



The Big Takeover #53 was published in December of 2003. 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](http://www.bigtakeover.com).

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aluminum babe

**s/t**

(mother west)

Very confusing. Swedish girl comes to New York, fronts band of Yanks, writes song in French, sounds like Bangles on amphetamines, claims to be like Ramones. Makes fine no-fat 5 track collection of concise rocking punk pop numbers topped off with innocent girl vocals and a basketful of hooks. Brings smile to reviewers face. A full length should be out by the time you read this. ([www.motherwest.com](http://www.motherwest.com))

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baby woodrose

**honey for soul**

(bad afro)

It's unfortunate that the lyrics to this Danish CD spend a little too much time spreading that "Oh, baby, I'm the man who can satisfy you" sort of bullshit – damnable as either a bald faced lie or too much data whichever the truth of it. Too bad, because the music is pretty romping stomping

garage rock replete with some great 60s keyboards and Keith Moon school drumming. "Disconnected" and "You Better Run" are probably the best examples, and their lyrics hit a higher level by focusing on more broadly interesting themes. Better words make this an outstanding disc – as it is, it's got moments. ([www.badafro.dk](http://www.badafro.dk))

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barefoot

**only souvenirs**

(boss tuneage)

From Scotland, Barefoot recall groups like Mega City Four, or reaching back further, the Buzzcocks, although their vocal style isn't so memorable. They've got well rehearsed harmonies down pat, but it's a little too polished. "Taken In" begins with the classic chord progression from intro of the Only Ones "Another Girl Another Planet" and then busts off into a very nifty punk/pop direction of its own. "Punch Your Weight" is another cool one. But overall, it's a little on the generic side. ([www.bosstuneage.com](http://www.bosstuneage.com))

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ben grim

**retro**

(boss tuneage)

You've heard a million bands of this kind by now – poppy warp speed rock with impassioned upper register vocals and loads of harmony backing that's too slick to really work as punk. Ben Grim has that All influence so they change tempos and stop and start so many times in each song that they totally lose the effect they could get by doing it just once. Yes, they're ultra energetic, but it doesn't seem to go anywhere, and after 14 legitimate songs and another 8 unlisted demo tracks with the sort of recording values one expects from wax cylinders, my reaction is one of relief that it's over. ([www.bosstuneage.com](http://www.bosstuneage.com))

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ben's diapers

**laughter tracks**

(rhythm barrel)

This Finnish band plays a warm brand of power pop with country tinges – something that would fit well into the Athens, Georgia crowd roughly between your REMs and Let's Actives. Their ace track, "Josephine Geraldine", is one of those power pop classic songs with a chorus that us older rock scribes used to describe as leaping off the turntable – a rocking, catchy track with just a touch of wistfulness in it. The rest of this is comfortable, mid tempo rock that's pleasant but non-essential. ([www.geocities.com/rhythmbarrel](http://www.geocities.com/rhythmbarrel))

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marit bergman

**"it would have been good" CDEP**

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(simba)

It may seem inconsistent to spend most of your time listening to punk rock and then fall heavily for something like this Marit Bergman ep. But a lot of the allure of punk when it first appeared was that it was real music made by real people expressing real emotions, as opposed to the latest record of baloney by Bad Company. So even though Ms. Bergman superficially might seem to be singing the sort of fare that fills soft rock radio programming, there's something too real to be dismissed about a song that mourns a lost opportunity to share listening to Sonic Youth records with someone she cares for and concludes that "It would have been good, but since we're two fucked up people in denial, there's nothing left to say now but goodbye". All four of these songs lay raw emotion on the line, and if you get a twinge of sadness hearing them, there's no reason to feel guilty about it. ([www.revelationrecords.com](http://www.revelationrecords.com))

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bluebottle kiss

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**revenge is slow**

(in music we trust)

Gotta love a band whose credits read "Bluebottle Kiss use only the best equipment, hence the need to borrow other people's gear". This is the fourth album by this poetic pop band from Australia, and they continue with their tradition of mostly understated but sometimes noisy music. The thing here is the words, which are carefully put together to form a series of little verbal vignettes. It's a record that's best if you can sit and pay attention to it – it won't do you much good if you're blasting down the freeway cursing at the guy who just cut you off. My faves are "Last Cinema" and "Gangsterland", the former for its detached vocal, jerky rhythm and big chorus, and the latter for its cool guitar and bass interplay. ([www.inmusicwetrust.com](http://www.inmusicwetrust.com))

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the cheats

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**cheap pills**

(da core)

This Pittsburgh group is out to recreate the late 70s punk style of bands like the Dead Boys, or a bit later, the Pagans. They don't play as well and they don't write such memorable songs, and since the Dead Boys (and about a thousand others in between) were there ahead of them, they're not as original, either. Coming up with a different guitar sound than the usual bottom end heavy Marshall crunch doesn't hurt their cause. But it's telling that the closing cover of the **Rubber City Rebels'** 1978 single "Young and Dumb" – only a little above average in its day – sounds way fresher than everything except "Automatic Reaction", a track

with a good shout-along stop'n'go chorus that gives this disc one song well worth having. ([www.thecheats.net](http://www.thecheats.net))

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cheerleaders united

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**"electric blue"/"out of heaven" 7"**

(rhythm barrel)

The A side of this Finnish single is solid mid-tempo pop but the vocal line in the chorus is a little too overwrought. Lots of string section action in the background gives it a lush sound, but it's still predominantly guitar driven. The flip is a really sloooow downer ballad with keyboards and reverbed guitar that doesn't stick to the ribs that well. (rhythmbarrel@yahoo.com, [www.geocities.com/rhythmbarrel](http://www.geocities.com/rhythmbarrel))

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the chesterfield kings

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**the mind bending sounds of...**

(sundazed)

It seems like yesterday when the Kings started playing this sixties washed garage music in the midst of an indie scene dominated by hardcore punk and thrash bands. Twenty years later, they've lasted far longer than the original scene they drew from, and they make records that would have topped the charts with ease had they made them in the summer of love. A song like "Trip Through Tomorrow" could be a staple of Nuggets-styled retrospectives today. Since people take the Kings for granted now it'll probably be overlooked, but man, that's a great psych-punk track. "Flashback" is obviously a reprise of the Stones' "Jumping Jack Flash" with its Jagger-like vocal. And "I Don't Understand" is another classic in the Stones mold. The rest of the world's faux-garage rockers should be taking notes. ([www.sundazed.com](http://www.sundazed.com))

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the chucky monroes

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**fallen angels**

(laughing outlaw)

The Australians pioneered this sort of twisted blues and rock combination, starting as far back as bands like the Beasts Of Bourbon, Scientists, or Harem Scarem from the early 80s, and they still do it better than anyone else. With vocals that sound like a slightly less derelict Tom Waits and slithering slide guitar that ranges from the feel of early ZZ Top to, well, Beasts of Bourbon, these guys carry the torch for the Oz tradition of emotionally disturbed trailer trash rock in fine style. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au), [coupe@laughingoutlaw.com.au](mailto:coupe@laughingoutlaw.com.au))

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the cinch

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**s/t CDEP**

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(dirtnap)

The little I've seen written about this Vancouver band compares them to the Strokes, Velvets and Television. I'm not buying any of it. The Cinch are more muscular and intense than the Strokes, less minimalist than the Velvets, and far denser and more rocking than Television. Just because they cover the Modern Lovers' "She Cracked" (and marvelously well) doesn't mean that they've gone artiste. The clue is in how they amp it up. If you want a reference that really sticks, cue up their "French Maid" right after the Damned's first lp smash "I Fall". Anyway, these five tracks are the goods. (www.dirtnaprecs.com)

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vic conrad and the first third

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s/t

(parasol)

