



Foster Child #22 was printed in late 1996. Publisher Tony Miller asked me to contribute some material to it, so I gave him features on the Basement Brats and Deniz Tek, plus the reviews below.

THE ABUSERS

The Abusers (That's Entertainment)

This Norwegian band picks up the gauntlet from the New Bomb Turks, Dwarves, and Angry Samoans and, conceding nothing to accidents of geography, proceed to demolish everything in their path. This is adrenaline speed punk at the upper end of the scale...you can feel the blood vessels bulging out of your forehead just listening to the intensity of singer Marius Johnsen. The CD is made up of 14 tracks, and all are solid, while one, "Education", is a flat out classic with a brilliant guitar riff that'll lay you up for weeks. There's covers of the Angry Samoans' "Todd Killings" and the Violators "NY Ripper", both of which do justice to the originals. This isn't for the faint hearted, but if you're in the mood for some slam pit action, line up here. (PO Box 6897, St. Olav's Plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway)

THE APOCALYPSE BABIES

Whoops! (Smokin' Troll)

On this CD the Apocalypse Babies come *just this close* to being absolutely great. They've got brilliantly catchy tunes that spill energy all over the place. Their rhythm guitar sounds are huge and crunching like Stiff Little Fingers at their finest, their leads are sweet as sugar riding over the top like some Buzzcocks fantasy. Their lyrics actually mean something...they have song topics that have hardly been heard since the late 70s. The only drawback, and it's a minor one by comparison, is that the singer's voice isn't really the powerhouse that's needed to really do these songs justice. By no means should that keep you from tracking down a copy of this thing; you'd have to be pretty out of tune with punk rock in general to not think this is a hell of a CD. Songs like "Rebellion Is A Thing Of The Past", "I Don't Wanna Be A Nazi" or "Cops and Robbers" recall the glory days of Stiff Little Fingers when their first two albums awed everybody. These songs show how effectively politics and music can be mixed if you know what you're doing, and these folks certainly do. It's ridiculous that something this good is available in such limited quantities, but that's the way it is in music today. (48 Llyn Beuno, Bontnewydd, Caernarvon LL55 2UH, Great Britain)

ASTEROID B-612

Asteroid B-612 (Destroyer)

Forced Into A Corner (Shock)

Teen Sublimation Riffs (Augogo)

From Melbourne, and in the tradition of God, Bored, and Hoss (and possibly better than all of them), we bring you Asteroid B-612. This band is loud and gnarly, and if you played the Stooges *Raw Power* lp, followed by the Damned's *Damned Damned Damned* and then any of these three, you'd have something that made sense, even if your neighbors did call the cops. Asteroid B-612 specialize in complete over-the-top excess in guitar riffing and soloing with a vengeful rhythm section playing underneath and howling vocals that owe an obvious stylistic debt to Rob Younger in his New Christs form. The debut CD is allegedly recorded live in the studio, and while it has its sloppy moments, it sure came out punishingly enough. It tends to die for me a little in the middle with two long, slow bluesy tracks, but that invaluable fast forward button gets you up to "Gasoline" quick enough, where the power quickly returns. But this CD isn't the best of the batch; that honor would go to *Forced Into A Corner*, which is recorded much more clearly and has a huge guitar sound. On this one they've perfected their down-shifting chord changes and use them to powerful effect. The opening "Edge A Bit Closer"

is a monster, and there's no let down moving on to "People Like You". And here, when they do slow down for a song like "The 31st To The 2nd", the proceedings don't drag. This track reminds me very strongly of something like the New Christs' "Afterburn". They also turn in a great Chuck Berry rip-off in "Danny's Sister". Really fine. *Teen Sublimation Riffs* is probably the least of the three, although it's still quite good. Biggest drawback is that the songs aren't as memorable as on the other discs (the cover of Alice Cooper's "Is It My Body" is frankly lousy), though the production is sharper than the first one. Still, this is a band that has established themselves as worthy of a place in the annals of Australian Detroit metal bands for sure.

BACKYARD BABIES

Watch Out! (MVG)

This CD has only 5 tracks, but they are well worth the price of admission! Blistering Swedish punk rock in the same vein as their countrymen the Hellacopters, these guys could be dismissed as a copy of that band, except that it turns out that they've been going since 1989 and the Hellacopters were founded by one of their guitar players when the Backyard Babies hit a slack period. So much for that idea. At any rate, this stuff removes oil-based paint at 50 meters...pissed at the world vocals, ripping guitars, punishing drums, and powerhouse bass. Makes the New Bomb Turks sound like a bunch of nannies. Hard to pick a favorite since all the tracks are great, but the stuttering vocal of "UFO Romeo" probably gives it the nod. Wow! (Box 4131, 102 63 Stockholm, Sweden)

THE BASEMENT BRATS

Curse Of The Brats (1+2)

The Bratbeat (That's Entertainment)

The Ramones? Never heard of 'em. But this Norwegian outfit is a band well worth searching out, because they'll make you feel like the torch has been successfully passed. *Curse Of The Brats* is the more recent release of these two, but it's the older material...a collection of songs from an assortment of eps, vinyl mini-lps, compilation tracks, and unreleased demos that hangs together remarkably well. It kicks off with a great cover of Front Page's Norwegian punk classic "Monster" and proceeds through 24 more wonderful punk/pop songs, where when we say punk/pop, we mean the way the Ramones blended punk and pop, not like some Epitaph band or that sort of thing. Singer Ole Olsen has a great voice that conveys teen angst like few singers can; it's great for these rocking tales of love gone bad (or now and then, love gone *good*). The guitar is loud and slashing, like the Devil Dogs at their best, and

some of the songs seem like they could *be* Devil Dogs songs (like "Big Burden"), except they aren't. But the Brats have a better sense of pop than the Devil Dogs, who started out great but haven't matched their first lp.

