



The Big Takeover #49 was published in December of 2001. I wrote the following reviews for publication in this issue; most did appear, although some may have been edited slightly or cut due to space limitations.

american standard

the new american standard classics

(maggadee)

american steel

jagged thoughts

(lookout)

Superficially, *The New American Standard Classics* is a CD that seems to have everything. It's loaded with anthemic modern punk rock songs, roaring along in the finest tradition of bands like Husker Du and Leatherface. Gravelly, passionate vocals lead the way, but there's lots of firebrand guitar, smashing drums and powerful bass underpinning the music as well. Top it off with ace production from a team that includes Down By Law's **Dave Smalley** and it seems like this can't lose. But somehow it misses the mark...the feeling is just a little too generic, too sterile. It's like rebellion made by craftsmen, and it just doesn't ring right for me. (info@maggadee.com)

On the other hand, we have the similarly named American Steel, who have a gravelly voiced singer of their own and also present a disc loaded with

catchy and bold punk tunes. There's a sense of variety here that reminds me heavily of the Clash on "London Calling" as the band shifts from sledgehammer punk on "Time Gone By" to a light Caribbean feel on "Two Crooks" to a wistful ballad on "Maria". There's no question this is a punk band, but they're one that's exploring the boundaries rather than the middle. And they do it with panache and style. It's often the intangibles that count, and the Steels got 'em, the Standards don't. (www.lookoutrecords.com)

anti-flag

underground network

(fat)

If you ever spend time sitting around wondering what happened to bands like Stiff Little Fingers, you might want to be trying out the Anti-Flag catalog. This lot play passionately intense butt kicking punk rock with a message, and that message is: wake up and go change something! The topper is that they get better at it every time out. This CD is their best yet – just one terrific and compelling track after another. The songs burst with energy. Rippling bass lines roll up and down the fretboard in partnership with hyperkinetic drums to form the foundation while searing guitar lines cover the top. Singer Justin Sane has a slightly whiney voice that takes a little getting used to, but the shout-along backing vocals make the whole package pretty irresistible. (www.fatwreck.com)

asexuals

greater than later

(boss tuneage)

Montreal's Asexuals were minor legends in the mid-80s hardcore scene and that reputation was only enhanced when singer **John Kastner** left to form the **Doughboys**, whose debut lp *Whatever* was a phenomenal effort. But Asexuals records were never easy to find, so it's nice to have a career retrospective of the band, especially since it includes lots of post-Kastner material I've never heard. What's especially intriguing is that the later material is so different. With Kastner, the band feels like Doughboys-lite, with neither the songs nor the production measuring up. But at track 8, the style diverges dramatically with the change of vocalists and a very pop oriented approach including some great horn charts on "Time Will Tell", pedal steel guitar on "Fire Song", and an overall more radio friendly kind of feel. Ultimately this disc suffers a bit from being all over the place, and the conclusion is that the Asexuals were a good but non-essential band. (www.bosst@freeseve.co.uk)

barcelona

trans human revolution

(pulcec)

Barcelona play a very 80s brand of new wave (bit of a silly tag 20 years down the road, innit?). How else to describe it...herky-jerky rhythm guitars, cheesy synthesizer fills and a general air of Devo surround this group. The opening "Everything Makes Me Think About Sex" has the same kind of frantic adolescent hornyness of the Embarrassment's classic "Sex Drive", and from there on it's a non-stop geek-fest of semi-novelty disposable pop songs. Surprisingly enough, the material is up to the task, and when those "You Really Got Me" chords ring out the ridiculous "The Power Of Jen" to finish up the disc, I find myself sheepishly admitting to myself that that was not bad at all. (www.pulcec.com)

bidston moss

a nice lie down

(self released, Aus)

This Melbourne area band plays an entertaining brand of bratty-girl pop that's good for a few laughs but lacks much long term potential. The opening "Death To The MF" is a bit of surprise with two rather angelic voices singing along and then bursting into a chorus of "Die motherfucker, die!". "HowHard" is an energetic romp, and "Sad Goth" has some interesting guitar bits in between verses. Many of the other songs feel uneventful and while pleasant enough don't really demand that the listener return for more. (bmoss@pobox.com)

blue oyster cult

blue oyster cult
tyranny and mutation
secret treaties
agents of fortune

(columbia/legacy)

Before you laugh so hard at the idea of Blue Oyster Cult having anything to do with *music with heart* that beer comes out your nose, consider this evidence for the defense: (1) Legendary punk rock zine creator Mark Perry featured these four albums in his first ever issue of *Sniffin' Glue*. Right alongside the Ramones. (2) **Patti Smith** co-wrote a number of their songs and even shares vocal duties on "The Revenge Of Vera Gemini" from 1976's *Agents of Fortune*, (3) The title of Radio Birdman's devastating first lp, *Radios Appear*, comes from "Dominance and Submission" on 1974's *Secret Treaties* and (5) Cult producer / manager / lyricist **Sandy Pearlman** was chosen to produce the second Clash lp, 1978's *Give 'Em Enough Rope*. You see, jurists, this case is not so easy. In the first half of the 1970s, there was not a lot to hang your hat on if you liked your music to

