



These reviews were written for Foster Child #23 in early 1997. Unfortunately, due to various technical difficulties, the fanzine never appeared in print.

BACKSTREET GIRLS

Monster In My Cadillac/Loaded single (Hit Me)

Another band of Norwegians demonstrates that they've figured out how to play this Ramones style rhythm heavy rock and roll. This one has a really satisfying guitar crunch and solid *Rocket To Russia* backbeat, but the vocals are a little too non-descript for this to get the highest possible scores. The flip is more like it, with some Chuck Berry riffing over the top and a vocal that sounds like the singer is into it. (Deichmansgt. 17, N-0178, Oslo, Norway)

THE BASEMENT BRATS

It's All Right/Happy Girl single (Rapid Pulse)

Quite a pleasure to hear Norway's Basement Brats show that Ole Olsen was wrong (see the feature last issue) and that the Brats can still rock with the best of them even without Ole fronting them. Ole was a one in a million singer, while his replacement Egal Pinas is only one in a thousand,

but when the band is kicking posterior as it does on the A-side, that's good enough. The flip is more poppy but still very strong Vacant Lot styled punk pop. Cool. (PO Box 5075, Milford, CT 06460)

BEAT ANGELS

Red Badge Of Discourage (Epiphany)

The second lp from the Beat Angels and I'm still shaking my head in wonder that a band influenced by the New York Dolls glam/trash school of music could come from Phoenix, Arizona. Behind those power chording power pop backing tracks and the cheery lyric delivery lurk sordid tales of down and out desperate youth driven into the sleazy underbelly of city life. The production of this thing is commercial enough to make it on AM radio, but the tunes and lyrics are irresistible even for die hard punk rockers. (1303 W. 21st St., Tempe, AZ 85285)

BLONDIE

Picture This Live (EMI Capitol)

The cover says this is a limited edition, but I bought mine in Price Club, that bastion of quantity sales, and thus I can only assume that it's limited in the sense that they intend to make no more than they can sell. Then the first page of liner notes is a bunch of rubbish telling us how blessed we've been to have EMI around for 100 years; it's a little confusing since in the next breath they tell us they were formed in 1931, but then as anyone owed royalties knows, record execs never have been known for math skills. The rest of the liner notes, which at least can be said to be about the band that is packaged in the CD, were written by someone who was in fifth grade in 1978 and who spends most of his text telling us what life was like for him during Blondie's active years, a time in which by his own admission he was totally unaware of the band. Then he has the nerve to state authoritatively that after the release of *Parallel Lines*, "despite the overnight success, no one cries "sellout"". For those of us who were following the music then and read repeatedly the bitter sellout accusations that the band received from many of their early fans and from rock critics, this statement is so ludicrous that it sounds like some big lie advertising ploy. Why would the guy bother to make a statement like this if he didn't think it really had happened? I may just be a little cranky, but it doesn't seem to me to be too unreasonable to consider the idea of commissioning the job of writing liner notes to someone who actually had been around the band when they played!

Irritating package and liner notes aside, this is a surprisingly strong CD. About half the tracks are from a 1980 show and the rest from 1978, and the feel of each is fairly raw and clubby instead of the sort of bass heavy arena style usually favored on major label live records. In addition, while a good number of the post *Parallel Lines* hits are here, the song selection leans heavily on the first two (and best) albums. The 1980 material is really good, with Debbie Harry singing at her sassy best and the band darning interesting new patches into songs that by then were as familiar as old socks. "Dreaming", which for my tastes was their best song of the post-breakthrough period, just smokes behind Clem Burke's butt-kicking drum work. "X-Offender" also cooks, and for anybody who said that Debbie Harry couldn't sing...well, the woman hits every note dead on and sings with a great range of sex kitten expressiveness. The vocals on the 1978 tracks tend to be distorted, which robs them a bit, and the backing vocals by an uncredited band member on "Denis" are both louder than Harry's lead and so far out of tune to be an embarrassment. For live Blondie I still prefer the bootleg *Live At The Starwood 1978*, but this is better than I'd have ever dreamed for an official release. For those of us who like to think of Blondie as the 60s girl pop/punk group that came out of the CBGBs scene as opposed to the multi-zillion selling new wave hit makers of the time after "Heart Of Glass", this is well worth hearing.

