



The Big Takeover #51 was published in December of 2002. 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. I strongly recommend subscribing, which you can do at www.bigtakeover.com

77

revolution rock

(elevator music)

With technology for making professional sounding recordings so inexpensive these days, I'm always immediately suspicious of any release with the sort of *Spiral Scratch* era Buzzcocks ambience that this Portuguese band has created here. I mean, is the guitar player's ear really that un-schooled, or does he secretly intend to be that out of tune? Laying cynicism aside (hard to do when the seeming ego-maniac of a singer is pretentiously credited with "lead vocals, electronics, theremin, politics and history of contemporary art"), this is actually pretty good stuff. Fake or not, it's got that sort of edge-y primitive surge that powers records like the Embarrassment's "Sex Drive" or Gang of Four's first ep. The lyrics are well done, too – not a lot of words, but lots of repetition in a way that seems to make them count, and some interesting topics. I

give them the benefit of the doubt and play this a lot. (www.elevatormusic.com)

bangs

call and response

(kill rock stars)

Although it's only six songs, this is a solid followup to their outstanding *Sweet Revenge* CD of a year or so back. **Sarah Utter** and **Maggie Vail** set up a guitar'n'bass wall of sound that rocks as heavily as anyone, and their we-learned-from-the-Fastbacks vocal style gives them a light touch as an intriguing contrast. Song writing shows neat range, too, from the great bubblegum sound of "Kinda Good" to the more rocking "I Want More". Supposedly the 10" vinyl release has a bonus of **The Undertones** brilliant "Get Over You". (www.killrockstars.com)

big ray

business class

(boss tuneage)

This UK group formed from ex-members of **Sink** haven't had that many records over the last decade, but they've had enough band trauma (including drummer **James Kermack** death from a brain tumor) to not need an apology. This disc is neat enough pop/rock with slightly nasally, vulnerable vocals that bring to mind the Only Ones's Peter Perrett. It's more one for lying back and listening to the reflective words as opposed to something to smash your furniture to. The high points are the breezy wistfulness of "Buzzing", the keyboard driving rock of "Chocolate" and the monstrous "Stepping Stone" riffage of "Selfish". (www.bosst.freeserve.co.uk)

bonecrusher

"gotta believe" 7" single

(77 rpm)

This seven incher is a mixed bag. Instrumentally it's a major kick in the backside, with all three tracks featuring stirring and well constructed street punk anthems with powerful production and strong hooks. The drummer's got a great rattling style and the guitar player unloads some really tasty solos. But then there's the singing, which sounds something like Saruman's *Uruk-Hai* at choir practice. Gotta take the bad with good, I guess. (www.musicsucks.com)

botnlethja

folk er fifl

(r&r musik)

Obviously art school students - this Icelandic group have way too many ideas to be making this all up

themselves. Allegedly they toured the UK with Blur a few years ago, in which case I wonder how this whacky, twisted music of theirs went down. They've mastered the art of parry and thrust, with songs that lay back and then explode in your face, then calming down to do it again. Lyrics are unintelligible, but the assorted screams, shouts, yelps and la-las serve primarily as more instrumentation so it doesn't matter much. Spiritually these guys are like Wire but rhythmically they're more like a grunge band on speed, though I really haven't heard much to match them. (no address!)

the braille drivers/miss lonelyheart

**"america's child"/"hey lockhaven"
"receiver"/"pollyana" split 7"**

(molecular)

West Virginia's Braille Drivers have been faves of mine for a while, with their off-kilter indie pop giving a spiritual reminder of early Flying Nun singles by the Chills with perhaps a touch of Bob Mould in the vocals. Their two tracks here are both solid mid-tempo indie pop – something that could be said about a lot of bands but which somehow means more this time. I'd never heard of Miss Lonelyheart before, but they prove to be a fitting partner for this split...a little more hyperactive (especially in the drums) but still solid and tuneful stuff. (pucho1@aol.com)

the chevelles

girl god

(zip)

Here's the piece of power pop perfection that this Perth group always had the potential to make! In the past they've been dogged by inadequate finances and sometimes by shortcomings in their own material, but *Girl God* ranks alongside any of the best Perth pop records made, which is saying something since the place is something of a mecca for this stuff. These 13 tracks rock hard and there's loads of catchy and memorable songs among them. The rocking crunchers like "Madeleine", "Angelina Jolie" and "Sleeper" are especially great, but there's no slack moments at all. In 1969's bubblegum era this stuff would've been all over AM radio. (116 Montgomery St, Suite 200, SF, CA 94015 ziprecords@earthlink.net)

the chimney sweeps

devil girl

(vicious sloth)

Want to get that authentic garage sound? Record like this 60s Australian band did, with a single mike duct taped to a broom stick and mixing by

adjusting how far away each instrument is placed! This retrospective traces the 3 year career of a band that changed their name seemingly at whim but stuck to their passion for basic, blues influenced guitar rock. Covers of songs like **John Lee Hooker's** "Boom Boom", **The Kinks** "Till The End Of The Day" or the rarely heard **Rolling Stones** tune "Grown Up Wrong" fit in well here. If you like this sort of obscure stuff, check the rest of the Vicious Sloth catalog...they specialize in 60s Aussie sounds. (www.viciousloth.com.au)

clang bang

s/t

(clang bang)

