cirrus Minor"), commissions thirty-five artists to remix and refigure his 1998 *Attention: Cats LP*, to astounding results.

As there are several friends of mine featured on this recording, I did my best to listen all the way through without looking at who was remixing what, in an attempt to remain unbiased, and to challenge myself with a sort of Jukebox Jury of my own. As predicted, the contributions of heavyweights V/M, Cex, Pita, Fennesz, Farmers Manual, Push Button Objects and Pimmon are unmistakable, as are those of Kid606 and Thurston Moore (whose "Cock Ramones ESP Radio Mix" is one of the most brilliant remixes he's done).

It's all here, and not a stinker in the bunch. From the cut and paste

psychosis of Drusca's "Alandala Remix" (which dips very close into Ambush / DJ Scud territory) to the zombie new age of the always-impressive Electric Birds, *RKK13* is worth its three-year wait. Who would have thought that deconstructivism, properly applied, could yield such tremendous content?

A look at who didn't fit on this particular compilation reads like an all-star team—M. Behrens, Han Bennink, Thomas Brinkmann, The Dylan Group, I-Sound, and Lost In Translation are all promised to appear on the companion 12". Can I pre-order one?

I hear Hrvatski's now working on an acoustic guitar record for Kranky. Fucking bonkers. [Reckankreuzungsklangwerkzeuge] *James Jackson Toth*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Songs for Cassavetes CD*

The mission statement comes near the end; a string of folks read chunks of quotes from late film-making rebel John Cassavetes stating, basically, that most U.S. citizens are emotionally dead at 21, co-opted by cultural mores that tout spiritual sustenance thru material consumption; his art/films aimed to be an antidote.

So here are many bands whose members lay claim to the intense immersion/release experience of creating and performing electric, rock-derived music. And they seem to argue this is everyone's birthright. Like they say of Cassavetes: the point's hard to disagree with. But that doesn't address questions of the "objective" aesthetic worth of what's thus produced. Nor should it, as it concerns the folks doing the thing. For others to buy what they produce is another matter.

Songs for Cassavetes is soundtrack album to an indie documentary picture about the NW underground rock scene circa late '90s and accordingly is dedicated to that idiom. Live recordings, studio stuff. Who's Who?, The Make-Up, Sleater-Kinney, Some Velvet Sidewalk, Bratmobile, Dub Narcotic Sound System and such. From the viewpoint of the consumer rather than the participant, it's all an eloquent testimonial to the overweening OK-ness of the scene's output. The tracks're full of enthusiasm. They all steer away from conventions of mainstream popular music. None of them indulge in precious production values or overthinking. All well and good. But aside from their enjoyment of self-liberation, nothing much is achieved that's especially relevant to third parties except by way of example. An' yes—I do believe it's better to be a half-assed original than a top-notch camp-follower. Freedom of choice, baby. Not that it always makes for compelling listening. [Better Looking Records] *Howard W.*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Stalin Claus Superstar! CD box set*

I've known some fairly wacky characters in my day. There was the guy who barbecued and ate a housecat. There was the fellow who saved all his toenail clippings in a box on his nightstand. None of these characters ever plopped down in front of a synthesizer and reeled off four hours of schlock opera (56 songs in all) about... um... what the hell is this about? Well, it's billed as "Another Suplex Prune Hittite Fantasy" (somehow I missed the other installments). The piece contains reoccurring fetishes regarding bronze-age trade patterns, pro wrestling, Retin A, Slim Jims (the yummy meat-spackle snack), and other random, esoteric points on the human-time continuum. The music is plenty tight and well-produced, making it all the more confounding—who would go to all this trouble? Well, several individuals from unheard-of bands residing in the Bay Area with a helluva lot more free time than you or I. In defense of these idle hands, I've listened to most of this lumbering master work, and some of it is quite funny, landing well-deserved blows against snooty subcultures and charlatans, and supplying an endless stream of knowing references in tightly-rhymed stanzas. The listener can follow along with the rather-lengthy lyric book. The project is definitely more *Joe's Garage* than *Tommy*, so don't expect it to hit Broadway anytime soon. I predict this handsomely-appointed box set will sell well into the single digits. [Spam] *Bo Pogue*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Sulphur: Compound CD*