In some admittedly very small circles, Conrad is revered for his late 80s records with the Adelaide psych/pop band **The Garden Path**, who recorded for one of Australia's premier labels, Greasy Pop Records. Their killer flexi-only track "All The Girls Wear Black" gives Conrad all the pop credentials he'll ever need, but here he teams with his former GP bassist **Colin Gellard** and ex-**Screaming Believers** drummer **Craig Rodda** and then adds help from lots of friends, including ex-Greasy Popper **Charles Jenkins**, formerly of the brilliant **Mad Turks**. To cut to the chase, this CD is very Kinks-sounding, mostly due to Conrad's dead ringer vocal style, but the backing music is pretty well all over the map so it's not a CD for those with narrow style preferences. "People Who Care" and "See My Way" are the best of the pop vein, while "Magneto" turns to a rougher attack that works neatly. It's a grower and a good one. (www.parasol.com)

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the crybabies

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daily misery

honest john plain

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honest john plain and amigos

(angel air)

Although their US profile has been non-existent, the Crybabies have been an on and off concern for nearly 14 years now. Aside from a penchant for really cool songs, their biggest selling points are the presence of **Die Toten Hosen** drummer **Vom Ritchie** and former **Boys** guitarist **Honest John Plain**, whose neat pop/punk/glam songs and nifty licks litter *Daily Misery*. These recordings were actually made in 1996, but the tapes sat on a shelf until this year – a bloody shame, really. I love the bittersweet feel and those "sha-la-la-la" choruses in "Back Street Girl", and it's kinda funny the way the romping cover of **Bob Dylan's** "I Want You" is

followed by an original that sounds like they lifted the melody from "Rainy Day Women #12 and 35". "Staggering Lengths" is another cool one – an almost bluesy thing that sounds like a Miami Steve Van Zandt composition. On the cover it says "Probably the best rock'n'roll band in the world" – that'd be a stretch, but this is still a fine record.

There's not that much difference between the Crybabies CD and Plain's solo disc, except that Plain does more ballads and his sympathy for loser songs shines through a bit more clearly. He reprises old Boys numbers "SAP" and "Pick Me Up" and provides some neat new ones with "Billy" and especially the rocking "Beautiful Lies". The lyrics of the solo disc are a bit more interesting, but the music on the Crybabies disc is more fun. (www.angelair.com.uk)

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dakona

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perfect change

(maverick)

Usually it takes TV programming with the quality level of *American Idol* to summon this much pathos from a singer. But this Canadian band plays a brand of indie rock that's driven by a vocalist, **Ryan McAllister**, who's so bloody emotive that having heard him I'm considering going down to the clinic for a dose of antibiotics. Just in case, you know, 'cos you can never be too sure. Yeah, it's gorgeous and lush and Radiohead/U2 influenced and all that, and yeah, I'll admit that down inside, and not very deep at that, I'm an uptight and repressed WASP male who'd rather watch a pre-season LA Clippers game than deal with emotion, but throw me a friggin' bone here – I've never known ANYBODY who draws this much angst in every breath he takes. (www.dakona.com)

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dirtbike annie

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show us your demons

(dirtnap)

There's times when I get really encouraged about the state of rock music. Even though the percentage of truly creative stuff getting released is no better than usual, it's a fact that rocking, punchy music is in vogue. And that's something I never would have dreamed possible in the dark days of the late 70s when it seemed like punk, our last best chance for vital music, was for sure going to lose and rock's last breath was just a gasp or two away. Records like this make me think "Hey, we won! We  *fucking*  won!" Because this is bright, tuneful, rocking punk pop that hits hard, and it's commercially viable in today's music market. Which it would no way in hell have been in 1977. No, it's not an important record, and no, you don't

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need to have it, but you put this on and it's got short snappy tunes, big guitars, bashing drums and clever pop hooks, and while it's playing you feel good. And y'know, there are a LOT of records out there now that can give at least that level of satisfaction. It was not always like this. (www.dirtnaprecs.com)

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dirtbombs

**dangerous magical noise**

(in the red)

Meet the new Detroit, same as the old Detroit. The Dirtbombs play rave up rock and roll with character, charisma and variety. It's the sort of music you'd normally have to write to Sweden for, especially if you've liked the Royal Beat Conspiracy or Mondo Daio. Soulful, big vocals front fuzzy, rocking guitars. And how can you not fall for a song with such a great sixties radio hit feel as "Earthquake Heart"? "Get It While You Can" has a similar soul/rock sound, and the baritone guest vocal on "21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox" is killer. "Don't Break My Heart" and "Start The Party" just let it rip, and "I'm Through With White Girls" discards political correctness. And if you need a gimmick, this band has two bassists and two drummers – sort of the anti-White Stripes. (www.intheredrecords.com)

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division of laura lee

**97-99**

(lovitt)

Given how smitten I was with their *Black City* CD (see last issue) I had ultra high hopes for this collection of their earlier material. With the exception of the opener "Guess My Name", all of these songs were previously released on a hard to find CD called *At The Royal Club*. But this instead shows a band whose ideas have yet to coalesce into a consistent direction, and it lacks the balance of tension and catchiness that they developed later. Too much of this is dull and dirgey, with plodding heavy beats and screaming vocals. So I'm gonna wait for a new one and see if they build on *Black City* instead of this disc. (www.lovitt.com)

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doughboys

**"la majeure 1987" 7" single**

(boss tuneage)

Although Montreal's Doughboys subsequently became too overproduced and squeaky clean, their *Whatever* lp period was sheer brilliance. I still remembering seeing them on tour with Bullet LaVolta (prior to their also reaching for the MTV brass ring and falling on their face) and being completely floored at the non stop energy and fantastic songs. These three tracks are pre-

*Whatever* studio demos of three of the best Doughboys tracks from that era – "The Forecast", "Stranger From Within" and "I Remember". The recordings aren't quite as sharp as the official release, but if you're a fan, or if you've never heard whatever, you're still likely to be impressed. (www.bosstuneage.com)

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the dragons

**sin salvation**

(gearhead)

San Diego's Dragons serve up yet another slab of rave up stompers. This is a Detroit rock collision with Bowery trash and knobs at 11, Johnny Thunders guitar licks spilling out all over, and a headlong rush of rip snorting energy that'll leave you short of breath even when you're reclining in the barcalounger for a listen. Over ten years and a fistful of albums, the Dragons have now proven that they can make really solid records. Next they need to make a great one. The material on this disc is fun and well worth hearing, but it's a little formulaic. With another step in songwriting effort and some stronger lyrics, this band could make a classic next time out. Here's hoping. (www.gearheadrecords.com)

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the fight

**home is where the hate is**

(fat)

I had high hopes for this young UK punk outfit after the opening "Forgotten Generation", which despite a female lead vocal reminds me of early 80s Vancouver greats The Modernettes due to the rough male/female wo-ah backing vocals and the time worn but never-failing ruse of using the word "generation" in the chorus. Unfortunately, after that the songs lack distinction despite remaining really punchy. Maybe with a little more experience under their belts, these guys can deliver like that first song consistently. (www.fatwreck.com)

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fireside

**get shot**

(v2)

A look at the cover shot of the band throwing buckets of paint at each other made me expect a fairly lightweight me-too kind of alterna-rock disc, but this one is really the goods. These Swedes are no rookies. They've been playing since the early nineties and this, their seventh album, is loaded with songs that stick to the ribs. The feel lies somewhere between Soundtrack Of Our Lives and Division Of Laura Lee – more aggressive than the former but with smoother vocals than the latter. There's half a dozen super tracks – my faves are "All Criminals Are Us" for its arresting use of

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handclaps and “Follow Follow” for its drop-dead hook. Terrific. ([www.v2music.com](http://www.v2music.com))

fortress madonna

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**one hundred beacons**

(laughing outlaw)

Every review of this record is going to mention the unusual alleged background of Russian-born cellist, songwriter and band leader **Alex Serikov**, a former Olympic gymnast (although strangely enough the only Google hits for his name coupled with “gymnastics” are music articles) and KGB recruit (um, OK) who either died from high altitude pulmonary edema in March 2002 while climbing Africa’s Mt. Kilimanjaro or was killed in his homeland by the Russian mob because of old gambling debts, depending on which web article your search engine points you to. Dead or alive, twirling or not, Serikov has his mythology attached to a fairly wonderful album of dark and moody rock/pop made with over a dozen musician friends of his. These songs are all growers and over time it seems like almost every one of them could be the corner stone track for a CD by a more average band. It’s hard to imagine that a lineup this complicated can make such a cohesive record, but they’ve done so. And it’s one that could easily stand without such a tall tale behind it. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au))

gingersol

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**the train wreck behind you**