This album has too many echoes of early 70s dinosaur rock bands like Jethro Tull or Queen for me. "Daze Control Board" could have been on *A Night At The Opera*, and the over-wrought "Silence Is Part Of The Danger" features good lyric sentiment horribly presented. The opening "Firecracker" is the one exception, mixing a tropical sort of samba beat with a cool pop tune to make something worth having. (www.clangbang.com)

sam d'angelo

nothing left but hope

(sad)

In my view, Sam D'Angelo and his late 80s band **Sister Ray** deserve to be mentioned anytime Ohio rock greats are discussed – right there with Pere Ubu, the Dead Boys, Rocket From the Tombs and all those Cleveland acts. In contradiction to its title, their *No Way To Express* lp was a classic expression of alienation. Although on this new solo lp D'Angelo has scaled back the instrumental attack of old and resorts to an acoustic approach on about half the songs, the emotional core of the music is just as raw as ever. Songs like "(Another) Disconnection" or "Disintegration" make you squirm a little in your seat...like you're overhearing someone talking to themselves about their deepest secrets. Rocks the head, not the body. (443 Twinning Drive, Dayton, OH 45431)

died pretty

"my generation landslide" CD single

(citadel)

After nearly two decades of making consistently great music influenced by the Velvet Underground and Suicide, Died Pretty are wrapping it up. This is their bittersweet farewell single – musically the title track is more typical of the mid period of the band than their last lp with a wistful guitar feel and lyrics suited to the occasion. "Angels Before" feels more like a *Using My Gills*-era track with warbling guitar squeals over the top of a mellow lyric. And on

“Pleased To Meet You” **Ron Peno** sings in his best Lou Reed imitation before leaping to a higher register on the break out chorus. Not their best, but still a nice finish. (www.citadelrecords.com.au)

the distraction

calling all radios

(dirtknap)

Spiritually sounding pretty close to fab Dirtnap labelmates the Briefs, The Distraction play what they regard to be 70s styled punk in the vein of the Buzzcocks or the Boys. Although it really isn't – none of the bands of that day had this sort of sound on record. Rhythmically perhaps – the slower but still hard hitting whiplash style of songs like “Locked Up” would be hard to mosh to but are irresistible pogo numbers. But the guitar sound is much more modern and full than those old punk records (even if the song writing's not quite the same hall of fame caliber). Lyrically concise and witty, vocally nasal and bratty, musically hook filled and catchy, this one's a good treat. (www.dirtnaprecs.com)

driver x

super 12

(reel to reel)

This New York band plays heartfelt and introspective pop in the vein of the mellower moments of Big Star. “Red White and Blue” touches a nice chord, while “Smile” has the neat line “Have you ever been scarred by Marvin Gaye?”. It's the hardest rocking card in the deck with cool organ washes that could've stood to be a little louder in the mix. “Wanderlust” has a really pretty chorus. Overall the laid back factor is a little more than I normally look for, but kinder, gentler people could go for this a lot. (www.reeltoreelrecords.com)

los dryheavers

s/t

(panacide)

“Setting an al-time low standard in rock'n'roll...and failing to meet it” is the motto on the booklet by this Mex-American group from the California coast south of Frisco. I'd say that's harsh self-criticism, because Los Dryheavers kick harder than a fifth of Old Overcoat. With a singer like first SLF-lp Jake Burns (singing in Spanish half the time) and a band that sounds like the Ramones' *Road To Ruin* played at 45 rpm, this is an irrepressibly high energy CD that rips from get-go to heave-ho. The press sheet says the band's lyrics are politically motivated, but I'd have never noticed otherwise. (www.panacide.com)

duke fame

regrets

(cdfreedom)

The debut from this totally unpretentious and self-deprecating (check out their hysterical website for a fresh take on promotion!) Georgia band is a pretty cool blast of modern pop. Given how much singer **Eric Zweig** sounds like *Ziggy*-era Bowie, I'm not sure if the band's name is complete coincidence, but the underlying music crunches along in a style that would make them fit somewhere between Nirvana (for grunge guitar crunch) and Possum Dixon (for quirky pop leanings). Check out “The Day I Shaved My Head” for just one cool example of what these guys are onto. (www.dukefame.net)

the exit

new beat

(some)

Superficially, this has the hallmarks of being a first rate punk rock album. It's got a cover that looks like classic Clash and it's produced by **Daniel Rey**, normally a trademark of quality. But the inside is a bit disappointing. The music is high gloss melodic punk that's so slick it won't stick. Overly emotive super-harmonized vocals front All-styled hyperactive drumming and smooth (but not too loud) guitars. The opening “Worthless” strikes something of a chord, but after that it feels like punk rock for people who'd rather be playing the Eagles. (www.some.com)

the full nine

s/t

(mammoth)

This band states flatly that their number one goal is to “make it” – usually the kiss of death for me. But after a few plays I have to say that I find their blenderization of Black Sabbath riffs and angst ridden U2/Radiohead pseudo-falsettos is pretty interesting, even if it isn't always the most hummable stuff in the racks. “Coffee” drops the monster crunch guitar and is a pretty nifty pop song. But “Fourteen” is more typical – stripped of vocals it'd sound like full metal, but the singing carries it somewhere else completely. (www.mammoth.com)

the gasolheads

red wine and white russians 10” mlp

(deadbeat)

