



MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL REVIEWS #518

JULY 2026

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MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

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This issue contains 82 reviews, contributed by:

Jake Joyce
Mama Goblin
Romain Basset
Jason Harding
Sir Bobos
Biff Bifaro
Willis Schenk
Robert Collins
Tony Party
Seth McBurney
Erika Elizabeth
João Seixas
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THE COUNTERFORCE

This zine digest was compiled and laid out by The Counterforce.

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Print It Yourself.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Belly Button / Pang Pang

WATER HEATER – Weaponless Attack High Explosive Anti-Tank cassette

Debut full-length cassette from this project out of Indonesia, and when I say full-length, you better believe I mean it. At 50 tracks and roughly an hour-and-a-half in duration, WATER HEATER seems to have thrown everything, including the kitchen sink into this release. WATER HEATER has been releasing digital singles and EPs since 2023, and I believe this is their first physical release, though I can't say that with complete certainty. What I can say for certain is that this is a legitimately cool and energetic post-punk, new wave, and egg-punk amalgamation. The tape begins with a synth-heavy noise track featuring spoken-word instructions on how to replace your water heater. Whether gas or electric, and even tankless options, WATER HEATER makes sure everyone knows the correct and safe way to install this major household appliance. As a bit of a home repair enthusiast, I would have given this tape a thumbs up if that had been the only track. Lo and behold, that was just the beginning of a very long journey. If this tape were roughly one-third as long, I'd be willing to bet that multiple labels, myself included, would be clamoring to put out the next release from this wildly versatile band. With the amount of genre-hopping that WATER HEATER eventually devolves into on this cassette, it only furthers my belief that this really should have been split into multiple different releases. From where we began, we end up veering into lo-fi synth-pop for a number of tracks, then warbly garage rock, before ultimately ending with about a dozen tracks of outright avant-garde nonsense. While it's never great to be in a position where your water heater is too small and runs out while you're in the shower, it does at least leave you wanting more, which is something you're unlikely to be feeling after track 50 fades out.

Reviewer: Bliff Bifaro
Label: XTRO

WHITE TRASH – Wake Up EP + Hell No Demo LP

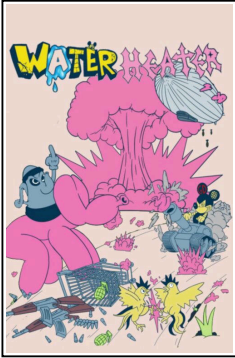
Originally reviewed by Tim himself in 1982's *MRR* #3, WHITE TRASH's *Wake Up* EP is back in a brand new edition. This archival release comes to us courtesy of the Spanish BCore label, and also includes the band's original *Hell No* demo tape tacked on for a total of sixteen old school tracks. The sound is original nascent hardcore, complete with adolescent musicianship, rebellious spirit, and crude humor. It was noted as a "classic" back then, but seems far less so today, due largely to the deluge of certified bangers that have followed it over the decades. But you can still see how this was probably pretty cool at the time and it's certainly a time capsule carrying the energy of the era. What can I say—*Leave it to Beaver* references just don't hit the same in 2026.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: BCore / Hyperpyncal

WITHOUT EMPATHY – Lesser Beings cassette

Listen, all I gotta say is this: If you're gonna go ahead and kick your record off with a WOODY GUTHRIE sample, then you best be jumping directly into a cover song immediately following it, especially if you're a band from Oklahoma! I'd even give you a pass and let you bust out a harmonica solo!! Anyway, this is pretty much your standard grind/powerviolence affair—the exact type of grind/powerviolence band you picture whenever anyone mentions that genre pairing. Decent enough. Drums sound great.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Cult Love



WORLD I HATE – Total Nuclear Annihilation LP

A furious soundtrack for late-stage capitalism's funeral procession, WORLD I HATE delivers exactly what the title promises: twelve tracks of scorched-earth hardcore. Harshly bleak and confrontational. Keith Caves' artwork matches the record's worldview perfectly. Metallic hardcore and modern powerviolence are the cards that they have up their sleeves. The relentless pace and short song lengths evoke WEEKEND NACHOS and INFEST, while the crushing mid-tempo sections recall TRAP THEM and early HARM'S WAY. There are also traces of the suffocating atmosphere and social paranoia found in bands like CURSED. Tracks like "Disappeared," "Than Zero," and the title track channel rage at state violence, economic exploitation, and social decay into compact bursts rarely exceeding two minutes. Weaponized anger!