The Bratbeat came out before *Curse*, but was recorded later. It's too bad that the tension of recording these songs eventually led to the departure of the Brats lead singer, since as good as *Curse Of The Brats* is, this CD is better. In fact, *The Bratbeat* is as good as the Ramones' *Road To Ruin* or the Undertones first album, which for me is as good as it gets. And this is no idle talk, either; I've listened to this CD almost daily for six months waiting to see if my enjoyment of it would start to fade before I made any rash statements about it, but I find that each day I still want to play it just as much or more. Ole Olsen felt that the band was getting too poppy and too polished and that the songs were too hard to sing for him, but the result is a masterpiece. The vocals are even better than on *Curse*, the songs are better, and the production and mix have attained some kind of magical balance. The rippling bass lines, crunching guitar, and the propulsive beat of the drums are just great. And what songs! Check out "Ordinary Guy", which has the most amazingly melancholy chorus, some great subtle parts in the verses, and then some crunching rhythm parts. This song is a rock and roll rollercoaster all by itself...the kind of song everybody seems to have forgotten about these days in the rush for loud guitars at the expense of all else. Then there's "Girl Of Mine", with Steve Diggle styled leads and great "shoo-wop" backing vocals. This song ends and the all out attack of "Just Can't Help It" comes next...it highlights one of the little touches that makes this record so great; the way drummer Mads Bratman switches from tightly closed high hat to slightly open to make the rides go from loud and raw to quiet and driving to complement the guitars as they switch from ringing chords to muted crunch. Killer! "You've Got Me Shaking" has an ungodly stop-start guitar bit in the verses and then rockets off for the chorus. And then "Get Down " comes next with a brain-eating lead guitar riff and hot tempo. Downshift again with the positively luscious guitar licks and heart-rending vocals of "Can't Go On"...just a gorgeous song. And there's a cover of Stiff Little Fingers' "Here We Are Nowhere" that'll make you forget the original, as good as it was. Of 14 songs, only 4 are over 3 minutes long, and more than half are under two minutes. These songs are direct and to the point, and they cut to your heart like a hot knife through butter. This is probably the best CD I've heard in two years, and you should spare no expense to track it down. Supposedly it's also out

on the Dutch Screaming Apple label on vinyl. Find it!

THE BEAT ANGELS

Unhappy Hour (Epiphany)

Almost nobody tries this sort of thing these days, but the Beat Angels don't just try it, they succeed at it. This CD is kind of like a New York Dolls record with 90s production values and a teenbeat magazine twist added. At times it reminds me of the English punk pop band the Boys, too. The singer has really whiny brat-boy vocals that manage to not be irritating, and the band behind him plays hugely, with a big drum sound, fat power chords, and really tasty leads...just check out the playing on "The Most Beautiful Loser In Town", and if you know the Boys, you'll see exactly what I mean. The song topics are mostly about trashed out lives on the seamy side of town, but the tunes are so irresistible it's easy to assume that something much more lighthearted is taking place. These people can write songs that stick with you. Purists will say it's commercial sounding, but I think it's great.

BERRACOS

Berracos (Rock Indiana)

Too Good To Loose (Rock Indiana)

The vocal sound of this Spanish band reminds me a little of the Muffs (although without the occasional screams Kim Shattuck is known for), but the music is much more old school punk styled. Both these CDs have a strong guitar/bass/drums instrumental underpinning, though the song writing quality varies. The lyrics are in English, but it's clear it's a second language for the band as they always seem a little stiff. *Too Good To Loose* starts slowly with the pedestrian "One More For The Road", but it's got a better production style and packs a bigger punch than the first CD, and once that first track is over the songs are really good with a solid instrumental underpinning that's sort of half punk, half power pop, and nice poppy female vocals on top. The back cover photo is a take off of the Damned's first album front cover, and they do a reasonably credible version of "Neat Neat Neat", although they don't try to match Brian James' wild guitar style. The first CD includes a good cover of the Real Kids classic "Better Be Good" and probably has more consistent songwriting. I've played both these quite a bit...for a fan of late 70s punk, they're real nice to have.

THE BITTERSWEETS

Lesson One (That's Entertainment)

Another absolutely gobsmacking brilliant CD from Norway, of all places! The Bittersweets serve up one track after another of crackling punk pop

anthems loaded with ringing guitars, Thunders-like leads, snappy drums, cool keyboards and woah-oh harmonies. They've got the best Ramones tribute I've ever heard in "I'm Gonna Miss The Ramones", where they mix together names of Ramones songs to make up the verses and play to a punishing rhythm that captures the feel of the original (circa *Road To Ruin*) perfectly. This worked out so well that they also toss in an Alice Cooper tribute using the same idea ("Love It To Death"). They also cover the Saints' "Story Of Love", which is the slowest song on this thing, to give you an idea. In between these they turn in 9 other tracks of their own that all pump and sparkle. The way these guys blend styles gives them a feel that clicks in right away but still sets them apart from all the other punky pop bands out there...that light touch of organ in the back and the panache with which they play makes all the difference. From singer Arne Thelin's opening deadpan warning *Get ready to pay!* onwards, this CD is one kick in the backside. (PB 6897, St. Olavs PI, 0130 Oslo, Norway)

BORED!

Scuzz (Shagpile)

Melbourne's kings of heavy rock probably had a great time recording this...14 tracks of punk rock classics covers and then 9 more live cuts in one CD. As for long term listenability, it's got dubious value, but it is interesting to see what these guys have been listening to. It's especially odd since Bored's track record would seem to point to a lot of metal and Black Sabbath style hard rock in addition to punk, but there's nothing but blue ribbon punk material represented here, some of it pretty obscure, like the early Wipers smash "Return Of The Rat"...how Bored ever got clued into that in Australia is beyond me. Oddest of the lot is their cover of Pray TV's "In My Street" (part of a deal where Pray TV did a Bored song for a split single in return), since these bands have little in common stylistically. Anyway, Bored do a nice job with this, and it's more fun than it has any right to be. A good buy in a used bin.

BUZZCOCKS

French (IRS)

All Set (IRS)

I'm sad to say that I think the Buzzcock's day is finally past. When they reformed back in 1989 I was really skeptical, but their reunion show blew me away, and their return CD *Trade Test Transmissions* was nearly as good as anything they'd done in their original incarnation. When they toured with a new rhythm section, I was even more skeptical, but the show was again great and the new members filled their roles as well as you

could ask. But these two CDs are of marginal value. First of all, there are so many live Buzzcocks releases now that a new one isn't going to get much listening, even if it is as well recorded and powerfully played as *French*. There's no doubt that in these aspects it surpasses *Entertaining Friends*, the live CD from the early 80s. But does that make it better? Does anyone really want a live CD of clinically perfect Buzzcocks tracks? I much prefer the sloppy familiarity of *Entertaining Friends*, where you can hear John Maher speeding up and slowing down in the middle of songs and know that as great as these guys were, they were also human and possessed of their own frailties. *French* instead comes across like some interstellar rock and roll juggernaut from a vastly superior planet playing Buzzcocks songs to try to calm us into feeling safe with them just before they grind us into alien puppy chow. I won't take it to the used store, but I don't play it much, either.

As for *All Set*, well, it just doesn't have it. I never thought the day would come when I got a new batch of Buzzcocks songs and felt like there was nothing of any value there, but Shelley has already proven that he can create some duff music during his solo career, so it shouldn't have been a surprise. I listen to this, and yeah, it's Shelley's voice, and those are Steve Diggle's solos just like before, but these songs don't click, and after repeated plays nothing changes, either. I always thought Shelley wrote some of the best lyrics around, but his songs here have lyrics that descend to the lowest of hack levels..."Give It To Me" is as bad as a Bad Company song; just horrible. "Point Of No Return" is just about the only Shelley track here that has any interesting ideas in it. The best tracks here are the ones that Diggle wrote, but there's only three of them and they can't save this thing. Depressing!