(rubric)

When I last checked in on this band, they’d released their debut 6 track *Extended Play* CDEP during Clinton’s first term. That promising introduction was a nifty set of rollicking songs that blended hard charging but intelligent music with emotion soaked lyrics. Two more releases followed and now this new one hardly resembles the original model at all. For one thing, the entire band with the exception of **Steve Tagliere** has rotated out. The new band plays like they’re holding back for all they’re worth, and it extends to the singing, too – the upfront and boisterous feel of *Extended Play* is replaced by an ultra-high vulnerability quotient. Only “Make It Stick” really feels like it can generate any heat. The rest of this is inoffensive but tepid. ([www.rubricrecords.com](http://www.rubricrecords.com))

hard-ons

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**very exciting**

(bad taste)

Australia’s Hard-Ons cut a swath through the indie rock landscape of the late 80s with their totally uncompromising approach to rock. Imagine: a Chinese bass player, an Indian drummer, and a

white guitarist making singles that ranged from sweet rocking power pop songs like “Girl In The Sweater” to the full-on thrash of “Suck and Swallow” and managing to get significant radio airplay in Australia despite the fact that their name was guaranteed to lead to bans everywhere. How’d they do it? By striking a chord that resonated with skinny geeky kids who, like the Hard-Ons, got beat up daily and couldn’t get a girlfriend in school. And by making entertaining and varied songs with funny and sometimes insightful lyrics, bristling with energy. Now they’re old guys, and drummer **Keish** is gone, but this is probably the best Hard-Ons record yet. Stylistically it’s all over the map – from thrash to pop to death metal to progressive kraut-rock, often touching all these bases in one song. And as terrific and unique a drummer as Keish was, his replacement adds a different dimension entirely with his crushing style – he makes every song hit like a rain of hammers. Your mother will be pissed. Tough. ([www.badtasterecords.se](http://www.badtasterecords.se))

the heatseekers

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**in praise of**

(chev)

The press kit for this band bashes all the neo-garage and punk groups today while avoiding saying very much about the Heatseekers themselves. To their credit, they’re better than average, but if you’re gonna badmouth your peers, you ought to be really out in front of the pack. Songs like “Stranded”, “The Strangler”, “New (Old) Sound” and “Brand New Year” all are good fun for jumping about the lounge room and there are a lot of good guitar moments. This is high octane trash rock that fans of the early Devil Dogs will be very happy with, but if you’re looking for a new twist, it ain’t here. ([www.chevrecords.com](http://www.chevrecords.com))

hedningarna

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**1989-2003**

(northside)

American record stores would probably bin this Swedish band with world music, because they use Swedish folk as their foundation – rhythms that sound foreign to ears trained on rock music, Swedish language vocals chanted and shouted, and plenty of strange sounding instruments like accordions and fiddles mixed with a lot of electronica. It’s a retrospective spanning 14 years, and the band swings all over the place in style, but they always have the sort of wild intensity you’d expect from a band whose name means “The Heathens”. The overall ambience is like what you might find if you stumbled into a gypsy party out in the woods of Eastern Europe – a kind of dark,

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dangerous and exotic feel. Certainly the most intriguing sounding CD to cross my path in a while. ([www.noside.com](http://www.noside.com))

herman dune

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**mash concrete metal mushroom**

(shrimper)

Worshippers in the same church as the Velvet Underground and Modern Lovers, these Swedes make ridiculously incompetent music – exactly the sort of thing you'd expected from an outfit fueled, as described in their own press sheet, by hash cookies. The best moment here is "Why Would That Hurt (If You Never Loved Me)", which rips off both chords from "Waiting For The Man" but at least does the courtesy of using a different vocal melody. "Taking Taxis In Winter Clothes" sounds like a tape of the drummer's first lesson with musical accompaniment. It's one thing to be minimalist and another to have that beginner charm, but these guys have been at it 10 years. So either they truly ARE incompetent or else they're faking it, and I'm not sure which is worse. ([www.midheaven.com](http://www.midheaven.com))

keene highland and his vatican sex kittens

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**be more flamboyant**

(stanton park)

Boston fixture Keene Highland seems to have been around forever, and he's still trading in garage punk slop that's half way between *Sticky Fingers* era Stones and the New York Dolls. Here he spins up 9 pretty fun songs and one colossal stinker in "Punkabi Dhaba" whose run length is almost greater than the rest of the songs combined and is basically a waste of studio time. "Not Too Shabby At The Abbey" is Chuck Berry rave up riffage, and "I'll Show Them Who's Mod" is great fun, too. The cover of the **Temptations** classic "My Girl" misses the mark – too straight to be parody, but not good enough to be serious. And the theme song "Vatican Sex Kitten" captures the spirit of the Stones "Brown Sugar" but lyrically turns it into something more in line with the skeletons in the Catholic church's closet. ([www.stantonpark.com](http://www.stantonpark.com))

william hut

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**road star doolittle**

(fiveone)

Hut is the lead singer of Norway's **Poor Rich Ones** (see the review of their CD below), and here he demonstrates that most of it is his fault, since his own record is filled with the same sort of quiet and understated melancholy. When he sings that song about hardwood floors in his soft falsetto, I can almost imagine Hut sitting in a typical Bergen

house looking out the window while it rains (as usual) straight through the 4 hours of light afforded by a January day – no one's gonna write a song about putting their surfboard in their Woody when it's like that! But don't try this if you're already feeling maudlin. ([www.fiveoneinc.com](http://www.fiveoneinc.com))

i excuse

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**burn the empty to the ash**

(newest industry)

"When can we make an empty bottle without killing anyone? In this place I can't control anything called estate. Creation of the future is the same. I can't understand you at lunch." That's a lyric from Japan's I Excuse, and while on one level this song and its 11 flatmates makes no sense at all, somehow there's something worthwhile there anyway. Certainly the smoldering *Mush*-era Leatherface inspired guitar blitzkrieg and the hoarse, shout until your gall bladder flies out your throat vocals convey a passion that says there's meaning behind all this racket. Overall it's a little too faithful a reproduction of their idols, but it's still a cool disc. ([www.thenewestindustry.com](http://www.thenewestindustry.com), [noideanerds@earthlink.net](mailto:noideanerds@earthlink.net))

penny iking

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**electra**

(career)

Iking has been playing guitar in a variety of Australian bands for years – most notably in the brilliant Sydney garage/punk group the **Wet Taxis** throughout the 80s, and then with a number of different bands fronted by former Taxi-driver **Louis Tillet**. She's only now venturing out on her own, and all I can say is: *what took so long?* This is a fabulous album loaded with cool and seductive songs, none of them fast but all of them striking a haunting chord and played with intense passion. Iking's guitar work is noisy and abrasive and provides a nifty counterpunch to her sultry and subdued vocals. Her songwriting is a clear cut above – there's nothing on here that doesn't ring with originality and taste. Highly recommended. ([www.careerrecords.com](http://www.careerrecords.com))

ipanema

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**"je suis un baseball bat" cd single**

(boss tuneage)

In today's world there's not very many bands that debut with a single, so it's kinda nice to go back to the day when you could get an introduction in two tracks and soak in an impression in concentrated form. Sounding more than a little like Snuff, these Brits have the sort of band that I might have ignored with a debut lp – emo often gets to be too much over a full length. But bashed up and out in

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6 minutes it can be a blast. Which this is. (www.bosstuneage.com)

jet

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**get born**

(elektra)