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Convulse

ZEMĚŽLUČ – Všeho Do Času LP

For 40 years, Czechia's ZEMĚŽLUČ has been chucking out sing-along punk, and this batch of tunes continues with the unyielding punk and hardcore pace that they set in 1986. *Všeho Do Času* is another relentless blast of kinetic punk, building with uneasiness and leaving you twitching just waiting for that lightning strike. The songs could be passed off as "standard" musically, but it is in the urgency and deliberate tone that Sotý delivers each line that pulls you forward through the fourteen songs. I can't wait to see what the next 40 years bring for these people.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Papagájův Hlasatel

ZORN – Return to Castle Death LP

Philadelphia's ZORN has steadily improved and found their proper footing since their inception, becoming something of an esteemed band with an identity of its own. I could not quite get into their previous recordings, but *Return to Castle Death* is a definite win. The members are not just experts at painting their faces or dressing up; they are actually brilliant musicians too, with a flair for writing cracking metal punk songs for heathens and medieval cosplayers alike. I enjoy that they firmly build on the old school metal punk influences but still offer something different that can appeal to many chapels. Classic bands like GISM, ZOÜO, and other Japanese metallic punk acts, early diabolical legends like VENOM or BATHORY, and of course their neighbours DEVIL MASTER all got invites on this brand new album. ZORN is a band I would love to see pair up with RIGOROUS INSTITUTION, as both share a passion for the catchy hook (the detail that makes a fine song into a good song) and each have their own identity. There seems to be a revival of old school metal punk, and I really cannot complain when it is inspired and done that well.

Reviewer: Romain Bassot
Label: Sorry State

ŠANOV 1 – Konec Světa LP reissue

If you're a fan of the pure punk sound, then nothing beats the bands that come out of Eastern Europe. I don't know if it's a direct result of generational dictatorial trauma, but there's a palpable dystopian darkness that oozes from each and every act. Granted, I usually have no idea what they're singing about, but the angst is so thick you can cut it with a pocket knife. ŠANOV 1 incorporates a Gothic-flavored Oi! style that sounds like it came straight from the '80s—instruments chock-full of reverb and biting, snotty vocals. Really solid stuff here, I'm just confused why Papagájův Hlasatel doesn't give me the option to buy any of their albums on Bandcamp!

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Papagájův Hlasatel



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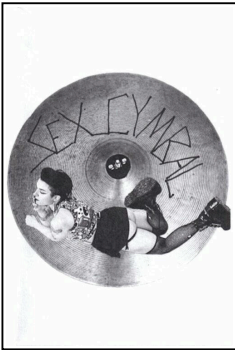
RADIO STATIONS