THE CELIBATE RIFLES

Spaceman In A Satin Suit (Hot)

Since 1982 Damien Lovelock, Kent Steedman and Dave Morris have been pounding out some of the most full-on guitar rave up masterpieces the world has ever seen, yet for some reason widespread acclaim seems to have missed them completely. Other bands have come and gone (and come and gone again) during the years since *Sideroxylon* first put a dent in my head, and I still find that every new Celibate Rifles album is a cause for celebration. This one is no different...it's got maybe their sharpest production yet, and as usual there's a fistful of real nuggets mixed in with a bunch of other tracks that are at worst really good. My favorite is "Kathy Says", where Damien's dry

vocals are at their best and the rhythm guitars crunch with power. As usual, Lovelock gets to the point lyrically with caustic social commentary. Steedman and Morris pump out some of the best guitar sounds on the planet, mixing powerhouse rhythm playing with totally crazed wah-wah solos and chord bending madness. Drummer Nick Rieth (also plays on the Deniz Tek solo stuff) is the best the Rifles have had...he makes the whole goings on seem way tighter than they've been in the past. Overall, while this CD isn't clearly better than any of their others, I wouldn't hesitate in recommending it as an introduction to the band...all their stuff is great and this is no exception. (PO Box 326, Spit Junction, NSW 2088, Australia)

CLOVER

Clover (MDS)

I don't know anything about this except that I bought it because it came well recommended by Augogo's mail order catalog. So they're Aussies, of course, but beyond that, who knows? Anyway, it's a really fine brand of paisley psych pop they play on this 6 track CDEP...nice ringing guitar work, vocals in a sort of flower-child semi-falsetto, and modestly rocking tunes. In 1982, when the Three O'Clock were regarded as big stuff, this would've gone over big. Today they'll be ignored, which is unfortunate, since this is real nice.

THE COSMIC DROPOUTS

Hoolabaloo! (That's Entertainment)

Sonic Circus (Kicksville)

The Norwegians and the Swedes have been rivals for centuries; the Swedes with their flat lands and fertile fields have been the wealthier, but the Norwegians with their mountains and fjords have the best views. So the Swedes seemingly have the kings of garage rock in the fabulous Nomads...what can the Norwegians do to rival them? Plenty, actually, since out of Moss near Oslo come the Cosmic Dropouts, a band that doesn't have to concede an inch to their better known Swedish pals. They actually had a US release on the now defunct Skyklad label a few years back (called *Groovy Times*), and despite being ignored, it was a great record. *Sonic Circus* is even better. This band has it all for garage freaks...loud guitar, classic rock organ, a big drum sound, a wild and powerful singer and tunes that are flat unstoppable. Best of the bunch on this 1993 CD *Sonic Circus* are "New Generation", with a great vocal call and guitar/organ response verse structure and a soaring chorus, and the closing "The Beast In Me", but surrounding these tracks are 10 other originals that just smoke. The lone marginal song is a dubious cover of "Dizzy", a late 60s bubblegum hit that resists all efforts to infuse it

with energy. Regardless, this is a fabulous CD, easily one of the prime examples of garage revival music that's been recorded since 1980.

Hoolabaloo! is from 1991, right after the Skyclad release, and it's also a great record, though the songs are just a little better on *Sonic Circus*. Their remake of the Motown oldie "Leaving Here" is mesmerizing, and the epic "Into The Blue" has a tight, tense sort of feeling that feels great. I love the Nomads, don't get me wrong; I wouldn't be without any of their records, but the Cosmic Dropouts show clearly that they aren't without competition. (That's Entertainment, PO Box 858, Bergersborg, N-1501 Moss, Norway).

COSTELLO'S GONE MISSING

What About Costello (Art Clearing House)

I'm not sure exactly what to make of this; it's a solo project by a fellow from Perth named Bruce John Abbott, but he gets a zillion of his friends to sit in providing instrumental backing. Most notable of these is Dom Mariani, the frontman for the Stems, Someloves, and DM3, but the direction is definitely provided by Abbott. He's got a knack for a tasty pop song...the sort of familiar, easy fit kind of stuff that you might've got on Flying Nun Records out of New Zealand a few years back. Abbott's voice has that same stuffy nose feeling of early Elvis Costello (which is probably why he named the project the way he did) but without the anger. His songwriting is quite good...not in a bludgeoning energetic way, but these are just well crafted tunes with good memorable hooks. Real good quiet time material.

DEMOLITION 23

Demolition 23 (Music For Nations)

Here's the picture...a band fronted by the former lead singer of Finnish metal-glam outfit Hanoi Rocks goes into a studio with ex-Springsteen and Southside Johnny guitar player Miami Steve Van Zandt producing and helping out liberally with the song writing. Now imagine this as the result: one of the best punk rock albums of the last 5 years. No lie. This CD comes across like the album the Dead Boys should have made after *We Have Come For Your Children*. It's 70s styled punk rock; meaning slower, more crunching, and with more room for hooks than the 80s and 90s brand. The guitar sound is enormous, and the rhythm section is hard hitting and brutal. Lyrically the songs are great, too...I love the line "Now there's nothin' straight enough to rebel against" from "Hammersmith Palais", and the whole theme of "The Scum Lives On", where all the good young rock and roll heroes die while the old bastard politicians live forever, is great. There's 3 covers (perhaps too many); an updated take of one of the

finest Dead Boys tracks "Ain't Nothin' To Do", where the words go "Gonna knock down the next suit I see", plus Johnny Thunder's "I Wanna Be Loved" and the UK Subs "Endangered Species", all done in overpowering wall of guitars style. This is one hell of an album, and I had it on my list to find for nearly a year before I found it. You should look harder than I did. (888 Latimer Rd., London W106RA, UK)

DM3

One Time, Two Times, Three Red Light (Citadel)

It's great to see Dom Mariani (ex Stems, Someloves frontman) keeping on making records after all these years. And getting better at it, too. I mean, I still rate those first Stems singles as among the classics of Aussie rock, but Mariani has migrated from garage rawness to power pop brilliance with style. This new group has the pop sensibilities of the Someloves, but they've traded for a bigger, tougher guitar sound that reminds me of the Raspberries at times. And this album delivers a couple of classics for the ages..."Foolish" is just a fabulous song, with a great stuttering intro and loads of irresistible guitar tricks. And "1 Time, 2 Times Devastated" is another killer that features a driving guitar bit. In between are a pile of other really good songs that would be A side material for most bands, like "Blue Thing" or "Like This". A great effort.