This is a pretty good blast of 8 songs loaded with Lazy Cowgirls styled riffage and distorted vocals. Lots of furious energy drives the rhythms and the ghost of Johnny Thunders makes appearances for a guitar solo now and then. My only complaint is

that going all the way to France for such an American styled record seems a bit much – I was hoping for something to add to the heritage of Les Thugs, the Dogs, Chameleon's Day, Fixed Up or the City Kids. But it's still fun. PO Box 283, LA, CA 90078)

gbh

ha ha

(go-kart)

GBH were a second rate third wave punk band when they hit the scene 20 years ago, but this record is actually heaps better than any of what they did in their heyday. These songs are short and snappy with the standard wall of guitars sound and half strangled vocals – nothing new, but consistently above average in execution. My favorite is the track "Crush 'Em", which is supposed to go "You gotta crush 'em like ants" but somehow I hear "You've got a crush on my dad". Whatever – it rocks like a fiend. "The Power Of One" has a really neat little guitar noodle and a nice ringing chorus. Good fun. (www.gokartrecords.com)

the heelwalkers

s/t

(brobdingnagian)

Good god, this is one monstrous, bone-splintering slab of Detroit rock mayhem! From Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Heelwalkers will pulverize you into whimpering submission with track after track of hammering rock and roll that's about as subtle as a mastodon in a tea room. Lyrically they aren't much, and vocally it's the usual shout along sort of stuff, but instrumentally this band is like a machine with powerhouse, catchy riffs and rock hard rhythm. "Shake My Ass" has a searing lick and takes the cup, but the horn charts of "Crank It Up" (very Stax Volt and not at all wanky ska) make it memorable too. (1096 Queen St Suite 229, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 2R9 Canada, www.brobdingnagian.com)

the hellcopters

high visibility

(gearhead)

By now I ought to know which side of the Hellcopters question I stand on – they've had a pile of singles about 8 inches high and what, 7 albums now? But it's hard to decide what to say about a band that's equal parts MC5, Stooges, Sonics, Sex Pistols, Led Zeppelin, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Kiss and Bad Company. Most of these tracks power kinetically with strong hooks and lots of over the top solo work, but when it ends it feels like you just ate a meal of Duncan Hines canned frosting.

For an underground band they're pretty darned commercial sounding. The neat lyrics of the lead-off "Hopeless Case Of A Kid In Denial" score some bonus points at any rate. (PO Box 42129, SF, CA 94142, www.gearheadrecords.com)

the henchmen

lust for glory

(raw power)

In the early 1980s New Zealand's Henchmen were the anti-matter version of a Flying Nun band. They were founded on the rubble of a primordial punk outfit called the **Dum Dum Boys** who left behind a solid lp called *Let There Be Noise*, and subsequently moved to Europe and morphed into **Reptiles At Dawn**, releasing several good records on the New Rose label. As the Henchmen they only had a handful of hard to find 7" releases, and this CD collects those tracks with a batch of demos and live tracks for a full length retrospective. The band plays Stooges/Radio Birdman influenced rock (covering "Now I Want To Be Your Dog" and "I Got A Right"), but not as brilliantly as the limited legend that now surrounds them might suggest. But it's still an interesting time capsule to open. (rawpower@paradise.net.nz)

hellride

troublemaker

(scooch pooch)

It's hard to complain about the high octane Detroit rock instrumental backing in this Swedish group's songs, but the singer is one of those high elbow action screamers who gets tiring fast. Like after 45 seconds. And if the delivery wasn't enough of a problem, the content of the lyrics is the usual brain-dead stuff – song titles like "Highway Demon", "The Devil's Own", "Ready To Rock", "Get Down", "Beast Of A Man"...you get it. Fifteen years ago this band would've played heavy metal to arenas full of bic lighters. (www.scoochpooch.com)

kevin k

13th street

(vicious kitten)

If you're like me and think that two New York Dolls albums and a couple Johnny Thunders records left that form no where near played out, then this Kevin K disc is for you. It's loaded with the sort of recycled guitar licks and bootlegged lyric ideas that you only find digging around in some New York trash rock dumpster. The trick is how you put the pieces together, and man are there some great tunes here! My faves are "Seduction", "Days Move So Fast" and the title track but there's really no let downs over the whole 13 tracks.

(www.viciouskitten.com.au, GPO Box 20, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia)

the kills

black rooster ep

(dim mak)

Hmmm...here we have a band that consists of one individual of each gender making roughed edged, lo-fi blues influenced garage rock. Woulda seemed more clever pre-White Stripes, but initial prejudice aside the four songs on this ep prove to be pretty compelling. The two band members (named **VV** and **Hotel** – what were their mothers thinking?) take turns on vocals with Hotel sounding like Lou Reed and VV like Cheryl Crow. The seesawing rhythms of “Cat Claw” and “Black Rooster” make them the pick hits, and “Dropout Boogie” recycles the “You Really Got Me Riff” neatly. (POB 14041, Santa Barbara, CA 93107)

la motta

la motta

(boss tuneage)