"We Don't Want The Hype" screams the back cover of their press kit magazine – that's right, a glossy, full color, printed both sides thing packed with skillfully presented reprints of about 500 NME articles on the Aussie group (when everybody else is content with a one page xerox typeset in MS-Word). Nope, no interest in hype in sight! Well, here they are, the next Vines/Strokes/Hives/White Stripes/D4/what have you. And they're really not that bad. Any band that says they were waiting for grunge to end so they could get back to playing music inspired by the Who and the Easybeats could be a lot worse. But there's something overtly market-oriented about a group that has one song each of every kind of rock and roll imaginable on it, from AC-DC hard rock crunch, to piano balladry, to garage rock, to strummed acoustic folk, to Big Star pop. I have to confess a soft spot for the rollicking songs "Get Me Outta Here" and "Take It Or Leave It", even with the nagging suspicion that all that's really happening is that my demographic happened to come up. (www.jettheband.com)

john kennedy

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**kennedy town**

(laughing outlaw)

Born in Liverpool but moved to Brisbane at age 7, John Kennedy was a well recognized name on the Aussie rock circuit throughout the 80s with his bands **JFK and the Cuban Crisis** and later **John Kennedy's Love Gone Wrong**. Beating genre-slotting reviewers to the punch, he tagged his music with the fitting descriptor "urban and western", and his "Ballad of Jackie O" / "Careless Talk" single was the very first in what came to be a nearly 200 title long list of releases on the influential Sydney label Waterfront. Now he's seemingly at home on a label that specializes in alt country and is likely to find an audience for his rich voice and folksy songs. Be that as it may, in the past 25 years the guy's lived in more cities than Larry Brown, and half these songs are about going back to the places he's left – not the kind of lyric inspiration that makes for an unforgettable full length and one of the reasons I've always preferred Kennedy in singles doses. (www.laughingoutlaw.com.au)

kick joneses

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**tales of discontent**

(boss tuneage)

This German band serves up a boatload of hard hitting and clever songs – not the same old recycled riffs but a load of neat ideas and thoughtful lyrics that make for the best kind of CD – one that calls you back for more listens. Songs like "Go To Hell, George", "Hate List" and especially the bouncing pair "Love Your Enemy" and "Let's Be Fiends" are the right stuff, no doubt. Punk at the roots, but the blossoms have gone elsewhere. (www.bosstuneage.com)

last days of april

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**ascend to the stars**

(crank!)

This Swedish outfit plays pop that doesn't employ enough guitar crunch to include the adjective *power*, but that still feels pretty potent in a Guided By Voices kind of way. At least in the beginning – the band has sequenced this CD to stack its rockiest and most exciting tracks at the start and left the melancholy slow stuff for what in a less digital time would've been side two. Certainly "Playerin" has all the elements you'd want, especially with its big chorus and irresistible catch line. But by the time this disc winds down, you may have forgotten how good those early tunes were and be less inclined to replay it than you should. (www.crankthis.com, jeff@crankthis.com)

logh

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**the raging sun**

(bad taste)

I've long ago learned that most people listen to music in different ways and for different reasons than I do, so I can only imagine what goes on when someone puts this on. I see a young man coming home late. Tonight his girlfriend has left him. He's depressed. More than depressed, he's devastated. Maybe a little drunk. He's alone. It's dark, so he turns on a small lamp in the corner. He puts this Logh CD on, and it plays softly. But there's no comfort or joy in the soft monotone vocals and gently strummed guitars. He gets out a bottle of sleeping pills, thoughtfully spins the cap off, and swallows a tablet. He hesitates for a moment, briefly considering the healing power of sleep. But the music only amplifies the sense of despair, and so, one by one...he eats them all. (www.badtasterecords.se, info@badtasterecords.se)

manifesto jukebox

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**s/t CDEP**

(boss tuneage)

Their *Remedy* CD (reviewed in BT #41) was a brilliant slab of Leatherface/Husker Du influenced punk rock whose US release put this Finnish group

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on the map. This disc actually steps *back* in time, combining their debut 4 track 7" ep from 1999 and another single. Judging from the power of these songs, the band pretty well hit the ground running – these tunes would overpower 85% of the other punk CDs around. There's a nifty version of their great song "Trail" that's quite different from the one that landed on *Remedy*. "Still Got The Fire" and "Stains" deserve special mention, too, but all six cuts are winners. (www.bosstuneage.com)

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dom mariani and the majestic kelp

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**underwater casino**

(head)

One of my all-time favorite Australian performers from his years with **The Stems**, **The Someloves**, and **The DM3**, **Dom Mariani** is apparently letting his head rest from years of making great power pop and he's trying his hand at surf instrumentals for a change. (Rumor has it that he's temporarily replacing Danny McDonald in **The Stoneage Hearts**, which could mark a return to his Stems' roots.) Anyway this set of songs is largely mid-tempo and mood-inducing with plenty of spy-theme riffs, lots of heavily reverbed, whammy bar action, and very 21<sup>st</sup> century production. The main ingredient lacking is anything that really rips loose – this is more for people looking for some restraint. A nice record, but not a great one. (www.headrecords.com)

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danny mcdonald

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**summer city**

(zip)

Having made a name for himself in a span of just a few years with terrific power pop outfit **P76** and garage project **The Stoneage Hearts**, Danny McDonald has now solidly launched his solo career by following up some superb singles with an even superber full length. McDonald's to-the-point songwriting hits hard and leaves a lasting impression. Whether he's rocking on endless summer tracks like "Soaking Up The Sunshine", "At The Seaside" or the gritty surf instrumental "Mermaid Beach", or getting sensitive on the two acoustic tracks "Let's Get Drunk To You And Me" or "An Hour's Drive In A Sandman Panel Van", McDonald combines great songwriting about good times with a sincere and believable delivery. Magnificent. (www.ziprecords.com, ziprecords@earthlink.net)

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mensen

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**oslo city**

(gearhead)

Unlike most all-girl bands, Norway's **Mensen** has a guy in the group. And he's not the drummer. So

there. And they bust other girl band stereotypes, too – no jailbait Runaways/Donnas stance for this outfit. Coming off like the Shangri-las with Ed Kuepper-era Saints as the backing band, **Mensen** storm through 13 ripping tracks loaded with punishing rhythms, searing guitar licks and memorable pop hooks. And although it's just their second lp (the superb *Delusions Of Grandeur* being the first), the band have learned how to introduce production tricks that create more staying power for the songs without impacting their punch, like that short maraca shaking break in "Keep Up" or the electric piano in "Bosnia". Not a weak moment. (www.gearheadrecords.com)

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minus

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**haldor laxness**

(victory)

Iceland seems to spawn bands that play harsh and unrelenting music. **Minus** sure fit that stereotype. They have a guitar attack that sounds like death metal, but they're far from brain dead – despite the torrential roar of the guitars they actually take a fairly different direction. Most of this is really harsh, ugly music, and where the guitars finally do lie back a little, the song, "Insomniac" turns out to be about torture by sleep deprivation. Pretty ferocious stuff, but not all that listenable. (www.victory.com)

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the mixelpricks

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**complete the grin**

(boss tuneage)

This Indiana nerd punk band has been hiding its light under a bushel for some 8 years or so, but now instead of the anonymity afforded by a handful of badly distributed singles, they've got a full length CD with releases on three different labels worldwide. Amazingly they've still got the freshness and naïve charm of a fairly new group – a rather rough and unpolished presentation with vocals that are a little vulnerable, if a bit short on character. The songs are generally catchy and the guitars have a different sound from the overworked Marshall/Mesa Boogie roar most everyone else has. I especially liked "I'm Trying To Think", which has a neat guitar break leading into a good chorus. But the bottom line is that there's nothing really remarkable here – just a solid, workmanlike effort. (www.bosstuneage.com)

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mondo diao

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**bring 'em in**

(capitol)

Sweden's **Mondo Diaio** latch onto that rocket fueled 60s rock and soul revue theme that their countrymen the **Royal Beat Conspiracy** have done

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so well, and *cor, blimey!* if they don't take it even further. This is one steaming thrill ride of a CD – muscled Hammond organs, raw garage guitars, Stax/Volt horn charts, and TWO fabulous singers each with signature vocal styles. If you get one chance to hear Bjorn Dixgard leap into those falsettos in “The Band” while the organ burns holes behind him, you'll realize these guys are something special. It's not just that one song either – check the scorched earth brilliance of “Sheepdog”, “Paralyzed”, or “Sweet Ride” as well. Songwriting, energy, performance – it's all there. (www.mondodiao.com)

motorpsycho & jaga jazzist horns

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### in the fishtank

(konkurrent)

I should preface this by saying that there's no way am I qualified to be reviewing this. Norway's prog-rockers Motorpsycho are on the very edge of what I listen to under normal circumstances, and here they've made a collaboration with a Norsk jazz combo that puts them well beyond my ken. There's five songs here averaging 9 minutes each that no doubt would recall greats like John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, and Miles Davis if only I'd ever listened to them enough to have something to recall. The whole proceeding gives me the uncomfortable feeling of having accidentally walked into a smokey club full of well dressed people drinking hundred dollar a bottle wine, a feeling which probably only proves my ignorance on the topic. Funky jazz types – line up, low brow sweating rocker people – beware. (www.jagajazzist.com)

nervous eaters

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### eat this!