DM3

Road To Rome (Citadel)

Boy, I thought their debut CD was damn close to power pop perfection, but they've gone and done it one better. This CD is an incredible exhibit of everything that can be done right in making what Dom Mariani calls "an unashamed pop recording". Twelve songs of boy meets girl, boy flips for girl, girl dumps boy, boy dumps girl, and even though we've heard a million songs on these topics, there's not a boring moment here. The DM3 pull out every trick in the book; stop/starts, ringing power chords, anthemic choruses, driving verses, you name it. The only fault I can find with this is that it doesn't have two tracks that I'd rate as classics like the first CD; it only has one, the opening "Can't Get What You Want". But it makes up for that in consistency, which is one of the hardest tricks in making power pop records. Song after song with different tempos and arrangement approaches, all of which hang together great. Crackling bright production doesn't hurt, either. I've played this god knows how many times now, and I'm not slowing down. This and the first DM3 CD are as good as any power pop albums that have ever been made.

DRIVEN

Spirit (Stuntpram)

If you've followed what I've written in Noise For Heroes at all in the past, you'll know how much regard I have always had for Paul Berwick's band, the Happy Hate Me Nots. The HHMNs split near the end of 1990, and shortly thereafter Berwick put together a new 3 piece band called Settlement that included Jim Dickson on bass (New Christs, Barracudas, Survivors) and Chris Welsh (Died Pretty) on drums. They played for about 18 months, but Chris decided to return to Died Pretty, and that, combined with battles Paul was having with Waterfront Records over royalties never paid, disillusioned him to the point where he didn't want to play anymore. So he put his guitar away and went off to school at the local university. In 1994 he received a major shock when former HHMNs guitar player Tim McKay overdosed on heroin and died. Thinking about Tim's sad fate and other things made Paul decide that if you can play you should be doing it, and he decided to once again put together a band. It came together quite quickly for him, with no auditions at all; just a few discussions with friends. The band includes former HHMNs bassist (now also playing with the New Christs) Christian Houlemare, and former Barbarellas drummer Christian Hampson. In addition, Bruce Tatham has just recently joined on keyboards, although he doesn't play on *Spirit*. Tatham played in the mid-80s Sydney band Decline Of The Reptiles, who left behind two very good mini-lps and a single on Waterfront. He's also guested on recordings by the HHMNs, Celibate Rifles and Lime Spiders.

Having bridged history, we turn to the music. *Spirit* hit my CD player with much anticipation and some nervousness. Would it live up to the brilliant legacy of the Happy Hate Me Nots? In fact, it does that quite nicely. Paul Berwick's soulful voice is as compelling as ever, his guitar sound is just as powerful, and Hampson amazingly comes close to matching the fabulous Mick Searson...fast and hard hitting. The tunes themselves are snappy blasts of melodic and catchy power pop that's never wimpy but always drives hard. There's one soft ballad in "Come Home", but the other 6 tracks just jump off the glass with energy. Berwick's songs are rhythmically complex, with many changes in tempo and mood, but at the same time they are quite simple, relying on a small handful of chords skillfully chosen. This is music that will move you and will have great staying power...you can listen to this a hundred times and still find something fresh in it.

It really is a shame that fates and trends have conspired to prevent Berwick from doing more than a handful of recordings in the 14 years he's been playing in bands, but then maybe that just makes each one that more important to have. Don't miss this one. (PO Box 7, Alexandria 2015, Australia)

feedtime

Billy (Black Hole Recordings)

This is an impressive return to form for this tradition bucking three-piece from Sydney. Rick and Al from the original lineup return to handle guitar, vocals and bass as before, but Tom has been replaced by John on drums. Regardless, the feel on this CD harks back to the halcyon days of the *Shovel* and *feedtime* lps, their two best. I had felt that the band was losing their touch on their all covers *Cooper S* and on their last lp, *Suction*, but here they seem to have fully recovered the knack they once had, plus they've pulled their best production job as well. If you haven't heard these guys, they play a sort of music influenced about equal parts by blues and by punk rock and that consists of driving but minimalist drum beats and bass lines with complementing rhythm guitars and occasional slide leads, covered by Rick' gravelly vocals that sound like Louie Armstrong on downers. It would be easy to lump feedtime in with the masses of noise bands that have been and gone since feedtime last split up, but that would be a mistake...if you read feedtime lyrics, you can see that these guys have a lot more depth in songwriting than a lot of bands they might get lumped with, like the whole Amphetamine Reptile crowd, for example. This is unique stuff, and unique stuff that works. (PO Box 4023, Richmond, East Victoria, Australia)

THE FREELOADERS

Squalorfications (Dogmeat)

From the ashes of the Adelaide's Philisteins and Melbourne's God comes this group with a wonderfully named new CD that lives up to the heritages of all involved. The opening "Split" is as good as anything on the Philisteins' classic first mini-lp ("Bloody Convicts"), and things just don't let up from there. The lead vocals swap back and forth from Guy Lucas to Sean Greenway, and as they do, the feel shifts from reminding of the Philisteins to God and back. Guy's guitar tends to capture the day, though; he has a uniquely psychedelic feel to his playing that makes this stand out above the pack. They've got a couple of slow hard rock styled tracks that recall some of the lower points that God would hit on occasion (like "Small Problem"), but for everyone of those they come back with two like "The Ride" or "Something For Nothing", which power along and show great

taste and originality. (GPO Box 2366V, Melbourne 3001, Australia)

THE HELLAOPTERS

Supershitty To The Max (White Jazz)

From Sweden, these guys have got the idea of being influenced by the Stooges down right. There's so many bands that get touted as "Stooges-influenced" who really sound more like they grew up listening to thousands of pedestrian hard rock and heavy metal bands, but put this album on and stand back, because the intensity and mayhem are gonna feel like they're for real. The record (yep, it's on vinyl) kicks into gear with "(Gotta Get Some Action) Now!" and proceeds to pile on like the Oakland Raider defensive backfield from there on. These guys are mates of the Nomads and in fact Hans Ostlund guests on guitar on one track while Nick Vahlberg joins in the singing on another, but this is not a Nomads-like record. The Nomads are great in their own way, but they sound like guys you could have a beer with. The Hellcopters sound like a band that just as soon put a tire iron in your teeth and take your wallet and your car keys. This is messy, dirty, grease-under-the-fingernails kind of rock'n'roll, the kind that leaves piles of demolished equipment on stage and broken furniture and bar glassware off it. Chaotic, hell raising rock and roll. (Box 21 40, 103 14 Stockholm, Sweden)

THE HIGHROLLERS

Good Morning Little Schoolgirl (Snake Eyes/Sonet)

I'm amazed how a small country can suddenly spawn a scene where there's a ton of bands pumping out great music...Norway's on a tear right now, and the Highrollers are a great band from Langhus, just south of Oslo. They play a pumping brand of psych/pop...their opener "Come On Down" sounds like a helicopter attack fleet taking off, while the keyboard fueled "Baby's Coming Back" is garage powered greatness that'd make the Cynics or Cosmic Dropouts drool. And while the Highrollers specialize in these high energy garage blasters, they also have a good knack for slower mood makers (check out "Killing Time", a brilliant 3/4 time epic cruncher), and it's the combination of these with the mashers that make this disc have great staying power...I've listened to this dozens of times now and I'm always glad I decided to put it on rather than something else. When the intro of the closing "Not So" comes around with its emotive chord changes, I'm always a little bummed to think it's the last track. But you can always play it twice! (Vevilstadasen, N-1405 Langhus, Norway)

