

babysueTM review

#28



Issue 28 babysue review

"Bad Don" W. Seven, Publisher

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ON-LINE MAGAZINE:

In addition to our printed magazine, we also publish an on-line magazine on the Internet. The on-line magazine features a music section that is updated monthly, plus samples from the regular **babysue** magazine. Check it out, Diana. The URL is www.babysue.com.

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We review everything everywhere. Things that we like are always given preferential treatment. We review CDs, vinyl, cassettes, comic books, stereo equipment, software, movies, magazines, fresh pukk, lackajack stipple, lassie broaden, sniffie breeze-dew, and hakkety-pakkety.

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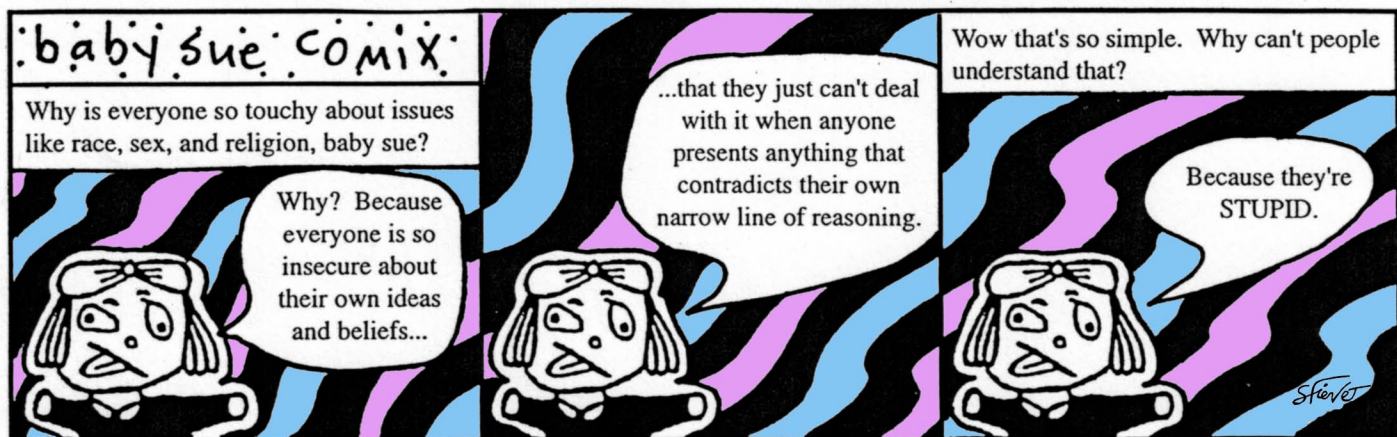
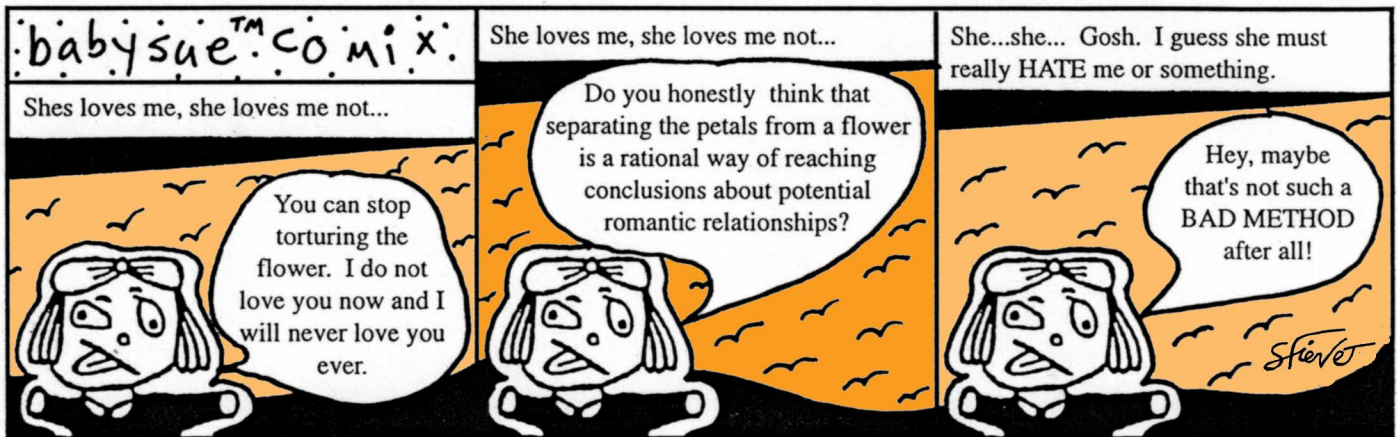


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JOKES

Q: What is the difference between right and wrong?

A: There is no difference between right and wrong.

Q: What do you get when you cross a penguin with a rabbi?

A: Chewing gum dribble.

Q: Why did the priest run into the wall?

A: Because he wasn't watching where he was going.

Q: What makes children bad?

A: Their parents.

Q: What is the difference between three fingers and four fingers?

A: Three fingers fit, four fingers don't.

Q: How many light bulbs does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: None. Light bulbs can't screw themselves in.

Q: What does Monica Lewinsky like to do?

A: She enjoys sewing.

Q: What did the door-to-door salesman do?

A: He went from door to door selling things.

Q: What is the easiest kind of promise to break?

A: One that involves love.

Q: What do most husbands do?

A: Cheat on their wives.

Q: What do you get when you cross a hamster?

A: A really angry damn hamster.

Q: What did one wall say to the other wall?

A: It said, "Do you have a quarter?"

Q: What was "Bewitched"?

A: It was a television show.

Q: When are hippies at their best?

A: When they're dead.

Q: If God is all powerful, could he make a rock so big that he couldn't move it?

A: Sure he could, but he doesn't want to.

Q: Does anything matter?

A: No.

Q: Why are short men neurotic?

A: Because they were born that way.

Q: Are E-coli outbreaks serious?

A: No, but they're at least good for a few laughs.

Q: What do you do after a natural disaster kills thousands of innocent people?

A: Celebrate.

Q: What do you get when you don't return a phone call from a friend?

A: A nice pleasant feeling knowing that you've ditched someone you never really needed in the first place.

Q: What did one blonde say to the other blonde?

A: It said, "Gee, we're both blondes!"

Q: What kind of cereal makes you sick?

A: Cereal that has poison in it.

Q: What is catching criminals?

A: A waste of time and energy.

Q: Should children be punished?

A: Not unless they talk.

Q: Why do policemen like doughnuts?

A: Because they're usually free.

Q: What do you call a lesbian with two heads?

A: Barbara and June.

Q: Why did Karen Carpenter like laxatives?

A: Because they helped her to lose weight.

Q: Why are straight women always attracted to gay men and gay men are always attracted to straight men?

A: Because everyone wants what they can't have.

Q: Why do teenagers like drugs?

A: Because they like to have fun.

Q: What do you get when you cut a martian in half?

A: A dead martian.

Q: Which way is up?

A: Who cares?

Q: Why are public restrooms unpleasant?

A: Because of the people who use them.

Q: Why did Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit?

A: Because it was forbidden.

Q: Are people ignorant and stupid?

A: Definitely.

Q: What is feminine hygiene?

A: A contradiction.

Q: Why is everyone self conscious?

A: Because they aren't good enough.

Q: Who runs for public office?

A: Retarded idiots.

Q: What do all people have in common?

A: They're all worthless.

Q: What did the blind man do after he crossed the street?

A: He ran into a telephone post.

Q: What do butter and margarine have in common?

A: They will both kill you eventually.

Q: Why do most parents drink?

A: Because they hate being parents.

Taking Advantage Of TECHNOLOGY

Whether we like it or not, technology is here to stay. Whereas it was once limited to the area of personal computers, technology has now invaded practically every aspect of our modern day lives.

Computers are in our watches, our cameras, our television sets, our stereos, our dishwashers, our ovens, our cars...practically every electrical item you can imagine. The sad part is that we have now become totally dependent on this new technology. Try to imagine a world without computers. It sounds beautiful, yes...but it also sounds impossible.

So...just what exactly is a person to do?

THE IDEAL

The idea situation is to simply rid yourself of all computers. After all, we already know that the very things that were supposed to make our lives easier have only made things more complicated and difficult. So...if you can...just don't buy into the hype. Get rid of your personal computer and don't buy any electrical item manufactured after 1980.

For most of us living the ideal is, unfortunately, impossible. So the next best thing is to figure out how to make technology work in our favor instead of against us. To understand how to do this, let us first consider the source of the problem.

THE CREATORS

To first understand why technology isn't such a great thing, think of all the people you know who are driven by the newest technological advances. They're not exactly your *favorite* people, are they? Go back one step farther and consider the people who are developing these new technologies. These are people who you wouldn't even want in your circle or friends...so why would you want them dictating how you spend your money?

The world of technology is run by a network of retarded nerds who have no connection to the real world. Because of their inability to function socially, these "people" revert to their isolated little chambers to create all sorts of new devices that will be eaten up by an all-too-gullible public.

Do not let yourself be taken advantage of. You do not have to be one of those ignorant and foolish schmucks who goes around buying up all the latest devices. Pay attention and learn, as you are about the learn the secrets of staying ahead.

WINNING BY LAGGING BEHIND

Because we have already created devices that do more than we would ever need them to do, the obvious conclusion is to stay *behind* in technology. Why? Well, simply because it is more *cost effective* and *reasonable*.

A new computer may cost you several thousand dollars, whereas a computer that is a couple of years old can be had for a hundred bucks. The older computer will do more than you will ever use it for. So...buy the old computer and save big.

The same is true for software. Don't buy the latest versions. Buy the older versions or get them for free. *Who cares* if they're the latest ones with all the extras that you won't even use?

CHOOSING THE UNPOPULAR MEDIUM

One of the most obvious mistakes everyone makes is jumping like retarded pups every time some new medium is introduced. Just look at how vulnerable everyone was when CDs were introduced. While everyone was frothing at the bit to get their hands on CDs, you could virtually pick up all the vinyl you could ever want for virtually nothing. And now with the introduction of DVDs, the same thing is going to happen all over again.

The lesson to be learned is simple. Instead of going out and buying that elusive DVD player and then having to shell out all the big bucks for all those movies and albums on DVD discs, delve into the previous, *unpopular* medium and save BIG. While the popular opinion is that DVDs are the wave of the future in home theatre, I would advise you to stock up on videotapes. Why? Simply because videotapes are already becoming extremely inexpensive, and the price will only drop as more and more assholes run after the new technology...all the while tossing their videotape machines and tapes along the way.

The result? You win *if* you choose the previous recorded medium.

The same applies to music. Would you like MORE MUSIC than you could *ever possibly listen* to during your entire life...for just pennies? Why not take this incredible opportunity to increase your cassette tape library? After all, everyone else is virtually trying to give these things away at yard sales. And because no one wants them, you are welcome to take all you want with virtually no competition whatsoever.

Look at what happened with 8-track tapes. Everyone dumped them because cassette tapes were the preferred medium. And now look at where cassettes lie in the food chain.

It is easy to see why it is foolish to gobble up the latest recorded medium.

WHY GIVE THE SECRETS AWAY?

But now that the secret is out, won't *everyone* be trying to stay behind in order to get ahead?

Let's be real here. People are stupid. They aren't going to do what is reasonable and what makes sense. They *want* to have their snouts tugged about by big corporations. They *like* being manipulated by glitzy advertisements and corporate schmaltz. People are not reasonable creatures. They like that retarded little feeling that they are the "first" to have the "latest thing" because it makes them feel less "worthless" and helps them to forget how truly "miserable" they really are in their crappy little day-to-day lives.

WATCH THE IDIOTS SCRAMBLE

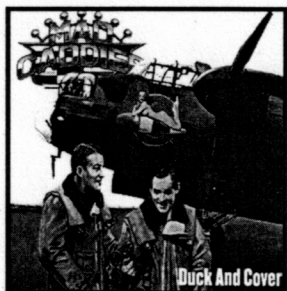
Be one of the few who don't follow the trends. As you save big bucks, watch all the idiots of the world scramble to buy the latest things. Marvel at how happy they are to slap down their hard-earned bucks for things they never needed in the first place. And watch how they are ready and willing to make the same mistake over and over and over again...never really learning a *goddamn thing* simply because they are in too big of a rush to think.

THE ADVANTAGE

The lesson for the day? Take advantage of technology instead of letting it take advantage of you. In the end, you will be the smartest of shoppers. Gently push your shopping cart up, up, UP into the sky filled to the brim with thousands of items...while your friends struggle to be able to afford to buy that single piece of the latest gear.

In the end, who wins? He who has the *cheapest* toys, of course...

MAD CADDIES



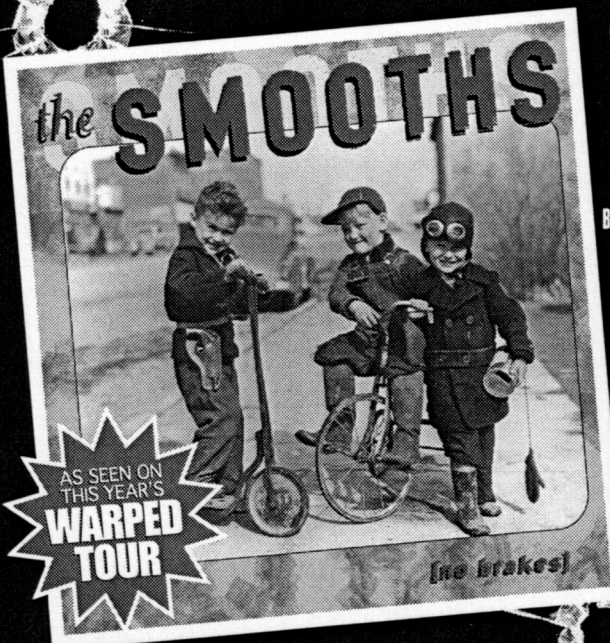
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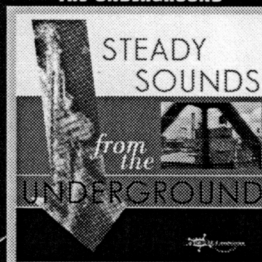
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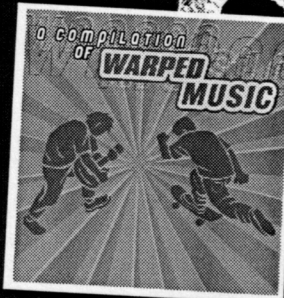
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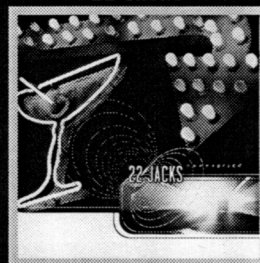
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22 JACKS



Overserved is a collection of great new songs, some energetic live recordings and a few blazing cover songs. Joey Ramone joins the band on an amazing rendition of the Cheap Trick classic "I'll Be With You Tonight". For anyone who has seen the band, guitarist Steve Sotos' live performance of the Polices' "Message in a Bottle" will bring back fond memories. All for \$8.

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Reviews

RATING SYSTEM:



6 heads = GODDAMN!!!



5 heads = EXCELLENT



4 heads = VERY GOOD



3 heads = GOOD



2 heads = FAIR



1 head = SHITTY

ADVENTURES IN STEREO

Alternative Stereo Sounds (CD, Bobsled, Pop)

The Beach Boys if they were high school girls. *Adventures in Stereo* is an outfit from Glasgow, Scotland whose music is decidedly out of synch with much of what's currently on the horizon. The band's super simple approach to writing a tune is pumped up by some otherworldly, breathy female vocals. There's a lot of vocal layering here (a la Beach Boys), and the instrumentation is kept to a bare minimum. The simplicity brings to mind many pop artists from the sixties. The band presents no less than eighteen tracks, including "Silence Falls," "A Brand New Day," and "Dream Surf Baby." Memorable and pleasing. (Rating: 4)



AMBUSH

Rumours (CD, Possible/Invisible, Drum and bass)

Extremely sparse drum and bass music. This was originally released on Mick Harris' Positive Records in Great Britain, and the fine folks at Invisible are making it available for folks in the U.S. This is a bit different than most drum and bass releases I've heard, mainly because of what's not there. There's no flash or extras added to this music. *Ambush* simply provide a steady rhythm with some very subtle, slightly spooky, background effects. This sounds like the kind

of thing British kids must listen to in the clubs after 4:00 a.m. This one's kinda hard to rate, but it gets a "4" because it's actually rather pleasant in a mind numbing kind of way... (Rating: 4)



AMNESIA

Lingus (CD, Supreme Recordings/Island, Pop)

Production heavy pop heady effect heavy overdub. Heady, heady, heady...Brad Laner is back with another psychological trip into the mind of the recording studio. From the sound of this, I'd say Mr. Laner is becoming less commercial...which in this case is a very good thing. There's no need to mention Brad's former band, because he obviously is not relying on past glories to prove himself. Plenty of good stuff here like "Love Story," "Swimming Lessons," "Train Try," and "Pastry Dog." *Amnesia* is a good mix of heady technology combined with thoughtful pop melodies. Pretty damn neat. (Rating: 4)



APPLESEED CAST

The End of the Ring Wars (CD, Deep Elm, Pop/rock)

Good driving music that reminds me of mid-eighties Boston rock (the city, not the band). An interesting note is that this band claims that they are not based in any particular city, as they currently live on the road touring. You can tell from listening to this that these guys are truly into what they do, and that this is more than just another droning rock band. The thing that sets *Appleseed Cast* apart from the growing mountain of rock bands is that they evoke moods and emotions with their songs. *The End of the Ring Wars* features a wealth of good guitar driven pop/rock music that ought to please most underground rock fans. (Rating: 4)



ARCHERS OF LOAF

White Trash Heroes (CD, Alias, Pop/rock)

It's hard to put your finger on exactly what *Archers of Loaf* is all about. The band's peculiar pop music is somewhat accessible. It's off the wall, sure...but it's not so far off the wall that it's lying all over the floor. These guys have a weird sense of songwriting. Sometimes the music is direct rock...other times moody pop...and at other times it's some sort of mutated hybrid of the two with all kinds of skewed elements thrown in for good measure. One of the best compliments I

can give the Archers is that they don't really remind me of anyone...which is an amazing feat in itself. I've heard there's another band out there called *Pinchers of Loaf*, so these guys must be making a dent in the world of the underground... (Not Rated)

ATLANTA

(Overrated urban kind of crappy thing)