Former **Asexuals** singer/guitarist **Sean Friesen** moved to LA and put together this new band, and I don't think it's going to disappoint any of his old fans. The disc leads with three fine power pop tunes in “Night Sun”, “California” and “Millionaire” – big guitars, smacking drums, and great verse to chorus changes. Subsequent tracks have the same relentless production punch but in the middle of the disc the songs suffer a little from lack of variety until you hit the two closing aces, “Tunnel Vision” and “Black Sugar”. (www.bosstuneage.com, PO Box 74, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WB, UK)

the m-16s

“sweet luck” 7”

(beelzebub club)

Here's a nifty pairing of hard hitting Detroit rock sides with a bit of a pop edge to them out of this new Perth group. It's nothing new, but both tracks are fueled with powerhouse guitar riffs and rippling with energy, and there's none of the dumb posturing that sometimes drags bands like this down. The singer makes this band remind me of old Perth favorites the Kryptonics. Time for a full length.

manifesto jukebox

remedy

(byo)

Not quite up to the level of their terrific *Desire* CD (see issue 49), *Remedy* is still an effort most bands would be damned proud of. This Finnish band has a lot of the atmosphere of Leatherface, with thick

rhythm guitar overlaid by clear arpeggios and passionate, snarled vocals. “No Love Lost” is perhaps the finest moment here with a ringing, anthemic lead riding over high tension rhythm parts, but this general approach pervades everything Manifesto Jukebox does. Intelligent and poetic lyrics make it that much better. (www.byorecords.com)

the martinets

new stories for men

(scooch pooch)

No sophomore jinx here. The Martinets have come through with a superb follow up to their great *Love...Hate!* CD of a couple years back. The Martinets' approach is to merge Johnny Thunders styled rock with intelligent lyrics in a way that puts them light years ahead of the beer swilling masses that share their influences but not their abilities. They can make a ballad like “The Finer Things” that's every bit as wistful as Thunder's own “You Can't Put Your Arms Around A Memory” or an in-your-face rocker like “Millions To Blow” that rivals “Subway Train” in the blistering guitar sweeps. Wonderful. (www.scoochpooch.com, 5850 W. 3rd St. #209, Los Angeles, CA 90036)

midnight oil

capricornia

(sony)

This is a bit of surprise – the last few Midnight Oil albums have seen the band still making good songs, but fumbling a bit trying to find a different kind of sound from their *Diesel and Dust* and *Blue Sky Mining* days. On *Capricornia* it feels like they just decided, fuck it, let's do what comes most naturally. The resulting album swings from end to end with 12 really nice pop/rock tracks. **Rob Hirst** has one of the most distinctive styles of any drummer around – without being in anyone's face with his playing, he still deserves credit for the silky rolling feel these songs have. There's no big causes on this record – just a bunch of warm and comfortable songs. (www.sonymusic.com.au)

mishaps

get away volume

(scissor press)

Baltimore's Mishaps hit here with a pretty decent 5 track ep. It's bashing pop/punk stuff – ordinary as far as the generic punk rock vocal style goes, but the rhythm section has a neat feel with some almost-jazzy beats (played at 100 mph). A cool up-picked guitar style makes the songs “Generator” and “Mr. Wellington” particularly stand out. The pathos in the lyric of the latter makes it the best of the disc. (www.scissorpress.com)

the naked eye

from obscurity to nowhere

(corduroy)

This new Melbourne band has certainly set a high bar for themselves with their debut release! This bloody thing is just packed full of energetic and tuneful rock songs where every lick sounds fresh and original. "Blessington Way" leads and sets the tone for the rest – a gorgeous chorus and a brilliant, compressed guitar sound. If that doesn't move you, there's bagfuls more – "Too Far Gone" and "Sacharine Twins" being two of the best. Concise, direct and hard hitting tunes make this one of the best CDs I've heard this year. (nakedeye100@hotmail.com)

the new christis

we got this!

(laughing outlaw)

In the New Christs' feature in issue #48 **Rob Younger** discussed a forthcoming album that at the time appeared to be only a month or two off. A lot has happened since then – their record label went bankrupt, the studio seized the tapes as collateral for unpaid recording time, and the band disintegrated in turmoil. It appeared unlikely that we fans would ever hear anything from those sessions beyond the fabulous but impossible-to-find "On Top Of Me" single (both tracks thankfully on this CD). Yet miracle of miracles, Laughing Outlaw Records has ransomed the tapes and paid for the completion of mixing, and here we have only the fourth full length New Christs album in their 20 year existence! And every one a gem.

How to describe it? The songs are hard driving, tough rock and roll, but using pop hooks to keep things memorable. Younger's passionate vocals, which are at turns bitter, sarcastic and ironic, are the band's obvious trademark. **Mark Wilkinson** and **Al Creed** exchange inventive and clever guitar licks that don't sound much like anything anyone else is playing. And the rhythm section of ex-**Happy Hate Me Nots** bassist **Christian Houlemare** and ex-**Hammerfish** drummer **Stuart Wilson** give everything a rocking bottom end.