ICE CREAM HANDS

Traveling...Made Easy (Rubber Records)

People who know anything about Australian bands are used to thinking of them as being ignored or underappreciated. But compared even to the normal level of acceptance accorded the underground bands from down under, the efforts of Chuck Skatt and Dom Larizza have gone completely unnoticed. And that's an incredible injustice, since their prior band the Mad Turks were one of the all time great power pop bands of anytime, anywhere. I saw them in Melbourne in 1990 playing in a mostly empty club with only about four friends watching...an incredible squandering of talent. Since then the Turks have split up, but Dom and Chuck have put together this new band (new as of 1993, anyway), and pushed on. Ice Cream Hands are a little softer than the Turks were, but they've still got Skatt's fabulous voice and his great tunes to work with. Skatt has a vocal quality that's perfect for this sort of heartbreaking jangle pop, playing the perfect loser who can't even get organized enough to vacuum his dusty house..."I suppose I wear men's clothes, and I should prove my worth" he sings on "The Study Of Her". I'd prefer a Turks record for its more rocking approach, but for as skilled a songwriter as Skatt I'm glad to have him still recording in any capacity. This CD probably will do even less to make Skatt and Larizza a known commodity than the Mad Turks records...your loss more than his.

IRON SHEIKS

Absolutely Sheik (Bastard)

The Sheiks weren't the greatest band on the Adelaide scene during their heyday, but they were good for a loud and rowdy time, and for those who missed them back in the days of vinyl, here's your chance to get everything Sheik on one very long playing CD. Packed into these grooves are their *Do You Sell Beer Here?* and *Do You Fancy Me?* mini-lps (in two titles they've succinctly summarized their two main concerns; getting drunk and getting laid), plus there's still room for 11 more tracks seeing the light of day for the first time. The Sheiks remind me of nothing so much as the Dutch band Loveslug, but that won't mean much to most people, so I've just gotta say that they play a really high speed Detroit metal sort of style that also cops bits from thrash punk. Their lyrics have no redeeming value whatever, but it doesn't seem to matter. Brainless fun. (PO Box 436, Kent Town 5071, Australia)

JALLA JALLA

Snowman's Land (Hiljaiset Levyt)

This is the third album from this great Finnish group, and there's no doubt it's their best produced by far. It might even have their best songs, although that's a tough call because they've made some wonderful recordings before, too (check out their first two lps on the NKVD Jalla Jalla CD). Their music is a hard to describe sort of power pop/rock that mixes hints of punk rock, country, reggae and ska, but just enough to flavor things slightly rather than to give you a tag to hang on them. They have some of the tastiest guitar parts you'll ever hear, with fat, bluesy guitar leads that would've made Johnny Thunders proud. They've been described as a tough, young Graham Parker fronting "Exile On Mainstreet" era Rolling Stones, but I don't think that's the right description, either. Whatever it is, they have a certain magic that on their best songs that just grabs you by the heart and won't let go. On this CD they make that connection several times, most notably with the leadoff "Hospital Waltz", featuring a guitar riff that speaks volumes even if the band isn't singing in their strongest language (lyrics are all English). Then there's "Make A Deal", with more of the same sweet, sweet licks that almost bring tears to your eyes. "Free-Ons Play Tonight" is another great one...it's hard to tell with their fractured lyrics, but this one seems to at least give a nod to their fellow Rovaniemi townsmen Greenhouse AC, another excellent band but only the second best north of the Arctic Circle. Jalla Jalla don't try to be the biggest, baddest punk rock dudes on the street (these guys are way too nice for that), but they've got heart and guts and they're never wimpy. If all you like is New Bomb Turks style bluster, you won't go for this, but if you can appreciate a band that can convey a range of emotions in their playing, these are your guys. (PO Box 211, SF - 33201 Tampere, Finland)

THE NEW CHRISTS

Woe Betide (Citadel)

The idea that prior to this release Rob Younger only had the opportunity to record one full length album since the demise of Radio Birdman in 1978 is one of those unfair twists of fate that can never be set right. In the mid 80s he had two different and fabulous bands backing him (and actually many sub-versions of those), but the band that made *Distemper* was an incredible power house of a group. Since that release many years have passed until now, and Rob finally has gotten a band together to record once more. Yeah, there was that ten inch record a little bit ago, but that sounded like a band just starting to find its way. On *Woe Betide* the group has clearly come

together and they're playing the kind of snarling, gut wrenching rock and roll that Younger has made his name on. Granted, there's only seven songs here, but each one is the sort of stuff we've all been hoping for since *Distemper*...songs of desperation, anger, and defiance. It's hard to pick a favorite here; "These Rags" has an incredibly expressive chorus which I can only understand part of but which still makes a big impression. Even when the backing music is relatively bright and cheery like on "The Half That's Left", Younger sounds like he's about to explode. The only track of the 7 here that doesn't connect directly with me is "Corporate Son"...every other one bites like a piranha. The closing title track will knock the breath out of you with its signature guitar riff played over punishing drums, and I suspect you may leave the disc in the CD player and just press the replay button when it's done. A long time away for the New Christs, we didn't know how badly we missed them.

THE NEW CHRISTS

Lower Yourself (Citadel)

Rob Younger is getting absolutely prolific these days, and if you ask me it couldn't have happened soon enough. It wouldn't be a New Christs' record without a personnel change, so guitar player Tony Harper is gone and in comes Mark Wilkinson to replace him. There's also plenty of keyboard contributions from former Thought Criminal and Died Pretty member John Hoey. The sound is bigger and louder than on *Woe Betide* and there are 12 tracks this time with a bonus disc having four more. Unheard of quantity from Younger, but the quality is everything you could hope for. It's getting difficult to analyze these things without sounding repetitive, but Younger is about as good as anyone at painting a picture in song of someone who is tortured by life's events to the point of breaking. The title track is a prime example...a buzzing, psychotic guitar lead and a slow, punishing drum beat with a single piano note played percussively in just the right spot, the image comes through without even trying to understand the lyrics. "From On High" is a more traditional rocker, but Younger crosses it up by pretty much talking the vocals. "Asphalt" buries you in guitar with Younger chanting the reverb smothered vocals like a priest saying mass in some enormous empty cathedral. "Party Time" has a brilliant sense of dynamics and powers with more monster riffs. And it goes on...every track different but with its own superb story to tell. In a world full of transparently faked emotions, Rob Younger is one of the very few who can create a song that drags the listener into his own personal maelstrom of desire, anger, fear, hatred and pain and leave a

feeling that every word was real. This is a great, great record and exceeds what were already very high expectations by leaps.