THE BODY ELECTRIC

I Don't Want It (Way Over There)

Charlie Marshall used to head a great Australian band called Harem Scarem that specialized in playing a bluesey style of rock that was pretty special but not likely to appeal to a very broad base of fans. Their "Miracle Mile" single was a minor classic of late 70s Oz rock. Marshall had been pretty quiet for many years, but returned fronting the Body Electric a little while ago. This is the second CD by this outfit in the past couple years, and it appears that Marshall has decided to turn his efforts a little more towards the mainstream in the hopes of being able to sell a few CDs. Not to say we're dealing with a sell out here; just the music is not quite so adventurous as before. This is fairly straight pop rock whose main distinction is Charlie's voice; the one thing he can't get away from...a very rich, soulful, throaty sort of tone that you could pick out of thousands. If it was anybody else singing I probably wouldn't give this the time of day, but Marshall is a guy who is always worth hearing. (PO Box 1167, Carlton 3053 Australia)

JEFF DAHL

Heart Full Of Snot (Triple X)

Jeff Dahl has been a favorite of mine since his *Vomit Wet Kiss* lp back in 1988, and since then he's put out some brilliant albums in the tradition of the Dead Boys and Johnny Thunders, like *Scratch Up Some Action* and the great *Wicked*. So I always have high hopes for his releases, but sadly this one fails. In his press kit Jeff reviles modern punk production values, but his mix here renders what might be some good songs pretty unlistenable. This is especially true in the drums, which are all cymbals, no kick at all and a snare that sounds like an empty oatmeal box being hit with a pencil in the next room. Even Jeff's signature guitar doesn't have its normal bite. A shame. (PO Box 862529, Los Angeles, CA 90086-2529)

DM3

Garage Sale (Citadel)

Not exactly a new CD by this outstanding power pop group (see the feature), *Garage Sale* is a collection of B sides, tracks recorded for compilations, alternate mixes, and instrumentals. As a result, it really isn't a fair indicator of how great this band really is, but on the other hand, it does say something that their non-prime material is this good, too. It's easiest to talk about the covers, since everyone knows them...Dom Mariani has said that Credence Clearwater Revival is his favorite band ever (after which it has to be said that he certainly hasn't tried to mimic them with his own band), so a cover of "Sweet Hitch Hiker" should be no surprise. The DM3 play a rocking version, but the impression of the original is so hard to overcome in my own mind that this go 'round doesn't really take for me. They're more successful with the Plimsoul's "Zero Hour", which they play with a lot more power than the original. Then there's a remake of the Somelove's "Little Town Crier" that's pretty close to the original except maybe a little louder guitars. "Beachline" is a cool one...a slow surf instrumental with that classic twangy guitar, and "The Creeper" is another instrumental that reminds me of Credence doing "Run Through The Jungle". Overall a CD mostly for fans, but one that will get played a lot more than most releases of this sort.

DM3

Dig It The Most (Bomp!)

Let's cut to the chase. This is likely to be the best power pop record you will ever lay hands on in your lifetime. Raspberries, Big Star. Paul Collins

Beat, Plimsouls, Records...great bands all. None are better than Dom Mariani's 3 piece outfit from Freemantle, Australia. And now Bomp has put together the best tracks from the first two Aussie only DM3 CDs, so the US finally gets to hear incredible tracks like "Foolish", "Can't Get What You Want", and "1 Time 2 Times Devastated". Huge guitars, crackling drums, killer harmonies and insanely catchy tunes. Everything that made me first love rock and roll is here and more. Brilliant. (PO Box 7112, Burbank, CA 91510)

EURO BOYS

Jet Age

(Sympathy For The Record Industry)

For anyone thirsting for a different twist on music in this day of total punk rock overdose, Sympathy brings you Norway's Euro Boys, sounding like no one else playing the planet today. Their all instrumental CD consists of 15 tracks, each of which could have been the theme song for a 60s detective movie. The surf oriented concept avoids another of today's ruts by heavy and spirited use of horns, whose staccato blats add a great kick. And there's lots of tasty surf guitar played by guys who can really do it. This could've been really lounge-y sounding, but instead they've pulled off a big coup here.