Atlanta is a rotten city. Full of urban snobs and pretentious artist wannabes, the city is driven first and foremost by the almighty dollar. Watch and hear as the remaining forests are destroyed left and right to build more and more buildings...all the while the citizens cry that they must combat pollution by carpooling and riding mass transportation. Racism is alive and real in a city that has plenty of time to hate. There are lots of jobs in Atlanta to be certain...but who in their right mind wants a job? There's plenty to do, but nothing is worth doing. No wonder the city turns into a ghost town every time a holiday rolls around. If you live in Atlanta, the best thing you can do is go on vacation and get away from it... (Rating: 1)



BADI ASSAD

Chameleon (CD, i.e. Music/Polygram, Brazilian pop)

Sexy acoustic guitar-based folky Brazilian pop music. The sound quality on this disc is excellent...and *Badi Assad*'s playing and singing ring strong and true on almost every track. This disc is appropriately named as there is a good bit of variety among these tracks. Our initial faves are "Butterfly," "Naked," and "Waterfall"...while the cover of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" works quite beautifully as well. I can't help but wonder if this lady's name is made up. After all, it sounds suspiciously close to "bad ass"...which I bet Mrs. Assad has, based on the publicity photos. Never matter, never mind. It's the music that matters, and these tracks sound pretty goddamn good. This should appeal to Arto Lindsay fans... (Rating: 4)



AT THE DRIVE-IN

In/Casino/Out (CD, Fearless, Rock)

Loud, chaotic, nervous, spastic, jumpy, obtuse, jagged, ragged, and LOUD. This band's nasty sound is offset by some surprisingly musical passages in their tunes. Hailing from Texas, *At The Drive-In* have more in common musically with bands from California or Oregon. This disc features eleven crashers, including "Alpha Centauri," "Napoleon Solo" (this one's our favorite),

"A Devil Among The Tailors," and "Hourglass." (Not Rated)

AUDIO EXPLORATIONS

Who Wrote The Words To Everyone's Dreams? (CD, Stripmine Recordings, Soft/moody pop)

Very soft introspective minimalistic pop music that works amazingly well...especially considering that this is an independently produced project. Not only is this a compelling collection of tunes, but this duo comes across as anything but pretentious. **James Tritten** and **Steven Haley** are **Audio Explorations**, although some special guests pop up on a few of the tunes. As hard as I have tried to come up with comparisons, the only similar artist that comes to mind is **Donovan**...mainly because of the simple nature of the tunes and the breathy vocals. The subtle trippy nature of this music is a refreshing change of pace from too many artists whose music is so overarranged and over-produced that it tends to all blur into one big disappointing wash. There are some absolutely stunning tunes here...making this disc a totally cool listen. Check out the band's web site at <http://www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Underground/3360/index.html>. Neat, neat, NEAT. (Rating: 5)



BABE THE BLUE OX

The Way We Were (CD, RCA, Pop/rock)

I caught this band live once and liked what I heard, but this is the first time I've heard their recorded work. **Babe the Blue Ox** have a real winner with this one. Their fifth full-length release, *The Way We Were* is ambitious and multi-faceted. Instead of going for one sound or style, these three folks (**Tim Thomas**, **Rose Thomson**, and **Hanna Fox**) experiment with a wide variety of song structures and styles. These people are not alternative no talents. They can really play and sing. Rose and Hanna are one of the best female rhythm sections I have heard, and Tim's guitar playing is absolutely killer. Babe the Blue Ox is anything BUT a canned rock band. Their songs are sincere, thoughtful, hummable...and the music holds up to many repeated listenings. There's not a bad song on this one. Honest. Real nice stuff... (Rating: 4)



BABYLAND

"Safe Equals No Sound" b/w "Test Pilot" (7" vinyl single, Mattress, Industrial/techno)

California's **Babyland** were one of the early pioneers of electronic punk, making bands like **Suicide** seem tame in comparison. These two tunes find the band sounding excellent, if just a little less aggressive. Don't worry...the band hasn't lost their edge. Instead, they are simply mutating a bit...incorporating somewhat of a dance/techno sound into the mix. "Safe Equals No Sound" has some spacey effects, while "Test Pilot" almost has a gothic feel...although it is far from gothic (!). The two tracks will be included on the band's fourth full-length release. Can't WAIT! (Rating: 5)



MANDY BARNETT

I've Got The Right To Cry (Advance cassette, Sire, Pop)

Man oh man. A lot of people are going to be pissing in their underwear over this young lady. Why? Well...mainly because she sounds almost exactly like **Patsy Cline** did before her plane accident. This collection of tunes is definitely a blast from the past, harkening back to the time when male and female vocalists ruled the music charts. I can't give too much personal information about this artist as no biographical information accompanied this advance cassette. Just be prepared to see (and hear) the name **Mandy Barnett**...because the name is going to be popping up a lot in the months ahead. Good stuff. (Rating: 4)



FRANK BLACK AND THE CATHOLICS

Frank Black and the Catholics (CD, spinART, Pop/rock)

Never say never, at least not until some later date. I had pretty much written off **Frank Black** many years ago, even though I was blown away by the first three **Pixies** albums. For whatever reason, it seemed as if the things I liked about Frank's music disappeared as the band became more and more popular...and his solo stuff lost me totally...until now. Frank has gone back to his roots (so to speak) with this CD. His new band features a standard line up (guitars/bass/drums) and this may partly explain why this is the best thing he's recorded in years. At times this disc is a game of hit and miss, but the good tunes are really quite excellent. Our faves include "All My Ghosts," "Do You Feel Bad About It?," "I Need Peace" and "Suffering." I can't believe it took Mr. Black this long to come out with another winner, but the man has finally gotten his ass in gear once again. Here's to even better days ahead... (Rating: 3)



BLUE PLATE SPECIAL

A Night Out With... (CD, Beyond, Swing)

Lesson for the moment. Don't hate a band just because they happen to be part of a glutty revival movement. To be certain, it is annoying that so many bands of late are playing swing/ragtime music. After all, only five years ago the style was as dead as Granny's doughnut. But now it seems as if everyone is into the swiny thing. Despite the trendy aspect, however, I like **Blue Plate Special**...which just goes to show there are gems in every pile of doodoo. These guys have a big, horn driven sound. They're tight. I like the vocals. The overall sound is infectious. And the choice of tunes is appropriate. Tunes include "Night Out," "Double Talkin' Fool," and "A Night in Havana." Well played and honest. (Rating: 4)



BOMB 20

Field Manual (CD, Digital Hardcore, Noise)

A very difficult listen. **Bomb 20** (a one man electronic band) ought to appeal to fans of **To Live And Shave**

in L.A. The two bands are extremely similar in that instead of trying to draw the listener in, the main point is to alienate and distance the listener by presenting such a barrage of hard noise that virtually no one can cope with it. It's kind of like a modern day **Alice Cooper** gone electronic. This is the kind of stuff kids in the nineties can play that is CERTAIN to drive their parents up the goddamn wall. I don't claim to know whether this is bad or good...it's just really...INTENSE. Can you handle it? (Not Rated)

THE BOMBORAS

Head Shrinkin' Fun (CD, Zombie A Go-Go, Surf/rock)

Good surf guitar (mostly) instrumentals featuring dual reverb soaked guitars. **The Bomboras** have already established themselves by touring with the **Cramps**. This band's revved up retro music is much more believable and enjoyable than your average surf band. PLUS...and this is a big plus...they've got GREAT haircuts! This release is one of the first to be put out on the newly re-established **Zombie A Go-Go** label (run by **Rob Zombie**). Nice easy fun...and those guitars sound GREAT. Fifteen tunes including "Land of the One Percenters," "Project Zero," and "Mystery Planet." (Rating: 4)



BRIGHT EYES

Letting Off the Happiness (CD, Saddle Creek, Pop)

I can't help but wonder if this "band" got its name from the character in *Watership Down*? Never the matter. **Bright Eyes** is a project spearheaded by **Conor Oberst**, who has quite the knack for penning some fine damn emotional pop music. This is amazingly mature, considering that this fellow hasn't been (to my knowledge) recording for that long. Mr. Oberst's ability to write quality melodies is light years beyond most songwriters. In addition, his breathy vocal style fits his music perfectly. Features guest appearances by members of other bands including **Cursive**, **Drip**, **Lullaby for the Working Class**, **Neutral Milk Hotel**, and more. Ten tunes including "If Winter Ends," "The City Has Sex," and "A Poetic Retelling of an Unfortunate Seduction." Holds up to many repeated listenings. Excellent. (Rating: 5)



BUCK JONES

Shimmer (CD, One Ton, Pop/rock)

Led by the husband and wife team of **Gabrielle** and **Burette Douglas**, **Buck Jones** is a band with more than one sound. In fact, upon hearing the tradeoff between male and female lead vocals, you may actually get the feeling you're hearing two bands at once. What makes this band's music really work is that, in addition to having good tunes, both vocalists have excellent voices. **Buck Jones** is, first and foremost, a pop band. This is the band's second full-length on the already ultra-hip **One Ton** label. The band has a good sense of melody and a talent for good arrangements, as is evidenced on tunes like "Wasted," "The Boy With The Mechanical Heart," and the delightfully melancholy "Night and Day" (which features some really cool lead

guitar). (Rating: 4)



RICHARD BUCKNER

Since (CD, MCA, Folk/pop)

Richard Buckner is an interesting newcomer onto the folk singer/songwriter circuit. His material falls somewhere between artists like **Hayden** and **Richard Thompson**. I enjoyed his first MCA release, but *Since* is even stronger. Mr. Buckner's tunes are introspective and anything but calculated. This man's acoustic storytelling singer/songwriter approach is both sincere and real, and you can tell from his voice that he is truly into the words he sings. There's a wealth of good material here, including "Believer," "The Ocean Cliff Clearing," "Pico," and "The Night Will Bury You." Very relaxing and completely reflective stuff... (Rating: 4)



BUFFALO DAUGHTER

(Live performance, July 15, 1998)

This concert was not like what I was expecting. **Buffalo Daughter** is a delightfully different Japanese band, and their latest CD (*New Rock*) contains some killer material. Judging from the band's recorded work, I was expecting a large band dressed in funky clothes playing with a drum machine. WRONG. Instead, the band consisted of only two ladies (they said they left the third one in Japan during the show) and an impressive fellow playing real drums. Instead of costumes or a funny image, the two girls were dressed casually in t-shirts and trousers. If there's one thing I can say about this band, it is that there is some real talent here. It used to be the case that most Japanese bands were a novelty and they really couldn't play or sing all that well. Times have changed, and Buffalo Daughter is a good example of just how far some Japanese musicians have come. The guitarist/lead vocalist in particular played some amazing stuff. Though I would have to admit some of the material did not come across as well as on the CD because of the sparse lineup, overall this band delivered the goods. And I liked the fact that they ended with one of their softest numbers. If you're looking for the obvious, look elsewhere. If you are up for the unexpected, check these folks out. They easily stand out in a world of sameyness. (Rating: 4)



CALIFORNIA GUITAR TRIO

Pathways (CD, Discipline Global Music, Instrumental)

None of the three guitarists in this trio are from California. Instead, they hail from Brussels, Tokyo, and Salt Lake City (!). Regardless of their geographic origins, these three fellows have managed to come up with new ways of utilizing acoustic guitars. Instead of going for a folk sound, these guys' music is much more baroque in nature. They play all kinds of stuff that is normally never played on a guitar. The trio consists of **Bert Lams**, **Hideyo Miroya**, and **Paul**

Richards. These guys are DAMN good at what they do. All three attended guitar classes given by **Robert Fripp**...which may explain why they are so technically proficient. This is a well-executed idea, worthy of many repeated listenings... (Rating: 4)



CATFIGHT

"Panic Attack" b/w "She's Tight" (7" vinyl single, Worrybird, Rock/pop)

Worrybird is a great little obscure label. Like so many other small independents, the label is not motivated by money and sales as much as by the desire to put out quality releases. This particular label now finds itself in a peculiar position with **Catfight**. The band puts out good material and...here's the shocker...their stuff SELLS (!). The band's latest features a pussized version of the **Rolling Stones'** *Sticky Fingers* artwork, and the single within is pressed on clear vinyl with a random blotch of red. "Panic Attack," the A-side, features the buzzsaw attitude rock that the band is known for. Punchy and short, the tune was written by **Ann Ciovacco** who plays drums for the band. The B-side is the well-known **Cheap Trick** tune. Hopefully Catfight will stick with Worrybird instead of going for a major label... (Rating: 4)



CAULK

Imaginary Enemy (CD, One Ton, Rock/pop)

Somewhat dischordant, somewhat droning, somewhat rocky...**Caulk** is a band with thick guitars and a vocalist who reminds me of **Robert Smith** of **The Cure**. The band's inventive intertwined guitars provide an interesting backdrop for the vocalist's meanderings. Meanwhile, the drummer and bass player throw all kinds of peculiar unknowns at the listener. The culmination is a rock band that's just off the beaten path. There's enough to latch onto to make the tunes memorable, but this certainly is not wimpy, simple sing-songy pop. Some of these tunes remind me of stuff from the early eighties. Ten cool tunes including "New Disguise," "Pretty Penny," and "Lip Gloss." (Rating: 4)



CHEAP TRICK

Cheap Trick (CD, Epic/Legacy, Rock/pop), *In Color* (CD, Epic/Legacy, Rock/pop), *Heaven Tonight* (CD, Epic/Legacy, Rock/pop)

Re-live some of the best music of seventies pop music with Epic/Legacy's latest remastered reissues of the first three **Cheap Trick** albums. When the band first made its presence known, few folks would probably have believed that this band would have had the influence and staying power it has had. Let's look at each album individual, shall we?

Cheap Trick. The band's debut album didn't blow me away then, and it doesn't blow me away now. The music is okay...but there's just not too much focus, and the tunes don't trab the listener. It's almost like

throwaway rock that sounds too generic. A couple of good songs, but overall rather forgettable. (Rating: 3)



In Color. By the time **Cheap Trick** recorded their second album, they had transformed from a samey rock band into a focused sharp shooting unit. The band's songs were drastically improved. Opening with the totally bitchin' "Hello There," the band's hyperactive power pop abilities are evident. "I Want You To Want Me," the hit single, was light but catchy fare...and it still sounds good today. Modern pop groups could learn a thing or two about the clean, uncluttered pop in tunes like "Downed," "Southern Girls," and "So Good To See You." The guitars ring loud and true, thrusting **Rick Nielson's** talents firmly into center spotlight. By this time, word of the band's live show was spreading...creating an even more intense buzz. *In Color* had some truly great moments, but the best was yet to come... (Rating: 4)



Heaven Tonight. It is this writer's humble opinion that *Heaven Tonight* is the best **Cheap Trick** album ever. Shrugging off some of the more rock and roll aspects of their earlier work, the band this time opted to shoot pure power pop hits directly into the center of the planet...and it WORKED. There's a cool urgency to this album that somehow captures the essence of what the band was about. Almost bubblegummy tunes like "Surrender," "On Top Of The World," "Takin' Me Back" (this one still sounds particularly vibrant), and "How Are You?" grabbed America's consciousness and made everyone stand up and take notice. (Most folks probably still think "California Man" is a **Cheap Trick** tune, despite the fact that it was actually penned by pop legend **Roy Wood**). The production is crisp, but not too slick. The band rocks, but not too hard. Above all, these guys came up with some searing melodies that have stood the test of time. Totally bitchin' in the best kind of way, this is an album that makes you want to move. (Rating: 5)



VIC CHESNUTT

The Salesman and Bernadette (CD, Capricorn, Pop)

I usually HATE artists who are as hip and cool in an underground sort of way as **Vic Chesnutt**...but fortunately my tendency to prejudge didn't get in the way of being able to appreciate the subtlety of this man's music. The guy's understated pop music brings to mind artists like **Cat Stevens** and **Tom Waits**...although he really sounds like neither. With so many struggling artists trying so damn hard to please, it's refreshing to hear a man simply put forth tunes that seem to come so naturally. The arrangements are just right, and the vocals extremely laidback and relaxed. Nice, simple, real lyrics complete the picture...making *The Salesman and Bernadette* a completely worthwhile experience. (Not Rated)

CHICAGO

(Really big city kind of thing)
What a rotten, overrated place. (Rating: 1)



CHOCOLATE GENIUS

Black Music (CD, V2, Jazzy pop)

Why aren't there more artists like **Marc Anthony Thompson**? I can't answer that question, but I can say this. In a world where everyone wants to fit into some goddamn category or marketable niche, this guy stands out like a sore noodle. Instead of tossing out generic crap, Mr. Thompson comes up with some absolutely killer moody pop pieces that sound as if they're coming straight from his soul. The man is honest and sincere...and he's got a KILLER vocal style that just oozes out of the speakers. This is only his third album in 14 years, so he's not one of those "sell crazy" artists who pinches off a new one each year for the bucks. Mr. Thompson is something like a black **Leonard Cohen**. You don't know exactly what kind of music he's playing, but you know it belongs in your permanent collection. If only ALL black music sounded like this. This is wonderful. (Rating: 5)



CINERAMA

Va Va Voom (CD, spinART, Pop)

As lead singer/songwriter of **The Wedding Present**, **David Lewis Gedge** has already made a name for himself in history. As Mr. Gedge softened his sound over the years, original Wedding Present fans jumped ship (as fickle music fans are apt to do). Those fans are the ones missing out, however, as Gedge's tunes and songwriting style have only strengthened over the years. **Cinerama** is David's latest project with his partner **Sally Murrell**. The soft catchy pop of **Cinerama** is reminiscent of some of **Ray Davies'** softer material. There's no unnecessary clutter here. The tunes speak for themselves with way-above-average melodies that'll stay with you. As usual, the lyrics are wonderful. Includes "Maniac," "Hate," "You Turn Me On," "Honey Rider," and many others. Great listening. (Rating: 5)



CIV

Thirteen Day Getaway (CD, Lava/Atlantic, Pop)

I really like the single off this disc ("Secondhand Superstar"). It's extremely accessible, upbeat, and catchy...and a perfect single. The rest of the tunes are basically good, but not as direct and memorable. Still, the band plays with gusto and they're tight. Thirteen tunes including "Everyday," "It's Not Your Fault," and "Little Men." (Rating: 3)



COLLECTING THINGS

(Stupid waste of time idiotic kind of hobby thing)
Let's all try to justify our existence by collecting all kinds

of worthless objects in our homes. You can collect just about anything...stamps, coins, records, postcards, clothes, toys. But in the end it's all the same. The objects you collect don't mean a *goddamn thing*. And the only reason you collect them is because you feel unimportant and worthless...and you feel that by collecting lots of little physical objects you can somehow justify your rotten little existence on this crappy-assed planet. So go on. Impress your friends. Collect everything you can. Keep collecting...until you *die*. (Rating: 1)