GRAHAM PARKER

Acid Bubblegum (Razor & Tie)

There was a time when I regarded Graham Parker as one of the most important figures in rock and roll. His first 4 studio albums were all crucial, and I had a hard time understanding why Elvis Costello become such a commercial and critical favorite in the late 70s while Parker was relatively an underdog, although some people were on top of things...I recall one reviewer saying he would gladly pay money to hear Parker singing in the shower, and that's a pretty fair assessment of where the man stood in those days, when his *Squeezing Out Sparks* album could justifiably be argued as the best album of 1979. But after that, Parker began a long descent into mediocrity. First, he dropped his fireball backing band, the Rumour, and replaced them with a bunch of technical competent but spiritually empty studio musicians, and then he got married and happy and lost the bitter edge that made his lyrics so great. I stopped even buying his albums and there's a long blank period of 13 years or more in which I have no idea what the guy was doing. But last fall I was visiting friends on the east coast and listening to a college radio station, when I heard a track from his latest lp, *Acid Bubblegum*. It sounded pretty good, so I thought I'd give him another try. And what do you know, this new one is a strong return to form for him. He's no longer on a major label, and the shortfall in recording budget has worked wonders. The band is still a little too smooth behind him in spots, but the drums have a live a crackly feel, and the rest of the band at least has a little *swing* to them. And Parker's singing and lyrics are right on...he's back to biting off those cutting lyrics. Maybe it's just that there are so few bands these days that give a damn about what their words say that makes this seem so good, but it sure is easy to get wrapped up in songs like "Sharpening Axes" (*I don't appeal to the masses, and they don't appeal to me*), or "Obsessed With Aretha". And Parker can still put together a high tension piece of melodrama like "Impenetrable" when he wants to. This album has some of the best songs and best singing Parker has ever done. If the band had the spark that the Rumour used to display, it could have been his best album ever, but it's still one of the better records this year.

THE PASSENGERS

The Passengers with Angie Pepper (Revenge)

People really into the scene that spun up around Radio Birdman in Sydney will be familiar with the

name of this band. They had a single way back when with "Girlfriend's Boyfriend" and "Face With No Name", and those two songs appear here with six others that were recorded in the same sessions. Allegedly Deniz Tek (Angie Pepper's husband) has remixed the tapes now and is looking for a deal to put out a more polished version of this, but for now, this is certainly enjoyable enough. Combined with the style of pop/rock that they play, Pepper's voice will remind people of Blondie to some extent, but her voice has a lot more character to it than Debbie Harry, who tended to sound a little too manufactured at time. Pepper's singing has a vulnerable sort of edge to it that reminds me of a lot of 60s girl groups. The presence of ex-Visitors keyboard player Steve Harris recalls that band a lot, too, since not many groups have this sort of electric piano sound. On listening to this several times, I wonder a little at the choice of tracks for the single, since I think "Sad Day" and "Love Execution" would've done better. But it's all pretty consistent and a really nice record to have after all the years when these tapes were only heard by the members of the band and their friends.

POSSUM DIXON

Star Maps (Interscope)

This ridiculous "major" label, Interscope, has been sending me piles of horrid CDs to review ever since I stopped doing Noise For Heroes on paper back in 1992. Most of the time I don't even bother to pull 'em out of the shrink wrap, and at best they sit around in piles until some day when I'm feeling particularly bored with everything else I'm listening to, so I load up 5 in a changer and play a song from each. This almost invariably leads to all of them being thrown into a box to go to the used store. Well, one day about a year ago, I load up the changer, and...hey! what's this? This sort of funky, slinky bass line from "Go West" comes on, and I'm mesmerized. It's like finding Aladdin's lamp in the dump. This is the second Possum Dixon CD (you can bet I ran out and found the first right away), and while underground purists will probably be unwilling to give it the time of day, all I can say is that this thing moves from one clever neurotic pop tune to the next with such a flair that I have no difficulty overlooking their modestly commercial tendencies. Like a Doctor Seuss poem (some go loud and some go slow and some of them just go, go, go), the variety on this is great, with moody, slow, depressive numbers like "Party Tonight" or fast rocking, depressive numbers like "Crashing Your Planet". The arrangements add to the vitality of the thing, variously emphasizing guitars, bass, cheesy keyboards, and vocals. The overall feel is like some post punk band from 1981

that showed up in 1996 through some kind of time-space continuum rupture. Possum Dixon are infectiously accessible, slightly pretentious, moderately commercial and totally great. In any properly done world, about 9 of these songs would be top 5 singles on the radio (pressed on vinyl, of course). We'll have to wait for such a world to come along; in the mean time, there's no reason for them not to be top 5 in your living room.

PROTONES

Cartunes (Rock Indiana)

The debut CD from this 5 piece power pop outfit from Spain is a real pleasure to listen to. The band displays a great talent for writing a wistful sounding pop tune that maintains a snappy feel and doesn't get soppy. Compared to their second CD, this one has a smaller guitar sound, but otherwise its got nothing to complain about...energetic stuff that strikes a chord and conveys that teen emotion feel really nicely. My fave is "Footsteps", which has some nice guitar touches and an infectious chorus. In general, though, this is a package that'll win you over by its consistency...the song quality is right up there on every track, and a more powerful production could've put this to near hall of fame status. As it is, it's still a fine effort. (APDO 10.539, 28080 Madrid, Spain)

PUNK LUREX OK

Hatut Ja Myssyt (Hiljaiset Levyt)

Back in 1977, there was a Finnish band called Kollaa Kestaa, who served as inspiration for a generation of Finnish punk fans, including Hiljaiset Levyt label boss Jukka Juntilla and the youthful girls Tiina Wesslin and Riitta Suojanen of the current Tampere band Punk Lurex OK. More recently, but still a few years back, these two formed a band called Porttikielto and played sets of covers of Kollaa Kestaa songs. At one of these gigs, Juha Helminen, the guitar player from Kollaa Kestaa, was in the audience, and he liked them so much he asked to join the band. So Porttikielto split up and Juha joined up, bringing former Kollaa Kestaa drummer Jyrki with him. So that was the start of Punk Lurex OK. I think that's kind of a neat story. Except now for their second CD both the Kollaa Kestaa guys are gone and replaced by new members, but Punk Lurex OK has managed to record a fine set of songs without them, featuring great 70s dole queue styled punk music with that chugging sort of high hat sound that made the early Vibrators records so distinctive, and some strong guitar work, but then with these really sweet female pop styled vocal harmonies on top of the whole thing. Their first CD wore thin a little too quickly, but this one has much tougher production and really stands up well to repeated listenings.