EVEN

Less Is More

(Rubber Records)

Australia's Even manage a vocal sound that'll remind you of Ziggy-era Bowie, The Kinks and the Beatles all at the same time, but with a rocking musical backdrop that would make Oasis jealous. While there's no question this is power pop, the playing is intense...hard hitting drumming and loud, skillfully placed power chords provide a punishing delivery for this great batch of tunes. These guys have blended 60s pop-psych with 90s values to create something that's simultaneously familiar but fresh sounding. Best new band I've heard out of Australia this year. (59 Victoria Ave., Albert Park, 3206, Australia)

THE GAZA STRIPPERS

Transistor/Stinger 7" single

(Bam Bam)

Rick Sims (ex-Didjits) steps out with a new band. No big change...Sims has always had a knack for playing guitar riffs that could strip the chrome off a Harley, and he doesn't let that talent go to waste here. Lyrically the guy is a certified nut...there's no knowing what these songs are about. But if you're a sucker for rampaging, hook happy power chords and razor sharp production, line up here. (3338 N. Oakley, Chicago, IL 60618)

THE GEE STRINGS

The Gee Strings

(High Society)

This German group inspired me to dig out my Avengers lp for another spin; the singer is a dead ringer for Penelope Houston, and the band behind her plays a powerhouse brand of late 70s styled punk rock. The band makes great tunes even better by well chosen bits of guitar frosting and lots of shout-along backing vocals. The only down side is that the lyrics, while sung in English, seem to have been written by someone who barely knows the language, so the message fails to match the urgency and punch of the medium. If they did, this would be one for the ages; as it is, it's still one of the best punk records I've heard this year. (Ehrenbergstr. 51, D-22767 Hamburg, Germany)

HUNDRED MILLION MARTIANS

Martian Arts

(Hiljaiset Levyt Records)

Besides being an all-round good guy, Hiljaiset Levyt label boss Jukka Juntilla also has a knack for digging up some of the best bands Finland has to offer, and without being bound to any one style. This outfit plays Mega City Four styled punk/pop without the overproduction that plagued a lot of records by that UK band. The ace track "A Perfect Pop Song" from this CD pretty damn near lives up to its title...3 minutes of irresistibly catchy tunefulness and one of the best songs you'll hear all year. And there's no lack on 13 other tracks...they're all bursting with melody, harmony and energy, yet they have an original feel to them that most of the US punk pop bands seem to have missed. "Misery For Misery's Sake" busts things open at the start with crunching guitar, great snotty vocals and soaring harmony parts. "Brighter Days" is two and a half minutes of infectious good time punk pop bliss, and "I Wanna Hate You" makes me think of an amped up version of the Soft Boys "I Wanna Destroy You". This seemed a little lightweight the first time I played it, but now I can't stop. (PO Box 211, FL-33201 Tampere, Finland)

ICE CREAM HANDS

Memory Lane Traffic Jam

(Not Lame)

In my book, Adelaide band The Mad Turks were one of the finest power pop bands ever to grace this earth. Their "Temper's Fire" is every bit a match for classics like The Plimsoul's "Million Miles Away", and they had several others as good. The Turks are gone now, but key members Charles Jenkins and Dom Larizza carry on with the Ice Cream Hands making more of the same tasty pop songs. This is their second full length lp, and the first to be released in the US. One listen to the

opening "Is It Your Electric Chair" with its dizzying key changes ought to quickly rope you in; theirs is a brand of power pop that is low on sugar glaze but instead satisfies with strong harmonies, clever lyric phrases, well built tunes and punchy playing. The band is rocking much more than they did on the understated debut CD *Traveling Made Easy*, and this CD is pretty much a match for any Mad Turks CD as a result. Sadly, Dom has apparently left the band just recently. (PO Box 9756, Denver, CO 80209)

JOHNNY DOLE AND THE SCABS

Scab Animal

(Brain Salad Surgery)