CROSSWIND

Stompin' Ground (CD, Surf, Rock/pop)

Interesting. Listening to **Crosswind** is like hearing a combination of **Tina Turner**, **Janis Joplin**, and **Aerosmith**...with a solid dose of southern grunge punch. This band has a big ballsy sound that boasts a blasting rhythm section, a big fat guitar sound, and a female vocalist (**Dana Hall**) who can wail, screech, and scream like nobody's business. These tunes are even more impressive when you realize that they were recorded direct to tape at a church where the band invited their friends and fans to join in their live taping. The feel is just right, the sound quality excellent...and it all adds up to a CD that literally seems to jump from the player with energy. Rock stompin' good stuff like "Stompin' Ground," "Just Stand Still," and "Harder Than Stone" make this CD a great listen. (Rating: 4)



CRUMB

Seconds>Minutes>Hours> (CD, Red Ant, Pop)

Though it's a formula that's been used thousands...even millions...of times before, when you layer great vocal harmonies over good pop music the results can be substantial. Such is the case with **Crumb**, a pop band that has been garnering a good bit of press in some notable music magazines of late. Unlike many pop bands who maintain that lo-fi is better, **Crumb** is a band that is proud of the fact that their tunes are slick and well produced. Their attitude is justified, as the excellent sound quality of this disc is anything but detrimental. Although I will admit that the glossy sound does tend to make almost all pop bands sound more generic, in other ways it makes the music soar to levels that wouldn't be possible in the world of lo-fi. Hi-fi. Lo-fi. Fuck-it-fi. Fe-fi-fu-fu. The tune "Month To Month Apt." is GREAT. I smell the pop songs of a good San Francisco band... (Rating: 4)



CRUMBOX

Map of the Sky (CD, Time Bomb Recordings, Pop)

Nice upbeat inventive pop with clear vocals, challenging guitar work, and a pounding rhythm section. **Crumbox** are a lot more poppy than on their last release, and the change is in their favor. Not content to play one style, these guys are rather diverse in their songwriting abilities. Sometimes direct and simple and

at other times atmospheric and moody, this band is much more entertaining than your average pop band. Good sincere lyrics complete the picture...making **Crumbox's** second release a solid listen. Twelve tunes. Our faves are "Drown" and "Purolator." (Not Rated)

BRANDON CRUZ

Eddie Is A Punk (CD, Taang!, Pop/rock)

If the name **Brandon Cruz** doesn't immediately ring a bell, perhaps *The Courtship Of Eddie's Father* will. Cruz was the innocent little chap who said all those cute things to father **Bill Bixby** and **Mrs. Livingston** (one of the hottest Asian babes ever to hit television). Brandon is a big boy now, and he's lost his innocence. This curious disc is a culmination of recordings Cruz has amassed over the years. More a curiosity than anything else, this disc features no less than four (???) versions of "Best Friend" (the theme from the t.v. show) featuring artists such as the aforementioned **Bixby**, **Harry Nilsson** and **Mickey Dolenz**. The rest of the disc features punk tunes on which Cruz penned the lyrics (the music was written by other folks). This isn't as listenable as it is peculiar. May possibly be a collectable at some point in the future... (Not Rated)

dada

dada (CD, MCA, Pop)

Don't let the name mislead you. *dada* is a pure pop band. These fellows' pop music is highly produced and orchestrated, sometimes to excess. This, the band's fourth release, contains a wealth of good material...but along the way there are a couple of KILLERS. The standout tracks are "This Thing Together" and "Beautiful Turnback Time Machine," the latter of which sounds like a great single from the sixties. This band has a lot going for them...good melodies and excellent vocals. I'd like to see them expand on their lyrics (which may be the weakest link in the chain). Good stuff. (Not Rated)

DAMNATION

Sick Phuckin' Shit (CD, Burning Tree, Rock)

The cover of this one will grab your attention immediately. Fortunately, the music contained on the actual disc may surprise you. From the fright cover, you'd think this would be death metal or doom and gloom noise. WRONG. Instead, **Damnation** is a pure rock and roll band complete with driving rhythms and devil-may-care vocals. They're a damn good rock band, too. Instead of going for gimmicks and lots of clever instrumental shifts the band mostly just plays it straight. Timeless rockers include "Somebody Who Cares," "Far Before Our Time," and "O' Seraphine." This band is a BLAST. (Rating: 4)



DEAD VOICES ON AIR

Piss Frond (Double CD, Invisible, Electronic/pop/instrumental)

Boy. What a mouthful. **Dead Voices On Air** songs go all over the goddamn planet on their latest double disc. One minute you think you have the band pegged, but then the next song loses you completely. It's this obtuse quality that keeps the listener's interest throughout the entirety of this lengthy release. To try and de-

scribe this is difficult, because so many of the songs are so drastically different from one another. From orchestral to droning electronics to dub to techno to ambient and back, these folks refuse to be pigeonholed into one particular style. Surprisingly, the discs are rather cohesive. It's hard to pick favorites, but the initial standouts seem to be "Geong G'uma," "Swan Flax," "Of Hare Hill" (not to be confused with "On Hare Hill"), and "Irthing Fell." Overwhelming. (Rating: 5)



DILLINGER FOUR

Midwestern Songs of the Americas (CD, Hopeless, Hard rock)

Intense hard rock. Big wall of noise. Aggressive punchy rock music that sounds something like early **Jam**, except much louder and harder. Rarely does a hard rock band catch our attention like **Dillinger Four**. These fellows play so hard and they're so tight that you just can't help but sit up and take notice. And it's NOT "just loud noise"...this band plays intelligently while causing all hell to break loose. Plus...they've got a sense of humor which is obvious from the song titles: "Dick Butkus," "Supermodels Don't Drink Colt," "Honey, I Shit the Hot Tub." Easily one of the best hard rock bands we've heard this year. Expect their live show to leave you on the floor gasping. (Rating: 4)



THE DISABLED

(Unfortunate stunted kind of can't do things people) *Boo hoo hoo!* All cry for the poor unfortunate disabled! Their lot in life is so *very* SAD! How unfair that they should be cursed with such terrible physical deformities that do not allow them to function normally in our society. But it is so IMPORTANT that they HANG ON TO LIFE anyway, isn't it? And it is even MORE important that the rest of us should spend tons of money to help them *pretend* that they are a part of the real world like the rest of us. Blisters on the hands and feet, sore from the slapping shores of distant mental retardation. **Barbara** and **Elliot** crawl across the desert squashed and scrawling. The disabled do not deserve whatever it is they get. The best thing to do is always to just...give up. (Rating: 1)



THE DUSTERS

Simplicity (CD, Superbad/Dischord, Pop/rock) Instantly likable pop rock with a difference. This D.C. based band was formed from the splintered fragments of other bands. **The Dusters** are loud and powerful, but first and foremost they are smart and inventive players. The band's simple tunes are direct and have just the slightest quirky sound. The guitar work is dynamic and surreal, and the rhythm section is tight as a barker's nightstand. Despite the fact that the band is playing a style of music being played by a thousand other bands (which unfortunately may not work in their favor), they manage to easily stand out based on talent and sheer style. Fun stuff, including "A Day Away,"

"Breather," and "Killing Ground." (Rating: 4)



ed

Rock and Roll is Cool, Daddy, and You Know It! (CD, edipal, Rock/pop)

Interesting stuff. Kind of like adding **Walt Mink** guitars into **Bowie's** *Man Who Sold the World* album. **ed** hail from Memphis, Tennessee. The band has a sound that harkens back to the seventies with all kinds of nineties influences flying around in the mix. The band is not only tight, their material is way above average...particularly when you consider that this is a self-released disc (!). You can reach the band at edipal productions, 1742 Lawrence, #2, Memphis, TN 38112...or check out their web site at <http://i.am/edipal>. Mighty entertaining stuff... (Rating: 4)



ELECTRIC FRANKENSTEIN

Spare Parts (CD, Get Hip Recordings, Rock)

This one's a scorcher. **Electric Frankenstein** already won us over with their last 10" vinyl release, but this one's even better. The band's flailing, driving rock music sounds like it's continually about to spin out of control. The studio tracks on *Spare Parts* were previously available on a 10" EP in Switzerland. This CD combines those tracks with three live cuts, giving the indication that this band may even be better live than they are on their studio recordings. Simultaneously loose yet very, very tight...it's almost impossible to keep still when this band's music is playing. Cool tunes like "Devil Dust" and "Man's Ruin" are cool as shit...and the band even does a blinding cover of **The Dictators'** "Borneo Jimmy" that does the tune justice. GREAT! (Rating: 5)



ELECTRIC FRANKENSTEIN

I Was A Teenage Shutdown! (CD, Estrus!, Rock)

Holy mommy of doo-doo queen! The more I hear from **Electric Frankenstein**, the more I like 'em. This is a band that truly ROCKS. Thanks to the fine folks at Estrus, tunes from a previously hard-to-find limited edition vinyl picture disc are again seeing the light of day. Recorded live to 16 track at **WFMU** in 1996, this batch of tunes is one big blast of explosive energy. If you're tired of posers and rock bands who just don't have their act together, check out anything by this band. One of the most direct blast of high energy rock currently out there. Includes "It's All Moving Faster," "Rise & Crash," "I Wish I Could," "Right On Target" and four more. This KICKS! (Rating: 5)



ENTWINED

Dancing Under Glass (CD, Earache, Rock)

This British band stands out for several reasons. First, they play loud and heavy yet their vocalist actually

sings melodies and you can usually understand what he is singing about. Secondly, the band's keyboards are reminiscent of progressive seventies bands which adds a somewhat orchestral sound to the tunes. Third, and most importantly, the band writes good songs and pads them with way-above-average arrangements. It's almost like listening to death metal with touches of synth pop added in for good measure. Mixing pleasure with pain is a difficult accomplishment in the world of music, yet these folks seem to have mastered the art. Nine tunes including "The Sound Of Her Wings," "The Forgotten," and "Red Winter." (Rating: 4)



ESCAPADE

Citrus Cloud Cover (Double CD, Mother West, Instrumental/improvisation)

When I was a closed minded little snit of a kid, you would've never gotten me to listen to something like this. Now that I'm a big husky man-adult, this kind of stuff fascinates me. The note on the back of the cover says it all. The music was composed spontaneously and collectively and there are no overdubs. How many bands can make that claim? The basic sound is something like a mixture of space rock and jazz music. Two tracks ("Undermine" and "Overmine") were recorded live at the Orion Space-Rock Festival which is held in Baltimore. For a spontaneous recording outfit, this group manages to come up with two disc's worth of material that is anything but directionless. The ideas are inventive, progressive, and at times very much off the wall. As cool as an ice cube insertion... (Rating: 4)



EUPHONE

Breaking Parole EP (CD EP, Hefty, Instrumental)

Euphone is the one man project of **Ryan Rapsys** (with some help from guitarist **Bill Dolan**). The last release from **Euphone** was one of my top favorite releases of 1997. This EP picks up where the full-length left off. Mr. Rapsys is mainly a percussionist, so his tunes are driven by rhythms. Although there are certainly some elements of jazz in this music, it is much smarter than that. What makes these tunes really shine is their sparseness. Instead of overlaying and overproducing his tunes, Ryan leaves plenty of open space for the listener. My only gripe? I want more. An EP just isn't enough when the music is this cool. Seven tunes including "The Sun Theme" and "Little Warbles." (Rating: 5)



THE EVAPORATORS/THEE GOBLINS

I Gotta Rash/We Are Thee Goblins From Canada (12" vinyl and CD combo, Nardwuar/Mint, Rock)

Nardwuar is, to my knowledge, the only company currently selling 12" vinyl releases that include a bonus CD in the package. Not only that, this band also offers their releases on 8-track (available by mail only). Far from being just a novelty, however, **The Evaporators** are a band pumped up with energy, style, and hyper

ideas that are downplayed somewhat by the vocals. Basically a good listen, with the exception of the cover of "Eleanor Rigby" (which would have been better left in the ground). (Not Rated)

THE GODRAYS

Well Composed Death Notice (CD EP, Sin-N-Spin, Pop)

Another enjoyable mini-spinner from **The Godrays**. This guitar pop band packs an emotional punch that is missing in most modern day pop acts. This could be in part because of the band's reflective lyrics and somewhat moody arrangements. I like this band best when they are at their most subtle (the title track is a good example). Other favorites this time around are "Shark Shaped Ship" (an emotional outpouring) and "Hold Tight." We eagerly await the next full-length form this engaging band... (Rating: 4)



GOTOHELLS

Burning Bridges (CD, Vagrant, Rock)

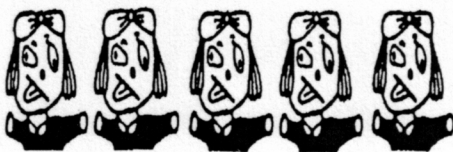
Loose, ballsy, macho cock rock with a big-assed sound. It's odd that with so many rock bands out there that so few realize the secret to making it work: Relax and just CUT LOOSE. Well, that's EXACTLY what Florida's **Gotohells** do on *Burning Bridges*. No cute time changes. No bizarre studio tricks. No fancy playing. No intellectual crap. This band just gets down and plays like there's no tomorrow. The rip roaring buzzsaw guitars trot along beautifully with the who give a shit vocalist while the drummer and bass player pound away into infinity. There's a **Stooges** flavor in many of these tunes, while others are simply basic rock music played from the hip. Rockin' stuff that gets to you. (Rating: 4)



GRASSHOPPER AND THE GOLDEN CRICKETS

The Orbit of Eternal Grace (CD, Beggars Banquet, Pop)

NEATO. **Grasshopper** is best known as the guitarist of the ever-challenging **Mercury Rev**. Even that didn't quite prepare me for how exceptional this CD is. Full of dreamy, kaleidoscopic pop not unlike some mid-period **Pink Floyd**, this band has an ethereal, dreamy sound that is characterized by breathy vocals and some absolutely mind blowing guitar work. Musicians adding their talents to the disc include **Suzanna Thorpe**, **Jonathan Donahue**, and **Dave Fridmann**. This music sounds very nineties while retaining some of the better elements of late seventies psychedelic rock. This is just experimental enough to be interesting, while just accessible enough to make for good listening. Great tunes include "The Ballad of the One Eyed Angelfish," "The Orbit of Eternal Grace," and "Midnight Express." (Rating: 5)



THE GRASSY KNOLL

The Grassy Knoll III (CD, Nettwerk, Instrumental)

Man oh man. I was HUNGRY AS HELL to hear this disc. After all, the previous CD from **The Grassy Knoll** was one of the best CDs of the year. With *The Grassy Knoll III*, the band continues in the same grand path...creating some of the most trippy, hallucinogenic, dub-like jazzy instrumental music on the planet. Creative mastermind **Bob Green**'s compositions are heady and complex...heading in multiple directions at once...while slowly pulling the listener into his otherworldly mix of rhythm and sound. Putting it simply, this man is creating some of the most hypnotic music found anywhere. And while it borrows from a multitude of sources, it doesn't actually steal from anyone. Thirteen brain challenging tunes including "A Beaten Dog Beneath the Hail," "The Violent Misery of Everything Lost," and "112 Greene Street." This ought to appeal to fans of acid jazz, dub, ambient, soundtracks, techno...and just about everything else. This disc is a MUST HAVE, for certain... (Rating: 6)



JIM GREER

Rover Songs (CD, Fortune, Pop)

A different sort of pop music. So many popsters take exactly the same approach. No wonder that are so many carbon copy pop bands around. You'd think that simply being able to tap into one's imagination wouldn't be sure a rare thing, but it is. **Jim Greer** is a gem in the world of underground pop because he's not following any particular path. Instead, Jim simply follows his own unique muse. It's hard to describe this guy's "sound" because, although he has his own sound, he treads in a wide spectrum of musical influences. "Southern States," the opening track, almost sounds like **Ben Folds Five**. But by the second tune, that comparison no longer holds. No matter how he chooses to get his point across, Jim succeeds in getting to the point with his songs. Even the piano instrumental ("Hunker in the Bunker") is a standout. If you can't find this in stores, e-mail the label at fortune@dnai.com. (Rating: 5)



GUMBY

(Playdough little kid kind of entertainment figure)

Dumb ol' **Gumby** wasn't good for nothing. His goddamn dough-like head and his warp seven ankles bashed his boney out of Cincinnati. The shoestring mouth and the sloping head brought injustice into the homes of our children and their children...promoting a puppetassed world where nothing ever happened. **Pokey** wasn't any better, pumping his sloppy orange ass around the screen like a sex object for **Marsha**. The ugly little playdough world was nothing more than a dash of pepper and a hashing of brats. The shame fell upon the producers and animators, opting for the balance of a more obvious nature... (Rating: 1)



LISA HALL

Is This Real? (CD, Warner Bros., Pop)

Despite the fact that I enjoy listening to this, I can only recommend it to a very specific audience...that being folks who are into super slick Top 40 radio pop. There's certainly money and a certain calculated manner to the tunes on **Lisa Hall**'s debut CD. But despite this, Ms. Hall's tunes are credible, hummable, and well arranged. Her breathy vocal overlays sound rather grand indeed over the safe and steady rhythms, creating highly produced toe tapping music with brains. Ten tunes including "Comatose," "The Sign," and "Secret." This disc may very well yield some BIG hits... (Not Rated)

HAYDEN

(Live performance, August 13, 1998)

I have been an ardent supporter of **Hayden**'s music since hearing his first disc. In case you don't already know the rags to riches story, Hayden recorded an album in his parent's bedroom which ended up being a huge commercial success on the Canadian music charts. Since that time Hayden has continued writing and recording extraordinary music that has thus far only caught on in a minor way in the United States. Though I love this guy's music, I had the feeling that a live show might not be terribly exciting. After all, most of the music is mid-tempo or very soft. Boy was I WRONG. Hayden KICKED ASS in concert. His backup band was mindblowing...pushing many of the tunes to a new level. Everyone switched instruments constantly, without sacrificing quality. Of course, Hayden's true element came forward during the acoustic section of the show which demonstrated that this fellow's songs are strong enough to stand on their own without any backup whatsoever. Still, hearing material I know and love played with some extra backing meat was a real treat. In addition to being a powerful performer (Hayden managed to keep everyone's attention despite the fact that he kept his eyes closed during most of his songs), this cool Canadian also displayed a keen sense of connecting with his audience...communicating with them instead of speaking at them. You would think from the introspective, serious nature of his music that Hayden would be a very serious performer. WRONG. His in-between song patter had the audience in stitches. This was easily one of the best concerts of the year from a songwriter who is just hitting the prime of his career. Get in on the ground floor. Hayden is the BEST. (Rating: 6)