(no tomorrow)

Boston rock fans often swear by the Nervous Eaters, but their recorded legacy doesn't measure up to the praise. I've always assumed the studio failures were down to bad luck / bad timing / bad producers. Their self titled Elektra lp was fairly tepid power pop and their *Hot Steel and Acid* lp on the renowned Ace Of Hearts label had too many metal flourishes despite a brilliant title track. I figured the live shows I never saw must have proven the band's real worth, but now here's an lp where mainman **Steve Cataldo** has control of everything, and it's still got problems. This is fundamentally a plodding arena metal lp. Does anyone need a song that goes “Jesus said go start a band / Jesus said you are the man”? Not me. (www.notomorrow.com)

93 million miles

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### s/t CDEP

(simba)

During the brief inter-regnum between Swedish bands **International Noise Conspiracy** and the more punkish **Refused**, singer **Dennis Lyxzen** fronted this ephemeral band. They recorded only a 3 song single in 1998 and 2 songs for a compilation in 1998. This CD makes those songs available for those with change left after buying all the INC releases. The music lacks the garage feel of INC and it's pretty harsh and abrasive bellowcore™, but it has a certain sincerity that makes it click. I kinda dug “This Party Sucks”, which is not the Slickee Boys tune by a long shot but provides a nice tension if you don't mind being screamed at. (www.simbarecordings.com)

angie pepper

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### res ipsa loquitor

(career)

“The thing speaks for itself” is what the title means, and in that case, what it says to me is that Australian born Pepper, who fronted the fine late 70s Sydney band **The Passengers** and later led **The Angie Pepper Group**, still has a passion for music but has much broader influences now than in her older girl/pop group incarnation. The opening “Baby Don't Go”, written by husband and former **Radio Birdman** guitarist **Deniz Tek**, follows the old style in fine form, but elsewhere the sounds are often more complex and less pop oriented. The mix is pretty harsh on the high end with abrasive cymbal sounds making an otherwise cool cover of the **Lipstick Killers'** 1979 smash “Hindu Gods Of Love” feel hard on the ears. The fact that the material was recorded with three different backing bands and different studios creates a sonic attack as varied as the material, something that can make an album more interesting but in this case renders it a bit unfocused. Still, it's nice to have Pepper making music again, and maybe with this under her belt she's ready to pick up where she left off so long ago. (www.careerrecords.com)

the peppermints

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### sweet tooth abortion

(pandacide)

It's always good to see a band from your hometown making good music. San Diego's Peppermints aren't going to make anyone's top 40 with their fractured and noisy avante-rock, but if you ever had a soft moment for groups like the early Swell Maps or the Cows or any of dozens of others who twisted rock into a totally weird permutation, this is your lot. My favorite track here is “Down and Down”, which is drums and shouted vocals only – kinda reminding me of that great

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track "Caucasian Guilt" by San Francisco's Noh Mercy from the *Earcom 3* compilation, but that was so long ago it's not going to help much. A band that totally deconstructs rock and roll is a good thing now and then. ([www.pandacide.com](http://www.pandacide.com))

the phoenix foundation

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**these days**

(newest industry)

This Finnish group plays searing punk rock inspired by bands like the Moving Targets, Leatherface (circa their great *Mush* lp), Husker Du, and brilliant early 90s countrymen Hitmen 3 (but with longer songs). This is intense, gripping stuff, with sheets of arpeggio guitar riffing and ripping hardcore tempos. My fave track is the smoking "It Won't Rain Everyday", but there's nary a dull moment on this thing. The only complaint about this CD is that it's a little *too* faithful to its influences. The Phoenix Foundation has learned everything their masters taught them, now they just need to do their own thing with it. ([www.thenewestindustry.com](http://www.thenewestindustry.com))

pineforest crunch

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**panamarenko**

(zip)

This is the third album by this Swedish soft pop group. They feature a breathy singer named Asa Eklund whose highly emotive, sex-kitten voice is the dominant factor in the band. Her mates summon up the sort of technically exquisite but relatively soul-less kind of performance that graces most light rock FM radio fodder. Their leadoff "Situation Endless" features some really nice vocal work and "Innocent" is decent mid-tempo pop, but, to be polite about my views, this disc targets a market that I'm not part of. ([www.ziprecords.com](http://www.ziprecords.com))

poor rich ones

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**joe maynard's favorite**

(fiveoneinc)

It's been a couple years since their *Happy Happy* CD, so it seems time for a new disc, but this instead is a compilation of tracks from earlier recordings released only in Norway and a couple of new cuts. The result demonstrates that there was no big change in reaching their last lp – it's still the same blend of sounds reminding of mellower U2 and Radiohead moments. The new opening track, "Milwaukee", is the biggest sounding and best song on the disc, but the song "Habit" is well worth a listen, too. Elsewhere the slow-paced melancholy is served in a little bigger dose than I'm in need of. ([www.fiveoneinc.com](http://www.fiveoneinc.com), [kenji@fiveoneinc.com](mailto:kenji@fiveoneinc.com))

adam power

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**more juice**

(laughing outlaw)

Power's pop debut comes across like an updated Electric Light Orchestra fronted by a singer who's a hybrid of Paul McCartney and Ray Davies. Produced by Australian pop wunderkind **Michael Carpenter**, the album is lush and dense, with lots of string section backing that's at times complemented by some surprisingly fat and dirty guitars. Power's songs mostly don't tend to feature the huge and obvious hooks of great power pop but instead work their way up via subtlety – the exception is the punchy "Face In Time", which combines both cool wordplay ("You know your blows will break his nose...") and hot guitar licks. More typical is the understated and jangly "In My Shoes", a song that Mitch Easter would've been proud to write. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au))

qgmr

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**quiet is not loud**

(carcrash)

I guess they've been watching too many TV game shows and think they have to pay for vowels, since the name is shorthand for "Quagmire". Anyway, this Swedish lot make noisy art damage music that would've been quite at home on Touch and Go in the early nineties. Or as a more recent comparison, take countrymen The Division Of Laura Lee and remove the 2% of them that has a commercial element, and you're close. This stuff is raw and ugly and in places more than a little bit like a plodding metal record. The only track that does anything for me is "Anything New", and that's more because it has a fairly in-the-pocket rhythm happening than for any overall excellence as a song. ([www.carcrashrecords.com](http://www.carcrashrecords.com))

read yellow

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**s/t CDEP**

(fenway)

They may be outta the college town of Amherst in western Mass, but Read Yellow remind me of nothing less than the spirit of big city Bostonians Mission Of Burma or 80s heartland weirdoes the Embarassment. This ep delivers a short sharp shock of angular but full on rocking songs and then gets out. "Fashion Fatale" is the most straightforward of the four, but that police siren guitar lick that leads into "The Association" sells that one as well. Pretty nifty. ([www.fenwayrecordings.com](http://www.fenwayrecordings.com))

reno divorce

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**you're only making it worse**

(boss tuneage)

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Half Floridians, half Coloradans, Reno Divorce have been around since 1997 but this is their first time on my radar screen. It won't be the last. This CD is ripping, gripping punk rock that brings to mind Social Distortion in their *Mommy's Little Monster* days. The songs have a hot intensity to them, but they also have hooks that help them lock into your head. That big chord change in "A .45 Will Pay The Rent" makes it the highlight of the CD, but the lyrics of the title track leave it a close second. The topical "West Bank Blues" rocks the mind and feet together the way a good political song should – leaving enough ambiguity that nobody will feel preached to. (www.bosstuneage.com)

the rollstons

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**"exploring the fingerboards" 7"**