Other than 3 tracks on the impossible to find Aberrant compilation *Why March When You Can Riot?* (now itself reissued and reviewed elsewhere on these pages), until now this late 70s Sydney punk band hasn't had anything on record for the masses to consume. But given the craze for genuine artifacts of the punk heyday, someone finally got the thought that this collection would be a welcome addition. Johnny Dole and the Scabs played around the same time as Radio Birdman, but their style is much closer to that of the b-grade yobbish London punk bands like the Nosebleeds or some of the groups on the UK Raw label. The sound quality of this isn't great; about 8 of the songs were recorded at an 8 track studio, but the masters were lost and the source tape used for this CD was a cassette copy that leaves a fairly flat sound. The other songs are substantially worse audience tapes of live gigs, both in sound quality and in performance. For my money only the studio stuff is worth listening to, and the best cuts are clearly the three that Aberrant chose for their comp. "Living Like An Animal" and "Psychoanalyst" are very good and stand up to Brits like the Drones or like the Members first recording "Fear On The Streets" from the Beggars Banquet *Streets* compilation, where any of the Johnny Dole studio tracks would have fit comfortably. "Stuff Your Rules" is pretty much punk-by-numbers stuff. Of the songs I hadn't heard, "Aggro" is the best...it's slower and gives more room for some interesting guitar riffs to help things out. Fans of first generation obscure punk bands will enjoy this quite a bit, but others probably ought to steer clear. (PO Box Q378, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney, NSW 2001)

LA PESTE

La Peste

(Matador)

Well, they certainly are getting their mileage out of the lp artwork! Boston's La Peste only had one single while they were active, and they made it

count...the single "Better Off Dead" was a classic piece of late 70s punk rock. The band split shortly afterwards and lead singer/guitarist Peter Dayton made a dreadful solo pop mini-lp before dropping out of sight. Sometime in the mid 80s, a vinyl lp of a live La Peste radio show got released with the same sleeve as the single. It's a real find, and their song "Radio Moscow" is a killer from that record. Now Matador has released a CD...same sleeve design again...but it has a mix of studio and live stuff from a different gig. The good news is that the studio tracks include both sides of the single and some other studio cuts that to my knowledge haven't see release before. The not so good news is that it doesn't include "Radio Moscow", which is their second best song. There are multiple version of several songs, but most of the cuts aren't on the vinyl record. The band's preoccupation with death seems a little contrived, especially with Dayton yelling the song titles "Kill Me Now" and "Don't Wanna Die In My Sleep Tonight" in an overly dramatic style. If you haven't heard La Peste before, the band seems to straddle a line between Talking Heads/XTC styled new wave (from the early days of those bands) and Richard Hell styled punk. In general, the playing and production aren't enough to push most of this into the league of the single (or the vinyl record), but for a first sample of the group it's worth searching this out; it's the only recording of theirs you'll have much chance to find, I suspect.

MARTIN LUTHER LENNON

Music For A World Without Limitations

(Not Lame)

I guess this one's been out a little while, but hey, we can't all be trendy hipsters making the scene. Anyway, MLL is basically Tony Perkins and a group of friends on loan part time from other LA bands. As a group, they've managed a CD of really fine power pop tunes here, and about half of them hit harder than the dentist's drill on your average root canal. Catchy is hardly adequate to describe a song like "Gun Heaven", a two minute wonder ("It's raining buckshot and beer") that blasts along with power and guts. "Nobody I Know" is more of a mid tempo track, but it also has a powerhouse hook. And for those really into firearms, it doesn't stop with "Gun Heaven", there's the rocking opener "Kill Kill Kill" and then the great "Brenda Revisited" with the catchline "I'm a killer, but I'm all right / I'm looking for something to do / There's a gun on the wall that always reminds me of you". The only problem with this is that as good as the good songs are - and the greats are really terrific - the handful of filler is really bad. For example, "I'm Just An Elephant" sounds like a Sesame Street reject...it's the sort of thing a 7 year

old would sing along to in front of the TV. Fortunately, out of 12 songs, only two really take that kind of dive and the rest are so fine that they can be forgiven.