HAZE

Master of the Powerless (CD, Emerald Forest Entertainment, Pop/rock)

My first reactions are rarely wrong. However, my giggles and initial bad reaction to this CD were dismissed as soon as I put the disc in and pressed PLAY. Though her image is similar to thousands upon thousands of talentless retards, **Haze** rises high above the onslaught of current female music artists. To put it simply, she has good songs...plus she's got a great sultry, sexy vocal style that grabs your attention immediately. The music is well produced rock/pop with an industrial edge. In addition to her own cool tunes, Haze also

presents surprisingly credible covers of "Tracks of My Tears" and "Tom Dooley." This lady is an exciting new artist with the stuff it takes to really go somewhere. Check out Haze's web site at <http://www.coolhaze.com>. (Rating: 4)



THE HIGH LLAMAS

Lollo Rosso (CD, V2, Pop)

Remixes are to CDs what live releases were to vinyl. That is, lots and lots of groups release the things in between their REAL releases. Remixes can be very good or mere filler, but they are almost never as good as a band's normal releases. This is the case with this disc of remixes from *babysue* favorites **The High Llamas**. Yes, this is eons better than most remix CDs...but it is still not nearly as pleasing as the Llamas' last release. Oh well. This just makes us hungry for the next regular studio full-length... (Not Rated)

HOMOSEXUALS

(Alternative lifestyle almost people kind of things)

Before this review even gets underway, let me state that I am well aware that THERE ARE EXCEPTIONS. There are ALWAYS exceptions to every rule. Anyone who doesn't know that is an idiot. Well...now that we've got THAT out of the way... **Homosexuals** are, unfortunately, a rather pathetic lot. They claim to be progressive while at the same time being very closed minded and prejudiced. Their taste is predictable and samey. The music they listen to is always THE WORST. They act phony...they usually dress stupid...they're arrogant...and they're got a really bad attitude about themselves. No wonder almost all of them want to stay in little groups all amongst themselves. After all, who would WANT these people around except for others of their own kind? Sorry homosexuals. I'd like to give you all a high rating because I think you have the potential to be *really cool people*. But this is the real world. And, in reality, you are simply shitty and depressing. (Rating: 1)



HOUSE OF WIRES

You Are Obsolete (CD, Tooth & Nail, Pop)

Upon hearing this, the first thing I thought was "This reminds me of **Joy Electric**!" So it was no surprise at all when I read the bio which explained that **House of Wires** was "discovered" by Mr. J.E. himself, **Ronnie Martin**. But whereas Mr. Martin's analog electronic pop picks up where the **Archies** left off (don't laugh...it's a compliment!), **House of Wires** songs are more similar to bands like **O.M.D.** (the vocals are particularly similar). Basically upbeat analog electronic pop with occasional mood swings. Fun. (Not Rated)

KENNY HOWES

Back To You Today! (CD, A.A.J./Shoeleg, Pop)

Kenny Howes is one of the best kept secrets in the Southeast. *Back To You Today!* is Mr. Howes' third full-length, and it's another smashup collection of killer pop. It's no wonder this guy has become a favorite among pop music reviewers across the country. I can't

figure out why a record company has not signed this fellow, as his material is eons better than most of the pop slop that comes into this office. Just as on his previous releases, **Kenny** writes and plays everything except drums. The music harkens back to pop from the late seventies and early eighties. There are lots of **Beatles** influences, and the guitar playing in particular reminds me of British groups from the late seventies. These tunes feature some very intricate arrangements, creating a semi-psychedelic sound. But once again, it's those super clean vocals and harmonies that send these compositions way up into the clouds and away. A clean hit. (Rating: 5)



LIDA HUSIK

Faith In Space (CD, Alias, Pop)

Lida Husik is a true original. When I think of women whose music matters most in the nineties, her name immediately comes to mind. Ms. Husik's music doesn't fit in any particular genre. The only constant in her string of releases is that the material is always top notch. On *Faith In Space*, Lida returns to the technol/trip hop style of her earlier releases. For this release **Beaumont Hannant** takes charge of the beat generation duties. Together, he and Ms. Husik create some trance-like pop pieces that are both heady and rhythmic. This disc features ten tracks, our favorites being "Build A Fire," "Waterfall," and "Blood and Water." Although I think I prefer Lida's pop music (you MUST check out *Fly Stereophonic*, one of the great underrecognized pop discs of the decade), I still get a mighty big charge out of this. Includes an obtuse cover of **The Jam's** "Monday." (Rating: 5)



INDUSTRIAL TEPEE

What Diving Engine (CD, Mother West, Pop/rock)

This is NOT an industrial band...but it is an INDUSTRIAL one. **Industrial Tepee** is the duo of **Tom Shaner** and **Bob Sharkey** (with some additional musicians adding support). Together they write, sing, and play some great goddamn pop music with just the slightest hint of country. Some of these tunes remind me of mid-period **Kinks**, although overall this band has a very different sound. Excellent melodies, smart lyrics, snappy arrangements, and an overall good feeling are present in all of the tunes on this disc. There are some real beauties here, too. Check out "Swim (The Tide of Love)" or "Joe's Airfield." This band is writing tunes straight from the heart, yet the end result is neither sappy nor emotionally draining. Simply put, **Industrial Tepee** is a damn great little outfit creating some amazingly credible pop tunes. Yes. (Rating: 5)



INNER CITY PEOPLE

(Attitude ridden smelly kind of things)

I moved a few months ago to a secluded home. One of the reasons I moved was to get away from **Inner City People**. After being around these "people" for a

few years, I definitely had my fill. What's wrong with pathetic urban schmucks, you ask? PLENTY. All they seem to have on their minds are charity walks, recycling, politics, expensive cars, who has done what and who has gone where, dumb clothes, and ugly haircuts. One thing they definitely can't do is communicate effectively. It's probably because their phyness is so deep that they themselves aren't even aware of it. Whatever the case, I am so glad I escaped the shitty little world of inner city people...crapasses jogging and rollerblading everywhere I went...walking their ugly ratass doggies...pushing their little ratchildren in carriages. Go to hell, inner city people. You are all so stupid that you don't even know how pathetic you are. (Rating: 1)



SUSAN JAMES

Fantastic Voyage: A Double Album (Double CD, Red Letter, Pop)

Ultra-sweet voiced **Susan James** is a surefire hit for folks into artists like **Joni Mitchell** and **Sinead O'Connor**. Ms. James' intricately arranged progressive pop music is just what a lot of folks are probably searching for in music. The melodies are strong, and the music extremely accessible. This double CD contains twenty tracks which include "Manna," "Every Side of Lonely," "The Bean March," and "Stranger Bedfellows" among others. Though this doesn't really push my peculiar buttons, I would still recommend this for folks into the aforementioned similar-sounding artists... (Not Rated)

JEREMY

Pop Heaven (CD, Jam, Pop)

Of all the underground singer/songwriters that I can think of, **Jeremy Morris** is the epitome of the self made pop star. Despite all the frustrating obstacles of the shitty world of music, **Jeremy** continues writing and recording some of the most uplifting and beautiful pop that the world has ever known. *Pop Heaven* is possibly Mr. Morris' strongest release to date. The disc is full of unashamedly positive pop that stands out like cheez whiz in a world awash with too many artists trying way too hard to be different and unique. **Jeremy** has the amazing ability to take trite musical cliches and make them sound totally genuine and unique. This could possibly be because instead of just hashing out generic music he puts his heart and soul into his tunes. Never has this been more true than in absolutely stunning pop confessions like "I'm Flying," "Goodbye Bad Guy," "You're Not Alone" (my personal favorite), "Come To Me," and "Can't Make You Stay." The silly psychedelic cover fits the tunes perfectly, and the liner notes are practically a who's-who of underground pop in the nineties. The only slight problem with this CD is that it's heavy on the treble, which can easily be remedied by the simple twist of a knob. Can't find it? Write to Jam Records, 3424 Wedgewood Drive, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. (Rating: 6)



JON COUGAR CONCENTRATION CAMP*Til Niagara Falls...* (CD, BYO, Rock)

Hard, sharp, direct, edgy, loud, succinct, powerhouse punk/pop. I had heard of this band before (who could forget the name?), but this is the first release I've heard. **Jon Cougar Concentration Camp** tunes are extremely simple in nature, but they are slammed out as if there isn't going to be any tomorrow. "C'mon, Baby C'mon" is a great introduction, and from there the band just flails and pounds away until their point is driven home. For a three-piece band, these guys have a FIERCE energy that is both captivating and somewhat frightening. Above all, they're got some killer tunes. Our favorites are "Clique" and the aforementioned "C'mon, Baby C'mon." From the sound of this, I'd bet these guys are a MONSTER in concert... (Rating: 5)

**THE KINKS**

Muswell Hillbillies, Everybody's In Showbiz, Preservation Act I, Preservation Act II (CD reissues, Velvel, Pop/rock)

Hats off to the folks at Velvel for reissuing what I consider to be music from the most incredible point in the Kinks' long and winding career. I was a late bloomer as far as Kinks fans go, and *Preservation Act I* was the first album I obtained when I was in high school. This long overlooked and critically neglected album had a huge impact on my life as a kid...but we'll get to that disc later in this overly lengthy review.

Muswell Hillbillies has long been a favorite among Kinksaholics and for good reason. The album marked somewhat of a change in direction for the band, as they introduced a somewhat drunken hillbilly influence into their music. The timeless tunes on this album can be played literally into the ground...and they will STILL sound good. The original RCA pressings of this album (or at least the two in my collection) were marred by pops and crackles...and the mastering just wasn't so good. The CD reissue suffers from neither of these problems. Legendary tracks like "20th Century Man," "Acute Schizophrenia Paranoia Blues," "Holiday," "Alcohol," "Complicated Life," "Uncle Son," and "Muswell Hillbilly" sound as clear as beer and better than ever. This album doesn't contain one bad track...and the extra good news is that the listener is also treated to two previously unreleased bonus tracks ("Mountain Woman," "Kentucky Moon"). If the only Kinks songs you know are "You Really Got Me" and "Superman," you need to back up and check out *Muswell Hillbillies*. (Rating: 6)

Most folks would probably say that *Everybody's In Showbiz* was the high point in the band's career (either that or *Village Green Preservation Society*). There's no denying the quality of the material. Picking up where *Muswell Hillbillies* left off, *Showbiz* finds Ray Davies alternating between pure upbeat tunes ("Here Comes Yet Another Day," "Motorway"), offbeat pop ("Unreal Reality," "Supersonic Rocket Ship," "Look A Little On The Sunnyside"), and extremely introspective ballads ("Sitting In My Hotel," "Celluloid Heroes"). What is probably most intriguing about this album were Mr. Davies' insights into his own life at the time ("All my friends would ask me what it's all leading to..."). The disc also includes the live LP. *Showbiz* is an alter-

nately goofy and surprisingly candid collection. Includes the bonus tracks "Till The End Of The Day" and "She's Bought A Hat Like Princess Marina." Whew. (Rating: 6)

Next up is my personal favorite. *Preservation Act I* contains what I consider to be some of the most incredibly beautiful tunes that Ray Davies has ever penned. At this point, it almost seems as if the band was becoming a loose collection of friends as more horns came into the picture and female backup singers were added. As a teenager, I ran around for months humming "Daylight," "Sweet Lady Genevieve," "Where Are They Now?" (which may be my favorite Kinks song ever), "I Am Your Man," and "Sitting In The Midday Sun." All the while I was wondering why the only Kinks songs anyone seemed familiar with were "You Really Got Me" and "Tired of Waiting"...when this newer material was obviously so much better...? Whatever...this album made me go nuts over the band...and I immediately began scanning record shops for the band's back catalog. Just as was the case with *Muswell Hillbillies*, RCA's record pressing plant was producing vinyl albums with plenty of pops and crackles. Hearing these tunes in crystal clear digital format is like having that same high school rush all over again. Really great music is music that can stand the test of time...and this does just that. (Rating: 6)

Preservation Act II, the Kinks' follow-up double album, found the band turning the entire troupe into a traveling vaudeville show. The lyrics, tunes, and package were created in such a way that the band could actually pack up and perform more as a stage show than a rock band. I'm not sure if perhaps a few fans were lost along the way, but as a kid I was knocked out...and still am. Though *Act II* is certainly more campy and calculated than *Act I*, the band (and more importantly the tunes) remained as strong as ever. This time around the songs were tied together by a narrator which only added to the unusual direction. This double album is mind-blowing in its sheer intensity. Current bands seem to have difficulty coming up with one credible tune per album. The Kinks managed to flood the listener with no less than 23 tracks...and THEY ALL KICKED ASS. There are too many "never were hits" to mention here, but some personal favorites include "Introduction to Solution," "When A Solution Comes" (this is particularly cool), "Second-Hand Car Spiv," "Mirror of Love," "Oh Where Oh Where Is Love?," "Nothing Lasts Forever" (ahhh...beautiful), and "Artificial Man." Another "6"? You BET. (Rating: 6)

IN CONCLUSION... If you are as knocked out as I am that Velvel has re-released these long overlooked classics, consider this. Coming soon are reissues of *Soap Opera* (YEAH!!!), *Schoolboys In Disgrace* (YEAH YEAH!!!), *Misfits* (YEAH YEAH YEAH!!!), *Sleepwalker* (more YEAHS!), *Low Budget* (not as many yeaHS), *State of Confusion* (YEAH!), *Give the People What They Want* (less yeaHS), and *Word of Mouth* (another YEAH!). (Overall rating: 6)

**SUZANNE LANGILLE WITH LOREN MAZZACANE CONNORS**

The Enchanted Forest (CD, Secretly Canadian, Extremely soft pop)

This is one of the quietest CDs I've heard this year, but unlike most quiet CDs that we receive this one isn't trance or ambient music. Instead, **Suzanne Langille** plays extremely quiet guitar pop that is so subtle that it almost isn't even there at all. Ms. Langille's restraint in her music is what we find most appealing, as her words and sparse music are rather engaging while simultaneously mentally challenging. Possibly the most interesting aspect of this disc is its timelessness. For all intensive purposes, this could have been recorded in the twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties, or nineties. Suzanne's music has an eerie obtuse quality that doesn't quite fit into any specific genre or time period. In a word, this is...unique. And in today's climate of "everybody sounds just like everybody else"...that's saying something. Very different. (Rating: 4)

**LIGHT BULBS**

(Fragile glass light producing stupid kind of things) Light not necessary. When sun come up is time for seeing. When sun go down, no need to see. Big wow for person what discover light bulb. Bulbs everywhere make for life not as good as before...make for too much work...too much chaos...and cause for computer. Do away with all light bulb action for better. Everyone always think progress good. It not. Progress bad. (Rating: 1)

**ARTO LINDSAY**

Noon Chill (CD, Bar/None, Obtuse pop)

The more I hear from **Arto Lindsay** the more impressed I am. The guy is simply in a class all by himself, and this has never been more true than on *Noon Chill*. I received this disc late, but I had been reading all kinds of reviews where the general consensus seemed to be that everyone was confused by this CD. Now I know why. Although comparisons are almost worthless in trying to describe this, try to imagine **Donovan** singing Brazilian pop tunes. That should at least give you some idea of what this is like. Lindsay's material is very subtle. Yes, it is very offbeat and strange...but it's so subtle that you almost don't notice it at first. Most of the other reviews of this disc were not overly positive. Our own personal view is that this is one of Mr. Lindsay's best. As always, the production and arrangements are superb. In particular, the songs this time around are exceptional...showing what a mature artist this man has become. A very solid release from start to finish featuring odd compositions like "Whirlwind," "Anything," "Take My Place," and "Reentry." A really cool mental trip. (Rating: 5)

**LIVING**

(State of being kind of thing)

Living just isn't what it's cracked up to be, or isn't even what it once was. The life that you think you have isn't what you think it is at all. Your friends' lives aren't what

you think they are. Everyone tries to present a distortion of what their life is really like because they don't want to face (to themselves or to others) what they are really going through in their day-to-day life. Though living is an overrated state of existence, dying probably isn't everything it should be either. In the end, nothing is anything. The only distance between immediacy and the hereafter is tiny little doll arms. The arms talk and move in circles, sometimes hovering in and out of your line of vision. At the end of an exhaustive cloud of product, a lonely little Donna pouts a frown to let everyone down. Donna's frown is eventually replaced by **Andrew the Locksmith**, who seems to have keys for everything imaginable. Power to the ol' pokey dog, power to the stroker. (Rating: 1)



LOCAL H

Pack Up The Cats (CD, Island, Rock/pop)

Local H is one KICKASS ROCK BAND. They've approached things from a different angle than most bands, yet have had amazingly big success doing it THEIR way. *Pack Up The Cats* picks up where the last disc left off. This is rebellious high school angst prepared and produced by two guys who haven't lost their innate desire to play loud music. The band's pop influences have never been stronger, but that doesn't in any way detract from the power or intensity of their music. I particularly like the way the band incorporating some everyday common house sounds into the tunes (cats meowing, someone walking around whistling). Few popular bands are deserving of the praise and attention they receive. Local H keeps getting better with each release. Their music is rebellious enough for kids, while smart and creative enough for older farts. A whole slew of crunchers including "All-Right (Oh, Yeah)," "Lucky," "Stop Worry And Love The Rock," and "Laminate Man." This is a GREAT CD. (Rating: 6)



LUNACHICKS

Drop Dead Live (CD, Go-Kart, Rock/pop)

Whew. Bizarre hard rockers **Lunachicks** pump like a monkey's ass on their latest live CD. I have unfortunately not caught this band live, but this batch of tunes gives excellent insight into what the concert experience must be like. The music is frantic and wild enough, but these gals have always been into extreme visuals with their outfits and makeup...so that probably adds even more ooooOOOPH! to the music. There are few girl groups around who have the high-charged impact of the Lunachicks. It just goes to show what you can do when you write good songs and stick to your guns. Brain-smashing tunes include "Yeah," "The Day Squid's Gerbil Died," "Don't Want You," and "Dear Dotti." Now that the **Red Aunts** are no more (sob!), the Lunachicks are even more vital to underground rock. This KICKS. (Rating: 5)



MADONNA

Ray Of Light (CD, Warner Bros., Pop)