Just as some examples: "First Plane Home" features a sinuous guitar lick and a high tension rhythm backing. "He's Too Slow" is a kick-ass rocker. "Spit It Out" sparkles musically and is the most optimistic song on an album whose negative vibe might otherwise be too much for some. "Nadir" has a staggering drum beat and intense vocal. But there are no dull moments among the 15 songs and hour plus duration of this disc – it's a

great, great record. The best New Christs ever? I won't try to sever that baby, but it's certainly good enough to raise the question. (www.laughingoutlaw.com.au)

ninety nine

anatomy of distance

(stickfigure)

OK, so I like the opening trick of having the first two words of lyrics be "One hundred" when your band's name is one less than that, but it's kinda downhill from there for this Melbourne band. The vocals sounds like the nice people next doors' daughter singing her earnest best at the high school pageant. The underlying music is a thin sort of indie pop that would've played well with Rough Trade's A&R department circa 1982. My favorite moment is the Swell Maps vibe in their deconstruction of Black Sabbath's "Iron Man", but you have to sit through a lot for that moment. (PO Box 55462, Atlanta, GA 30308, www.stickfiguredistro.com)

the nuggets

...are the alchemists of music!

(sound of subterranea)

Unlike the killer *Crystalline Creations and Power Pop Sensations* CD (reviewed in issue 49) from Norway's Nuggets, this record takes a less full on approach. There's no opening salvo of instantly overwhelming songs to reel you in, but that doesn't make it bad – it's just a little more subtle. It's 8 tracks of excellent, psych-tinged power pop (which you better deliver if you're going to use this name for your band!). The cover of the Beatles "Run For Your Life" is neatly done. (www.soundsofsubterranea.com)

parallax project

oblivious

(tallboy)

The harmonies and slightly compressed guitar make this band (actually more of a solo project) at times a dead ringer for the outstanding but long gone UK power pop band the Records. Project manager **Michael Giblin** writes most of the songs and plays most of the guitar and bass, but he gets a helping hand from some pals including ex-**Neighborhoods** frontman **David Minehan**. There's two really superb Records-like tracks in "To The Moon" and "Definitely Maybe". Beyond those, it's maybe a bit more like Sgt. Pepper era Beatles – softer and less rocking. (www.tallboyrecords.com)

radio birdman

radios appear
living eyes

(citadel)

If you haven't got the message on this fabulous and incredibly influential Australian band yet, here's one more chance. Citadel Records have obtained the rights to reissue the band's two late 70s studio lps, and they've done their usual masterful job. These are the re-mastered *Radios Appear* and remixed *Living Eyes*, and it's one of the rare times that new studio manipulation makes a noticeable difference – a huge leap in punch for both. In addition, RA comes with a bonus CDEP of the original *Burn My Eye* ep, while LE has a bonus of the *More Fun* ep. Add piles of photos and liner notes, and the only complaint is that these aren't gatefold vinyl lps where this stuff can be reproduced in a more reasonable size! If your collection is missing these vital albums, snap them up and thrill to seminal Sydney rock sounds like "New Race", "Aloha Steve and Danno", "Descent Into The Maelstrom", "Smith and Wesson Blues" and "Cryin' Sun". SubPop's *Essential Birdman* CD was a nice introduction – now get the whole enchilada. (www.citadelrecords.com.au)

randy

cheater

(burning heart)

Canada's Randy play a ripping brand of garage punk like a poor man's Thee Michelle Gun Elephant, and it shows in both the playing and the sleeve art. Warp speed chord changes, jagged Strat-like guitar sounds, distorted vocals and chugging drums fuel the 6 tracks making up this ep – a great adrenaline rush. Couple this to really catchy hooks and you've got something. "Stepping Out" is the best – memorable chorus, muscular bass lines, the works. (www.burningheart.com)

rocket from the crypt

live from camp x-ray

(vagrant)

Not a live album at all, this is in fact a storming new studio release from these San Diego veterans. Unlike the legions of guitar fueled punk influenced bands out there, RFTC add horns to the mix much as the Saints did on their landmark *Eternally Yours* lp – not wanky ska sounding horns, not exactly Stax-Volt soul sort of horns, but full on rampaging in-your-face punk rock horns. With vocals that cross Chris Bailey's nose with Graham Parker's *Heat Treatment*-era throat and a rampaging set of wildly catchy rock tunes led by the brilliant "I'm Not Invisible", this sub-30 minute 10 song set will wake

the deaf, let the blind feel, and make the dead see. In that order. (www.rftc.com)

kim salmon

e(a)rnest

(mgm)

"It wasn't the wages that attracted me – it was the sin on its own, I'd have done it for free" sings Salmon, reviewing his career on *E(a)rnest's* "Lord Of Darkness". That sort of lyrical cleverness pervades his latest solo offering, one that's about as far from his usual noisy self as you can imagine. But despite musical backing that's primarily acoustic guitar and keys, somehow the sound is still rich and full. Superficially it sounds like a very basic home studio job, but there's been a lot of care paid to detail and the result is a record that really holds attention. The load of really clever songs certainly doesn't hurt. I'd have never anticipated it on first listen, but this has become my favorite Salmon recording since his **Scientists** days. (markandjoanna@bigpond.com)

satanic surfers

unconsciously confined

(bad taste)