MATERIAL ISSUE

Telecommando Americano (Rykodisc)

What a major loss for power pop fans everywhere to hear that Jim Ellison of Material Issue committed suicide in the summer of 1996! I never felt that Material Issue made the best individual power pop songs in the world, but their albums have always been consistently solid; the sort of thing you could listen to over and over again and always enjoy it. The band's strong suit throughout their career has been Ellison's vocals...a classic power pop voice (sort of Cheap Trick-ish) that displays all the vulnerability needed for the material without ever sounding wimpy. The band has generally gotten credit for writing really catchy songs, but my own belief is that this is actually where they fall short...the songs aren't really that good but Ellison brings everything possible out of them. But this CD, which was half done when Ellison died and was finished by his bandmates later, is as good as anything they've done. "What If I Killed Your Boyfriend" is an unusually aggressive approach to the classic power pop problem, namely: *how do I get the girl?* "You Were Beautiful" has a really nice wistful vocal that seems even more poignant knowing that the singer is gone. "Our Daughter" is the best and most crunching rocker on the disc, although "Head Shop" is close to matching it. As a bonus you get all 6 tracks from their debut 1987 ep, and oddly enough, they feel just like their last songs.

MILLENCOLIN

For Monkeys (Epitaph)

From Orebro in the center of Sweden, these guys play the Green Day punk/pop thing as though they were born in Berkeley. And their English is better than that of most Americans, so don't worry about understanding the words. Their opening "Puzzle" reminds me of NOFX's "Please Play This Song On The Radio" with its lyrics about trying to write songs and its high velocity tune. I usually find this style of punk to lack staying power, and although this isn't a huge exception I've got to say that Millencolin have strong tunes and they play them with a hard punch. And it's such a relief to hear a punk band sing about something other than getting drunk these days that even though the lyrics here are pretty mundane, the good time cheer with which they sing has me won over. (2798 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90026)

NEW RACE

The First And The Last (reissue) (Total Energy)

In February of 1981, a couple years after Radio Birdman broke up, Deniz Tek played in Australia again as part of the Angie Pepper band. Angie, who was to become Tek's wife, had let Rob Younger know about their plans, and Rob started trying to figure out a way to get a tour together that could be used to promote the release of the second Radio Birdman lp, *Living Eyes*, which finally was to be released almost four years after its recording. After some discussions with Tek, the two of them pulled together a band with ex-Birdman bassist Warwick Gilbert, Stooges guitar player Ron Asheton, and MC5 drummer Dennis Thompson. They toured Australia under the name New Race, playing songs by Radio Birdman, the Stooges, the MC5, and Tek's post-Birdman band, the Visitors. The resulting live lp *The First And The Last* was originally released in 1982 and reissued again by Citadel a couple years later, but never came out in the US. This release changes that, and adds two new cuts, a pretty fair version of the Stooges "Loose" and, very strangely, the studio Radio Birdman take of "Descent Into The Maelstrom" from *Radios Appear*. New Race played in a somewhat heavier, more hard rock style than Radio Birdman did, and Rob Younger's vocals are much closer to his full throated New Christs style of singing than the way he sang for the Birdmen. I never cared that much for Asheton's metally solos, but other than that this is a powerhouse set of Detroit metal at its best and the album is a classic for sure. My one complaint is that the artwork is just awful; Radio Birdman always were very careful about controlling the imagery of the band, and this carried into New Race as well. The cover art here is totally at odds with this style and looks ridiculous.