There are few big celebrities who I respect as much as **Madonna**. True, I did initially despise her image and music. But after years of observing her and her work, I can honestly say that in the world of slick commercial radio pop she is one of the best. Her releases always reflect her concern for high quality and great production. *Ray Of Light* represents a slight departure from previous material as these tunes are techno/dub in nature. Madonna's voice fits this style of music quite well. This disc includes thirteen semi-trippy tunes, and represents yet another successful venture for this multi-talented lady. This isn't her best disc ever, but it's still a great listen. If Madonna had a hairy back I'd probably be turned on by her... (Rating: 4)



GUNNAR MADSEN

Spinning World: 13 Ways Of Looking At A Waltz (CD, G Spot, Instrumental)

Gunnar Madsen is best known as the founder of **The Bobs**...a band that I admit I am unfamiliar with. This could be a plus, as I have no preconceptions in reviewing Mr. Madsen's newest release. *Spinning World* is, in a word, magnificent. Instead of playing pop music (which is most likely expected of him because of his past), Gunnar heads off into the world of instrumental music. The disc contains mostly piano-based pieces, but the arrangements are filled with a variety of other instruments...making this disc a pure delight. This harkens back to a time when music was uplifting and spiritual. With so many artists stumbling over their feet attempting to recreate music from the past (and failing miserably), this disc stands out from the crowd. Aesthetically and sonically delightful. (Rating: 5)



MAIN

Firmament III (CD, Beggars Banquet, Experimental)

Firmament IV (CD, Beggars Banquet, Experimental)

It's odd. My main interest used to be pop music. But after years of hearing WAY too many rock and pop bands that all sound too similar, my interests have turned to experimental music...and my particular favorites are those artists whose music is almost completely abstract. Accordingly, the latest two CDs by **Main** (**Scott Dawson**, formerly of **Loop**) hit my brain dead center. The music on these discs is indeed off the beaten path. Probably too far off the beaten path for the majority of music listeners. These pieces are experimental and void of any sort of commercial appeal whatsoever. Interestingly, the instrument that is played, mutated, and expanded out of all recognition is the guitar. But you would never EVER know that the instrument being played is a guitar unless someone told you. Most folks would probably have difficulty categorizing this as music in the first place. Heady, surreal, bizarre, and fixating...this is a hallucinogenic, hazy dream. I love it. (Rating: 6)



ELENI MANDELL

Wishbone (CD, Mr. Charles, Pop)

As the world's most mentally retarded reviewer, I am always on the lookout for that particular artist, band, or thing that just isn't quite like all the rest. They are few and far between, that's for sure. The latest CD from **Eleni Mandell** is refreshingly different. Ms. Mandell's style of music is an obtuse sort of pop music that has a good bit in common with obscure male artists. The music has an odd masculinity that's inviting and slightly odd. Actually, moody may be a better adjective to describe these tunes. Eleni's tunes creep up on your subconscious in a very subtle way. She's got a sultry, emotional vocal style that fits her tunes well. *Wishbone* contains eleven tracks including "I'm Your Girl," "Wishbone," and "Nickel Plated Man." Good stuff. (Rating: 4)



MARILYN MANSON

Mechanical Animals (CD, Nothing/Interscope, Rock/pop)

No matter what the quality of his recordings and concerts, I am always impressed with **Marilyn Manson**. How many other big name performers can you think of who have based their career largely on *great publicity photos*? Mr. Manson initially started out influenced by **Alice Cooper**, but nowadays his image and sound are more closely aligned with **David Bowie**. Witness the "shocking" cover photo of a "naked" Manson. Can you believe that *anyone* would get upset by this cover? Sheesh. Compared to most stuff out there it's so incredibly TAME. And the music inside? Manson has toned down the harshness so that this almost sounds like FM radio pop. This doesn't in any way match the balls of *Antichrist Superstar*. But then, I get the impression that this man isn't trying to stay in the same vein he's been in. This isn't a bad CD, but if you're looking for harsh and evil...this just ain't it. Even though, it's still a good listen. It'll be interesting to see where this guy heads next. He's beginning to seem more and more like **Ru Paul**... (Rating: 4)



JOAO CARLOS MARTINS

The Essential Bach - Selections From the Complete Edition, Volumes 1-15 (CD, Concord Concerto, Classical/piano)

Brazilian pianist **Joao Carlos Martins** takes **Bach** to the next level. Mr. Martins approaches these well known pieces from a different perspective, often offering a great deal more emotion than one would normally hear from Bach. This disc is a best of collection from Mr. Martins' twenty volume (!?) collection entitled *The Complete Keyboard Works of J.S. Bach*, a twenty year project which was completed in 1998. This disc features fifteen pieces including "Prelude No. 1 in C Major," "French Suite No. 5: Sarabande & Gigue," and "Concerto for Two Pianos & Orchestra in C Major." An impeccable collection of tunes from an extraordinarily talented man. Extremely nice. (Rating: 5)



MEAT BEAT MANIFESTO

Actual Sounds + Voices (CD, Formula/Nothing/Interscope, Dance/dub/electronic/collage)

Jack Dangers is **Meat Beat Manifesto**. He has released a slew of amazing techno/electronic releases to date, and he continues to challenge his listeners. *Actual Sounds + Voices* picks up where the last album left off. The disc is chock full of electronics, samples, dance beats, and funky rhythms. My favorite track this time around is the Orb-like "Acid Again," which has some very funny samples of a young girl proclaiming that she will never do acid again. Other cool tracks include "Everything's Under Control," "Let's Have Fun," and "Wavy Line." Trippy electronic music that sounds the way it OUGHT to sound. Clever, inventive, and intense. (Rating: 5)



MEDESKI MARTIN & WOOD

Combustication (CD, Blue Note, Jazz)

Longtime favorites among the alternative music scene (even though they play jazz), **Medeski Martin & Wood** return with their most progressive release to date. These three guys are masters at sticking in a groove and staying in it. Their music is seductive and stylized to the point that it makes you think that these guys must have been playing together their entire lives. *Combustication* contains some of the band's most spooky sounding stuff to date. Some of the keyboard overlays almost bring to mind artists like **Scorn** or even **Medusa Cyclone**. Simultaneously funk and physical, this trio transcends their genre...creating yet another stunning batch of tunes for an increasingly hungry multitude of fans... (Rating: 5)



MEDUSA CYCLONE

Mr. Devil (CD, Third Gear, Spooky experimental)

The last disc from **Medusa Cyclone** CD is one of my favorite obscurities...although it took a great many listens to finally make me realize how crazy I was about the music. The band is a project created by **Keir McDonald** as a vehicle for his rather unstable and uncategorizable music. I want to compare these "songs" to **Scorn** because of the spooky nature...but they are much more diverse than that. Mr. McDonald has an imagination that puts other musicians to shame. Most other artists are either trying to come up with a "hit" tune or go so far off the deep edge that nobody (or their grandmother) would ever want to hear their stuff because it's so self indulgent. This guy manages to come up with compositions that really mess with your mind. It's like a drug trip...without having to search for them. Hallucinogenic, obtuse, trippy, surreal, and skewed, the tunes on *Mr. Devil* are difficult to describe...and even more difficult to compare to other artists. Simply put, Medusa Cyclone is a musical entity that stands alone in its own category. In today's musical market, that's a BIG one. This one's GREAT! (Rating: 6)



MEN

(Masculine sexuality kind of things)

You'd think with all the talk about "real men" that there would be some examples somewhere to be found to substantiate the idea. But...is NOT! Are no REAL men anywhere. All men same as mouse, having no substantial ball to take hold of and pump. Deep down below, all men excessive sissy wimp. All having very sensitive spot in brain what for crying lite dove tear. Poor men! Comparing to women, you is just all nothings. All damn no good nothings. (Rating: 1)



MIDGET

Jukebox (CD, Sire, Pop/rock)

Good name for a band, and the band itself is even better than the name. This band's strangely hummable powerful pop is reminiscent of bands like **Sparks** or **Chixdiggiti!**. Hyper-charged melodies, steady rhythms, and loud guitars make this band's tunes sound like updated sixties bubblegum. One of the best aspects of **Midget** are their inventive backing vocals. They take cues from fifties and sixties vocal groups and incorporate them into their tunes, giving their modern rock sound a strangely familiar sound from the past. These guys' main focus is obviously writing songs. They've come up with a whole slew of winners on this one. Great tracks include "Invisible Balloon," "The Day Of Your Life," "Welcome Home Jellybean," and "The Way Things Turn Out." Possibly the most amazing thing about these tunes is that they could easily become commercial radio hits. A cool blend of accessibility and imagination. A HIT! (Rating: 5)



THE MINDERS

Hooray For Tuesday (CD, spinART, Pop)

Soaring pop that harkens back to British sixties pop. This reminds me in many ways of **Herman's Hermits** in that the music is presently simply and melodies matter first and foremost. This is the kind of pop music that makes you forget whatever is on your mind. There aren't enough bands who use the approach that less is more. **The Minders** are spearheaded by an English fellow named **Martyn Leaper**. Mr. Leaper certainly has a command of the language of pop. Every tune presented here is clean, precise, and direct. I have a feeling this band's name is going to be discussed a great deal in the months to come among underground pop fanatics. Produced by **Apples In Stereo's Robert Schneider**, you can certainly hear his influence bleeding through the speakers ("I've Been Wondering" sounds almost exactly like a Schneider-penned tune). This is an excellent collection of tunes that'll hold up to a great many listens... (Rating: 5)



MINERAL

EndSerenading (CD, Crank!, Rock/pop)

Nice emotional rock music. **Mineral** are quickly building quite a reputation for themselves based purely on

their ability to play and write good tunes. (They're obviously not going the gimmicky route of wearing stupid clothes and pushing a comball weirdo rock image.) The most endearing elements of the band are their beautiful intertwined electric guitars that weave in and out of one another in a most entertaining fashion...and those plaintive vocals. Though the sound is entirely different, the basic idea behind this band reminds me of **Television**. This ain't no simple pop/rock crap. These guys' tunes are mature and musically complex at times. Urgent tunes like "LoveLetterTypewriter" and "Unfinished" are good examples of what **Mineral** are capable of. This collection of tunes took over two years to complete. The work was worth it. This shines. (Rating: 5)



MONO PUFF

It's Fun To Steal (CD, Bar/None, Pop)

After hearing the second full-length from **Mono Puff**, I'm rather impressed with Mr. **John Flansburgh**. Say...how about if we do this review...WITHOUT MENTIONING HIS "OTHER BAND"??? Can it be done? Can it??? We're always testing the boundaries of reality around here...so let's see if we can AVOID MENTIONING THE NAME OF HIS OTHER BAND. Though some of these pieces do have a somewhat programmed, sterile sound there's a lot of good meat here to rip off the bones and digest. One piece of meat I particularly like chewing is the cover of the **Young Fresh Fellows'** "Hillbilly Drummer Girl" (one of our favorite almost completely overlooked pop gems). Other standout tracks include "Creepy," "Poison Flowers," and "I Just Found Out What Everybody Knows" (a nod of the head to **Frank Zappa**). This is not quite as silly as **They Mi...** OOPS! Oh my God...almost let it slip. "Pretty Fly" is actually my favorite tune because it just doesn't fit. Fun CD. You can find Mono Puff stuff in the cheapie bins. Check it out. It's maybe even better than...uh...uh...uhhhhhHHMMMMM...ahem... (Rating: 4)



MONSTERS UNDER THE BED

Neighborhood of Reality (CD, Optional Art, Pop)

Monsters Under the Bed is an exceptional pop band, and pure proof that one man bands don't have to sound like sterile computerized shit. I was already familiar with these tunes having reviewed an earlier single and listened repeatedly to one of the band's earlier cassette releases. These tunes sound particularly incredible on CD...crisp and clear and breathing energy. In truth, however, it is **Lance Morgan's** tunes that make **Monsters Under the Bed** such a standout pop project. Tunes like "Inner Something," "First One," "Without My Skin" and others pulse with ultra-catchy pop energy while offering superb musical arrangements. This stuff may not stick with you on the first listen, so give these tunes time. After a few listens you'll probably find yourself hooked. This is so much smarter than most of the pop dribble currently being farted out by closed minded record companies desperate to latch onto the next big seller. If you can't find this in stores,

contact Optional Art at P.O. Box 22691, Seattle, WA 98122. This is WAY cool. (Rating: 5)



JOCELYN MONTGOMERY

WITH DAVID LYNCH

Lux Vivens: The Music of Hildegard Von Bingen (Adventure CD, Mammoth, Twelfth century nun pop)

And now for something *completely* different. This puts most gothic releases to shame, although the actual pieces were written hundreds of years ago by a German nun named Hildegard Von Bingen. The artist? Jocelyn Montgomery wasn't a professional singer until David Lynch approached her as she was singing during a walk in the Hollywood Hills. Mr. Lynch approached Ms. Montgomery, and within weeks she was in his studio recording her first album. And WHAT an album it is. These monk-like pieces sound totally incredible recorded with digital effects. "Kyrie" in particular is both eerie and spacey. Jocelyn has a knock-out voice that is so clear it could break glass monkhearts. An absolutely beautiful collection of tunes that just doesn't fit in, and that is a VERY GOOD THING. Spellbinding. (Rating: 5)



MORCHEEBA

(Live performance, September 15, 1998)

Morcheeba are on top of the heap of trip hop/dub/soul pop bands of the nineties. I suppose I didn't realize just how true this was until I attended a recent live concert which was almost sold out. Being an early supporter of this British band, I assumed that...since they were so good...most people wouldn't go for it. After all, when bands or artists put out quality music they are generally ignored by the masses. Morcheeba is one band that has managed to combine quality and integrity with accessibility and commercial success. In concert, the band sounded as good...or even better...than on their recordings. Whoever was at the board mixed this band so well that it was almost unbelievable. Surrounded by candles and subtle lighting, watching this band was a very hypnotic experience. Though they are technically a trio, there were three additional musicians on this tour. The guitarist in particular was amazing...playing some absolutely blistering solos. Lead vocalist Skye Edwards is a true performer. For such a small lady, she has a deep and resonant voice...and her eyes are mesmerizing. And instead of having the kind of attitude one usually associates with techno/trip hop artists, she came across as a very real and genuine lady (her bright orange hair was somewhat shocking). The band was obviously having a good time playing their music...and they had the audience in the palms of their hands from the very first tune. Though you may have to fight the crowds to see them now (bummer), this band is still pleasing our pants off in *babysue*land. This was a GREAT concert. (Rating: 5)



MR. ZERO

Voodoo's Eros (CD, Get Hip Recordings, Garage rock) Nice lively garage rock that's particularly good in the rhythm department. Mr. Zero is a project spearheaded by Oli Dolot (formerly of Squares and Headcoats). The cuts on this CD are sparse and simple, yet there's a great deal of energy present due to spirited playing and extra crunchy production. The guitars are loud and distorted, and the vocals intense. Mr. Zero is a garage party band to be certain, with more punch and circumstance than a barrel full of pollydogs. (Rating: 4)



THE MUSIC BUSINESS

(Incestuous perverted kind of thing)

Isn't the music business a *great* thing? There are so many wonderful people involved in it. All those wonderful marketing specialists...all those creative A & R people...all those pathetically dressed aging big executives hoping to score with some up-and-coming artist who was signed for no other reason than someone in the company wanted to screw them...all those ego-inflated disc jockeys who think that what they play actually matters...all those writers who have such a rotten attitude about what they're doing...and last, but not least, all those obnoxious idiot musicians who create all that terrible goddamn music that helps to make the world a shittier place for all of us. All hail the music business. It's a wonderful thing, it is. And now...WE TIP OUR HATS to all the FABULOUS CONTACTS that we've made over the years... (Rating: 1)



NADA SURF

The Proximity Effect (CD, Elektra, Pop/rock)

In all honestly, the first time I listened to this I wasn't too impressed. Fortunately, I gave this disc a few spins before writing this review because this band has come up with an absolutely stunning collection of pop tunes. I liked the last Nada Surf CD, but this is light years better. The band's thoughtful, intelligent pop music is anchored in a basic guitar/bass/drum lineup...but they inject new energy and life into their bright pop tunes. To top it all off, the lyrics actually make you think (give a listen to "Why Are You So Mean To Me?"). The softer stuff really hits home. There are a lot of bands playing pop/rock, but few who do it as well as Nada Surf. An exceptional collection of great tunes. (Rating: 5)



NEW RADICALS

Maybe You've Been Brainwashed Too (CD, MCA, Pop)

You know...I wanted to hate this, but I ended up really liking it. This sounds very much like Top 40 radio crap...but underneath the surface there's more going on than initially meets the ears (particularly in the lyric department). Bandleader Gregg Alexander's clean, techno-like radio pop sounds something like a schmaltzier version of Ben Folds Five. The guy's got

a real knack for writing radio friendly pop tunes, and he's got a falsetto that you'll have to hear to believe (reminds me very much of seventies popster Andy Pratt). I'm not too crazy about commercial music...but when it sounds this sincere and real, I don't mind the big production or the busy arrangements at all. Mr. Alexander is a voice that we're all going to be hearing a lot more from in the years to come. That's a certainty. (Rating: 4)



OF MONTREAL

The Bedside Drama A Petite Tragedy (CD, Kindercore, Pop)

Athens, Georgia's Of Montreal play a peculiar brand of pop music that wouldn't sound out of place amidst music recorded around 1934 or 1947. That is to say that this band's acoustic driven pop music has a sound that harkens back to a time gone by. Songwriter Kevin Barnes has a breezy, light songwriting style that stands out from the pack like mashed potato acid. The only slight negative here is that there needs to be more variation in the vocal department. Either that or a few instrumentals would help to break things up. A slight problem, as this is still heads above most pop CDs I've heard of late. This cool band will appeal to fans of Apples In Stereo and Neutral Milk Hotel... (Not Rated)

KEN PEPOWSKI

Grenadilla (CD, Concord, Jazz/clarinet)

This is a beautiful collection of pieces centered around the clarinet. Ken Peplowski is amazingly adept at the clarinet, and the tunes on *Grenadilla* are light and airy compositions that are both inspirational and upbeat. "Grenadilla" is the name of a type of wood from which most clarinets are made. Perhaps this offers some explanation as to why this disc has such an organic sound. Tripping in and out of a variety of musical styles, Peplowski's intent in making this disc was to explore different styles in which the clarinet could be utilized. Ultra cool pieces include "Benny's Pennies" (a variation on "Pennies From Heaven"), "Copi," "Indian Summer," and "Cry Me A River." This is super slick, produced music that comes across sounding very sincere, clear, and real. Excellent. (Rating: 5)