Robin Rimbaud, better known as Scanner, presents selections from his Sulphur label. Only a few artists I'm familiar with: Two Lone Swordsman, DJ Spooky, and David Toop. The sound is Cool Electronica, with the jazzy side of things the most prominent. There are a few jaunts into near-chill territory (Vertical Cat, Solo, Arbir/Infant Reader) and some weirder efforts (Vitiello) and a stray into the funk by Dstar. Nothing slacks, but there are

a few standouts: the Swordsman and Future Pilot. Mostly previously released material, if you are keeping score. [Sulphur] *Les Scurry*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *Supersonic Sounds From The "Fuck You" Movement CD*

This compilation of completely retarded punk garbage is almost enough to restore your faith in punk's original D.I.Y. intent. Crappy color Xeroxed booklet, severely brain dead prank phone calls in between tracks, and as much don't-give-a-fuck, lo-fi punk rock and noise as you need filling out the rest, you couldn't ask for much more. Kojak, PCP Roadblock, and Suppression are the stand-outs but Pus Del Recto's version of The Stooges 1970 will kick your ass. Most of these bands/units/folks seem to be from in and around the East Coast from MD and PA to VA although in that light it makes no damn sense at all that Bastard Noise appears here. Not that that should dissuade you...you still need to have this. [C.N.P. Records, PO Box 14555, Richmond, VA 23221] *Wm. Christman*

VARIOUS ARTISTS *This Is Next Year: A Brooklyn-Based Compilation dbl CD*

This is one of those compilations that is really designed for no other reason than to benefit a handful of unknowns. This can often lead to the unpleasant task of suffering through a slew of sub-par, teenage toss-offs, but not this time. *This Is Next Year* delves deep into the New York borough of Brooklyn where we hang out with some recognizable and not so familiar faces. The comp works the haven't-heard-yet angle with a few established scene makers: Les Savy Fav, Clem Snide, They Might Be Giants, and Nada Surf are thrown between Grand Mal, The French Kicks, Black Beetle, and about 35 others. I expected this to blow, especially after discovering TMBG was on the comp, but I was more than pleasantly impressed by a good majority of the tracks. There's always going to be some shit on even the greatest compilation, but there's enough quality diversity here to carry the length of a double CD. There's something for everyone with plenty of cross contamination to keep even the most discriminating happy. After all, it's fuckin' Brooklyn! You wouldn't expect any less. [Arena Rock] *Troy Brookins*

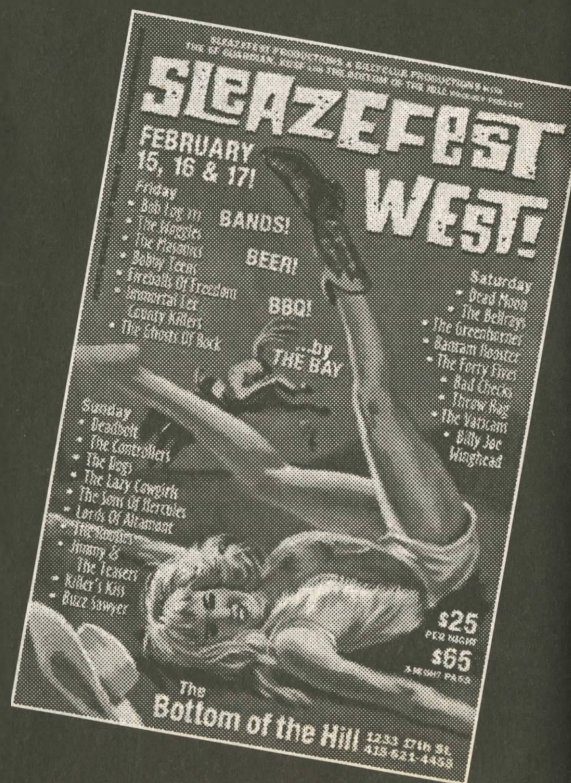
VARIOUS ARTISTS *Troubleman Mix-Tape dbl CD*