have the hint of a threat about it. But Blue Oyster Cult was one of the rare pegs. Yeah, they were erratic and were as likely to turn out a slab of horrible sludge metal such as "Cities On Flame With Rock'n'Roll" as a brilliant, searing manifesto like "Hot Rails To Hell". And once they started having radio hits they quickly changed from the purveyors of the joke to the joke itself. But there was a time when I sat mesmerized by the power of their double lp 1975 live set *On Your Feet Or On Your Knees* (sadly not part of this set of reissues), and the studio versions of those cuts that appear on the first three of these records (from 1972, 1973 and 1974 respectively) are just as strong, if somewhat diluted by all the filler that sits between them. Blue Oyster Cult at their best played intense, inventive rock and roll that had the swing of fusion jazz and the crunch of heavy metal and featured lyrics that felt just slightly evil, like the first steps on a road that might end with you holding a glass of odd smelling Kool-Aid on some Caribbean shore with that upside down question mark symbol tattooed to your forehead. After all, even though the scent was getting stale, peace and love were still the vogue, and songs like "Career Of Evil" or "Subhuman" just weren't the proper sentiment. By 1975 BOC seemed the ultimate underground band, so those of us who were fans were certainly floored when *Agents of Fortune* spawned a major chart hit in "(Don't Fear) The Reaper". It's hard now to imagine just how unique those dark, ringing arpeggios, heavily reverbed ride cymbal, and lyrics about death sounded coming out of 1976 radio. There just wasn't anything on the air to compete with it.

So those are the good points. On the deficit side of the balance sheet, we must remember that in those times, an lp seemed a relative success if it had two good tracks on it. Blue Oyster Cult records averaged about four. That still leaves more than half of each lp as nearly unlistenable, and the bonus tracks dredged out of some moldy vault where they'd have best been left to decompose in peace do not help the ratio. (www.legacyrecordings.com/boc)

b movie rats

bad for you

(junk)

This one's a mixed package – there's no denying the intense, rave up Detroit-like quality of the tunes on this disc, but there's also no denying that, well, let's just say you wouldn't bother copying these guys' homework if your dog ate yours. This is mindless, directionless energy, and it's no surprise that the bio repeatedly compares the band to AC/DC. The opening "Revolution" captured my

fancy for a few minutes, but I couldn't take the sub-ZZ Top lyrics of "Strut" and as for "1000 Miles", here's a sample piece of lyric beauty: "She's a sweet little rock and roller / She's a thousand miles from home". I don't think it's supposed to be a joke. (www.junkrecords.com)

the braille drivers

white dwarfs and red giants

(molecular laboratories)

A sprawling collection of 20 titles like "Your Swordsmanship Has Increased Remarkably" or "An Arson On Good Grief Street", this one is an indie-pop delight that's somewhere between Guided By Voices and Sugar, but with less polished presentation. There's lots of different guitar textures from song to song and doubled vocals with plenty of harmonies that keep a rough edge to them. Despite the clever titles, most of these tracks sound fairly earnest and don't betray any obvious joke unless you listen very carefully to the words. "Swordsmanship" is indeed my favorite with an early Chills-style of punch, but the country tinged "Cold Shoulder" and "I Spent The Entire Summer In That Glass" are close behind. Entertaining and consistently good. (www.molecularlaboratories.com)

simon chainsaw's badass roadshow

fire down below

simon chainsaw with the intruders

hell die glaser klingon

simon chainsaw and the forgotten boys

s/t

khrysler broham's ghetto heart

s/t

(corrosion, aus)

Simon Chainsaw is actually **Simon Drew**, former frontman of the first rate mid-80s Australian outfit the **Vanilla Chainsaws**. Of late he's taken to an interesting lifestyle, traveling around the world and making recordings with whoever he feels like teaming up with (the **Chainsaw Men** CD *Electric Jujū*, which included this writer on drums, was such a project). This pile of CDs was recorded over the past two years, and I'm not sure if he's really put them out on his own Corrosion Records label or if these are meant to be promo teasers. If it's the latter, someone should snap these up quick! One Drew strength is a great, dusky vocal style...I've never seen anyone who can step up to the mike in a studio and belt out one convincing first take vocal after another like he can. The other is an ability to write really driving songs based on his hard and steady rhythm playing. These talents show through strongly on *Fire Down Below*...almost every song here has some crunching guitar hook

that locks in hard. "In My Mind" and "Lust Is The Drug" are my two special favorites. The only complaint I've got is that too many of these songs run on for well over 4 minutes (and a few pass five). A little more compactness in the arrangements would make this unstoppable.

The *With The Intruders* CD features Marky Ramone's backing band and is the result of Simon being a roadie for that outfit on a South American tour. It's only three songs, but they sound great...this band kicks like a mule. The topper is a fabulous version of the late 70s Australian classic Razar track "Stamp Out Disco".

The *And The Forgotten Boys* disc is a fiery full length album made with members of three different Brazilian punk bands while Simon visited friends in that country. It's blistering, full on rave up rock and roll, and for my money outdoes the *Roadshow* CD with tighter, harder drumming, stronger guitar leads, and more concise songs. A killer version of the Saints first lp classic "No Time" uses yammering piano and a unique angle on the guitar riff to add a new fire to a song that never needed much more in the first place. The Drew originals here are no slouches, either.

I don't know much about the *Ghetto Heart* CD except that it was recorded in Germany and it's more poppy than the other three discs. Part of this is in the songs written for it, and a big part is that Simon shares the singing with an un-credited female singer to a very nice duet effect. Of the four of these, this disc is the one you could play for your mom, but that doesn't mean that it lacks passion. Overall, it's impressive to see what Drew has accomplished by sacrificing lifestyle to music over the past couple years...sleeping on people's floors all over the world to find friends to play and record with and producing some great music in the process. Good on ya, mate! (www.simonchainsaw.com)

citizen fish

life size

(honest don's)

I've long lost track of how many CDs this lot have released, but I look forward to every new one. This band has a great knack for making irresistibly catchy punk rock songs that put across a message with such good humor that you can't avoid a smile whether you agree with them or not. The singer has that same yobbo singing approach that worked so well for the Members' Nicky Tesco years ago – when they go reggae style as on "Autographs", it's easy to imagine that it IS the Members. But more typically the musical background is a much fatter

and more full throttle style. The anti-TV rant "Picture This" sticks to the brain like flypaper, and "Back To Zero" is another powerful one. (www.honestdons.com)

dead fingers talk

storm the reality studios

(sanctuary)