PETS

(Stupid living things cared for by other stupid living things)

Get something that's alive and own it. Feed the thing and nurture it. Then fake yourself into believing that the thing loves you or cares about you. The life that you own doesn't give a damn about you. Your dogs...birds...cats...snakes...whatever... They wouldn't stay around if you didn't feed them or keep them inside a cage or a fence. Having a pet says a lot about you as a person. It means that you are boring. The only good reason to have a pet is to have something to beat...besides yourself. (Rating: 1)



PILSNER

Autosuggestion (CD, Get Hip Recordings, Rock)
Straight ahead, driving, going-to-hell rock music delivered without extra trimmings. **Pilsner** forgets the side dishes and gets right to the meat on the cleverly titled *Autosuggestion*. Instead of gimmicks and studio tricks, this band simply gets down and plays like the world is going to end. These guys have a really rough screamer of a vocalist (he does calm down occasionally), and authentic garage rock guitars that scream and howl like Heathermockers. Some of the band's louder moments almost sound reminiscent of early **Alice Cooper** (check out the chorus of "Fish Song" or "Shut Up!"). For hellraising rock music, you won't do much better than this. Pilsner is one FAT piece of LEAN MEAT. (Rating: 5)



PINETOP SEVEN

Rigging The Top Lights (CD, Truckstop, Pop)
With the onslaught of too many bands making music, what one usually finds in a home recorded disc is a bunch of crappy sounding shit that took no talent to write or produce. Fortunately, there are little gems like **Pinetop Seven** that pop up unexpectedly amidst the growing pile of rotten crap. Sounding more like a band from the midwest than Chicago (their hometown), this band sounds something like a serious **Jonathan Richman** or a more Americanized **Richard Thompson**. Actually, their music is a somewhat different type of pop with a yearning, dreamy quality. Songwriters **Darren Richard** and **Charles Kim** come up with some excellent tunes here...and the playing and recording are just right. Upright bassist **Ryan Hembrey** completes the picture...making Pinetop Seven an amazingly great little pop band. An obscure treasure. (Rating: 5)



PLANET MOSQUITO

Planet Mosquito (CD, Monolith/Soundproof, Electronic)
With the explosion of electronic artists in the nineties, the unfortunate side effect is that most of them are nothing more than carbon copies of one another. Most electronic musicians seem to like a particular style and they do nothing more than ape it in their own recordings. **Planet Mosquito** is a refreshing change simply because this "band" doesn't sound like other electronic bands. The only similar sounding band I can think of is **Spectrum**, probably because of the reliance on analog synthesizers. I particularly like the fact that the band does not drown the vocals in effects. Why, you can actually UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE SAYING (!!!!!!!)....which is virtually unheard of in the world of electronica. Overall, this is an ambitious CD that is available only by mail. Interested? Pop \$12 in an envelope and mail to Monolith/Soundproof, P.O. Box 990980, Boston, MA 02199. (Rating: 4)



POCKET FISHMEN

Simian Dreams (CD, Enhanced, Rock/pop)
One of my top favorite Austin bands ever returns with a mighty curious batch of new tunes. **Pocket Fishmen** is a wild and totally over the edge band that sounds something like a cross between the **Buzzcocks**, **The Bonzo Dog Band**, **The Sex Pistols**, and **The Dickies**. On this release, the band concentrates their energies on merkins and promoting the idea of having sex with gorillas. The lyrics and music are a weird blur of craziness...but the bizarre lyrics are offset by a band that is actually quite tight and proficient. Fronted by **Brant Bingamon** (easily one of the sexiest goddamn fellows in music), the Pocket Fishmen are one of the best...and funniest...buzzsaw rock bands EVER. My top picks this go 'round are "One Blowjob, One Handjob, One Vagina Job" and "Missy LeHand," the latter of which almost sounds like it could've been an outtake from **Bowie's** *Ziggy Stardust* album. This is a great band that is truly worthy of more recognition... (Rating: 6)



IGGY POP AND THE STOOGES

Live In L.A. 73 (CD, Snapper Music, Rock), *Your Pretty Face Is Going To Hell* (CD, Snapper Music, Rock)
As a big fan of **Iggy's** solo material as well as his period with the **Stooges**, it is interesting to hear these live tracks, rehearsals, and unreleased tracks. After all, at the time these tunes were recorded Iggy was just making his mark on a public that wasn't quite ready for his kind of entertainment. Unfortunately, I can only recommend these two CDs for Iggy completists. It's not that the material isn't good...there's some remarkable stuff to be found on both of these CDs. But the sound quality sounds like a medium-quality bootleg...and that limits the extent to which the music can be enjoyed. Instead, this serves as documentation of an artist in the seventies pushing the limits of what rock music was about. *Live In L.A. 73* is an interesting document of a live show (wish I'd been there), while *Your Pretty Face...* features unreleased tracks and rehearsals. Iggy's importance and influence has only been recognized in the past few years as countless upon countless bands have aped his style. It's kinda like the **Ramones**. Very few people liked them when they were at their peak, but then two decades later everyone is scrambling to proclaim how legendary their early work was... (Not Rated)

POSSUM DIXON

New Sheets (CD, Interscope, Pop)
Hard to believe that **Possum Dixon** has been around as long as it has. After all, with a name like that you would've thought the band would've broken up as a short-lived novelty band after beginning in 1990. Since that time, the band has consistently played live shows while releasing a whole slew of good discs...finally ending up in a comfortable spot on Interscope. *New Sheets* finds Possum Dixon sounding poppier than ever. The defining elements are still strong melodies and simple tunes. No difficult material here...and that may be the band's greatest strength. This one's appropriately produced by **Ric Ocasek**. (Not Rated)

THE CHRIS POTTER QUARTET

Vertigo (CD, Concord, Jazz)
The appropriately titled *Vertigo* features some loose and absolutely sultry jazz by **The Chris Potter Quartet**. What may set this quartet apart from most is that they play all original music composed by saxophonist **Chris Potter**. The tunes have a definite sound and direction, but the overall feeling this gives the listener is that of spontaneity. It's almost like mood music for the mind. Mr. Potter's saxophone weaves in and out of these tunes in a sometimes unconventional fashion. His style of music has been dubbed "contemporary acoustic jazz," and apparently the man is on the cutting edge. As is usually the case with Concord releases, the packaging and production are top notch...making this collection of nine tunes an extraordinary listen... (Rating: 4)



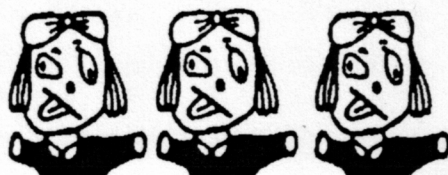
POUNDHOUND

Massive Grooves From The Electric Church of Psychofunkadelic Grungelism Rock Music (CD, Metal Blade, Rock/pop)
King's X is easily one of the best commercially successful rock acts of this decade. Despite the fact that the band's music is intelligent and complex, they still managed to become hugely popular. That band is propelled by a talented young fellow named **Doug Pinnick**, who has just released a solo recording under the moniker **Poundhound** (good name!). What does this sound like? Well basically...it sounds just like King's X! So why go solo you ask? Hey, WHY NOT? Doug is RICH now...and he can do ANYTHING HE DAMN WELL PLEASES. And because virtually everything he does sounds damn good, that's O.K. with us! Lots of thick meaty music here. Our faves are "Jangle" (great guitar work on this one), "Love," "Soul," and "River." This was recorded over a five year period, and the amount of work that went into making this is obvious. Mr. Pinnick is one amazing fellow. This is DAMN good! (Rating: 5)



PRIMUS

Rhinoplasty (Enhanced CD EP, Interscope, Rock/pop)
This is the first **Primus** release that I have heard that I'm not so crazy about, but that could be due to the fact that I'm generally not keen on cover tunes. That isn't to say this is a bad EP. The band's version of **XTC's** "Scissor Man" is quite good. I suppose that I'm just too spoiled by Primus' own material, which is far superior to most of the bands' tunes they cover. So...consider this filler...or something to fill the void until the next full-length (which we will be eagerly awaiting). Primus normally receives ratings of "5" and "6"...but not this time around. (Rating: 3)



PROGRESS

(Overrated "never for the better" kind of thing)

All progress is bad. Everyone thinks that it is good, but it is not. Do we really NEED to know more than we already know? No. Do we need any more cures for things than we already have? No. Do we need to have computers than run faster than the ones we have now? No. And should there ever in a million years be a need to build more buildings than we already have? No. People are stupid. The stupidest ones are the ones that try to find new cures...new technologies...and new ways of doing things. Progress. What a pile of SHEEE-yutt... (Rating: 1)



PROJECT DARK

Excited By Gramophones Volume 4 (CD, Sentrax/Invisible, Experimental/techno/electronic)

The confusingly titled *Excited By Gramophones Volume 4* (confusing because it is the band's first full-length release) is an interesting collection of technological compositions driven by some very compelling rhythms. Sometimes relatively tame and at other times rather noisy and distorted, **Project Dark** is a band that is unafraid to take chances with their music. There are plenty of accidental sounds as well as unidentifiable audio clips that shoot from the speakers. This music was created for a very select audience...that being the truly adventurous electronic music fans who don't always require odd tidbits like melodies and structure in their music. Word is that the band puts on some rather intriguing live performances. This isn't for everyone, and doesn't try to be. (Rating: 5)



PUBLICIST

(Good kind of get free things from type of people)

Some publicist good, some bad. Some call too often, only interest in trying for review. Many other however like nice friend what calls for offering free thing and not even caring whether to review or not. **Good publicist** easy to spot. Is publicist what main subject not always discuss latest band trying to push, but rather just stay in touch. **Bad publicist** is person what has main concern of only talking quickly about new artist and then having to go. Because publicist go both way, is impossible for one rating so give two instead. "1" is for bad publicist, "6" is for good. [Thankings to Michelle Ferguson for review idea.] (Rating: 1) (Rating: 6)



THE QUEERS

Punk Rock Confidential (CD, Hopeless, Rock)

Tons of bands are influenced by the **Ramones**, but some are influenced in much better ways than others. **The Queers** are at the top of the pack of nineties Ramones-type rock bands for the pure and simple reason that they write some damn catchy songs. Queer tunes are simple and direct. Buzzsaw guitars and steady rhythms drive the tunes, while ultra-hummable melodies soar overhead. The band's penchant for solid

writing is evident on tunes like "Tamara Is a Punk," "Everything's O.K.," "Today I Fell In Love," and "Don't Mess It Up." Simple and loud, these guys are doing it for all the right reasons. You can always expect direct hits from The Queers. This ROCKS. (Rating: 5)



THE RABIES

Want Me Back E.P. (CD EP, Dill, Rock/pop)

The Rabies are coming from the same general direction as **Bracket**. The band plays hyper, upbeat pop music at exceedingly fast speeds. Semi-bubbly tunes like "Want Me Back," "Go To Hell," and "Pork Chops and Soda Pop" are short and to the point...while still retaining maximum hummability. The Rabies are a short jolt of pure fun, spinning out of control in a goddamn cool sort of way... (Rating: 4)



RADIO STATIONS

(Really boring kind of things that shouldn't really be boring at all)

Poor radio stations. They ought to be really adventurous, interesting, open-minded, and entertaining...but they're not. They're driven by money. Trying to find a good radio station is like trying to find a beetle on a racetrack. Thank God that most radio stations will probably be drowned out by the advent of music on the Internet. But by that time, music on the Internet will suck as well. Why can't everyone be like me? Why am I the only person who knows what to listen to, and how? Am I all alone in this big crazy world? What the hell is the point of anything anyway? Will I be alone forever and ever...only to reappear on some mountain top hundreds of years in the future? Hoodie hoodie hoo? Pookie bookie poo? Muvvuh??? Muvvuh??? Izzat yoo, Muvvuh??? (Rating: 1)



RASPUTINA

How We Quit The Forest (CD, Columbia, Obtuse pop)

Rasputina is one of the most important and unique combos of the decade. The band's debut CD (*Thanks For the Ether*) is one of my top favorite listens of all time, so I was eagerly awaiting the follow up. It was worth the wait. In some ways, *How We Quit The Forest* is more accessible than the previous disc...but in other ways it's even more peculiar. **Rasputina** is not for everyone. **Melora Creager** (the main songwriter and vocalist) is coming from a direction unlike anyone else. The band's music combines classical, dub, ambient, industrial, and pop music into a bizarre collage that blends together so seamlessly as a whole that you almost forget how bizarre the mix really is. Not only are the tunes an incredible mindfuck, but the lyrics are (once again) some of the best. There are so few artists who have anything interesting to say, and even fewer who say anything in an interesting way. Ms. Creager's lyrics are heady, thought provoking, and mentally intense. Once again, **Rasputina** present an amazingly challenging collection of tunes that will be

greatly admired by a few...and probably misinterpreted and misunderstood by everyone else. Truly spooky music with brains. Top picks: "The New Zero," "Sign of the Zodiac," "Herb Girls of Birkenau," "May Fly," "Diamond Mind," and the title track. **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED LISTENING.** (Rating: 6)



READING

(Waste of time kind of activity)

One of the most overrated activities of the century, **reading** is for worthless scumbags. It is a thing that people do to help them try to forget how they hate their lives...how they hate their friends...how the world is so ugly and distorted. Reading is nothing more than an addiction like alcohol, marijuana, whatever. People read to try to escape and forget. So go ahead. Read. Read a lot. Go on reading. Read everything you can. If you believe that it makes you somehow smarter and better, remember this. In the end you will die anyway and it won't matter a damn bit what you read during your lifetime. (Rating: 1)



THE RED AUNTS

(Live performance, July 26, 1998)

I sure am glad to have caught this show. Sadly, the **Red Aunts** are calling it quits. But on the upside, at least they had the good sense to quit while they were burning HOT. Unlike many bands who continue wallowing in the same old formulas for years or even decades, these talented ladies are quitting while their integrity is still intact. It's strange that the Aunts were always lumped into the "punk band" category, because they were really much more intelligent and unusual than that. While the band never did garner a very big following, the folks who were into the music were **REALLY** into it. Seeing the girls play their final show in Atlanta was a mindblower. The Red Aunts were the most aggressive female band that I have ever witnessed live. But instead of just pounding out samey rhythms, the girls constantly threw curve balls at the audience...sometimes changing tempos and speeds five or six times within the span of one song. I think that upon looking back at bands of the nineties, these four ladies may eventually be recognized for how important their career really was. Instead of being pretty girl posers, these girls packed as big of a punch as any of the guy bands around...and instead of playing it safe or playing pop music, they played bizarre, challenging, abrasive stuff. Part of what I always liked about the Aunts was that they weren't afraid to be women. Instead of dressing in leather and the usual tired old rock clothing, they dressed like women. Hell, the lead singer (who can sing and play like a bat out of hell) came onstage wearing the nicest little cotton dress. Meanwhile, the other guitarist was busily looking through her purse for an item prior to starting the set. The Aunts were always comfortable in front of an audience, and this was true during their last Atlanta show. Because of the experimental nature of their music, there were bound to be some hits and misses. But when this band hit their highs...and this occurred fre-

quently during this show...the audience was stunned and bewildered that women could create such a formidable and overwhelming wall of music. If I had to name the five most influential female bands of this decade, the Red Aunts would most certainly be included. They proved that women don't have to assume traditional roles in music...that you can play really hard and loud and STILL be original...that you can act and play like a real bitch and STILL be a woman...and lastly that it's better to quit while you're ahead. Though most folks probably never even knew they existed, the Red Aunts caused some permanent damage during their brief career. Hats off to one of the best female rock bands ever. (Rating: 6)



THE RED AUNTS

Ghetto Blaster (CD, Epitaph, Rock)

Gee. I thought the Red Aunts had made the right decision by calling it quits when they were on fire. But after hearing this, their final CD, now I'm not so sure. *Ghetto Blaster* is surely the best release ever by these four talented ladies. It just gushes with energy and character. I'm sure gonna miss 'em. (Rating: 5)



RED HOT + RHAPSODY

The Gershwin Groove (CD, Antilles/Verve/Polygram, Various artists)

Another excellently executed project in the Red Hot series. Note that you can differentiate this, the real thing, by the "+" sign in the name. There are a lot of other companies ripping these folks off by using similar names. (Isn't it a shame that there are folks in the world who can't come up with their own goddamn names?) This George Gershwin tribute boasts some big names...Morcheeba, Bobby Womack, Sinead O'Connor, and David Bowie to name a few. These covers are highly produced pieces with some emotional zing...Interestingly, my favorite is Clark Terry's version of "Let's Call The Whole Thing Off" in which he sounds like a street vagrant screaming unintelligible gibberish on an alcoholic binge. There are a lot of Gershwin tributes out lately to commemorate the guy's 100th birthday. This is one of the best I've heard. Neat. (Not Rated)

REO SPEEDEALER

REO Speedealer (CD, Royalty, Hard rock)

Redneck rock played with blistering testosterone. The problem with many hard rock bands is that they are so concerned with their image and volume that they really don't provide much entertainment for the listener. REO Speedealer will grab your attention immediately. The band's loud, harsh music is much more than a loud blur. This is an intelligent loud redneck band (a category that very few bands fall into). The energy here is real and has not been artificially created by knob doodling in the studio. I wish I could understand the lyrics cuz I bet they're really fucked up. Can't WAIT to catch these guys live (!). The song titles say it all: "Turkeyneck," "Cocaine Dave," "Get A Rope," "Crank Bait"... Pounding, driving, head banging rock

music that is credible and real. (Rating: 5)



SHERRI ROBERTS

Dreamsville (CD, Brownstone, Jazz/pop)

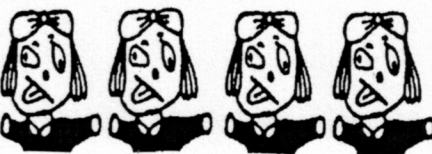
Smooth. Reeeeeeeaaal smooth. Jazz vocalist Sherri Roberts' vocal style reminds me in many ways of Doris Day, whom I felt has never received the attention she deserved for her recorded work. This is the second full-length that Ms. Roberts has recorded with bassist Harvie Swartz and pianist Mark Soskin. This collection of tunes has a nice mature feel to it, featuring covers of composers like Henry Mancini, Rogers and Hart, Cole Porter, and Dave Brubeck. Sherri's deep vocal style is dreamy indeed, and she has an amazing vibrato that sounds as slick as silk. Looking for dinner music that'll put that special guest in the exact frame of mind you want them in? Check out the appropriately titled *Dreamsville*. This is some SEXY stuff... (Rating: 4)