THE NORMA JEANS

Natural Blonde Killers (High Society International)

This German band plays a stomping fun brand of energetic pogo punk. Excellent covers of The Saints "Erotic Neurotic" and Dead Boys "What Love Is" give a clue where things are heading, but the band adds their own personal touch with a unique drumming style (the kick double timing it with a steady thump-thump-thump through every track) and tag team who-cares-if-we're-in-tune vocals. If this had come out in 1977, people would pay \$75 for a copy of it today. You are more fortunate than that. (Ehrenbergstrasse 51, D-22767, Hamburg, Germany)

PRAY TV

Westona

(The Hypnotized Label)

Another of Australia's hidden secrets, Pray TV have been around since the late 80s and have only a handful of lps and singles to show for it. But they've made the most of their opportunities; their recordings have been wonderful without exception, weaving dense and powerful trance-like guitar and occasional keyboards around Aidan Halloran's tired and dusky vocals. Most of their songs sound huge and forceful without going beyond mid-tempo; the key to their strength is careful songwriting and solid execution. *Westona* is no exception; there's not a song on here that doesn't find a solid foothold after a few spins. The tunes are almost all classic loser songs; losers at love, at bands, at work, at gambling...this band is on a perpetual downer lyrically, but they do a fine job of it. "Let It Go" is a great example...the singer talking to a past woman friend who years back chose to marry a banker ("I gave a glance, you gave a frozen shoulder") and now her looks are gone, and the baby is screaming, and "was there any other way"? But even if you aren't bottom feeding for a sad story put to music, Pray TV's skill at putting together songs with great dynamics will land you quick as a trout straight out of the hatchery. Almost without exception, these tunes build from restrained verses to huge anthemic choruses with walls of Husker Du styled guitar or keyboard flourishes and then ebb back down again for the next verse.

THE SAINTS

(I'm) Stranded (reissue)

Eternally Yours (reissue)

Amsterdamned

I tell you, it's enough to make you believe in conspiracy theories, the fact that these first two Saints albums have not been reissued in the US until now. I mean, let's get real, here. We're not talking chopped liver, we're talking about two of the greatest punk rock records of all time. Pick ten records you have to have to survive. Two of them have *got* to be these. *(I'm) Stranded* came first...the primal roar from Brisbane by a band that mutated out of seemingly *nothing* to become a southern hemispheric force of equal fury and value to the American Ramones and British Sex Pistols. What in that torrid city could have been the cause of this? We'll never know. But this lp, which was one of the very first punk rock records released anywhere in the world, contains a pile of songs whose intensity doesn't dim with age. People called them crude and raw then, but the magic of this record is the mixture of subtlety with bludgeoning. It seemed so easy to dismiss this

stuff as basic three chord rock, but those who did weren't listening, didn't get it, and deserve the oblivion they got instead. The way Ed Kuepper makes those chords work for him, with brilliant changes that form these unforgettable hooks...well, there just aren't many bands that have been able to do this, ever. And let me tell you, these guys could write a lyric about being frustrated and shoved aside. Count the classics up...the title track - one of the great songs of alienation ever. "One Way Street" with a drum break of barbaric force and Chris Bailey's dust-dry vocals ("there's too many creeps that are hungry for your blood, yes they are!"). The fabulous slowdown to "Story Of Love" followed by more ferocity in "Demolition Girl", and finally the epic "Nights In Venice" featuring a monstrous building outro bit that keeps rising until you feel like your head is going to explode. There's not a slouch song in between these, either, but these five are something special; the kind of songs that you'd be incredulous to hear just *one* of from any other band. But the Saints give you *five* on one debut record. And for this reissue, you get two songs that were single B-sides, "Lipstick On Your Collar" (a bit of a throwaway, actually) and a strong, punked up version of Ike and Tina Turner's "River Deep Mountain High".

The first album was recorded in Brisbane, but the Aussies weren't ready for the Saints and their record company figured they'd fit in better in the UK. That didn't really prove to be the case, as the Brits were feeling like they were the only people who could play punk and weren't open minded enough to listen to the Saints take on the form. And for their part, the Saints didn't really feel like they had anything to do with the spitting, spikey haired punters in the London pubs, either. *Eternally Yours* was thus recorded in London, and while it isn't praised as highly or as regularly as the first album, it's actually almost every bit as good. The classics here start with "Know Your Product", without a doubt the best punk rock song ever to use horns (nothing else comes close) and a track that is absolutely driven by a killer walking bass line. "Lost and Found" is another alienation special. "This Perfect Day" is yet another example of Kuepper's brilliant guitar playing...simple riffs played with a feeling that you'll never get from a really having that feeling and not from any lifetime of formal training. And Bailey's line "I don't need no one to tell me what I don't already know" is sung with such negative conviction that it seems to have the word *no* appearing in every other syllable. "Untitled" is this album's equivalent to "Story Of Love" and doesn't concede an inch. Finally, "(I'm) Misunderstood" is a brilliant reprise to "(I'm)

Stranded"...another slab of guitar mania driven by one of the most propulsive base lines you'll ever hear. The bonus here is the rather goofy "Do The Robot", which never the less has a strong guitar line running through it.