This is a reissue of a UK album that was pretty roundly ignored when it was released in the late 70s. Probably deservedly so...it certainly doesn't match up to the classics of the era, but on the other hand it's not without moments. The band actually pre-dated punk, and like many of the pub rock veterans of the time only made some adjustments to their sound in response to the revolution, rather than re-tooling completely. So the songs here are longer, slower and more diverse than a lot of their contemporaries. "Nobody Loves You When You're Old and Gay" shows a good warped sense of humor and production values that line up well with the Dolls or Hollywood Brats. "We Gotta Fight Our Way Out Of Here" is another gem. The rest (including 8 bonus tracks) is spotty but still interesting. (info@sanctuaryrecords.co.uk)

dead moon

trash and burn

(empty)

Another one of those hidden treasures of the Pacific Northwest, Dead Moon have been stealthily releasing their primal garage punk records for at least ten years now. This band is not for everybody...Fred Coles' high pitched, half strangled voice are like nails on a chalkboard for some, but the guy is without question a instantly recognizable quantity in a sea of bands with faceless frontmen. Musically the band is economical and the production is primitive without being low-fi. Despite the overall fuzzed out feeling, there's a hint of country in the songs, and the poetic lyrics really stand out. Well worth a try. (www.emptyrecords.com)

the decibels

the big sounds of the decibels

(half-tone)

If you needed any evidence that power pop is re-sweeping the planet, the presence of the Decibels in a town as relatively unknown for music as Sacramento ought to be enough. This is their second disc...it's nearly as good as the debut *Create Action* but lacks a great signature cut like the title track of that record. There's been more attention to vocals and harmonies this time around...almost too much – they seemed punchier with a rougher vocal. But the immediate,

compressed guitar sound is pretty much the same and the songs have a crackling energy to them that's a pile of fun. Well recommended. (www.stelladream.com)

deep reduction

"2"

(get hip)

I hate reviewing a CD when I've only listened to it once or twice, but this showed up just before the deadline and I *have* to get it in. Deep Reduction is the name of a studio project by ex-**Radio Birdman** guitarist **Deniz Tek** and various members of the **Stump Wizards**. This is the second CD they've released, and the news here is that this one includes Tek's Birdman cohort and current **New Christs'** frontman **Rob Younger** on vocals for over half the songs. With most of the writing credits going to guitarists Tek and the Wizards' **Jack Chiara**, the material here is less obviously focused on getting across a powerful lyric than with creating an interesting musical backing. Younger's vocals are thus not as much of a focal point as they would be with the New Christs, but his presence still means a lot, especially on the three tracks where he penned the words. There's several songs that provide the kind of rolling thunder that Radio Birdman were known for, like "Creosote", "I'm Gone" or a cover of the Pink Fairies "City Kids". But there's also some experimentation with other styles, like "Novatel Blues" or "Big Accumulator". I have to play it more, but I can already hear that there's a lot to hold the interest here. (www.gethip.com)

the dialtones

the dialtones

(screaming apple)

There's an awful lot of high energy, low intellect punk rock around these days, and most of it not only lacks originality, but also the minimal requirement of decent songs. Norway's Dialtones don't break any new ground, but they've got the tunes covered. They attack with thick sheets of rhythm guitar that sound like the first Pistols album played at 45 RPM and a singer who feels like a poppier Johnny Rotten without the English accent. With their 12 songs clocking in at a total of 17 minutes, there's no unwanted filler, either. Tasty. (www.screaming-apple-records.de)

the dialtones

"playing the beat on the radio" 7" single

(deadbeat)

In case you can't track down the album but want to try out the band, here's three more numbers on a US label. Same story as the lp...rave up snotty punk rock as played by the Devil Dogs. A solid but

slightly slow cover of the Fun Things classic "Savage" rounds out the three songs. (www.luckymule.com)

the dipsomaniacs

the life you're faking

(fdr)

The Dipsomaniacs are a pretty tasty power pop outfit out of Baltimore. On this CD they manage to string together 12 solid songs (13 if you count the two versions of "Everyday" as separate tracks), all of which are fine examples of jangly, guitar driven, harmony laden pop. The best comes in the middle, with "This Heart Be True" and "Valerie, Valerie". But the strength of this disc is consistency – there's not an obvious signature song like you usually get on, say, a DM3 CD, but on the other hand, there are no tracks that don't sound just fine while playing, either. Neat work. (www.facedown.net)

dm3

italian style – garage sale volume 2

(123 red light)

This one's a little hard to come by – it was pressed up in limited edition for an Italian tour by **Dom Mariani's** Perth power pop kings. It's the second CD from DM3 to compile an assortment of single sides, compilation tracks, and live cuts (hence "volume 2"), and of the two, it's without question the stronger. It starts with their cool "Just Like Nancy" single, but quickly heads into four rocking live songs, including ace tracks "Foolish" and "One Time Two Times Devastated". These are great fun to hear, since they're among the best power pop tunes ever recorded and it's nice to see that they carry off on stage as well as in the studio. Elsewhere it's a little patchy with alternate mixes of songs already on official CDs and some acoustic versions of songs (best of these is a cover of Mariani's **Stems** classic "Jumping To Conclusions". Great for fans...beginners should head to *1x2x 3 Red Light* or *Road To Rome*. (www.dommariani.com)

the dogs

"slash your face" 7" ep reissue

(dionysis)

Not the great French outfit, these Dogs were a minor Detroit band in the late 70s whose single has become a hot enough commodity among the followers of those *Killed By Death* punk bootlegs that they've warranted a reissue. The title track is musically pretty much Iggy's "I Got A Right" with some fairly pointless guitar noodling tacked on as an intro. "Fed Up" is also very Stooges derivative and kinda dull. The tasty track here is the cover of the Barbarians classic "Are You A Boy Or Are You