Having loved songs ranging from "Alternative Ulster" to "Snoopy vs The Red Baron", convinces me that the topic of a song isn't as important as how the thought is expressed. This Swedish band has lyrics that sound like they took all their rejected letters to the editor of Svenska Dagbladet and put them to music. The net result obviously means a lot to the band and the (rather large) bleeding heart liberal in me wants to warm to it, but man, this is one stiff record. "Bittersweet" is the one song that survives this, and its lyric basically says "hey, I don't know much and you shouldn't listen to me". Go figure. Musically it's pretty rocking pop/punk stuff, but that's too little, too late. (www.badtasterecords.se)

the shakedown

move

(vms)

Washington's Shakedown have the Electric Frankenstein school of trash punk rock pretty well wired – in fact, they probably go 'em one better. This CD is loaded with blazing, high energy riffs and snotty attitude that has me thinking of a poor man's Gaza Strippers or Didjits. On the downside, while most of these tracks are built around some incredible, mind-blowing guitar lick, as songs they don't sum up quite as well. There are exceptions – "Come With Me" pulls it all together and adds some neat female backing harmony and "Slow Rockin'" is powerhouse slamma-rama. Still, for out

and out manic guitar energy this is pretty high up there. (www.vmsrecords.com)

the shakes

s/t

(teenacide)

I like teenage bubblegum pop as much as the next paunchy old guy with receding hairline, but this disc really doesn't deliver the goods. Part of it's the production, which makes the drums sound padded and the guitars weak. The vocal harmonies are nice and tight, but stack this up against something like the Yum Yums *Blame It On The Boogie* (see below) and it just sounds limp. And wait until Britney Spears' legal team finds out about the mystery track – oops, there goes any potential musical career for you guys when the court finds that you're not that innocent. (PO Box 291121, LA, CA. 90029, www.teenaciderrecords.com)

shooter mcgavin

"saving the day" 7" single

(boss tuneage)

This single feels pretty flat...it's that homogenized pop punk sound with too much attention paid to making harmonies come out just so and a drummer so in love with his own (over) playing that he's sort of forgotten that the objective was...uh...oh, damn, what was it, anyway? Oh, to make a good song, that's it! Boss Tuneage can usually be counted on for quality, but this is a rare miss. (www.bosstuneage.com)

singapore sling

the curse of singapore sling

(hitt)

It's not every day you find out about a hot new band in an in-flight magazine, but that's what prompted me to check out Singapore Sling on a recent vacation trip to their home country of Iceland. And it more than lives up to the billing. This band has strains of Velvet Underground and Pere Ubu coursing through its veins. The opening "Overdriver" sounds like an updated "Final Solution" with huge droning chords and echoed, threatening vocals. "Summer Garden" is the token pop song with a Chills-like ambience. The rest is repetitive and droning minimalism in all the best ways. Intense! (www.edda.is)

sixer

beautiful trash

(byo)

Featuring former members of the excellent Virginia band **Ann Beretta**, Sixer continue in that tradition with another solid street punk release loaded with

Joe Strummerish vocals (but without a political slant). "Get Well Card" is packed full of tasty guitar hooks and a poppy chorus. "American Heartbreak" has a reggae influenced guitar bit that Stiff Little Fingers coulda used around the time of *Nobody's Heroes*. And "Furious and Outdone" has a great driving feel to it. This isn't quite as strong as their *Saving Grace* CD (see issue 48), but it's still a good one. (www.byorecords.com)

the snot rockets

liberty blues

(boss tuneage)

From the wilds of western New York state, the Snot Rockets fall somewhere between *Sorry Ma* era Replacements and the Angry Samoans circa *Back To Samoa*. That means several things: they've got a great sense of humor, they play crunching guitar at mostly blistering tempos, and they keep their songs short and to the point (16 tracks in 30 minutes). "Die Me Die You" manages to nick the lyric melody from Kim Wilde's "Kids In America" and the guitar riffs from the Ramones' "Beat On The Brat" at the same time, and elsewhere there are lots of non-punk seasonings stirred into the mix to keep it interesting. (www.bosstuneage.com)

squad 5-0

s/t

(tooth and nail)

This second album from Squad 5-0 is meat and potatoes rock'n'roll filled with catchy songs. **Jeff Fortson's** vocals come from somewhere between the Lazy Cowgirl's Pat Todd and the Real Kids' John Felice – a snotty tone, great phrasing, and an avalanche of words. The band hits hard but with lots of cool pop hooks – that late 80s Minneapolis ethic that led to the Replacements or Magnolias. "Screaming With The Sirens" and "The Adolescent Night" are particularly irresistible examples – ace tunes and fine singing with just the right production. (www.toothandnail.com)

stjornukisi

gothar stundir

(ved)

Here's another Icelandic band that's making some really interesting music. Stjornukisi's approach is big on dynamics – a typical effort is on "Monophrene", where there's a haunting little clean guitar lick in the verse that explodes into a heavy, pounding chorus. The singing (in Icelandic) follows suit, going from a low moan to a full scream. Instrumentally it's cold and stark, and though it rocks with intensity, it sure ain't the Stooges. The closing "Viltu Deyja" will give you whiplash as it

lays back and then goes for the throat over and over again. (www.stjornukisi.com)

the stoneage hearts

the stoneage hearts

(off the hip)