I always hate it when other people my age start talking about the old bands they used to listen to and romanticize how much better it was "back then". But goddammit, when the Saints were on the stereo it WAS better then, and it's better now, too. I'm gonna play these things until they burn up and the cops come take me away.

THE SAINTS

Howling

(Amsterdamned)

It's been quite a long time since the last album Chris Bailey released with the Saints name on it. Not that he hasn't been doing anything under his own name, and given that there has been little difference between a Saints album and a Chris Bailey solo album since Ed Kuepper went off on his own after *Prehistoric Sounds*, this one is more of a continuation of the style Bailey has been using for over 10 years now. At first listen you may be deceived into thinking differently, since the CD opens with two out of character tracks. The title cut has a creeping pace but a harsh instrumental backing to go with distorted vocals, and then on "Shadows" Bailey delivers one of the worst vocal performances I've ever heard from him, seemingly missing notes all over the place. It's a total surprise coming from him, since if there's one thing you can say about Bailey it's that he possesses one of the most expressive voices of all the former punk singers still going. There are a handful of other songs on this one that are a little more raw and have a little more edge than things he's done in a while, like the rocking "You Know I Know", which with a more punk styled guitar could've fit in on *Eternally Yours*. But after many listens, these few different tracks become less prominent and the lasting impression is a lot more of similarity to the best post-Kuepper Saints album, *All Fools Day*. Over half the tracks on *Howling* are slow to moderate tempo songs with good pop-rock tunes and strong singing. This is a record that has to be enjoyed independently of any longing for the Saints of the first two albums, and taken that way it's a really strong effort.

SPLATTERHEADS

Joined At The Head

(Subway)

The Splatterheads have been going for about 8 years now and are still hardly known even within their home country of Australia. They had to go to

Germany to get this CD released. It's a damned shame, since they have come closer to perfecting what fellow Oz bands Bored, Hoss, God, Asteroid B-612 or the Powdermonkeys have tried to do than any of them. Passionate, smokey vocals ride over a heavy power rock backing that somehow avoids that grunge metal feel (occasionally running the speed up to hardcore tempos). On slower songs they could be said to sound like Nirvana, but when they crank it up (as they often do) for a track like "Shaken (Trouser Soup)", their own feel comes through strong. The opening "Tired" has a great driving bass part that bursts into loud chords at the end of each line of vocals. "Crunchy Bananas" will take you into the mosh pit and thrash you severely. "Mine Field" and "Apes In A Cage" make you wonder why Sub Pop hasn't signed up this band. A mixed batch, but really well done.

THE STRIKE

A Conscience Left To Struggle With Pockets Full Of Rust

(Johanns Face)

Got this based on a recommendation from Jack Rabad of the Big Takeover, and I owe him a pretty big favor now, because this is the sort of thing I absolutely flip for. What these guys have is what Stiff Little Fingers had on their first two albums, what the Newtown Neurotics had, and what Leatherface had on their *Mush* album. It's fabulous political punk rock, with incredibly catchy anthemic tunes and smart lyrics. Just check out "Kicking Ass" with its sing-along catch phrase "She's kicking ass for the working classes / All you scabs better get out fast"...sounds like an ode to Mother Jones, the rabble rousing woman unionizer of the turn of the century. And there's lots of ringing call-to-action guitar, like in "Never Break" or "Win Or Lose", which recalls nothing more than SLF's "Tin Soldiers". Like SLF, they aren't afraid to drop the seriousness for a party song...instead of "Barbed Wire Love" we get their girl group friends doing a cool boy trouble song called "You Can Forget It". And they spice the proceedings with a couple of nice reggae tracks (a cover of Peter Tosh's "Downpresser Man" and their own "Victoria") just like the Clash or SLF would've done. Finally, to complete the circle, they've become probably the first band since the Clash to do a song about the Spanish Civil War. People can say all they want about naïve kids playing in political punk bands, but I bet there are many congressman who know less about the very real events these guys are singing about. And for those who say that a song never changed anything, all I can say is that you might as well say that a raindrop never caused a flood. It may be unfashionable as hell, but these guys wear class consciousness on their

sleeves like no one I've heard in the US in years and they've got at least one fan for life here.