A Girl?", which dispenses with metal flourishes and flat rocks out. (www.dionysisrecords.com)

the dragons

rock'n'roll kamizaze

(junk)

The Dragons' latest is another strong effort – not quite up to the quality of the last one, *RLF*, but not far off. The guitar hooks are maybe a touch less distinctive this time out, but it's otherwise another fine slab of Thunder's styled riffage. "Three Steps From The Bar" sounds like Tom Waits fronting the New York Dolls with those "woo-hoo-hoo" backing vocal bits. But that song is out of character...more often the vocals are delivered in a higher register and with a slurred, half out-of-it delivery that suits the generally debauched mood of the lyrics pretty well. "I Say Go" is one standout with a kinetic tempo and repeating, alliterative lyrics that really grab. Another is "Greyhound", which features the kind of rhythmic guitar hook that this San Diego band are getting known for. (www.junkrecords.com)

the finkers

double back and go

(stolen)

The Finkers play classic Perth-styled power pop, but they come from Melbourne, a town that with recent exceptions Even and the Ice Cream Hands is not normally associated with bright, cheery pop, and tight, pretty harmonies. The Finkers come across a lot like DM3 with perhaps a little more jangle and less crunch in the guitars. They don't win through on sheer power (although they're not exactly wimpy, either), but they do write distinctive songs that stick in your head. Nice cover of "Anne" by Seattle's **Flop**, too. (www.internationaltrash.com)

hands of time

hands of time

(stolen)

Featuring a couple of refugees from Tasmania's **Philisteins** and a name lifted from an lp by the Master's Apprentices, this band would have to be pegged for psych-garage frenzy before plucking a string. And you get what you expect, except it's perhaps more powerful and more original than the standard for the type. Part of that may come from the recording approach using just a four track studio – they achieve an authentic 60s sound that doesn't come across like one of these low-fi bands that records on 24 tracks and then dumbs it down in the mix. The leadoff "I'm Rowed Out" nicks the guitar line from "Dress In Black" neatly enough, and "Making Time" roars away with a nifty stop-start bit. "Can't Explain" (not the 'Oo tune) is

catchy in the extreme and “Nit Picking” is a cool, haunting instrumental. There’s so much more character in these songs than the average garage punk record – the songwriting really shines through. (www.internationaltrash.com)

the hives

hate to say I told you so

(gearhead)

This 3 track CD single gives a nice taster of the Hives’ *Veni Vidi Vicious* CD (reviewed last issue). The title track is one of the less frantic cuts from that disc but it’s got a great lyric and a pumping sense of drive. It goes down a storm. “Die All Right” starts with a spasmodic verse and 45 seconds in shifts into high gear with a punishing chorus. Finally, the previously unreleased “Hives Are Low, You Are Crime” is a Devo-ish instrumental. The Hives are a wonder for today...a band that rocks like a fiend but sounds original as all get out. (www.gearheamagazine.com)

hub

daylight

(soul selects)

Yipes! Someone’s let a quiet record slip into my pile. Hub play with a restraint that borders on superhuman...it feels like the amps are set to one and the singer is trying to avoid waking up his dad napping in the studio control room. Lyrically is where this strikes a chord for people like me who like a good wallow in the small but unrelenting traumas of everyday life. Loved that bit in “Secrets” where it goes “You say you did things I would not believe / Angel dust, poppy seed / Strange affairs with x-marines”. There’s loads of other neat lyrical snapshots throughout that make this worthwhile, but don’t expect to be bludgeoned. (www.hubmoore.com)

the intercontinental playboys

ladies may we introduce ourselves...

(full toss)

Dressed in vampire capes, Sydney’s Intercontinental Playboys fall back on the time honored ploy of using props and images to beef up their act. On the six songs here, it seems like they’ve got something going that isn’t really desperate for a visual schtick, though. The music is slinky and seductive with heavy nods to the Cramps but not so blatantly rockabilly influenced. “Crawling Out Of My Skin” has a languid kind of oriental feel to it. “Creature Of The Night” has nifty “ah-ah” backing vocals that give it a nice lift, and “The Way You Burn” has a good tough garage feel in an early Nomads sort of way. The other three tracks are in the same vein but less memorable.

Adequate but not overwhelming. (www.fulltossrecords.com)

jeff kelly

indiscretion

(a hidden agenda)

To the extent that he’s known at all, Jeff Kelly is recognized as one of the founders of the psych-pop band the **Green Pajamas**. This isn’t his first solo foray, but it’s the first I’ve heard and a bit different from what I expected. The songs here are fairly reserved pop/rock with well written tunes and interesting lyrics alleged to deal with Kelly’s sense of Catholic guilt but seemingly able to appeal to anyone. The dreamy feeling of the music reminds me quite a bit of *Sgt. Pepper* era Beatles, although with a bit more subtlety. For my tastes it’s a little too dreamy, but it’s well done and I expect many folks will enjoy it a lot. (www.parasol.com)

kidsnack

first steps

(double zero)

This Illinois outfit pumps out energetic pop/punk tunes one after the other on their debut CD. They’d probably be a great band as an opener for someone touring through their town, and fifteen years ago this would’ve seemed like a hot CD. But there’s too much of this stuff around these days for a new band to make a mark unless it really has some spectacular songs and drop dead production. Kidsnack don’t. They’ve got competence...decent songs, slightly flat production, those nasally and slightly whining vocals, standard buzzing guitar sound, but nothing that really makes me want to play this ahead of anything else in the pile of recent discs. (www.doublezero.com)

libertine

american heartbreak

(coldfront)