- **CJSF**, 90.1FM in Burnaby, BC, Canada Fridays at 5:00 am and Wednesday nights (Thursday morning) at 1:00 am
- **CKDU**, 88.1 FM in Halifax, NS, Canada Sundays at 3:00 am
- **Free Radio Santa Cruz**, 101.3 FM in Santa Cruz, CA Mondays at 1:30 pm and Fridays 10:00 am – noon
- **Freies Sender Kombinat (FSK)**, 93.0 FM / 101.4 Cable in Hamburg, Germany and streamed online Monday nights (Tuesday morning) at 12:00 am
- **KBGA-FM**, 89.9 FM in Missoula, MT Fridays at 11:00 pm
- **KCSB-FM**, 91.9 FM in Santa Barbara, CA Fridays at 5:00 am
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- **KBOG**, 97.9 FM in Bandon, OR Saturday nights (Sunday morning) at 1:00 am
- **KKFC**, 88.1FM from Merced to Delano Monday at 1:00 am and streamed online
- **KRAK-FM**, 91.3 in Kansas City Thursday at 10:00 pm and streamed online
- **Política y Rockanroll Radio**, 106.7 FM in Sonora, Mexico Wednesday at 11:00pm (Pacific and Mountain Time)
- **Radio Almaina**, 107.1 FM in Granada, Spain Mondays at 11:00 pm and Thursdays at 3:00 am
- **Radio Blau**, 99.2 FM in Leipzig, Germany and streamed online Friday at 11:00 pm (CET)
- **Radio Mutation** Garage Punk Pirate Radio Podcast Network
- **Radio Valencia** Sunday nights (Monday morning) at 2:00 am
- **Resonance Extra** via DAB+ in the UK to Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, London and Norwich, and worldwide online Wednesdays at 1:00 am BST/GMT
- **Space FM**, 101.1 in Seattle, WA Friday nights at 10:00pm
- **UMFM (CJUM)**, 101.5 FM in Winnipeg, MB, Canada Fridays at 6:30 am (Good morning, Winnipeg!)

3 THE HARDWAY – Sex Cymbal cassette

Solid three-song EP here. This has a real '90s vibe and will take you back in time to when riot grrrl was queen. *Sex Cymbal* hits all the sweet spots of lo-fi and noise, and at times reminds me of the classic acts such as GOD IS MY CO-PILOT and AIDS WOLF. There's a bit of a rock'n'roll edge here, but it's paired with a slow, sludgy cadence. It really felt like the rest of the world was melting around me. Perfect for those hot and heavy summer days which are bound to be fruitful in our current hellscapes. Bonus points for having a singing drummer—I've always loved that combo! Give this a couple plays and melt with me.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Fogman Detroit / Remove



ABRICHTEN – Aufheben cassette

ABRICHTEN find themselves a middle ground between the atmosphere of early doom metal and expressiveness of noise rock with their new release *Aufheben*. With its (relatively) lengthy songs and slow-burn approach, it definitely has its own intense ambience...yet it feels a bit too drawn-out at times. It is a bit outside of my taste for noise rock, but it is well-produced for sure.

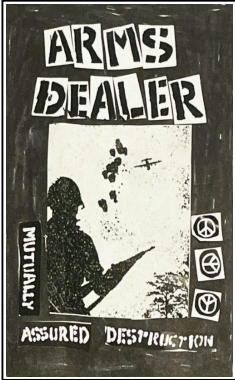
Reviewer: Mama Goblin
Label: It's Eleven



ARMS DEALER – Mutually Assured Destruction cassette

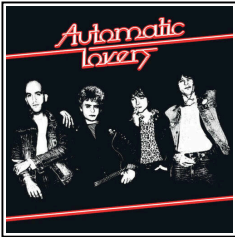
This tape looks great. Totally homemade cut'n'paste cover with about as much artistic craft as a six-year-old. Love it, and the music is on par with the visuals: four songs and four minutes of punk chaos for people who like their "music" raw, juvenile and to-the-point. Primitive D-beat hardcore with no production value but a lot of energy. AD'NAUSEAM traveling in Sweden and Japan, maybe? I understand members of ARMS DEALER also play in a band called BEER PISS, if that can give you any indication. These kids are from Athens, Georgia, and the tape is released on Hard Tack, a local tape label supporting the local scene. Not exactly Emmy Award quality, but good enough to drink yourself silly on a Friday night.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Hard Tack