MICK RONSON

Slaughter On Tenth Avenue (CD, Snapper Music, Pop), *Play Don't Worry* (CD, Snapper Music, Pop)

It's nice to hear these reissues of Mick Ronson's first two solo albums. As David Bowie's guitarist during his "glam" period, Mr. Ronson provided what was the epitome of the great British guitar sound of the seventies. Only in retrospect is it obvious how much his guitar sound contributed to some of Bowie's best material. *Slaughter On Tenth Avenue*, Mick's first solo outing, is a hit and miss affair. It contains some killer material, but on the whole the album comes off like he was trying to ape Bowie's vocals and songwriting style. While the vocals definitely left something to be desired, there were a few exceptional tunes that have stood up well over time. These include "Growing Up and I'm Fine," "Only After Dark," and the title track. The album didn't win Mick too many fans which is a shame, as *Play Don't Worry* (the follow up) was a drastic improvement. It's almost like Ronson had finally found himself. He played most instruments, and his vocals were 100% improved. Tunes like "Billy Porter," "Play Don't Worry," and "Hazy Days" show how much progress he was gaining as a songwriter. Unfortunately and for whatever reason, Ronson had already been categorized by the public as a backup guitarist for other artists...and his solo career fell into oblivion. Ronson died from cancer April 1993. Kudos to the folks at Snapper music for providing these reissues. It's an interesting look back at the career of a songwriter who could or should have been, but still made his mark through his associations with other artists. Both of these discs include previously unreleased tracks, the most interesting for me is his cover of Bowie's "Soul Love." (Rating: 4)



Rx

Bedside Toxicology (CD, Invisible, Electronic/pop)

Rx, the long awaited collaboration between Martin Atkins and Ogre may surprise a lot of folks. It certainly isn't what I was expecting. Instead of harsh electronic noise, this disc is a collection of (mostly) electronic pop with a surprising acoustic slant. Supposedly, in this project both artists were attempting to create something unlike their previous work. They succeeded. The new formula works well in most cases. "Scarecrow" and "Crackhead Waltz" are surprisingly normal in their content and sound, while other tracks tend to go off the deep end just a bit. The only track I don't care for is "Downtown." Overall, this is a much more musical and accessible endeavor than anyone would have imagined but...it works. (Rating: 4)



PETER SALETT

Paintings of These Days (CD, Dusty Shoes Music, Folkly pop)

Excellent new folkly pop artist. Peter Salett's tunes remind me of James Taylor and Neil Young, but he's not an artist trying to copy or ape other folks' styles. Mr. Salett's extremely hummable tunes are heartfelt and well thought out...yet they sound fresh and original. There's bad folkly stuff and there's good folkly stuff. This fellow's material definitely fits in the latter category, as tunes like "Black Heart" and "Some of Anything" will testify. This is slick and commercial, yet genuine and sincere. My bet is that you'll be hearing this man's name a great deal in the future. Very nice. (Rating: 4)



SATAN'S PILGRIMS

Creature Feature (CD, Estrus!, Guitar instrumental)

Surf-like instrumentals from Portland. Though Satan's Pilgrims are playing a style of music that is admittedly being played into the ground by too many bands shooting for the same sound...this band is still damn good at what they do. Probably what sets these folks apart from the majority of the guitar instrumental outfits is that they are tight and direct. The guitar work really shines, and there's more diversity than you normally find in surf music... (Rating: 4)



SCHROEDER'S CAT

Schroeder's Cat (CD EP, Emperor Norton Records, Pop)

Kaleidoscopic pop characterized by semi-psychedelic electronics and fuzzy guitar noodles. The band's music is basically melodic but that is offset by some of the off key arrangements. Sort of like a moody Jesus and Mary Chain, this band's music is somewhat droning without being boring. This EP precedes the band's upcoming full-length disc coming early 1999. Four fine tunes. Neat. (Rating: 4)



PAUL SCHUTZE

Green Evil (CD, Tone Casualties, Electronic)

Paul Schutze creates electronic music with a difference. Instead of the usual trancy effects or everyday blips and bleeps, Mr. Schutze's electronics sound more like architectural soundtracks. His compositions, while futuristic to be certain, have an obtuse quality that is hard to describe. There's a peculiar sense of isolation that runs through these cold, articulate compositions. "The Left Remembers" is a particularly pleasing somber track, bringing to mind some of Eno's ambient recordings. The "songs" for this disc were compiled from recordings Schutze has made over the past 14 years, which may perhaps explain why many of the tracks are so different from one another. Despite the variety, these pieces flow by nicely...making the listener feel both calm and somewhat confused... (Rating: 5)



DEBBY SCHWARTZ

Wrongs of Passage (CD, Mercury, Pop)

What a great debut CD. Debby Schwartz was apparently prompted by Joan Osborne (who had already recorded a cover of one of her tunes) to record this solo CD. Ms. Schwartz was previously in the band the **Aquanettas** (who I am not familiar with). This is gutsy female pop music with way above average melodies, and it's propelled by Debby's clean, focused vocals. Joan Osborne isn't the only celebrity connection here. One of the tunes on *Wrongs of Passage* was co-written by **James Mastro** (who produced the entire disc), and another tune includes string arrangements by **Toni Visconti** (!). This package is not just hype, though. Debby Schwartz is a talented lady with enough creative vision to set her apart. A very smooth, entertaining listen. (Rating: 4)



SCREECHING WEASEL

Television City Dream (CD, Fat Wreck Chords, Rock) Hyperfun chainsaw power pop/punk. **Screeching Weasel** has been around a while. The band formed in 1986 after being inspired by a **Ramones** concert. The Ramones influences are still evident, and the band is playing loud, fast, and hard these days. The best thing about this band is that they play with a real "who cares" attitude. Plus, the tunes are simple and direct. The formula works well, as is evidenced by super catchy tunes like "Speed of Mutation" and "Outside of You." This band's masculine sound is counterbalanced by some exceptional melodies that you may find yourself humming for days on end. Another big fun band from the fine folks at megaproductive Fat Wreck Chords... (Rating: 4)



JERRY SEINFELD

I'm Telling You For The Last Time (CD, Universal, Stand-up comedy)

People who reach the top of the heap usually stink. Whether you're talking about comedians, politicians,

artists, singers, whatever...for some reason success makes people turn shitty (or they were really shitty in the first place). Occasionally the public at large embraces someone who actually has talent. **Jerry Seinfeld** is one such man. Making sitcoms once again seem valid in the nineties, Mr. Seinfeld's television show was a laugh riot. The scripts were well written, and the characters strong and vibrant. Amazingly, people went nuts over the show...making it one of the biggest hits in television history. It was almost like another *I Love Lucy*...except the characters were more similar to our present selves. One of the best things Mr. Seinfeld ever did was to quit while he was ahead. It was so much more dignified than watching **Lucille Ball** slowly whittle away over the decades...becoming less and less humorous with each passing season. Surprisingly, this is Jerry's **FIRST** comedy album ever. And it's good. Really good. Recorded live, Jerry has the audience in his hands from moment one. There's no appropriate rating here, because as good as any comedy album is I simply don't want to hear them more than once. This has some extremely funny stuff. Highly recommended for fans of standup comedy. (Not Rated)

SHONEN KNIFE

Happy Hour (CD, Big Deal, Pop)

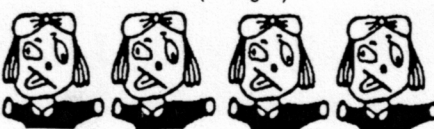
This disc confused me at first. The first track ("Shonen Knife Planet") sounds sorta like **Buffalo Daughter**, followed by "Konnichiwa," which sounds sorta like the **Butthole Surfers**. From that point forward, things level out a bit and things begin sounding more like traditional **Shonen Knife**. Overall, the disc sounds a lot more like *Let's Knife* than the band's previous CD. These ladies continue their tradition of singing about food ("Sushi Bar," "Banana Chips"), but the introspective track ("Dolly") ends up being my favorite this time around. **Shonen Knife** is a very consistent band with a very identifiable image and sound. This CD won't do much to increase the girls' commercial success...but will most likely keep their loyal fans mighty happy indeed... (Rating: 5)



SISTER FRICTION

Glamour...My Ass! (CD, Incidental, Techno pop)

Surprisingly radio-friendly one man electronic band with a knack for lyrics and a sense of humor. **Sister Friction** is the brainchild of **Robert Hedín**. The music harkens back to electronic pop of the late eighties and early nineties. Robert is not afraid to let his electronic pop sound electronic, as is evidenced by the programmed percussion and wealth of sometimes offbeat keyboard sounds. The use of analog synths is sometimes reminiscent of **Joy Electric**, although the vocals and actual songs are miles away. My own peculiar favorites here are "Sometimes" (which could easily be a radio hit), "Everything," "Gone," and "Love At A Distance." Really good stuff, just a bit off the beaten path. Check out the band's web site at <http://www.visi.com/~friction>. (Rating: 4)



SLOAN

Navy Blues (CD, Murder/Universal, Pop)

This is NOT blues music! Rather, Canada's **Sloan** is a pure pop band in the purest sense of the word. The band has been at it for some time now, and *Navy Blues* may just be their best...and most direct...release yet. Sloan tunes still retain that sixties flavor that is the band's trademark, and there is an overabundance of intense harmony vocal work on this one. Unlike many bands, the four guys in Sloan all take part in writing songs which may explain why the music is so multifaceted. Add to that the fact that the band trades off playing both guitar and keyboard based pop and you have a mindblowingly diverse pop collection. No sleepers here, only keepers. Our top favorites include (but are not limited to) "She Says What She Means," "Iggy & Angus," "Chester the Molester," and "On The Horizon." For fans of pop, you won't do much better than Sloan. And instead of burning out, these guys are just burning brighter. A fabulous CD. (Rating: 5)



SLOAN

(Live Performance, September 25, 1998)

Sloan is setting a fine example for rock bands the world over. Instead of letting obstacles get in their way, the band remains steadfast in their mission to provide excellent quality pop music to the world. Whereas most bands would split up and give up after a couple of label deals that went nowhere, the guys in Sloan decided they'd take their situation into their own hands. In doing so, they produced and put out their best release yet (*Navy Blues*) on their own newly formed Murderrecords label. Sloan is not a band for folks who are into the trendy or showy concert experience. The four band members focus exclusively on executing their songs to the best of their ability...and they trade off instruments frequently. This is one of those rare cases where each member of the band seems to be of equal importance in terms of their overall contribution to the band. What surprised me most about this show was the attendance. If this show wasn't sold out, it was damn near close. And you could tell that the folks in that crowd were very familiar with the tunes. For all those bands who say you can't make it on your own, check out Sloan. They may just revive your belief in the power of the mind. (Rating: 5)



SLOPPY SECONDS

More Trouble Than They're Worth (CD, Nitro, Power pop/punk)

YEEEEEEAAHHH!!! How long I have waited for this release. **Sloppy Seconds** won me over with their last release (*Knock Yer Block Off*) which to this day remains one of my top favorite power pop/punk CDs of all time. I'm happy to report that the band sounds better than ever on their latest disc. Pumping out more irresistible pop/punk music than any one band should be able to crank out, these guys have outdone themselves this time. The band's lyrics might make you think they're a joke band, but underneath the kooky lyrics in tunes like "Why Don't Lesbians Love Me?"

are intelligent melodies that are so damn catchy that you won't believe your ears. This band plays in a terrain where simplicity is king, and catchy melodies are way more important than creating loud walls of unbearable noise. I can think of few bands who are as good as these guys at what they do. You can hear the conviction and focus in every tune. Sixteen dangerously addictive tunes from a band that may never receive the attention they deserve. Everyone seems so intent on finding the band to fill the void left by the **Ramones**. Well, in our opinion, Sloppy Seconds are most definitely IT. Our top picks are "The Queen of Outer Space," "The Thing From Uranus," "Gimme That Zero Bar," "Why Don't Lesbians Love Me?", "Just Because You're A Girl," and "Forced To Suck." This **CRANKS** OUR THING ALL THE WAY UP! (Rating: 6)



SLUGWRENCH

Prole (CD, Intolerance, Electronic)

Here's an odd one. One man electronic band **Jason Shepherd** uses every trick in the book that has already been used with electronics...yet he makes it all sound new again. Let's face it. There's very little that hasn't been done in music, so the thing that matters most nowadays is how it's done. There's a lot of creativity and imagination that went into the making of these tunes. Sounds mutate, blip in and out, merge, and shift in a continually confusing fashion on *Prole*. The disc is very uncommercial, yet it doesn't really sound like the majority of electronic CDs on the market. Could be that these folks (most likely) created this work in isolation somewhere out in Oklahoma. Twenty puzzlers, including "Drat," "GagSlug," and "Dorkscrew." If you can't find this one, contact Intolerance Records at P.O. Box 55701, Tulsa, OK 74155 or e-mail 'em at dbasteri@intolerance.com. (You can also check out the band's web site at <http://www.intolerance.com/slugwrench>. (Rating: 4)



SMP

Ultimatum (CD, Catastrophe, Techno/Industrial)

Mid-tempo industrial pop/rock. This industrial quartet plays from center field. The music is noisy, yet not too noisy. The vocals are harsh, but not too harsh. The songs are fast, but not too fast. Is this starting to sound like **Goldilocks**...or what? You might think that by not going to extremes that **SMP** would be a boring band. Not in the least. Instead of going for that same old clobber-you-over-the-head approach of most industrial bands, these guys are more concerned with creating good songs with a real groove. The percussion is way above average, and the keyboards are inventive and spacey. Overall, this is one of the better industrial CDs that's come across our desk this year. The disc features seventeen tunes including "Humanplayer," "Success," "Negative," and "Gameover." Cool stuff. (Rating: 4)



SONICHROME

Breathe The Daylight (CD, Capitol, Pop)

Extremely radio-friendly pop music that sounds like **Material Issue** and **The Jam** (much more the former than the latter). The guitars jangle and jam amidst toe-tapping rhythms, and it's all tied together by above average melodies. The songwriting is on the safe side to be sure, but that doesn't make this collection of tunes any less enjoyable. "Over Confident," the opening track, just **SCREAMS** to be a hit. This is a fun listen from a very confident, accessible band. (Rating: 4)



SPAZBOY

Twilight Area (CD, Immune, Power punk/pop)

Whew! There are lots of buzzsaw power punk/pop bands out there...but these guys have got to be one of the fastest and tightest...while still managing to maintain identifiable songs (!?!). Yup, **Spazboy** play tunes that are almost bubblegummy in nature but they play 'em so goddamn fast that it becomes another medium altogether. It's the band's fresh energy that makes these tunes sound so vibrant. They crammed no less than 19 tracks on *Twilight Area*...and they fly by so fast you'll think you just shot up a gram of speed. There's a lot to digest here. Our initial standout faves are "Nothin' With You," "Easy," "Duluth," and "Stupid Songs About Stupid Girls." The band closes with an appropriate cover of the **Ramones**' "I Wanna Be Sedated." F.U.N.! (Rating: 4)



SPECTACLE

Glow In The Dark Soul (CD, Island, Breathy pop)

Fuzzy California pop reminiscent of a variety of bands from the late seventies and early eighties. **Spectacle** is spearheaded by **Blake Miller**, whose breathy vocal style fits his songs to a T. Though some of the lyrics may frighten off the occasional listener ("Close your eyes, don't be scared, it's my first time too..."), the melodies remain clear and certain. This is light music...sometimes sounding very much like AM radio hits ("So Unkind"). The vocals are way out front in the mix. These tunes are mostly mid-tempo pieces that focus on words and melodies. My favorite here is "Artificial Pain," with it's interesting guitar, keys, horns, and introspective lyrics. Light...but definitely not fluff...**Spectacle** is easy on the ears as well as the mind. (Rating: 4)



SPINESHANK

Strictly Diesel (CD, Roadrunner, Rock)

Solid hard rock music. **Spineshank** play loud, heavy music without resorting to spewing out a blinding blur of nothing (which many hard rock bands are guilty of). The band shows a good bit of diversity in their songwriting skills on *Strictly Diesel*. The music sometimes borders on pop and at other times teeters into the realm of death metal. This is hard rock music that manages to retain odd things like lyrics and melodies

while still being harsh and nasty. Plenty of good heavy tunes including "Intake," "Shinebox," and "Grey." The only tune that fails is the cover of "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" which would have been better left on the shelf... (Not Rated)

SPOCK'S BEARD

The Kindness of Strangers (CD, Metal Blade, Progressive rock)

Interesting. **Spock's Beard** is playing a style of music that was extremely popular in the seventies...but is now almost completely dead. The band's music is an interesting blend of a variety of seventies progressive rock acts including **Camel**, **Yes**, and **Utopia**. What is most surprising is how well their recreation of this genre works. This can most likely be attributed to (1) good songs and (2) damn near astounding musicians. If you enjoyed oldies progressive rock bands but you played their records into the ground decades ago, **Spock's Beard** just may reignite your interest in this form of music. Hey...it did it for me! These guys are **GOOD**. (Not Rated)

STARFLYER 59

The Fashion Focus (CD, Tooth & Nail, Pop)

For whatever reason, **Starflyer 59's** previous album wasn't my favorite thing they've recorded. It was more accessible, yes, but the songs just didn't seem as strong. For whatever reason (again), the band's latest...and even **MORE** commercial release...*The Fashion Focus* corrects whatever problems were inherent in the last collection of tunes. There's less emphasis on guitars, more keyboards, and the vocals are way out front. But as this band is becoming more mainstream, they're actually getting better. Whereas the early material was so filled with guitars that you sometimes couldn't exactly discern what the song was about, the ideas are now crystal clear. **Jason Martin's** vocals have never sounded better...or stronger. This may be the disc to break this band that has long been a favorite among snotty asshole critics like yours faithfully... (Rating: 5)



THE STARSEEDS

Parallel Life (CD, Millennium, Trance/pop/dub)

Soothing. Very, very soothing. British duo **Regina Dannhof** and **Alex McGowan** create really dreamy, trance inducing music that's sure to put you in a relaxed frame of consciousness. If you're into bands like **Morcheeba**, then you'll probably dig these folks' sensual, surreal sound. Some of the music is soft pop, while other segments are impressionistic sound which slides by like a glowing river. With this kind of music, it either works or it doesn't. These folks certainly have the right ideas...and it's all executed beautifully on these nine spacey tunes. Includes "Behind the Sun," "Timequakes," "Earth Moon and Stars" and more. Trippy and really, **REALLY** cool... (Rating: 5)