Kinda hard to review the forthcoming CD when you’ve got just a five track sampler of it to work from. But here goes. Libertine pick up where they left off on last year’s first rate *See You In The Next Life*. So much so in fact, that they re-did one of their older songs here...the superb “I Don’t Belong Here”. The previous version (from the *Here We Are Nowhere* compilation) was better, but it’s a great song either way. And although the band routinely are compared to Social Distortion, on the opening “Heaven” the feel is more like second album Psychedelic Furs. The sense of breaking away from the late 70s punk sound that was their stock in trade pervades all of this – they haven’t lost the tough guitar edge, but there’s a lot of nuances that weren’t there before and they’re

clearly trying to use other tools than raw power. I'm looking forward to the full CD. (www.coldfrontrecords.com)

little murders

we should be home by now

(swerve)

There was a time when the name Little Murders on a handbill in Melbourne excited as many music fans as a poster proclaiming a Birthday Party gig would have done. That was a long time ago in 1979, when the band led a vibrant Melbourne mod scene. Recording possibilities being what they were then, that version of the group left only a clutch of singles and a posthumous 1986 lp called *Stop It!*. But frontman **Rob Griffiths** revived the name in the mid 90s and has released a trio of fine CDs since then, this one being the third. Maturity has taken some of the frantic energy off the sound, but there's still an edge to this music. Some of it comes from Griffiths' obvious English accent (he was born there), and some comes from the fact that the band plays their pop with passion. If you've liked Aussies like the Go-Betweens and Triffids, this should be right up your alley. For my money, it's actually considerably better. (info@swerve.com.au)

the living end

roll on

(reprise)

I brought up this band on an Australian e-mail discussion group and received mostly derision in response. I can only chalk it up to jealousy – this outfit rocks with passion, power, and creative tunes. Their debut was loaded with punk anthems that also showed hints of rockabilly and ska, and this one is more of the same. Living End songs tend to be huge and energetic and loaded with hooks that make almost every track memorable after a few plays. The general feel is somewhere in that early Clash / Rancid sort of vein – probably half way between those two for speed but more polished than either. That this is a band with obvious commercial ambition hurts their credibility in some quarters, but so far it hasn't hurt their music a bit. Let's hope it stays that way. (www.repriserec.com)

the loch ness mouse

"busman's holiday" 7" single

(cara)

Norway's Perfect Pop Records used to be the Scandinavian answer to New Zealand's Flying Nun, and quite a few years back they released at least one and maybe more Loch Ness Mouse singles. I'd figured the band to be long gone by now, so I was quite surprised to see this single

getting a US release. The singing duties alternate between a guy and a gal, and when it's the guy fronting, this could be a dead ringer for the Chills circa the first couple singles. The title track features female vocals that are softer and smoother. This is one of those bands that doesn't put out a lot of power but has a captivating naïve attraction none the less. (mbennet@bennetlaw.com)

manifesto jukebox

desire

(boss tunage, uk)

Yet another stunningly good punk rock band out of Finland. If your idea of how this kind of thing should be done is Leatherface's *Mush*, this is a CD to track down. These songs are loaded with dense sheets of rhythm guitar covered with simple top-two string lead frosting and passionate, smokey vocals. The band does a good job lyrically, too, with classic punk themes of alienation poetically expressed. Lines like these leap out: "There's plenty I've forgotten, but I have forgiven nothing", or "I can still see you twitching, claiming that you never felt better, paralyzed". The only complaint is that the vocals are just a touch low in the mix – lyrics this good should be more audible! (www.bosst.freeserve.co.uk)

thee michelle gun elephant

collection

(alive)

This Japanese outfit has been creating a stir of late and rightfully so...they've got a sound that instantly stands out from the huddled masses of garage rock bands out there today. The unusual guitar style will hit you immediately. At its root it derives from that choppy, combined rhythm/lead style of Johnny Kidd and the Pirates and consequently at times brings to mind most every band with a Kidd-influenced guitar player, including early Dr. Feelgood, *Live At Leeds*-era Who, the Jam, Gang Of Four, and most recently, Sweden's Hives. But guitar is only a part of it...**Kazuyuki Kuhara's** drums are a total assault, working in lock step with **Futoshi Abe's** guitar. At times they combine to a stuttering machine-gun sort of effect that's devastating. And then there's the songs...these aren't some revivalist r'n'b thing, but something new. It rocks like hell, but there's no way this is garage music – these guys are dead skillful and not afraid to show it. Comparisons to the Stooges are also way off...the Stooges relied on minimalism and repetition, while TMGE aren't the least bit afraid of excess. There's also no consistent formula – hell, on "Revolver Junkies" they manage to sound like Stiff Little Fingers' version of Bob Marley's "Johnny Was"! This CD

compiles a bunch of Japanese records into a result that's that greatest rarity – original AND good. In 64 minutes there's only one turkey, the seemingly endless 8 minute "Boogie". Everything else on this sings. One of the ten best discs of the year for sure. (orbit23@pacifinet.net)

murder city devils

thelema do what thou wilt

(subpop)

river city rebels

playing to live, living to play

(victory)

Good thing that Rubber City Rebels retrospective didn't make it out and the Mud City Manglers stayed quiet or this would've gotten really confusing. The River City Rebels do it up pretty well with rabble rousing Oi-ish punk. Songs are stirring anthems with shout along vocals and titles like "Day To Day", "Small Town Pride" or "22 Years". RCR make their music more accessible with handclaps, horn fills and lots of "woah-oh" and "hey!" backing. It's a pretty derivative style to be playing here in the year 2001, but it's well done regardless. (www.victoryrecords.com)