This is just what it sounds like: Troubleman Unlimited CEO Mike Simonetti wanted to put together a comp, a "mix tape" if you will, for his own listening enjoyment and to spread his good taste among the consumer faithful. Well, Simonetti ended up piling his plate pretty high at the buffet, which resulted in 52 tracks from almost as many bands spread over 2 discs, totaling almost 140 minutes of rock, skronk, noise, hollering, garage tinkering, twisted funk, gentle pop-ish meanderings, and, well,

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you name it. There are a few known quantities here, such as Unwound, Blonde Redhead, The Fucking Champs, and Sean Na Na, but the bulk of the acts are name-recognition-only bands that get some attention but fly under the radar of everyone but the most elite of the music cognoscenti. Names such as The Locust, Men's Recovery Project, Harriet The Spy, Love Life, and The Flying Luttenbachers probably ring a bell, but that's about it. Thus, this comp. is a great one-stop-shop for those who've been slow in getting around to trying out the deep end of the pool. What's more, all of the songs are (allegedly) exclusive to this compilation (most of it recorded about three or four years ago), a fact that should send discography completists scurrying to the record store. In the liner notes, Simonetti raises a glass, in essence, to all the memorable compilations put out back in the day, from *Flex Your Head* to *SubPop 100* to *Let them Eat Jellybeans*, most of which had a lasting impact. Media diffusion (Napster, et. al.) and the blooming of thousands of subcultural flowers probably plays against *Troubleman Mix-Tape* having such an impact, but these facts don't subtract from the greatness of this comp. one bit. And I wouldn't bet against this comp. becoming an oft-mentioned rallying point. [Troubleman Unlimited] *Bo Pogue*

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2002

BBQ pits, cheap beer, and a fine collection of lowbrow rock

by Troy Brookins

Conceived in 1993 by Southern Culture on the Skids' Rick Miller and the owners of Chapel Hill's Local 506, Sleazefest was a mix of BBQ pits, roasted pig, cheap beer, and a fine collection of lowbrow rock. That format came to an end when, sadly, the 506 sold last August. Instead of letting a good thing die an untimely death, relocation became a necessity. Over President's Day weekend, the nine-year North Carolina institution packed up its bags and moved West, bringing three days of garage rawk and Southern fried shitkickers to San Francisco's Bottom of the Hill. Changes were inevitable, the most glaring being the absence of SCOTS who up until now were an obvious staple of Sleazefest, and since there's no place to set up a proper BBQ in SF, the pig was spared this year. Who needs a bad case of trichinosis anyway? The line-up was one that you have to kick yourself for missing. Friday sported blazing sets by Immortal Lee County Killers and Fireballs of Freedom, then slowed down a bit for The Masonics, and stepped into



the bellrays

high gear for a tail shaking performance from The Woggles. The crowd was an interesting mix of SF too-cool-for-school shoe gazers and those from the let-loose South. Since no one knew what to do with one another everyone got stinkin' drunk and enjoyed the hell out of the music.

Saturday's line-up was strictly A-list. I showed up with a bad hangover in time to catch Atlanta's The 45's who pull together a dynamic live set that overshadows their recorded material. Next up was the show-stealing Bantam Rooster who ripped through my cloudy head and got me running on all four cylinders. Singer/guitarist Tom Potter was in fine form tossing out his trademark "whoop" between songs, and the touring addition of Jim Diamond on guitar adds an unstoppable dimension that reeks of Detroit gutters and cheap booze. Pity the fools who had to follow that. The Greenhornes, who have taken a step back since losing organist Jared McKinney, took the stage and fired up their brand of '60s Nuggets