(rhythm barrel)

This 3 track ep from Finland's Rollstons is a cool hybrid of Jonathan Richman styled vocals and song structures that recall UK nerd-new wavers the Monochrome Set. On first listen these numbers sound a little pathetic and borderline incompetent, but after a few more spins they start to unveil some of the sort of luster that the better records on labels like Flying Nun have. Quite nice. (rhythmbarrel@yahoo.com, www.geocities.com/rhythmbarrel)

rubber city rebels

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**pierce my brain**

(smog veil)

Akron's semi-legendary Rubber City Rebels return with a full length new lp after some twenty plus years' absence. They're actually much better now than they were then, but that's not necessarily great praise. Their 1979 minor classic "Young And Dumb" could've been something of nihilistic youth anthem except it always seemed suspiciously like more of a personal statement than a manifesto meant for others, and a lot of their vintage material was closer to metal than punk. This new CD is decent ramalama rock'n'roll in the vein of Electric Frankenstein or the Candysnatchers. Guitar-mongers will find a lot to feast on given the big and powerful production, but people looking for some mental stimulation will think it suffers a bit from an excessive snot-vocal quotient. (www.smogveil.com)

ruby and the rednecks

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**from the wrong side of town**

(poo-poo platter)

Ruby's claim to fame is opening for the New York Dolls a quarter century ago, and she's finally getting around to making a record now. Bloody

procrastinator. She plays a sort of greaser rock a la revival acts like Sha-na-na ("Heaven Grand" sounds like a re-make of "Sea Cruise"), and a song from this record would've fit in fine on the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* soundtrack – it's got that same theatrical campy feeling. As a standalone listening experience it's a bit lacking, though. Ruby's voice irritates a bit like someone's grandmother from Kentucky getting down when the singer in a wedding band hands her the mic. Not one for a lot of plays. (www.rubyandtherednecks.com)

the screaming tribesmen

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**anthology 1982-1993**

(raven)

It's almost 20 years since I bought their "Igloo" single and when those shimmering chords ring out at the start of this disc it still sends shivers down my back – what a great song about alienation! Originally from Brisbane but transplanted to Sydney, the Tribesmen started with a primitive 4 track ep (now rare as hell but mined for just one track here) and then moved to Citadel Records where they made two singles – one the awesome "Igloo" and the other the less mighty "A Stand Alone". After a big lineup shuffle that left only founder **Mick Medew** from the original band but added ex **Radio Birdman** guitarist **Chris Masuak**, they released a garage pop classic in the 4 track 12" ep *Date With A Vampyre*, which drew enough attention to get them a deal on a bigger Australian label. The result was a fairly tepid 6 song mini-lp called *Top Of The Town*, a record with some superb tunes that suffered from smothering over-production. Fans might have been worried, but record execs loved them and they got a US deal for 1987's *Bones and Flowers* lp. A little more hard edged than the mini-lp, it spawned the single "I've Got A Feeling", which got MTV rotation and justified a US tour. But when they arrived, the band came across as arena rock wanna-bees instead of the *Nuggets*-inspired combo I'd seen in Australia a year earlier and that once reveled in covers of the Dictators, Stooges and MC5. Their descent from this pinnacle of near-mass acclaim took them through numerous lineup changes and adequate or less record releases for 5 more years until the band knocked it on the head. This CD spans the whole saga, with almost all the great early tracks making the first half of this a joy and the rest an exercise in what-might-have-beens. (www.ravenrecords.com.au)

the sewer grooves

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**saturday night, we're gonna have some fun**

(sounds of subterranea)

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For my money, the Sewergrooves are the best of the current Swedish Detroit rock bands. For one thing, their singer **Kurt Draches** actually sings as opposed to unleashing some faux-heavy metal screech, and he manages to convey as much intensity as any of his blood-vessel bursting brethren. For another, there's something about the Sewergrooves rhythm section that just swings and gives their songs a fluid power that few other bands have. This is a 10" record also available on CD, so it's just 8 songs, and unlike a lot of discs it's sequenced to get stronger as it proceeds. It begins to really kick with "Self Admired Suicide" on track four and then with "Up The Line", the innocuously titled "I Really Love You" and "Sleep Fox" it just blows the roof off. Laying back with the closing slow burner "No Time For Resignation" is a great cool down. ([www.soundsofsubterrainingia.com](http://www.soundsofsubterrainingia.com))

sheek the shayk

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### hour of the seventh moon

(laughing outlaw)

Sheek The Shayk are proof that not all Australian rock has succumbed to the creeping commercialism that throttled the scene in the early nineties. They combine some of the best aspects of the Oz heavy rock tradition in groups like the Lobby Lloyd and the Coloured Balls and the psych/garage flavors of the Lipstick Killers. Their one shortcoming on record is that singer **Senor Johnny** comes across a little like a bratty teenage brother with a snotty, nasally whine. But supposedly he's actually a fireball and a major asset live, so we have to let that go. Anyway, these songs have the sort of so-dumb-we're-smart quality to them that makes them work (as opposed to that so-dumb-you'll-wanna-run attitude that's far easier to find). Guitars are fuzzed to the point that when they rip off the signature riff to Hendrix's "Foxy Lady" on their "69 BC" it actually sounds as faithful as a sample. "Outta My Head" and "Wig Out" are the ace tracks here, and they pretty well summarize the proceedings. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au))

shutdown 66

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### welcome to dumpsville

(get hip)

Formed originally as a pick up group after some recording sessions by Melbourne's lo-fi garage kings **The Breadmakers**, Shutdown 66 play mid-fi garage rock awash with lots of organ fills and first lp Stones, Pretty Things or Missing Links guitar sounds. They do a very decent job of it, but frankly I've lost track of the point of trying to faithfully reproduce this musical era – at least on record. In a live scene there's an arguable justification for it,

since one can't go see the Stones with 20 year old Mick and Keef. But that's not the case with the recordings – you can still hear their glory days on CD today. That was butter, this is margarine. ([www.gethip.com](http://www.gethip.com), [gethip@gethip.com](mailto:gethip@gethip.com))

the shut-ups

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### it hurts to be seen

(imperial fuzz)

I'm suspecting that The Shut-Ups probably piss off other groups on the Athens, Georgia bar scene, 'cos their kind of band draws in lots of people with a mindlessly fun show and lots of danceable tunes, helping the bar move drinks and thus getting them invited back real quickly while bands with more substance languish for months between gigs. These songs are bright and bouncy, but when they get into a groove that feels like it's working they always seem to fall out, like on "What's A Booty?", which features a nice Squeeze-like vocal feel in the verses and then goes into an incredibly annoying chorus that's probably a great laser beam/mirror-ball moment at the club but falls flat at home. If you've been feeling kinda lost musically since the Fabulous Poodles split up, this just might be your band. ([www.imperialfuzz.com](http://www.imperialfuzz.com))

the singles

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### better than before

(rainbow quartz)

Detroit. MC5, Stooges, Destroy All Monsters, Sonic Rendevous Band, Bob Seger System, Beatles, Dave Clark Five, Hollies...*wait a minute, stop that. Silly!* But it's true – though the Singles may come from the Motor City, they play like some kind of British Invasion flashback and they've made a superb lp of updated Mersey-beat rock and roll, right down to the Lennon-McCartney vocal styles. Focusing on the excitement of the cracking, power pop side of the period, this thing almost out-Rutles the Rutles, for chrissakes. My favorite moment is the Keith Moon inspired smash-fest "No More Places (Left To Go)", but that's really not typical of the whole album, where first rate power pop is the order of the day. Consistently high quality from start to finish, this will prove to be one of the 10 or so records I remember this year for. ([www.rainbowquartz.com](http://www.rainbowquartz.com), [rainbowqtz@aol.com](mailto:rainbowqtz@aol.com))

slaughter and the dogs

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### a dog day afternoon

(tko)