The Murder City Devils are noisier and darker and sound like they had a bigger recording budget. They play an intense and hard hitting style of rock built around sticky guitar riffs and gravelly vocals. It's the keyboard sound that seems to give their music something special – not enough bands are using organs these days. Instrumentally this band really has something, but the singing is pretty characterless yelling and detracts from the overall effect. (www.subpop.com)

the new christis

"on top of me"/"groovy times" 7" single

(munster, spain)

What a bummer that the crash'n'burn bankruptcy act of the Man's Ruin label sunk the New Christs, too! The deal that was supposed to finally give **Rob Younger's** great band a US outlet instead left them holding the unpaid bill for studio time on an unfinished lp and created stresses that have blown the band apart, for now at least. Younger has proven to be a resilient and unstoppable force in the past, so let's hope he battles back, but in the meantime all we have is this hard to find single to show what might've been. "On Top Of Me" is the usual high wire music act with desperate vocals. "All the money in the world is as nothing/You can't buy me" he sings, and he's got the track record to prove it. The flip is more power house tension. Count on anything this band releases. (po box 18.107, Madrid, Spain)

the nomads

up-tight

(white jazz)

A garage band is supposed to be a bunch of young, amateurish louts playing sloppy three chord rock, right? But something's wrong with this picture, because the world's foremost garage band also just happens to be one of the tightest, most tuneful bunch of old, balding geezers under the Van Allen Belt. Twenty years on, a Nomads lp is still an event to their fans, and their records are as spirited and vital as ever – maybe more so. **Nick Vahlberg** delivers a great, wry vocal, and has a lyrical knack for turning a common phrase on its head as in "Can't Keep A Bad Man Down", "Competitors In Crime" or "To Make A Short Story Long". **Hans Ostlund's** lead playing used to get compared to Johnny Thunders, but he's now well beyond that and deserves to be a point of comparison of his own with sweet, tasteful contributions added throughout. "Crystal Ball" is terrific catchy rocking pop and makes a solid choice as the single, but the measure of this album is that it hardly stands above the other tracks – in fact my fave would be "It's Lonely Down There Too" because of the great chorus change. The Nomads don't break any new ground compared to their last ten year's worth of records, but it would be hard to lodge any other complaint here. (hok@houseofkicks.se)

no shame

schpunk

(straightedge)

No Shame are a Finnish bunch playing a powerful brand of crunching punk rock with thoughtful lyrics. Songs like "Love" or "Itch" have both the instrumental and vocal burn of bands like China Drum, Rancid, or Anti-Flag...racing, hard hitting tunes with emotional, gravelly singing. But despite the similarities to existing groups, the enthusiasm that comes with doing it yourself for the first time gives this CD its own shine. "Negative" is my fave track, with a really original, up-picked chunky chord fill bursting into an explosive chorus, but this disc goes for a solid half hour without any real weak spots. If they keep this up, I'd expect to see their next record getting a US release on Epitaph. (www.ifeelnoshameatall.com)

the nuggets

crystalline creations...and pop sensations

(screaming apple)

I was heartbroken when Norway's **Basement Brats** split up, but if I'd known they'd spawn an outfit like the Nuggets, I'd have been spared some of my tears. This disc doesn't sound like the Brats, but it's got the same spirit. The opening "Into The

Future" is a powerhouse garage punk tune driven by raging harmonica. Necks will snap from whiplash on the next tune as the band takes a 90 degree turn and pursues power pop with the same relentless energy on the wonderful "Letter To My Girlfriend". Then you can relax a bit as "Revelation Sun" takes almost a minute to built up to a huge crescendo chorus. From there it's another ten clever and catchy tracks loaded with energy and pop hooks...with far more power pop than garage. Not as punky as the Basement Brats were, but the songwriting is every bit as great. Keep an eye out for their equally tasty "Powerpop Girl" single on the Sneakers label, too. (www.screaming-apple-records.de)

the pictures

"you'll see"/"don't you wanna know" 7" single

(illustrious artists, aus)

You Am I drummer and all-round good guy Russell Hopkinson has launched his own label and his debut offering is this single from a band that brings to mind *The Who Sell Out*...a couple of vibrant power pop songs filled with over the top drumming, feedback-addled outros, and lots of falsetto harmonies like the Who used to do before Woodstock made Daltry go over the top macho. Good fun. (russellk@bigpond.net.au)

the psychodaisies

it's no fun to be paranoid

(suspicious hallucinations)

Guitarist **Johnny Salton** founded this band and is the only original player remaining since the last of their three previous lps came out 10 years back. The band as it is now appears to be primarily an outlet for his psychedelic guitar workouts. There's denying that he's quite a lead player and he wrings some great sounds from his instrument. Problem is that there's not a comparable level of craftsmanship in the rest of what's going on here. Too often the foundation of the song is some basic three chord riff that's beaten to an absolute bloody pulp and left for dead under layers of self-indulgent leads. Six minutes of B-A-E followed by seven minutes of A-G-D tends to leave one more paralyzed than mesmerized. The vocals suffer from a comparable lack of attention. Too bad, because playing like this could be something wonderful given a set of good songs to apply it to. (jillkahn@ix.netcom.com)

the racketeers

mad for the racket

(muscletone)

This collaboration between ex-**Damned** founding lead guitarist **Brian James** and **MC5** legend **Wayne Kramer** works spectacularly. It doesn't

hurt that they've both come up with some of the better numbers they've done in a long time, but the way the songs compliment each other makes for a diverse and interesting record that really holds together. There's three stone killers here. "Christiana" features a haunting guitar riff and vocals about a woman reporter who's always heading for world trouble spots. "Prisoner Of Hope" is a rocket fueled musical blast that backs what's essentially a spoken word performance by Kramer. And "Czar Of Poisonville" feels like an entire Al Pacino movie compressed into a 3 minute song...frighteningly intense. They should meet like this more often. (musclemuse@aol.com)

red letter day

chance meetings: the best of red letter day 1985-1998

(zip)