Knup rules, KO! (PL 211, 33201 Tampere, Finland)

THE RAINYARD

Let It Speed (House Of Wax)

Perth is a city that spawns good power pop bands like fish, and here's one of their best. The only complaint I have is that there's only 6 songs available by these guys, since this CD is over far too soon. Propelled by a fluid, rolling rhythm section, the Rainyard play songs that have a feel like the best Who material from before *Tommy* (the ones with Pete Townshend singing) but with very modern production. Loud and ringing power chords are their forte, along with some really great vocal harmonies. "Downward Rise" and "What's It Worth" are classics, worthy of consideration as among the best songs of the year in which they came out. I hear that this band has now split up...too bad, since the potential was enormous. (45 King St., Perth, WA 6000 Australia)

THE REFRESHMENTS

Fresh! (Gaga Goodies)

Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant! Holy smokes, what a slab of power pop this Finnish band has dished up! One can only assume they took the name of the CD from the Raspberries lp of yesteryear, 'cos here the Refreshments serve up their own style of miracle pop, loaded with big loud guitar chords and anthemic vocals. Catchy, melodic, and instantly accessible, this is record is just what you want if Material Issue aren't putting out CDs often enough for you...it's the same brand of music. Special kudos go to the classic track "Years Go Passing By", but none of these songs are slouches; there's batches of really cool loud pop here. (PO Box 47, FIN 13211 Hamenlinna, Finland)

SEÑOR NO

Senor No (No Tomorrow)

This Spanish band didn't make much of an impression on me the first time I played this CD, but after a few plays it started to grow and now I find this really enjoyable. The singer's voice is a little flat and gravelly, and despite good energy the first track seems a little directionless, but after that the proceedings get more interesting. The second song starts with a couple minutes of pretty wild wah-wah rave up action, and from there on it pretty well rips. Covers of the Damned's "Melody Lee" and MC5's "Looking At You" (by way of the Damned) give you some idea what to expect. Sharper production could have made this a big winner, but it's still a cool thing to hear. (APDO 1134, 12080 Castellon, Spain)

SEX PISTOLS

Filthy Lucre Live (Virgin)

This CD flies in the face of everything punk rock was against...old fossils of rock and roll playing out their greatest hits by-the-numbers for a live recording whose only imaginable (and even stated) goal is to make money. But can you blame them? The Pistols created a style that has made millions of dollars for other people, yet for the most part they hardly shared in it at all; Malcolm McClaren's corrupt Glitterbest company doled out tiny weekly salaries to the band members while the Pistols were a going concern and then spent all the rest of their royalties making a film no one in the band ever wanted after they had split, and topped it off by subsequently tying them up in years of litigation where money poured into the pockets of lawyers instead of to the people who created the music. Glen Matlock got paid a couple hundred pounds to buy out his interest in the band when he was booted out and probably made less money off the Pistols altogether than he could get selling his used car. So if the guys see an opportunity to get a little back, I'm not gonna blame them. Doesn't mean I have to take it seriously, either...they all look old and fat, and Johnny Rotten looks totally ridiculous, even if he still is an interesting interview. But despite what other people have said about this album, I think it sounds pretty damn great...as far as sound and impact goes it's better than all the best moments of all the 1970's Pistols live shows put together. The guitars are huge, the drums are punishing, and Rotten's singing is pretty decent, too, even if he does sound a little more like his PIL style than the way he sang in the Pistols. There's a few spots where the band gets lost in the middle of some of the songs, but they recover OK, and it makes the whole thing feel more real that they left these pieces in. I played this about 10 days in succession when I first got it and loved it each time. I've played all the Pistols stuff so much that I might never play *Lucre* again now, and if you're choosing between the original studio stuff and this, there's no question you should get the studio releases. But fans should not be afraid of buying this one. It doesn't disappoint as long as you have realistic expectations.

THE STEMS

Weed Out ! - Live At The Old Melbourne (House Of Wax)

I think this is the third live lp I've laid my hands on by this great Australian garage band from the mid 80s, and as good as their songs are it'd be more than I need except that this one has by far the best sound and the most spirited performance. The Stems migrated towards a more power poppy style later in their life, but this 1986 show precedes

that...in fact they had only two singles and a 4 track ep on vinyl when they played this show. So while the playing and singing are sharp, it's also gritty and with a more raw feel than the band had later, when they became more poppy. This was a hell of a group in those days, with both Dom Mariani and Rob Lane being excellent songwriters, almost dueling each other. If you haven't heard them yet, I'd look for one of their studio CDs first, but if you have those and want a live momento, this is the one to get.

SWINGIN' UTTERS

A Juvenile Product of the Working Class (Fat)

Kind of funny naming a punk album after a line from an Elton John song, but it is a great line, so you can't complain too much. Inside the jewel case the band sounds a whole lot like Rancid (and therefore like the Clash)...especially the singer, who has a ripped up throat that he uses to good effect in hacking out some pretty good lyrics. Musically the band are not as consistently fast as Rancid, but they do play some really tasty punk tunes. They lead with their best, the powerful "Windspitting Punk", which features a strong chorus couplet: "*You're telling me shape up or ship out / But I'd never shape myself to something so offending as you!*". They've got a gimmick to set them apart, too, which is to roll out an accordion for a few songs, which give the whole proceedings a vague feeling of having an Irish influence. It works well to give some variety. Rancid has better tunes, but then Rancid has better tunes than almost anyone, so that can't be taken as much of a knock...the Swinging Uppers do damn well in their own right. If you aren't too troubled by bands that maybe don't have the most original sound around then you can't go far wrong with this outfit...this is an excellent CD and will hold up to a lot of plays.

DENIZ TEK

Orphan Tracks (Revenge)

This is a mixed batch of fairly low key demos and odd tracks that Deniz Tek sold to the French label Revenge in the mid 80s at a time where he thought there was little chance he'd ever be recording music again. It's an interesting glimpse into a bunch of different sides of Tek's musical persona. The first four tracks feature his wife Angie Pepper (formerly lead singer for the Passengers) on vocals; "Miss You Too Much" was a Visitors song, and its sultry feel is enhanced by the feminine vocal sound, and "Why Tell Me" was released in a more polished form as an Angie Pepper solo single, but the other two songs are new as far as I know. They're also nice pop tracks. Side one closes with Tek singing "100 Fools", which appeared on a Citadel solo single many years

back. Side two kicks off with a rocking cover of "RPM" that mixes surf and Detroit rock the way a lot of Radio Birdman tracks did. "Big Ride" is a Ventures sounding instrumental demo on acoustic guitar that has a riff that I know comes from some well known song which I just can't remember now. "A C M" is a Birdman sounding instrumental with a real tinny drum sound, but it's a good track that would be great with a proper band behind it. Then there's a rough cover of Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane", which seems like an unlikely influence for Tek, but what do I know? Sounds like the Tek was feeling pretty loose when he did it. And finally, there's a rough and tumble version of Tek's old band T.V. Jones doing "Monday Morning Gunk", which later became part of the Radio Birdman set. All in all, it's one of those records that you only buy if you are a big fan, but there's a lot of fun tracks on it, and it's well worth having for my tastes.