Emerging in Manchester, England in the mid 70s, Slaughter and the Dogs probably would've become a glam/metal band had punk rock not diverted them. Their career ran out along with the first wave of punk and they dropped out of memory

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fairly quickly despite a number of pretty solid songs. But like many other minor legends of those days, the band now find that there's an audience who discovered them through re-issues and is willing to make them a marketable commodity for a tour and a CD or two. This disc is on par with the Sex Pistols *Filthy Lucre* reunion live lp a couple years back – impressive that they can still summon that much power in a live gig, but not a replacement for the original records. There are great covers of the Dolls' "Who Are The Mystery Girls" and the Velvets' "White Light White Heat", and also of the Stooges "Now I Wanna Be Your Dog" if you really give credit where credit is due for the Slaughter single "Hell In New York". Good fun, but probably not destined for classic status. (www.tkorecords.com)

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les slow slushy boys

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**"slush puppy"/"das weiss der teufel" 7"**

(butterfly)

This French group have been making records for at least ten years now, and they've got their soul instrumental thing wired – this is like Booker T and the MGs doing "Green Onions" with today's recording gear. Big, loud organ fills, horn charts, and memorable melodies. Very tasty. (Note to record store personnel – no one in the band is named "Les", so stock this in the "S" section!) (butterflyrecords@retemail.es, www.butterfly-records.com)

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the sons of hercules

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**right now**

(suprema)

This is the fourth album by San Antonio's Sons Of Hercules. They boast a singer, **Frank Puglise**, who at 51 is so superannuated that he played in a band that opened for the Sex Pistols on their first US tour. The band behind him plays a muscular brand of hard rock crossed with 70s punk, with some garage nods. The backing music is nothing new these days, but it's played with vim and vigor and has enough variety to be acceptably interesting. The big problem is that although he's not your typical punk shouter, Puglise still isn't much of a singer and his end of the bargain doesn't hold up that well. When they launch off into a prolonged instrumental break as on "Digging Your Own Grave" or the rocking intro to "Snake People" I find myself thinking that maybe these guys do have something after all, but when the vocals come back, I just want to get on to the next disc in the changer. (maricondas@hotmail.com)

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the sounds

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**living in america**

(new line)

Or should it be called "Cashing Checks From America"? Take four guys playing new wave synth rock and Euro-disco and front them with a blonde female singer with a slightly flat vocal tone – um, it was 27 years ago, but I still remember that formula. The reality is that this Swedish combo reminds me more of Kim Wilde's UK hit "Kids In America" than Blondie, and their songs ARE very catchy despite being disposable pop with pretty hackneyed lyrics. Recycled though it may be, this stuff manages to sound fairly fresh less through its own virtue than because few bands have doing this sort of thing for quite a while. The enthusiastic and energetic playing are a big plus. I suppose they'll be huge by the time this issue prints. (www.the-sounds.com)

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the soviettes

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**the soviettes lp**

(adeline)

This album's a whole lot of fun – like Norway's Mensen, the Soviettes are another 75% all girl band that rocks like a fiend. Being from Minneapolis, they lack the exotic charm of Mensen, but they sing in the same sort of bratty high school girl's choir style. This gives them a lightweight air that their full throttle musical attack counters neatly. The Soviettes also manage to imbue their mostly basic punk/pop approach with enough nifty textures and interesting chord and rhythm changes to create something that holds up over multiple listens. Having a drummer who plays like he's in the sessions for *Another Music In A Different Kitchen* doesn't hurt, either. (www.adelinerecords.net)

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the surfin' lungs

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**going to rockingham**

(no tomorrow)

This UK surf band began their career in 1982 in the wake of the Barracudas' run of great early singles, and here they are with a new lp 20 years later. They lack the sort of signature lead singer that the Barracudas had in the great Jeremy Gluck, but they write tunes that are just as catchy. The title track in particular is just brilliant surf pop, "The Godfather" and "Flashpoint" are terrific instrumentals that would make Dick Dale proud without totally ripping him off, and the cover of **Blondie's** "In The Sun" rocks. It's a well worn field, but even over 17 tracks, the Surfin' Lungs make it feel fresh and invigorating. (www.notomorrowrecords.com)

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suzi & los quartos

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**freak show**

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(no tomorrow)

Here's a plug for diverse value systems. Some couples think the way to celebrate an anniversary is to go to the Bahamas, but others book studio time and record some songs. These five tracks are an example of that second school of thought, and they work splendidly. Spain is a power pop haven, and this is one of the cooler examples of what they can come up with. Lightweight but rocking girl pop of the first water – topped by a great ersatz Ramones tune in "Backstage Bop". ([www.notomorrowrecords.com](http://www.notomorrowrecords.com))

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taxi

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**like a dog**

(dead beat)

Until the Loose CD reviewed last issued, I'd have been hard pressed to name an Italian band that struck me as worthy of repeated listens, but now with this Taxi disc I've got two! Lots of chugga-chugga muted chords, 70s dole queue punk rhythms, and Heartbreakers styled leads power these songs. Like a lot of records made by European bands, the accents give this its own special feel. "Slot Machine" has a backing rhythm like a *Pure Mania* era Vibrators cut. "Dogs' Eyes" is the blazing opener, and "Deep Red" has a really cool guitar intro. But when they sing in their own tongue on "Je Tombe En Bas" the result is the most convincing track in the batch. ([www.dead-beat-records.com](http://www.dead-beat-records.com))

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teen idols

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**nothing to prove**

(fueled by ramen)

Here's a cheery, rocking slab of paint by numbers punk pop that's a decent way to fill the commute to work but not much more. This has been done over and over and over and over and over again, and despite their obvious competency at it, the Teen Idols don't attempt to add anything at all of their own to the field. On the other hand, it probably makes the band's parents happy. All the songs are catchy and upbeat, and if your CD collection has only a hundred or so entries, there's plenty of room for a disc as likeable as this. But anyone whose music habit has been in the 20 plus discs a month range for many years will need something far stronger. ([www.fueledbyramen.com](http://www.fueledbyramen.com))

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terminus

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**graveyard of dreams**

(boss tuneage)

Though this British punk band tread the boards from the late 80s to mid nineties, this is my first time hearing them. Their singer is immediately appealing with a feel that reminds me of early

Stranglers records. The band is nothing like them, though – they play a varied and interesting brand of punk rock with well constructed anti-system lyrics that will be too preachy for people who don't like politics in their rock but sound fine to me. The rhythm guitar has that harsh solid-state amp tearing sound to it that hurts the sonic feel of the band, but there's enough good tracks to overcome it. "In Another Time" is my favorite, with a really nice chorus turn. "What Kind Of World" is also first rate. Over 18 songs it gets a little too much, but there are enough good moments to be worth a listen. ([www.bosstuneage.com](http://www.bosstuneage.com))

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tokyo sex destruction

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**le red soul committee**

(dim mak)

Making no bones about trying to summon the spirit of Detroit 1968 (every band member takes the last name **Sinclair**, for one thing), these Spaniards do a terrific job with their rabble rousing, soul shaking, rave up rock and roll. Despite the fact that the call to arms rap in the middle of the opening "Break Out Town" cracks me up because the accents make it sound like it's being recited by Roseanne Roseannadanna's brother, the 30 minutes of intensity in this CD are a treat, right down to the well-worn and well-rehearsed society-rending manifesto inside the booklet. In a time when every band that plays what used to be called heavy metal gets hailed as the next MC5, here's a band that might really deserve it. ([www.dimmak.com](http://www.dimmak.com))

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toys that kill

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**control the sun**

(recess)

My 12 year old nephew saw this disc on my shelf and remarked at how surprised he was to see me listening to something good! All I can say is good on ya, bud, you're starting to develop a little taste on your own. 'Cos this is pretty tasty modern punk rock – not just another dull set of recycled riffs, but a band that comes with lots of novel sounding tunes. They mainly achieve this by simple tricks like shifting tempos from song to song and by playing standard chord progressions with unexpected rhythms, giving it a feel that merges post punk with Marshall-stack roar. Tracks like "The White Lies" or the smashing "Illegitimate" are just the highlights on a really solid CD. ([www.recessrecords.com](http://www.recessrecords.com))