It's an embarrassment to have a band this good be around for about 15 years with me not knowing they even exist, but that's the story here, so I'll just try to make amends. Off listening to their career retrospective, this UK outfit have made some terrific records. Musically they're a dark sort of punk that recalls the UK Subs and others that play a little slower and give themselves a little more room to work with as a result. They use the space well, crafting memorable hooks in songs like "Rain", "Wherever You May Run", "Happy New Year" or the ringing "Pure". There's lots of Bic-lighter guitar moments in these songs, and if only the vocals were a little stronger, there'd be a passel of classics – unfortunately the singing is similar to a lot of those early 80s UK punk bands where they deliberately played up the Cockney feel in a way that seems too forced. Nevertheless, everything else about this disc is so good that it's still well worth a listen. (www.ziprecords.com)

the shambles

what you're missing

(snap!!)

various

spellbound – a san diego pop compilation

(snap!!)

various

staring at the sun vol 4 – it came from san diego

(blindspot)

Bart Mendoza is one of those guys that any local scene needs to give it a focus. He's been doing it for San Diego for about 20 years, starting by anchoring a once huge San Diego mod scene with his older band **Manual Scan** and now for most of the last ten years with the Shambles. His fingerprints are all over each of these CDs...Blindspot is his own label, and he wrote the

liner notes and assisted on compiling the *Spellbound* compilation. To start with the Shambles, they must be one of the all-time compilation slut bands – keeping up with everything they put out would be utterly impossible except that fortunately Bart compiles this material now and then into a full length CD. This is the second such effort, and it's chock full of the sort of jangly power pop the Shambles do so well. Since a lot of the recordings these songs first appeared on were tributes, there's a surfeit of covers, ranging from the 60s mod soul standard "Leaving Here" and the Count 5 classic "Psychotic Reaction" to a rocking take of the Jam's "But I'm Different Now", the Undertones' "It's Going To Happen", and oddly enough, the Who's *Quadrophenia* sleeper "Is It In My Head". Shambles' originals like "Innocence Becomes You" don't feel out of place in this company.

Of the two compilations, *Staring At The Sun* is the better. It's got 20 different bands, most of which make a very credible showing and some of which are superb. The Shambles' own "Nadie Te Quiere Ya" provides a terrific haunting melody and Spanish lyrics that fit the song superbly. **The Dragons** rock out with "Painkiller". Bart even goes back to 1978 for the **Crawdaddys'** classic "There She Goes Again", a record that probably meant more to Europeans than to locals when it came out. The quest for variety goes a little too far for me on three of the tracks, but the rest of this holds together wonderfully well.

As opposed to the vast smorgasbord of *Staring At The Sun*, *Spellbound* has just 5 different bands and allots them 4 or 5 tracks each. For my taste, these bands lack the distinctiveness that the other comp features. The music is mostly a softer brand of power pop – I like mine with lots of crunching guitars and big harmony choruses with irresistible and instant hooks, and this is a more reserved and subtle blend, displaying competence rather than abandon. (angelsnap@teleline.es, mendozab@juno.com)

smash up derby

sounds of self defense

(screaming apple)

Montreal's been a poor contributor to the Canadian rock'n'roll legacy compared to Toronto and Vancouver, but Smash Up Derby does a lot to re-balance the scales. They play a relentless brand of rocket fueled, greasy punk rock. Nothing remarkable on its own, but the good news is that these guys have the tunes needed for success and the production ideas needed to give a little zest to the recipe. "Little Miss TNT" leads with a bang,

and it's the handclaps that add the pop feel needed to make it stick in the brain. By about the fourth song, you'll start to notice just how neatly the bass player runs his lines up and down across the guitar instead of just duplicating the notes in the chords. If you're like me, by the eighth song you'll have decided that even though you hate it when the vocals are deliberately distorted, on this record it's working pretty well. And when the closing "Loser" rolls around, you'll probably want to press replay and get another dose of those ripping, concise guitar solos. The seeds from the first Damned lp are still sprouting. (www.screaming-apple-records.de)

toys that kill

the citizen abortion

(recess)

This came the same day as the Deep Reduction CD and hasn't been played enough for me to do it justice, but I like what I hear...very tuneful yet hard hitting punk rock loaded with tasty guitar hooks and smacking drumbeats. It's not that sort of ho-hum melodic style that's got a lot of people swearing off the stuff, either. Instead there's scads of creative hooks and unique guitar bits that have already convinced me I'm going to spend a good deal of time playing this over the next couple months. The band compare themselves to the Buzzcocks, Clash and the Jam – me, I hear more of the Descendants. (www.recessrecords.com)

uberscenester

the mini-lp

(elbasso)

In what sense a 10 song disc qualifies as "mini", I don't know, but it's the only bone I've got to pick with Uberscenester's first rate sophomore effort. This thing's bursting with bright and brash power pop with all the right elements...big guitars, catchy, rocking tunes, well sung but still rough edged harmonies and bashing rhythm section work. The guitars are particularly a treat...lots of tasty and creative bits are liberally sprinkled everywhere. "Cheap" is one special fave...it's got so many cool ideas it feels like there could have been five songs in there. "Mickey's Bar" is another one...a rollicking bash-along song that would've done the Vandalias proud. (uberscenester@hotmail.com)

viza-noir

s/t

(flameshovel)

This Chicago 3 piece play the sort of splintered twisted pop that early Mission of Burma favored. It's tense and wiry sounding music with no trace of a hummable melody. There's only 6 songs, and that seems like a good idea...longer and this might

have overstayed its welcome, but as it is, it sounds fresh and different. When it ends the reaction is: wow, that was different...I'll have to play it again tomorrow. The edgy guitar sound is great on "Pool Of Flame", but my fave track is "Safari" which has some hard hitting drumming and the most straight ahead rock guitar of the CD. (www.flameshovel.com)

the wanna-bes

s/t

(panic button)