THE SUICIDE COMMANDOS

Make A Record (reissue) (Mercury)

Having never been to Minneapolis, I can't really say how much impact this band had when they were active back in 1978, but if this reissue CD is any evidence it would be no surprise if all the great bands that came out of that city in the 80s owe everything to them. What baffles me is that long ago I bought the original of this on vinyl and wasn't impressed, but now on CD the Commandos have blown me away completely with a batch of irresistible punk/new wave songs played at such an energy level and with such obvious ability that I can't fathom how I could have overlooked them before. Me and 270 million other Americans, I guess.

SUNNYBOYS

Play The Best (Mushroom)

I've been listening to Sunnyboys records for years now; not so much because I like them myself, but because other people whose tastes I trust keep telling me that they were a great band. And while I'm still not ready to put them in the Australian pantheon of all time heroes, I'm starting to understand a little of it. When I bought this collection of their best tracks I figured if this didn't do it, nothing would. The Sunnyboys always felt a little stiff to me; their songs don't particularly swing even when they rock, and there's always a feel of awkwardness to everything they do; guitar, vocals, and rhythm section all seem to be holding back all the time as if they are too uptight to really cut it loose. But I've come to enjoy a lot of these songs anyway; there's something in the Sunnyboys' sort of unpretentious new wave pop that eventually finds a hold. Most of these songs were recorded between 1980 and 1985, a time when you either played hardcore thrash or synth pop. Too early for the late 80s Aussie explosion, the Sunnyboys played neither; their songs are mostly mid tempo guitar rock with occasional keyboards. If you've got the time for a CD to grow on you, this could be for you.

VARIOUS

Go And Do It - The Aberrant Compilations (Small Axe)

One of the great small labels of the 80s was Australia's Aberrant Records, releasing brilliant records (sometimes in quantities of only a few hundred copies) by feedtime, Positive Hatred, Examplehead and World War XXIV to name just a

few. Aberrant began their existence by releasing three compilation lps documenting Aussie punk bands from 1977 to 1985...*Flowers From The Dustbin*, *Not So Humdrum*, and *Why March When You Can Riot?* To this day, I regard them as perhaps the most interesting and well conceived compilation lps I've ever heard, as they included the only recorded songs by several dozen bands that form the critical link between the Radio Birdman fueled scene of late 70s Sydney and the well documented mid 80s Aussie explosion. This two CD set includes all three lps plus a few more tracks from a 7" ep that was released with the *Trousers In Action* fanzine that label head Bruce Griffiths used to write. No fan of Oz rock should be without it. There's minimalist blasts of feedtime and X, Clash inspired punk from Positive Hatred and The Kelpies, the first recordings by the great Happy Hate Me Nots, a more 80s hardcore punk sound from World War XXIV, the Hard-Ons, Rocks and Exserts, and lots of other styles that defy labels. Recording quality is less than pristine but not bad, either...about what you'd have to expect for a bunch of independently produced recordings from the early 80s, but in this case it only adds to the authentic feel of the whole thing. And the band performances are almost without exception inspired. These are groups that were all very capable and well proven live (or Griffiths wouldn't have picked them), but most had very few chances to get into the studio to record, and their intense approach to their big chance shows clearly. Griffiths told me in a 1988 interview that to him Aberrant meant "not what is expected", and that certainly applies here; there's a batch of different styles, yet the songs go together like they were meant to. Which, of course, they were. You rarely get a second chance in this life; don't miss this one. (PO Box A2155, Sydney South 2000, Australia)