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the uptight

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**s/t**

(off the hip)

This band feels like a return to the Sydney neo-garage days around 1984, when the place was

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crawling with keyboard/guitar lineups worshipping at the same Nuggets-strewn altars as US groups like the Cynics or Chesterfield Kings. The Uptight have a great instrumental sound as a band, but for them to rival past masters they need a singer who's more than OK. Instead they rely on a tag team approach sharing vocals between three members, and the result is a set of 12 pretty good songs, none of which has enough swagger to stand up and smack you. ([www.offthehip.com.au](http://www.offthehip.com.au))

the venue

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**mmhm!**

(bella union)

This Swedish group does the bass-o-matic routine on about 20 different sixties bands, at times sounding like dead ringers for the Beatles, Fifth Dimension, Byrds, Mamas and the Papas, Kinks and *Sell Out*-era Who. Maybe toss in a nod to the Raspberries (who were stealing from all these 60s guys anyway). Their predominant feature is lush four part harmonies that'd make any mop-top proud, while behind them guitar textures mostly jangle but occasionally crunch. "A Deadly Buzz" and "What's In His Head" both score with their choruses, but the optimism is almost overwhelming over all 11 tracks. ([www.bellaunion.com](http://www.bellaunion.com), [sdeskins@earthlink.net](mailto:sdeskins@earthlink.net))

the virtues

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**ruminate**

(zip)

Not your stereotypical Swedish rock band, the Virtues play an emotion-packed brand of what would have been called indie rock in the late 80s. They feel like Mission Of Burma with less quirkiness (I especially hear a lot of "That's When I Reach For My Revolver" in "Is That So?"). The primary downside of this CD is that it's too long to sustain so many similar songs. The message is fully delivered on the terrific opener "New Year's Resolution" – that despite superior poetic ability the protagonist in these songs is as fucked up a loser as most of the rest of us. Empathy can carry the listener through to about track 6 and after that the attention begins to wander. The upside is that it's heartfelt and sincere and feels real. You don't get that often enough. ([www.ziprecords.com](http://www.ziprecords.com))

wasted

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**suppress and restrain**

(boss tuneage)

This Finnish combo plays a decent brand of street punk. Musically it's sort of tract house music – the cookie cutter chord changes and impassioned, gritty vocal style you've heard a hundred times over the years make this CD feel almost like it was

built from a set of blueprints. But it's played with good intensity and heart and comes off a lot better than many other similar groups. Lyrically the topics are generally politically oriented but a bit too wordy and unfocused for older tastes. Maybe they'd do better stirring a younger audience to action. "Tell Me Something New" is the best of the lot – more variety in the chord changes and a nice instrumental bridge make it stand out. ([www.bosstuneage.com](http://www.bosstuneage.com))

wilmer x

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**lyckliga hundar**

(capitol)

Considering that the American market for Swedish language rock and roll bands playing Dr. Feelgood styled, harmonica driven, gritty r'n'b rock seems to consist of me and three guys from Minnesota named Sven, Bjorn and Per, it's hard to see how I'm gonna convince anybody that they ought to get on the internet and track down an import copy of this. But I'm still recommending it. **Nisse Hellberg** rattles off great songs like a one man Tin Pan Alley, and whether you get the words or no, you'll get the feeling. The production is cleaner than your typical garage band (20+ lps worth of experience will do that for you), but there's still an edge to everything. You'd expect something interesting when the cover art has pictures of an eclectic mix of records by the Clash, Sonics, AC/DC, Ramones, Slim Harpo, and the Sensational Alex Harvey Band sprinkled throughout a montage of images. And you get it.

x

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**evil rumours – live at the basement**

(laughing outlaw)

Many Yanks are likely to be unaware that the LA band was not the only late 70s punk outfit to take this name – Australia had their own X and they were if anything considerably *more* adventurous than their American namesakes. Their *X-Aspirations* album is a classic in the mode of noisy contemporary art-rock greats like Wire's *Pink Flag*, Pere Ubu's *The Modern Dance*, or The Swell Maps' *A Trip To Marineville*. Reformed with a new drummer, the band played a series of gigs around Sydney in late 2002, creating this 2 disc set as a souvenir. While it doesn't measure up to that great debut, it's still an intriguing document in the way it takes a set of what were very minimalist songs and fleshes them out to make something fairly different but still powerful. New drummer **Cath Synnerdahl** has a killer style with few rolls but lots of drop out accent beats that at times feel like they suck the air out of the room. Vocalist **Steve Lucas** can't replicate his old throat-destroying style and sounds

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like a different frontman altogether, but still intense. There's great versions of "Dream Baby", "TV Glue", "Degenerate Boy" and the formerly flexi only great "El Salvador" – and that's just a start. Great sound, too. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au))

various

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### shake your popboomerang

(popboomerang)

This 23 song compilation of Australian pop outfits has enough moments to make it worth tracking down, and if you give it time for some thought you'll realize that it's amazing that there are so many good bands down under doing this sort of thing. About half the groups are power poppers and the rest are a bit more mellow, but none are bad. I always side up to the crunchier bands in this field, and tracks like the ones offered up by the **Stoneage Hearts**, **Her Majesty's Finest**, **The Dreamdayers**, and **Showbag** are pretty satisfying on this account. Lighter efforts from solo folks like **Danny McDonald** (ex-**P76** and **Stoneage Hearts**), **Dom Mariani** (ex-**Stems** and **DM3**) and **Charles Jenkins** (**Mad Turks** and **Ice Cream Hands**) are also cool. ([www.popboomerang.com](http://www.popboomerang.com))

various

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### every word – a tribute to let's active

(laughing outlaw)

In the early 80s **Mitch Easter's** band **Let's Active** released a batch of records featuring a laid back sort of Southern pop that despite having what seemed superficially like a fairly high wimp factor proved to have a lot more depth than much of the competition. This was largely due to Easter's knack for unexpected chord changes and the neat way he made lyric melodies ride over the backing music. So it's no surprise that there are plenty of bands willing to line up for a tribute. There aren't any real brand names in this lot, and because they tend to be a little too faithful to the originals, the result is more homogeneous than I'd have hoped for. The major effect this set has had on me is to make me dig out my old Let's Active vinyl and burn CDRs to play. **Soapstar Joe** rock up "I Feel Funny" nicely, **Doug Powell** does a cool "Waters Part" (my fave Let's Active), and **Failed Energy Giants** ply cool surf guitars on "Blue (Pipe) Line". None of the other bands are a let down, but it'd be nice to have more that leap out. ([www.laughingoutlaw.com.au](http://www.laughingoutlaw.com.au))

various

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### tales from the australian underground

(feel presents)

If you heard and loved the great *Do The Pop* and *Born Out Of Time* retrospective comps reviewed in

issue 51, you'll go for this 2 disc package too. It's more of the same, documenting the flowering of the Australian underground music scene that happened starting with the first **Radio Birdman** and **Saints** singles in 1976. This set is compiled by Sydney icon **Tim Pittman**, a fellow who was there for the whole period and managed several bands on the scene. Pittman's choices are a little wider ranging than the groups on *Do The Pop*, with fairly out-there bands like **Venom P. Stinger**, **Thug**, **Makers Of The Dead Travel Fast** or **Sardine V** on one end of the spectrum and more pure pop choices like **Do Re Mi** or **The Lighthouse Keepers** on the other. In the wide middle are the bands that really made the scene, **Victims**, **Scientists**, **Eastern Dark**, **Celibate Rifles**, **Fun Things**, **Lipstick Killers**, **New Christs**, **Cosmic Psychos**, **Hard-Ons**, etc, etc. It was a great time and place for music – varied and brilliant rock and roll made for all the right reasons. These are mostly incredible records that I've personally treasured for years, and I've always mourned the fact that their makers were unable to achieve the level of recognition they deserved, even on an indie scale. But if the ignored punk bands of the late 70s can be revered now, then the same better-late-than-never redemption should be possible for these Australian groups, too. An essential purchase. ([www.feelpresents.com](http://www.feelpresents.com))