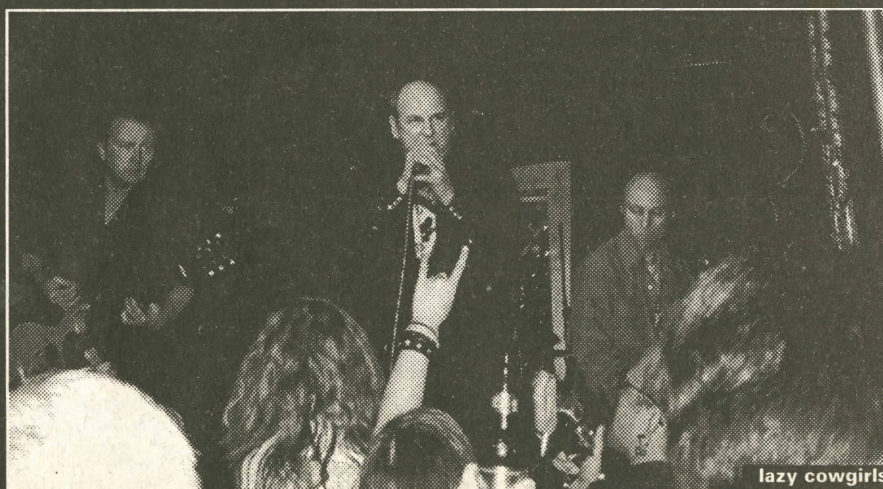
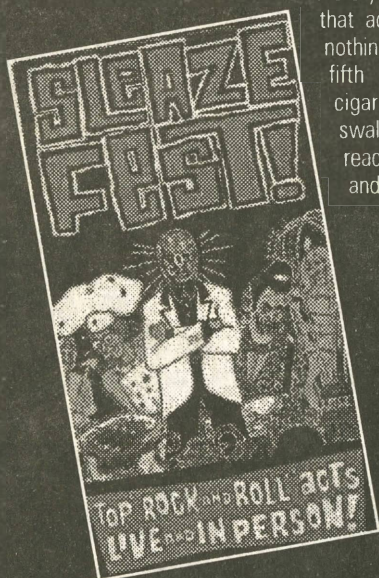
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soul. Not as impressive as they once were with that shake-yr-ass groove that McKinney provided, but the boys from Cincinnati still have plenty of kick. Speaking of soul, there's no one who can hold a candle to the sexy sounds of The BellRays. Singer Lisa Kekaula is a sultry soul siren who draws you in to the explosion created by guitarist Tony Fate. Once you're

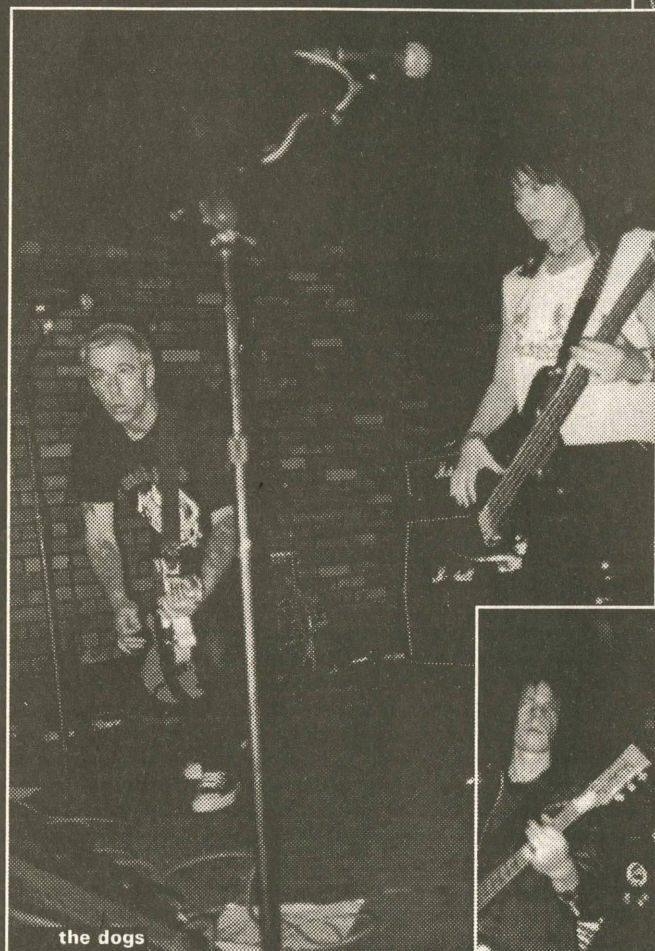
there you'll never go back. The go-go dancers that adorned the corners of the stage had nothing on Kekaula's moves. Going into my fifth hour of too much beer, too many cigarettes, and one last band to go I swallowed two shots of tequila and was ready for the headlining Dead Moon. Fred and Toody Cole are a mono-lovin' institution