It's less common than would be hoped that when a pick up band of guys from other good groups get together and make a record that it matches up to what they do in their main line of work, but that's what's happened here. **P56** frontman **Danny McDonald** teams with former **Philistein** bassist **Ian Wettenhall** and **Pyramidiacs** drummer **Mickster** to make an outstanding disc of garage/power pop tunes in the vein of the Stems with a dose of early Hoodoo Gurus. Their cover of **Paul Collin's Beat's** classic "Rock and Roll Girl" blisters, and their own material, like "So Glad (That Your Gone)", doesn't concede anything to that track. (www.offthehip.com, PO Box 1211 Carlton, VIC 3053 Australia)

superscope

torpedo

(zip)

Though they've been around for a long time, this is the first full length lp by Australia's power popsters Superscope. I was primed for an absolute killer after their 5 track "Lizzie" CDEP (reviewed last issue), and though this isn't quite there, it's still very good. I'm in the school that wants more power than pop, and this disc has a few too many ultra-softies, like "Hey Now" or "Take It Or Leave It", where the vocals go into Smokey Robinson-flavored falsetto overload. On the other hand, when they rock like they do on "Window", "Girls Smile" or "PPY", everything's pretty much all right with the world. (www.ziprecords.com)

trabant

moment of truth

(tmt)

Trabant don't measure up to fellow Icelandic bands Singapore Sling or Stjornukisi – this is moderately interesting electronica that would probably work OK as muzak to drown out clinking soup spoons from the next booth at Denny's, but mostly fails to satisfy as a stand alone listening experience. It's very ambient sounding with not many lyrics. Only "Org Org" really feels like something to sink teeth into with a neat slinky instrumental feel. The rest seems like it should be backing for a Mitsubishi spot. (www.thulemusic.com)

the travoltas

endless summer

(fastmusic)

Gadzooks! This is one brilliant slab of bubblegum punk rock. These Dutch guys knock most of the competition sideways with ten absolutely marvelous power pop songs that all sound like potential top ten chart singles in that hypothetical world with good radio that I'm always dreaming of. It's Beach Boys vocals, Ramones instrumentation, Phil Spector production (Castanets! Oh, baby!) and a batch of songs that almost make an acne relapse seem like a fair trade to be a teenager again. "You and Me" ought to be an international number one – it's got it all. (www.fastmusic.com)

the unknown

the real thing

(boss tunage)

This Cleveland band has been around for over a decade and released a pile of records and CDs, playing a blasting type of punk pop that echoes groups like the Mega City Four or All. There's five songs here, all racing along with loud guitars, bashing drums and harmonies tighter than the seal on a ziplock bag. A whole album of this might end up feeling a little too one dimensional, but in this dosage it's good medicine. (www.bosstuneage.com, PO Box 74, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2WB, UK)

unwritten law

elva

(interscope)

Haven't checked in on this San Diego group in a while, but it appears they've grown quite a bit from their early basic punk/pop roots. The result here is diverse and professional sounding, but it has the feeling of a set of songs with an eye towards a set of marketing demographics – the variety is a little too well organized with a ballad here and a reggae track there breaking things just so. But it's not without highlights - the opener "Mean Girl" has a tasty poppish chorus offset by crunching metallic verses and an almost dub-break bridge. "Blame It On Me" has a warp speed grinding riff that powers. And the chorus of "Actress, Model..." certainly doesn't leave the head quickly. (www.interscope.com)

the yum yums

blame it on the boogie

(screaming apple)

Don't be put off by the extremely tongue-in-cheek title. There's nothing "boogie" about this music at all – Norway's Yum Yums specialize in race car tempos and divine power pop hooks and they do it

with a power and panache without peer. Imagine the Buzzcocks playing late 60s bubblegum, and you're onto it. Frontman **Morten Henriksen** made great garage rock records earlier in his career with the **Cosmic Dropouts**, but it's clear he's found his true calling in this band. Tasty! (screamapp@aol.com)

various

do the pop

(shock)

various

born out of time

(raven)

How in the meager space of a couple paragraphs can I hope to describe two compilations filled with highlights of what to my own tastes was one of the most creative crossroads of time and place in rock history? Appearing in the space of a couple weeks this past spring, each of these sets is the lovingly presented result of the efforts of a fan with Lenny Kaye-like devotion to the Aussie independent scene of the 1980s. **Ian MacFarlane's** brilliant *Encyclopedia Of Australian Rock and Pop* is critical reading for any fan of his country's music – he compiled *Born Out Of Time*. **Dave Laing** ran the labels *Grown Up Wrong* and *Dogmeat* and is responsible for double-disc *Do The Pop*. Together, the two packages are like *Nuggets* volumes 1-3 of Aussie indie rock, loaded with killer tracks by bands like **Radio Birdman**, the **Saints**, the **Victims**, **Died Pretty**, the **Scientists**, **Lipstick Killers**, the **Celibate Rifles**, the **New Christs**, the **Eastern Dark**, **Sunnyboys**, **Fun Things**, **Hitmen**, **Passengers**...good lord, what a lineup! Australia in this time span was like a Galapagos Island of rock and roll – ignored by the killing fields of music press hype and commercial aspiration, the bands grew in a million different directions. You'll hear Detroit rock, power pop, punk, 60s psych, garage rock, girl group pop, and stuff where you just don't know what the heck to call it but love it anyway. Not only is there nary a dud here, but the discs just sequence from one stone classic to the next. Not just good, mind you, but awe inspiringly great. If you missed these bands in their day, here's where to start making up for lost time. (www.ravenrecords.com.au and www.shock.com.au)

various

the great stems hoax

(off the hip)