STATUESQUE

Arbiters Anonymous (CD, Cassiel, Pop)

I was impressed by this band's first EP that was released some time ago. At long last, Britain's **Statuesque** release their first full-length. These tunes were recorded in Boston with **Paul Kolderie** and **Sean Slade** at the board. When Statuesque hits target, they hit dead center. This is evident on such kickass pop tunes as "Redivider" (the single...it's GREAT), "Born Against," and "Redcoats." The band's sound is something like the **Pet Shop Boys** with **Peter Dinklage** on vocals. It's an upbeat, pure pop experience to be sure. There are a few misses along the way, but this is clearly a band that has the right focus and direction. If they continue in this direction, expect some amazing things in the future... (Rating: 4)



STEREOPHONIC SPACE SOUND

The Fluid Soundbox (CD, Mai Tai, Instrumental)

Neat instrumental that sounds like it might've been lifted from a **James Bond** movie. Sorta lounge-ish, sorta surf guitar-ish...these tunes are well written and fortunately not too overproduced. Hailing from Switzerland, **Stereophonic Space Sound** is the duo of **Ernest Maeschi** and **Karen Diblitz**. This is the second full-length from these folks, and it's a keeper. Cool bopping tunes like "Something For Johnny," "The Wobbler," and "Robot A Go Go" ought to be popular on both the airwaves as well as CD players worldwide. This ought to appeal to **Ben Vaughan** fans. Very YES. (Rating: 4)



SUNDAY PUNCHER

For Your Everchanging World (CD, Turnbuckle, Rock/pop)

Sunday Puncher is an excellent up-and-coming band that has a jagged yet hypnotic sound. Although the band will probably be confused by the comparison, in many ways Sunday Puncher reminds me of **Seely**...except for the fact that they are much more abrasive and loud. Loud as they may play, this disc is not as harsh as the band's last release. In fact, this disc is much more moody and complex. It's to the band's credit that they're heading in the direction they're in. They aren't copying anyone else's style, they're getting better, and their sound is more focused. This is a confusing band creating music that's easy enough to listen to, yet they somehow tend to perplex the listener... (Rating: 5)



SWELL

For All The Beautiful People (CD, Beggars Banquet, Pop)

I'm sure it's been said many times before by others, but **Swell** really is a *swell* band. Instead of dishing out samey formula pop, these people create a groove and then weave their moody pop into the fabric...coming up with some very heady and inventive music in the

process. The production and studio tricks work perfectly within the scope of this band's music to enhance rather than detract from the actual songs. Each tune stands out distinctively from the rest, making this disc a varied and highly entertaining listen. If there's any band that **Swell** reminds me of, it is **BeBop Deluxe**...not so much in their actual sound as much as their intensive studio-heavy approach to pop music. Twelve fine tunes including "Today," "Make Up Your Mind," and "Tonight." (Rating: 5)



SYRUP

Sweet Country Rock Ass (CD, PimpRock, Rock)

THIS is an *INDEPENDENT RELEASE*? We are...**BLOWN AWAY**. Florida's **Syrup** plays macho cock rock in the tradition of bands like **Fu Manchu**...and they pull it off with divine style. Syrup's rhythm section pumps like a mother...the psychedelic grass infected guitars have a big **FAT** sound...and those "who cares whatever" vocals fit the music perfectly. This is a band that is totally in synch with one another, creating a whirl of sound that is definitely bigger than the sum of its parts. This CD features some absolutely ass kickin' tunes such as "Drug Freedom," "Foxy Pussy," "Pure Baby," and "Redneck Space." This is easily one of the best independently released discs we've heard this year. This one **KICKS!!!** If you can't find this in stores, check out the band's web site at <http://www.cowhaus.com/bandpages/tallybands/syrup.html>. YEAH!!! (Rating: 5)



SYRUP

(Live performance, September 11, 1998)

On yet another recent trip to Savannah, luck was with Beth and I. Scanning the newspaper for concerts, I was pleased as punch to find that Tallahassee's **Syrup** was playing at a small club called the Velvet Elvis. The band's latest self released CD kicks mighty ass...and live the band sounds even better. The guitars are loud and the drums and bass pound like a mother. The band adds a distinctive flair to their live show by doing hilarious choreographed dancing and foot movements...all the while playing their instruments without missing a beat. If there's a band around the Southeast with motivation and team spirit, Syrup are it. These guys are a balls to the wall total blast of unrestrained rock and roll fun. This band is worth paying to see. BEEEEEEEEEG FUN. (Rating: 5)



12RODS

Split Personalities (CD, V2, Pop/rock)

Interesting hodge podge of styles that is something like a mix of **Pilot** (the original "real" band), **Utopia**, and **Built To Spill**. **12RODS** have a great deal more to say...and a lot more imagination than...most bands I have heard of late. You could label these guys as a pop band, a guitar band, or a progressive band...but in actuality they are a combination of the three. The

soaring melodies are accompanied by some very spacey, spectacular guitar work...while the rhythm section throws curve balls at the listener. The first time I listened to this disc I was intrigued. The second time left me...almost...speechless. This band is an instant personal favorite for 1998. They're smart. They're different. They're inventive without being cutesy. They're...they're...they're PERFECT. Killer tunes like "Split Personality," "Red," "The Stupidest Boy," "I Wish You Were A Girl," and "Girl Sun" will leave your mind reeling. JESUS. (Rating: 6)



12 ROUNDS

My Big Hero (CD, Nothing/Interscope, Electronic/pop)

The latest artist to be launched by those strong, sturdy folks at Formula (**Trent Reznor**'s public relations firm) is **12 Rounds**...the orchestrated electronic duo of **Claudia Sarne** and **Atticus Ross**. The CD cover features some amazing photography (must be done by the same folks who do all those great **Marilyn Manson** photos). This is not quite industrial, nor techno, nor pop. Instead, it is a hybrid of the three with the only real constant being Claudia Sarne's seductive vocals. The duo has a strong command of the studio...utilizing a slew of production techniques to support their sometimes trippy tunes. It's a mix of the old and the new, where effects take on vast importance along with the melodies and lyrics. Subtle and sometimes intriguing. (Rating: 4)



22 JACKS

Overserved (CD, Side 1, Pop/rock)

If you like the powerful pop of artists like **The Cars**, **Cheap Trick**, or **Elvis Costello** then there's a good chance that **22 Jacks** is going to rock your little sailboat. This band's simple, direct shot-from-the-shoulder pop/rock is as easy to like as lemon pie. The steady rhythms are bolstered by fuzzy guitars, but the overall sound is pure pop in nature...and the tunes are downright infectious. This disc is wrought with plenty of sure-fire hits including "Sky," "3 A.M.," "So Sorry," "Quit," and "Confusion." **Joey Ramone** even adds his vocal talents to "I'll Be With You Tonight." There are so many bands playing power pop/punk...and, unfortunately, most of them sound generic. This is not the case with **22 Jacks**. This is a band with a unique punch that'll knock your socks off. COOL. (Rating: 5)



THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

(Animal farm kind of hog things)

What were the **Three Little Pigs** doing building houses when they were so obviously meant for slaughter? Pigs should not build houses. They should grow up big and fat, and then submit to their inevitable death. Every pig should die, even little fairytale pigs. After the pigs are dismembered, packaged, and sent to grocery stores they must be purchased, cooked, and eaten. Ahhh...the beauty of it all. Some must die so that oth-

ers may live. That is so COOL! (Rating: 2)



AMON TOBIN

Permutation (CD, Ninja Tune, Instrumental)

Amon Tobin is a talented guy. I went totally nuts over his last full-length. It was an extremely heady and moody experience that bordered somewhere between trance and experimental electronics. Amon's follow up is a good listen. He continues to provide some very cool atmospheric sounds, but this time the tunes are mostly based around very busy percussive beats. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but the fast percussion seems to detract from the overall mood of this disc. There's still some good stuff here...but this one didn't meet my admittedly overly high expectations... (Not Rated)

U.S. MAPLE

Sang Phat Editor (CD, Skin Graft, Obtuse pop)

Even though this CD gets a high rating, please note that this is a very difficult, peculiar piece of work that is most definitely NOT FOR EVERYONE. In fact, the more I think about it, I'm not really sure who (besides myself) is going to appreciate this, but I'm sure a small devoted group of folks will...because it's DAMN interesting. U.S. Maple come off sounding somewhat like a distorted version of Captain Beefheart with vocal excerpts from pornographic videos. Sound odd? It is indeed. There's a cool haphazard nature to these "tunes" that is captivating, and the ultra-bizarre vocals are a BLAST. Shrugging off any sort of commercial appeal whatsoever, these guys are creating art for art's sake. Song titles like "Coming Back To Dammit" and "Through With Six Six Six" don't even begin to describe the music contained within. Are there lyrics? Are there melodies? Is this music? You decide. Abstract and unusual, yet very ENGAGING. (Rating: 5)



VANDALS

Hitler Bad, Vandals Good (CD, Nitro, Pop/rock)

Fast, static, frantic, melodic power punk/pop not unlike a mix of Bracket and Redd Kross. The thing that is lacking in most of the power pop/punk bands out there is good songs. Most asshole musicians think that it's enough just to be able to play...often forgetting that the point is to entertain others. Obviously Vandals have the right motivation. These hyped up tunes are heavy on melodies and these fellows put thought into their music without sounding contrived. Loud and punchy to the max, Vandals is a band that is chock full of fun. Fourteen tunes including "People That Are Going To Hell," "My Girlfriend's Dead," "I Know Huh?", "Come Out Fighting," and "OK." The cover of "So Long, Farewell" (yes, from *The Sound of Music*) remains frighteningly intact. Vandals are a great rock band, packing a mighty punch. Can't wait to see 'em live... (Rating: 5)



VARNALINE

Sweet Life (CD, Zero Hour, Pop/rock)

I've gone gushy over every Varnaline release I've heard...but this one may just be the band's best and most accessible release yet. Varnaline is a guitar lover's dream come true. Anders Parker is a man who knows how to make his guitar talk. And the guy's songs have a sense of truth and honesty that is painfully absent in most songs of the nineties. Anders is joined on this release by Jud Ehrbar (drums, vocals, keyboards) and John Parker (bass, keyboards, organ). The result is a bigger and more varied sounding CD. This is the least noisy, most focused, and most poppy disc yet from Varnaline (not counting the solo acoustic releases). Mr. Parker's vocals in particular sound better than ever, making these tunes memorable and thoroughly thought provoking. This ought to be the disc to push Varnaline out of the realm of obscurity. Whatever happens, this is yet another resounding artistic success from one of our favorite criminally overlooked artists. (Rating: 5)



THE VEHICLE BIRTH

Tragedy (CD, Crank!, Rock/pop)

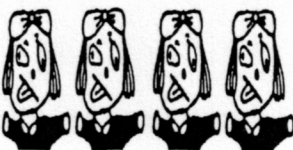
More than any other band, The Vehicle Birth remind me of Modest Mouse due to their superb guitars and peculiar vocals. I've heard so many loud rock bands now with screaming vocalists that they all blur together. The Vehicle Birth's understated vocals are what made them stand out from the continually growing barrage of rock bands. They've got an aggressive sound, but the vocals are mostly spoken/sung and in the background (although they do scream on occasion). The tunes are moody, and the band's tunes do not all sound the same. Headly and just slightly offbeat. Our favorites are "We Need To Find The Girls" and "The Leaders of Pursuit." Purty day-yum KOO-wull. (Rating: 4)



VOIVOD

Phobos (CD, Slipdisc, Hard rock)

Man. Is it hard rock...death metal...speed metal...experimental noise...or just a true blast of really evil sounding hatred? Skewed, static, unsettling, large, crazed, impersonal, and over the edge, Voivod is a band that is obviously getting a lot out of their systems through their music. True, there are a lot of extreme terror noise bands out there who are artificial and don't really deliver what they promise. But that's where Voivod is different. This band's BIG BLAST is the real thing. And their sound really does have a terrifying, violent feeling that is usually absent in generic metal bands. Few three piece outfits can top the sheer intensity and anger present here. Short titles complete the bizarre picture: "Rise," "Bacteria," "Neutrino," "The Tower." A mindblower. (Rating: 4)



RUBE WADDELL

Stink Bait (CD, Vaccination, Rock/pop)

This is different. Rube Waddell is three guys from San Francisco who play some rather unconventional music with a rough edge. The band is named after a real man who had his hands in some rather unconventional pastimes. So...the name fits the band. The only other artist that comes to mind listening to this is Captain Beefheart...although this isn't as far out as the ol' Captain's music was. There's an odd hillbilly/country sound to some of these tunes...yet this is far from sounding like traditional country music. These fellows play a mindblowing slew of instruments (including tabla, penny whistle, kzaoo, ukulele, banjo, washboard, jaw harp). Interestingly, the band plays on the streets regularly around San Francisco. Sure makes a lot more sense than trying to land some highly prized slot at some "hip" (fart) rock club. These guys are doing it right on their own terms...and creating some mighty heady, offbeat music in the process. This one comes in a nifty steel tin box, courtesy of those increasingly inventive folks at Vaccination... (Rating: 4)



WADE

Odd Man Out (CD, Interscope, Pop/rock)

It seems that Sweden is offering a wealth of musical artists these days, and the latest is Wade...a four piece pop band that plays very hummable guitar driven pop music that has a decidedly American sound. Actually, in listening to this it would be very easy to mistake Wade for an American band. No matter. The main point here is that the band has some good songs, and their music is very radio friendly without being sappy or shitty. The band consists of Fredrick Enqvist (vocals, bass), Robert Forslund (guitar), Daniel Soderberg (guitar), and Peter Sundqvist (drums). Good stuff, and well produced to boot... (Rating: 4)



WAGON CHRIST

Tally Ho! (CD, Astralwerks, Electronic dance)

Don't let the category frighten you. This is (gasp!) GOOD dance music. I know, I know. Most electronic dance music is garbage. No wonder so many folks hate the entire medium altogether. But there are great artists out there. Luke Vibert is definitely one of the best, no matter what moniker he records under (he also records using his own name as well as Plug). The rhythms are punchy, and the bass lines thick and fat. The music is somewhat trippy, semi-psychedelic fare. But it is Mr. Vibert's imaginative programming techniques that set him apart. Unfortunately, most electronic artists just aren't very creative. Consider this collection as what dance music OUGHT to sound like in the nineties. Thirteen kickass numbers including "Fly Swat," "Juicy Luke Vibert," and "My Organ In Your Face" (!?!). GREAT. (Rating: 5)



GILLIAN WELCH

Hell Among The Yearlings (CD, Almo Sounds, Bluegrass/folk)

Gillian Welch is first and foremost a songwriter. She and her collaborator David Rawlings know how to write tunes and, more importantly, how to put words to those tunes. The tunes on *Hell Among The Yearlings* range from bluegrass to folk, but the main thing that strikes me about this music is how much personality is present. In an age where so many folks rely on technology to hide their lack of talent, it's artists like this...who can present their music simply and without crutches...who stand out. This batch of tunes was produced by T Bone Burnett, who also lends a hand on some of the instrumentation. This music harkens back to a simpler time. Nice, simple arrangements. Clear vocals. Ms. Welch is an artist who doesn't have much competition, as she has created her own obscure niche in the increasingly overcrowded marketplace... (Rating: 4)



WHITEYS

(Pale, omnipotent kind of people things)

Awwwwww Whiteys! How come ya'll so goddamn UN-FAIR? Ya'll gots all the money. Ya'll gots all the power. Ya'll gots all the EVERYTHING! It ain't fair. That's why we have to have LAWS to protect the rest of us from the power of ya'll Whiteys. Whiteys is always unthoughtful and mean to everyone else. Down with Whiteys! They BAD! They MEAN! They even have they unclean barnhole, damn to Hell. (Rating: 1)



BRIAN WILSON

Imagination (CD, Giant/Warner Bros., Pop)

Reviewing new music by "legends" is a difficult task. You either end up spewing idol dribble or you tear the music god to shreds. Either way, the music almost always sucks. I never actually heard the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* until 1997 (gasp!), so I'm not one of those old fart Beach Boy fans. Actually, I never even heard that much of the band's music except for the hits. Besides...I was way too infatuated with the Monkees, the Beatles, the Archies, and Bobby Sherman...and the Beach Boys just didn't seem cool. I'll tell you what though...this guy still has some kind of odd magic in his music (mainly his slick vocals which still sound

superb). For fans of good vocal arrangements, this disc is a real treat. Layers upon layers of backing vocals and just the right amount of reverb. Mr. Wilson's music is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. There are very few legends who can claim that. Brian Wilson is easily one of the best vocalists of the twentieth century. It's incredible that at this late stage in his career he could come up with something this cool. Fantastic, timeless pop music. Wow. (Rating: 5)



JEN WOOD

No More Wading (CD, Tree, Folk/pop)

I'm not sure why, but usually when a woman (or a man) picks up an acoustic guitar to play solo folk/pop, it usually spells S-H-I-T. The motivation is usually to express one's pathetic emotions in a corny way or to express political sentiments (vomit). Fortunately there are occasional lapses when an artist seeps through the cracks who doesn't take such a trite approach. Jen Wood is such an exception. Using nothing more than an acoustic guitar, Ms. Wood proves that the medium

doesn't have to be annoying and dull. With a vocal style somewhat reminiscent of Julianna Hatfield, Jen shows an amazing maturity and depth in her songwriting style. This is particularly true in tunes like "Aching Heart," "Your Own Words," "One Fist To Fight," and "Imperfect." The lyrics are smart, the melodies intriguing. This is a disc that STICKS. Cool. (Rating: 4)



YELLOWCAKE

Hard Trax (CD, Chipie, Electronic/trance/techno)

A cool, trippy disc of groovy modern mood music. Yellowcake's *Spartaco Cortesi* shows considerable imagination on these trippy tracks. Sometimes he incorporates danceable rhythms into his compositions, and at other times he just lets the electronics slide by like asteroids in outer space. These "tunes" are thought provoking and intriguing...and heavy on the psychedelics. Mr. Cortesi effectively creates a groove and then expands upon it to create ultimately trippy pieces that put the listener in a very cool frame of mind. Twelve selections including "Driftless," "The Watcher," and "One Love." Neat stuff. (Rating: 4)

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Which FORMULA is THIS?

This is the one
where you ask me
a QUESTION...

...I make some
clever, perplexing
statement
in the
SECOND panel...

Oh yeah! And then I act
APPALLED!!! AND USE LOTS OF
EXCLAMATION POINTS!!!

Right. Then
I CLOSE with
a bored,
emotionless
statement.