that refuses to die. I know a few folks who would crawl over broken glass to see this band and every time I catch their set I'm reminded why so many remain loyal; Fred Cole is the closest thing to Bonn Scott we will ever get.

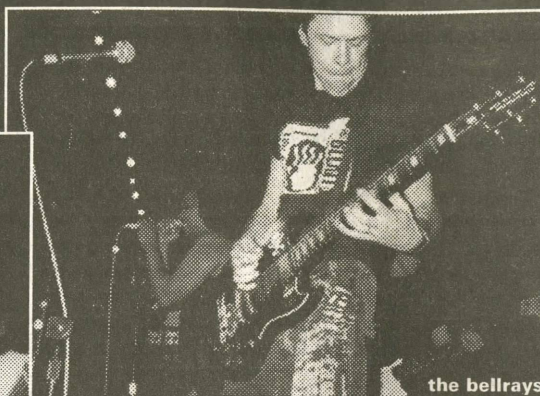
Sunday brings mixed blessings; one more night of this and oh-my-gawd one more night of this! There's something about climbing over thirty that makes going out three nights in a row torture. Once you get there and get rolling everything's fine, but it's mustering the endurance to get there that's the problem. I arrive around 7:00, late and hungover as usual, just in time to catch the last of the set by SF's The Roofies, who I've been meaning to see for months. Unfortunately, The Roofies were a bit much to handle and the schtick was too much for a headache that



lazy cowgirls



the dogs



the bellrays



monkeywrench

was begging for rest. I decided to drown the headache and headed for the bar. Feeling better I grabbed a spot for Lords of Altamont. I was never a big Bomboras fan and I walked out on these guys when I caught them in Vegas a couple of years ago, but I was told that they'd made vast improvements. I was mesmerized from start to fiery finish. Lords of Altamont are fucking bad ass; there's just no other way to put it. They tore the shit out of everyone lucky enough to witness their set. Redemption was in order for The Sons of Hercules, who had lousy luck with the inept soundman the last time they rolled through SF, and they didn't disappoint. Watching The Sons of Hercules is like scoring that hot waitress you've had your eye on for months, they give you that rush that makes you never want to let go. It's hip-shake rock and rhythm with a snotty bite that comes courtesy of singer Frank Puglise. It's a crime they don't have a record deal. The surprise of the evening was the set by 70s legends The Dogs. After a rather anemic performance from The

Controllers, I was afraid that the years would have taken its toll on The Dogs as well. Wrong. Louren and Mary sound like '78 was yesterday. Tight, loud, and giving everything like they were playing the Mab, I was blown away. This definitely wasn't one of those toss off, phone it in reunions that end in shame. I couldn't think of a better way to have topped off the evening so I passed on Deadbolt and grabbed a cab.