Even when (as in this case) I love the band being celebrated, I'm not a big fan of tribute albums. **The Stems** were one of the brilliant groups of mid 80s Australia, and their impact on the power pop scene

in that country can't be understated. There's a lot of really good bands on this compilation – the **Nuggets**, **Even**, **Hands Of Time**, the **Naked Eye**, **P76**, **Stoneage Hearts**, **Hunchbacks** and **Finkers** to name a few. These are definitely not groups that should just be dismissed out of hand, but their combined efforts don't measure up to the Stems own *Buds* CD retrospective. The most interesting track proves to be by one of the least heralded contributors – the **Trimatics'** eerie rendition of "Can't Turn The Clock Back" which completely re-interprets the original. (www.offthehip.com.au)

various

feast – a candle records collection

(candle)

This Aussie compilation is packed full of songs by musicians with the sort of genetic wiring that led to Janis Ian and Gilbert O'Sullivan – there should be an award for achieving such a consistent level of disastrous interpersonal relationships as those documented herein. Yet there's something surprisingly appealing about the way group after group here takes the stage and lays their misery bare. Fortunately, after 8 tracks in which the most positive sentiment expressed occurs in a song by **Darren Hanlon** called "Yes, There Is A Slight Chance He Might Actually Fail" comes **Ruck Rover's** hysterically sarcastic "Mortgage", detailing a conversation with a friend who's just closed financing on a house and wants to recount the details. This proves to be just a moment's diversion, however, and it's back to the gloom thereafter. (www.candlerecords.com.au)

various

pushing scandinavian rock to the man vol. 3

(bad afro)

This compilation of bands on Denmark's Bad Afro records is a great example of why it's well worth keeping close tabs on the Scandinavian scene. It's filled with first rate rocking songs that take basic garage ideas and build on them. Things begin with a great stop/start hook from Finland's **Sweatmaster**, roll through a soul burner from Sweden's **Royal Beat Conspiracy**, and a spaghetti western track from **Vegas V.I.P.** **The Chronics** kick out the garage rock jams and Norway's **Launderettes** do a surfer girl pop act on a cover of "Nobody But Me". Sweden's **Maggots** play the shimmery garage rock thing like they shoulda been on Amigo Records in the mid 80s. **The Mutants** cannibalize the Nomads 'Surfin' In The Bars" riff, stealing with style and taste. This is just a sampling – this thing has 15 bands, and there's no dull moments. One of the best

compilations I've heard in several years. (www.badafro.dk)

various

double dyn-o-mite sampler (vol. 3)

(estrus)

Here's a slab of eleven twisted and dirty rock'n'roll bands each punching out a pair of tunes with extra grunt factor. This is pounding stuff, heavy on guitars and bass and lots of pissed off singing. **Cherry Valence** have the keyboard sound of Deep Purple but without the histrionic vocals. **Federation X** remind me of late 80s Denver faves the Fluid on "Moose Blood". **Fireballs of Freedom** are a 70s hard rock mess, while **Gas Huffer** provide two typically solid songs. **Gasoline** feature Keith Moon-ish drumming and crazed guitar/bass interplay. **Man or Astroman** do their trash instrumental thing nicely. Elsewhere there's some mutant country and dirty blues for variety. Good entertainment value. (www.estrus.com)

various

move to riot

(raw power)

the bosse sound

shielded by death volume 1

(dionysis)

Compilations focused on late 70s punks scenes are always a lot of fun even though they tend to be uneven. It's amazing how many people in those days were inspired to go and do it and not be worried about whether they were "good enough". But it's doubtful that those folks ever imagined that they'd spawn a cottage industry 20 years later of people releasing compilations dedicated to the proposition that any single that once did time in a 49 cent bin must be great. *Move To Riot* provides 23 tracks from New Zealand punk groups. Production is mostly lousy, musical ability is hit or miss, but enthusiasm is off the charts. The best groups here might vie with London's Eater or Manchester's Drones in a battle of the bands, so there aren't any hidden superstars, but it's still good fun and an overall winner.

The Bosse Sound covers Swedish punk and hardcore bands from 1979 to 1986. Although that era of Swedish music did have a lot of interesting groups, they seemed to have successfully avoided appearing here. Instead what we have is a dry and featureless collection of shouted or snarled vocals overlaying basic rhythm guitar playing. Any humor that might relieve the tedium for us Anglos is lost due to the mostly Swedish lyrics.

Shielded By Death targets Eastern Connecticut and Western Massachusetts – locales presumably chosen because the bands are close enough to the bright lights of NYC and Boston to be strongly influenced by those scenes, but far away enough to make them outsiders. Anyway, most of what was wrong with *The Bosse Sound* is remedied here – there's lots of variety in style, and humor is plentiful. My faves are **M80's** "Myuns", **The Malarians'** spy theme "Get Out Of Dallas" and the **Reducers'** brilliant pop/rock tracks "No Ambition" and "Scared Of Cops", the former being one of my two or three very favorite singles of 1982. (crawl@ihug.co.nz, POB 7127 Wellesly St, Auckland, NZ, www.dionysusrecords.com)