DENIZ TEK

Take It To The Vertical (Red Eye)

The first word out of Tek in over 10 years, this CD came as quite a surprise when I found out that it existed. The legendary guitar payer had not abandoned his love of music after all! So there was much anticipation when I popped it in the CD player. I really didn't have any idea what to expect, but what came out of the speakers was an instrumental sound not unlike the pop/rock of the Angie Pepper single on Citadel many years back...clean, undistorted electric guitars, keyboards, occasional horns, and a bunch of different styles. "Dead If Looks Could Kill" has a soulful, almost Motown feel, and the next track "Where Dreams Go", has guitar that sounds like early ZZ Top topped by Angie Pepper vocals (she's Tek's wife). "Don't Axe Me" has the swing of several of the better Visitors tracks in the rhythm playing, but then gets a frosting of Spanish styled acoustic guitar to change the feel. And if they played "Is It Good Enough" with distorted guitars and put a little more *oomph!* into the playing, it could be a Radio Birdman track. Overall this is a nice CD with a good bunch of tunes, but it has to be enjoyed on its own as a separate thing from the Radio Birdman legend or its mellow feel will come across as a let down for some.

DENIZ TEK

Outside (Red Eye)

This is where Deniz Tek rises up to challenge Rob Younger head on for the title of best post-Birdman album on earth. And he's made it too close to call. This is an incredible effort; it's loaded with powerhouse tracks that would've fit into the Radio Birdman firestorm seamlessly. And the razor sharp production just adds to the impact. The

opening "Blood From A Stone" serves fair warning...it's based on a murderously punishing drumbeat and ride groove and then it's topped with a devastating guitar line the likes of which you won't have to worry about hearing out of any of these junior league nuevo-punk outfits making headlines today. "Dozen On Ice" is a knockout slab of Celibate Rifles styled power crunch. Same goes for "Condition Black" and "Rough Slide Drag". These are all seasoned with a handful of more mellow tracks like "Give It Up" or "Walking" that give you a moment to catch your breath for the next assault. And it all together serves to set you up for the final, fatal impact of the title track... "Outside" is an all out monster; as good a track as Tek has ever written with a dynamite riff that's completely overpowering but stunningly simple. Anybody who can form a bar chord can play this track, but few will get the feel that Tek and his cohorts manage to pull out of it. It's like swimming out in the ocean and seeing the biggest damn wave you ever saw about to break right on top of you and just crush you flat on the rocky bottom. The anti-climax of the acoustic "Sailor's Hymn" sounds like the house music after a great live gig by comparison. You can't afford to miss this one. (PS - early copies come with a 4 track bonus disc that includes alternate versions of "Rough Slide Drag", "Outside", and two others. It's not as essential as the main CD, but still fun to have.)

DENIZ TEK GROUP

Le Bonne Route (Citadel)

Having been completely stunned at how great *Outside* was, I opened this with huge expectations. What I got was a substantial surprise, as this is a considerable change in direction...it's really amazing how different the three Tek solo CDs are from each other...*Take It To The Vertical* being a relatively mellow rock/pop affair, *Outside* being a crunching progression from Radio Birdman, and this one being, well, being quite adventurous. There's a lot of really hard and tough tracks here, but there's a lot of weirdness, too. The bulk of these songs are collaborations between Tek and erstwhile Celibate Rifles guitar great Kent Steedman, and it's clear that some of the kinds of ideas that Kent has used on his side project, Crent, are leaking into the Tek proceedings as well (check out "Away From Here", for example). What that means is that you don't get *Son of Radios Appear*, instead you get something that's quite unlike anything you've heard before. How much you like it depends on how well the experiments connect. For me, some do, some don't. I find the shifts and turns of a song like "Rabbit's Foot" to be entertaining for a few listens, but it feels more like a novelty thing and lacks the staying power of his

best work. More interesting is "Lunatics At The Edge Of The World", especially the intro bit which features an ascending guitar bit over a pummeling tom beat. "Clear Itself" features the kind of dynamics that made "Outside" such a great track, but though it's damn good it doesn't reach quite the same heights. And "Dave's Insanity" has a nifty little bass solo to break up the sections of a pretty hard driving song. It took me quite a few listens to get comfortable with *Le Bonne Route*, and if it had been a release by a band I knew nothing about, I might not have given it a chance. But I find I like it quite a bit after 20 or so plays; it just takes a while to sink in. This record is the most consistently hard hitting and all out rocking of Tek's trio of solo CD releases, but it's unique style will lose some people who are mostly interested in straight ahead Stooges styled rock. It's the price of taking chances, and no one ever accused Tek of standing still.

LOS VIVOS

Do The Snake (No Tomorrow)

This Spanish band does covers of the Replacements ("Kids Don't Follow"), Eddie And The Hot Rods ("Teenage Depression") and Rolling Stones ("Connection"), but it's Radio Birdman that they remind me of with rippling quick tunes influenced by the Stooges but much faster. The vocal performance is more bratty and less intense; like Jeff Dahl rather than Rob Younger. Maybe instead of Radio Birdman it would make more sense to compare them to Teengenerate without the jivey trash production style. The rhythm section is a particular treat with these guys as the bass player sounds like he's on amphetamines, playing scales up and down the fretboard through every song they do and generally lending a real feeling of motion to everything. Guitar solos have that Chuck Berry kind of feel to them. If you're into that Lazy Cowgirls sort of bashing rock and roll, this will be a treat. (APDO 1134, 12080 Castellon, Spain)

WILMER X

Snake Show (EMI)

Name a Swedish band that plays 60s influenced rock and roll and has been around for more than 15 years, releasing over 10 lps in the process. The Nomads, right. Now name another one. How about Wilmer X? They actually were the cover feature for *Noise For Heroes* in 1988, and they still haven't quit. The vagaries of international distribution have made it much harder to track down their releases in the last 6 years, though...it used to be that better indie shops carried Wilmer X lps, but no more. I had left this band for dead after their *Teknikens Under* lp, in which they seemed to

go for a more modern sound with a lot of synthesizers. I bought this 1994 CD on a trip to Scandinavia last summer when I found it in a used bin in Oslo just to see what they were up to, and what a great surprise! It's a terrific return to form. Wilmer X has always had a flair for blending r&b and blues based rock and roll with pop, and here they do it as well as they ever have. Singer Nils Hellberg has a terrific voice that can growl in a way that makes him a dead ringer for Dr. Feelgood's Lee Brilleaux on the more rootsy songs, but he can also smooth it out in a higher register for more pop sounding numbers. Don't look for profound lyrics here; this is Saturday night party music for sure. Wilmer X are more polished and commercial sounding than the Nomads, and certainly don't compete for the same crowd, but this is excellent stuff in its own right.