Three days of hell raisin' and only one day to recover doesn't quite work as well as it used to and by the measure of how Monday felt, I had quite a time at Sleazefest. Rumor has it that they're going to do it all over again next year, keeping San Francisco as the location. And who knows? By then they may even figure out a way to get a pig or two going in the backyard. ⚠

Photos by Troy Brookins. Posters courtesy SleazeFest.com

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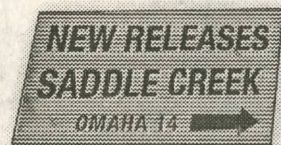
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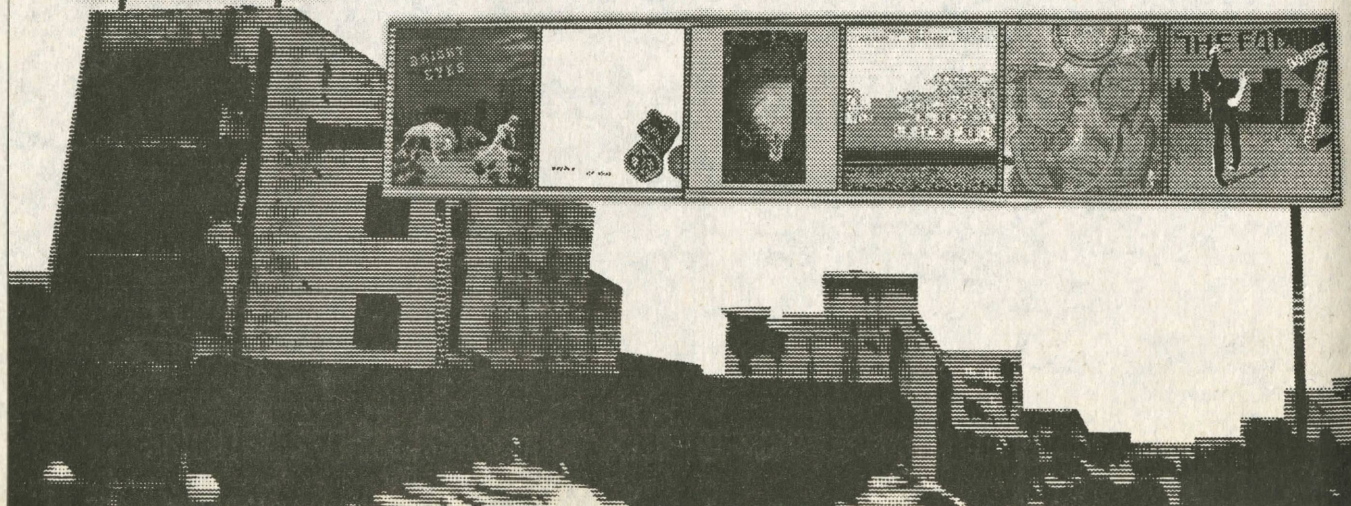
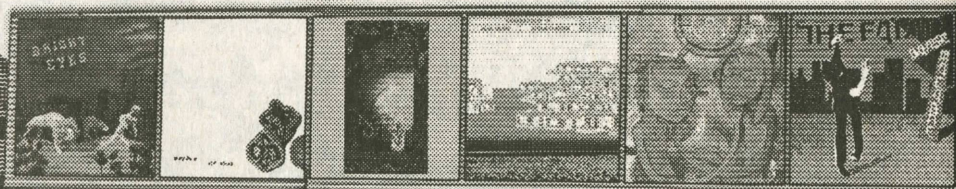
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YOUR FLESH

back issues

A PERIODICAL

YF #15: Cover photo of Killdozer's Bill Hobson, framed within Dave Deuteronomy's destruction of the dollar bill. Advice from Lisa LaBia (long before her tenure at *On Our Backs*); American Music Club; Poison Idea; the Fluid; Lazy Cowgirls; Bastards; Helios Creed; Government Issue Tour Diary; Laughing Hyenas, Melvins, Skunk, and more.

YF #21: Al "Baba" Silberstein did this cover. Lots of words about Brick Layer Cake, Claw Hammer, Cop Shoot Cop, God's Acre, *Film Threat* founder Christian Gore, Love Child, Cecil Taylor, Velvet Monkeys, Yo La Tengo, and Trashcan School, to name a few.