It'd be easy to write this up as a Ramones copy band, but it's such a first rate job of song-writing, playing and recording that more description is warranted. The songs use that short and snappy Ramones format with nods to late 60s bubblegum pop, but there are some differences. **Chris Workman** provides singing that's perfect for this...he sings in a somewhat higher range than Joey, but he's got the same kind of knack for phrasing that makes the lyrics feel convincing. There's buzzing rhythm guitar that Johnny'd be proud of, but there's also some simple Buzzcockian leads in the right places – enough to make a point but not to cloud the issue. Then there's a steady, uncluttered 4/4 drum beat that Tommy'd dig, but there's not a total abstinence from fills, either. But Dee Dee could play bass, no problem. Low scores for originality but off the charts for execution. (www.thewannabes.com)

x

x-aspirations

(rock'n'roll blitzkrieg)

live at the civic '79

(dropkick)

From the American side of the ocean it's easy to assume that Australia's late 70s scene consisted of the Saints and Radio Birdman and nothing else, but the reality is that just as in America and Britain the Aussie scene exploded in the late 70s and there were tons of bands, some of whom were absolutely staggering. X is one of them, and *X-aspirations* is a reissue of their *incredible* debut lp in which they unfurled a sound so original and stunning that only a handful of groups (perhaps Wire or the Gang Of Four) could possibly lay claim to a comparable inventiveness. X songs were stripped down to the bare essentials – pounding, rhythmic drums, throbbing basslines and shards of raw guitar that drop in and out of the mix, demonstrating that less-is-more restraint that few bands even try to deliver today. Delivered with **Steve Lucas'** hoarse, searing vocals, the clever lyrics just add to it all. There are no less than five all time Aussie classics on this lp in "Suck Suck", "Delinquent Cars", "Revolution", "I Don't Wanna Go

Out" and "Dipstick", and all the rest of it is at least very good. (PO Box 11906, Berkeley, CA 94712)

For experienced X listeners, *Live At The Civic* is a huge treat. In a reversal of form from the neatly packaged but horrible sounding live CD (*X Live 8 July 1978*) that came out last year, this one looks like hell but has a first rate, powerful sound that's sympathetic to the feel of *X-aspirations*, something that was lacking in the two subsequent X studio lps. To make it that much more special, there's only two tracks from the debut lp included in this live-to-air recording. (www.dropkick.com.au)

the young canadians

joyride on the western front

(white noise)

Along with DOA, the Modernettes and the Pointed Sticks, The Young Canadians were one of the anchors of the late 70s Vancouver punk scene. Starting out as the **K-Tels** but changing their name when legal action was threatened, they issued two great 4 song eps and a single before disappearing. More recently, a compilation CD of all their studio recordings called *No Escape* was released on Vancouver's Zulu Records, but it still didn't get the band the acclaim they deserved. Now here's a CD of a 1980 gig that probably will only get sales among their old fans, but is still fun to hear. The sound quality is dodgy at the start but improves as the gig progresses. Great and original sounding songs like "No Escape", "Automan", "Data Redux" and of course their hysterically funny fave "Hawaii" get a strong a rough edged treatment. The only shortcoming here is that the gig lasts just 12 songs. Sure woulda been nice to get an hour or more. (537 SE Ash Street, Suite 400, Portland, OR 97214)

the yum yums

singles'n'stuff

(screaming apple)

Most of the time when you get a CD collection of compilation and single sides, you know it's gonna be substandard compared to a formal lp release. Not this time...these 26 tracks will convince just about anyone that Norway's Yum Yums are one of the best bands happening today. Power pop action of the highest water is what you get...crunching loud rhythm guitar, piercing leads, and brilliant songwriting end to end. The Yum Yums burn with an energy that surpasses most of the dirty, beer-soaked, leather-clad punk and garage bands out there, but they top everything off with these great wistful vocal harmonies that feel like they were just made for AM radio stardom. How to start picking faves? There's so many great ones. "Back To Rosie" maybe is the best because

of the anthemic chorus and those great stop-start bits where the drums drop out and come back in. Or "Crazy Over You", with that blisteringly sweet solo in the middle dropping into another killer break. Then there's that nifty see-sawing guitar bit that drives "Digging On You" along. And what about the brilliant cover of **The Barracudas'** superb "I Can't Pretend"? It's an embarrassment of riches, this one is. (www.screaming-apple-records.de)

various

rock'n'roll war – an international collection of rock'n'roll action

(vicious kitten)

This one's an absolutely first rate collection of bands that play basic, gut level rock and roll with no pretense to anything other than the idea that rock'n'roll means everything. Starting with the brilliant **Dictators'** anthem "Who Will Save Rock'n'Roll?" (did they ever do a better song?) it rolls on through one great track after another. **Syl Sylvain's** poppy reworking of the **NY Dolls'** great "Trash", **Asteroid B-612's** rollicking "September Crush", **Brother Brick's** crunching power pop "See You Tonight", **Freddy Lynxx's** Heartbreaker's inspired "No Room For You", **Sheek The Shayk's** pounding guitar monster "Mary Lee", and **Deniz Tek's** decidedly un-Birdmannish quirk rock on "Out Of The Mood" are all great fun. Equally impressive are previously unheard groups like **Z-28** on the Detroit punk "Yeah Yeah", **The Botswana's** slinky pop track "Jennifer", **The Golden Arms'** surf rave up "Diamond Head" (best surf instro since Johnny Thunders covered "Pipeline") and **Pirate Love's** Dolls influenced "Midnight Song". This is one of those rarities...a compilation that holds up to repeated listens and with no need to push the skip button. (records@viciouskitten.com.au)