YF #22: Our second XNO cover painting, entitled "Frankenpop." #22 is full of cantankerous scribbling about Edgar Breau, Caspar Brötzmann, writer Marguerite Duras, King Carcass, Lithium Xmas, Frank Moore, Boyd Rice, Skin Yard, Thinking Fellers Union Local #282.

YF #25: Contains our first installment of a penetrating and insightful interview with Frank Kozik. The wraparound cover's Frank's interpretation of *The Flintstones* gone urban. Author Andrei Codrescu of NPR fame, Roland Howard, Leonard Cohen, Iceberg Slim, Hitting Birth...

YF #26: The second Kozik cover with the second part of the interview, plus info on Wendy/Walter Carlos; Caspar Brötzmann; former Beefheart sideman Gary Lucas; MC5 manager John Sinclair; twisted manga artist Suehiro Maruo; Young Gods; House of Large Sizes; photographer Dan Corrigan, and rap's House of Pain.

YF #27: *Your Flesh's* inaugural debut of perfect binding features an all original Dan Clowes cover plus an interview with the artist. *Answer Me's* Jim Goad on Glam Rock; Janitor Joe; Genitorturers; Raymond Scott; Ramones; Keiji Haino; illustrator Mirko Ilic; The Orb; Tristan Tzara; Monte Cazazza; Reza Abdoh; Sun City Girls and more.

YF #29: Cover art by cartoonist Frank Miller with interview; news on Arthur Brown; Bardo Pond; German guitar creep Caspar Brötzmann; art-rock troupe Caroline; the real deal on Cybertronics; Extreme Records profile; BBC radio legend John Peel; *Cud* creator Terry Laban; Moonshake; Popol Vuh; Shorty, and a Riot Grrrl op-ed by *Answer Me's* Debbie Goad.

YF #30: Magazine cover debut by premier rock poster artist Derek Hess with accompanying profile. Other features include The Apples before they became The Apples In Stereo; extensive coverage of the Mike Diana trial; underground film maker Jon Moritsugu; an overview of Japanese underground music; Charles K. Anderson and his Flat Earth Society, and an interview with comic book writer and artist Joe Sacco. Also includes thought provoking editorials on the Internet, and Pearl Jam's "Victim Rock."

YF #31: Original front cover by Coop with interview. Other features included: fiction writer Cormac McCarthy; Killdozer European tour; diary; the Boredoms; Destroy All Monsters; Fireworks; Pork Queen; Sean McDonnell memorial.

YF #32: Feature and amazing original cover painting by Kustom Kulture artiste, Anthony Ausgang including a "rantifesto" by the Ausgang himself. Other features include a chat with Kiwi-land guitarist Roy Montgomery; Chokebore; Atheist Jon G. Murray; the Cheater Slicks, and many other "think pieces."

YF #33: Original cover art by Steel Pole Bath Tub bassist Dale Flattum. An appreciation of Raymond Chandler by George P. Pelecanos; Covert Seduction Movement swami Ross Jeffries; Brainiac; MX80; Mike Rep; The Unabomber & more.

YF #34: Original front cover "jam" by and feature story on Los Brothers Hernandez. Jazz musicians David S. Ware & Ken Vandermark. Antioch Arrow; The Lee Harvey Oswald Band & Killing Joke. The secret alien identity of John Tesh revealed, and a special conversation with hard-boiled fiction scribe George P. Pelecanos.

YF #36: Original cover by Ed Fotheringham. Features include comedian Bill Hicks; conversation with John Petkovic of Cobra Verde & Guided by Voices; Mog Stunt Team 5; profile of avant garde record label, Table of the Elements and garage rock reductionists, In The Red Records; conversation and essay with Michael Gira of the Swans; sculptor, Edward Kienholz; New Discoveries in Prehistoric Homicide; and an eulogy of that great period in American theater-going better known as the "grindhouse era."

YF #37: Original cover by Jim Woodring and feature story, Sci-Fi scribe Mick Farren; Eel fishing in New Zealand; *Red Neck Manifesto* author and *Answer Me!* editor Jim Goad; Eleventh Dream Day; Firewater; Estrus Records; The Monkees; Lynnfield Pioneers; Ghost.

YF #38: Original cover art by *Ren & Stimpy Show & Film Threat Magazine* alumni, Glenn Barr. Feature stories on Crypt Records; Wm. S. Burroughs; Haters; Miles Davis; U.S. Maple; P.W. Long; Fuck; Debbie Goad's dream journal, and Glenn Barr.

YF #39: Original cover art by Grady McFerrin; Andre Williams; Brian Jonestown Massacre; Diary of a Golf Village Idiot; Donkey; Iron Chef and other bizarre Japanese television programming; the Kinks; the burnt Texas-psych musings of Lost Records; serial killer paramour Sandra London; Zen Guerilla; John Petkovic on Spaghetti Westerns; Quasi, and the demise of the old Las Vegas.

YF #40: Front cover by painter Jacob Pfeiffer. Features on Bashholes; filmmaker Sam Fuller; Country Noir writer Daniel Woodrell; Sweden's Soundtrack of Our Lives; Steve Shelley of Sonic Youth; Les Savy Fav, and an excerpted chapter from the novel *The Sweet Forever* by George P. Pelecanos.

YF #41: Front cover by and feature conversation with Tobin Sprout. A great solo musician and artist, and former long standing member of Guided by Voices; A conversation with Cheap Trick drummer Bun E. Carlos; William Parker and Matthew Shipp's engaging roundtable discussion of Jazz music; Starlite Desperation; Music critic Chuck Eddy exposed; A look at the literary accomplishments of James Sallis; Mick Collins... and more!

YF #42: Award winning cover by Wes Benscoter. Contains a Load Records overview, an interview with Tom Smith, an exposé on the frightening world of Stage Hypnotism, Profiles on Lifter Puller and black metal merchants, Emperor, plus George Pelecanos' interview with contemporary fiction writer Dennis Lehane, plus the usual staple items.

YF #43: Cover portrait of Redd Foxx by Jim Blanchard with accompanying feature story with three sidebars. Also includes interviews with hardboiled scribe, Gary Phillips and documentary filmmaker, Nick Broomfield (*Kurt and Courtney*). Profiles on the recent spate of Duke Ellington reissues, and Britains, Red Monkey. Also includes an essay regarding the career of Alice Cooper plus the staple goods readers have grown to expect.

YF #44: This issue's cover is The Forlorn Pup, Wes Benscoter's follow-up piece to his award winning Contented Cat cover from YF #42. Features this issue include crime fiction author, Barbara Seranella; 11th Dream Day; Gogol Bordello; High on Fire; Johnny Dowd; the King Brothers from Japan; Mark Mallman; and belated screen actress/poetess/performance artist, Zoe Lund.

YF #45: Our 20 year anniversary issue with original cover art by Giant/Obey's Shepard Fairey. Features The BellRays, 2001 A Space Odyssey, Leaf Records, an exclusive, rare interview with godsped you black emperor, Mat Maneri plus other fun and informative stuff...

YF #46: Original front cover by Shag with feature stories on Mark Lanegan, authors Pete Hautman and Jon A. Jackson, jazz guitarist Joe Morris, Holland's The Ex, overlooked Jazz Classics, and Gary Phillips essays the history of "bad men" in popular culture.



ordering info

All back issues are \$7.00 each domestic, \$10.00 foreign (includes first class postage). Being that some issues are only available in limited quantities it is crucial you list alternate selections in case you're out of luck (If it isn't listed above it is out of print so don't order it!) FYI: check this page first before you believe something is out of print. A lot of people on eBay like to say an issue of ours is out of print and nine times out of ten it isn't, capisce?

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