AUTOMATIC LOVERS – Automatic Lovers LP

AUTOMATIC LOVERS deliver a juicy blend of attitude and energy that's become increasingly absent from speakers in recent decades. These spunky Spaniards achieve their searing and stripped-down sound the same way '90s trash rockers like the HUMBERS and the DEVIL DOGS did—by setting their sights on '70s punk'n'roll in the vein of the VIBRATORS and the HEARTBREAKERS. Pure, authentic, and sweat-soaked fun ensues. But even with its two choice cover songs hammering home the band's motivation, this debut album is not merely a procession of typical, however well done, rock stereotypes. Garage turkeys are sure to recognize some of these riffs, but not all of 'em. At least not immediately. Well-crafted tunes like "WGTEYEO" and "Twist and Die" move the group's inspiration into cool new places, continuing the tradition instead of just dressing up in it. Factor in the traces of *Scene Killer*—era CAR-BONAS and what are probably the most blazing guitar solos we've heard in 2026, and you've got a smoking hot recipe for success. It's an automatic thumbs-up over here.



Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: FOLC / Wap Shoo Wap

BANANA CLIP – Banana Clip cassette

This tape opens with a sound clip from Hanoi Hannah, the North Vietnamese radio broadcaster who famously used psychological warfare against American G.I.s during the Vietnam War. From there, you are subjected to BANANA CLIP's own version of psychological warfare via an onslaught of blastbeats, crusty grind-core riffage, and savage political imagery. There is a rawness to the recording that I really dug, and I think that it supports the nature of the songs. The highlight for me is "Politically Unhoused," which is also a great song title. In under two minutes, they manage to combine death metal vocals, nasty chugging breakdowns, and blistering hardcore drums. It's kind of all over the place musically, but I think that's the charm. For a trio, they do some damage. I'd recommend this to anyone looking for noisy, dissonant, and politically-charged grind.

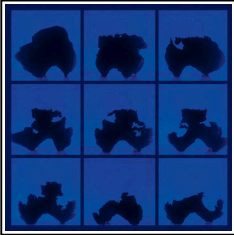
Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Pretty Good



BIRTH (DEFECTS) – Fictional Days LP

Hell yeah—nice and sludgy, noisy as hell, and chorus pedals completely maxed out. Is it passé to make *Spinal Tap* references in the year of our lord 2026? Because if not, these guys bring it all the way up to eleven. This needs to be listened to as loud as possible. My one and only complaint: the vocals do not match the energy of the music. Now, I'm not naive enough to think that this wasn't done intentionally, but when your band is playing music equivalent to the MELVINS on mescaline, I think it does it all a great disservice when your vocalist sounds like a mopier version of BECK. There are a couple tracks where the singer comes a bit more out of the pocket, like on the song "Scapegoat," sounding a bit more like a poppier LARRY LIFELESS than your standard '90s rock radio idol. Speaking of which, there are a handful of covers on this slab from bands like NIRVANA and SONIC YOUTH. Fun album if you like the heavier stuff. Worth a spin.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Expert Work / Reptilian



BLANKET OF M / DEAD DON'T LIE – Mayhem & Madness split CD

Short, sharp punk bursts from BLANKET OF M, absolutely classic sounds that land somewhere between MISFITS, the SPITS, and rough '90s punk with layers of hopelessly catchy vocals. DEAD DON'T DIE are less appealing to these ears, kinda like your awkward uncle's horror punk band except this shit is sloppier and the attempt at vocal croons makes me cringe. I gave up after the line "Maybe I'll get a sloppy blowjob" in the second track ("Serial Killer"), and I backed up to listen to BLANKET OF M again.

Reviewer: Robert Collins
Label: Rejected Youth



close to or over three minutes. I think this could have been a top-of-the-charts summer banger if the songs would have been capped at two to two-and-a-half minutes each. However, by the end of the third time through *The Furious Hours*, I am more in tune with where they are going in terms of setting up the longer-structured songs and giving the melody time to sink in. Maybe somewhere in the middle would be best? I guess I'm the jerk here (shrug emoji).

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Rotten Princess

THE LAST RESPONDERS – The Last Responders LP

THE LAST RESPONDERS' LP comes in heavy with shouted, anthemic street punk choruses and pivots directly to a devilish little mid-tempo, upbeat ska punk tune about the daily rat race of the working week. This is pretty straightforward street punk with hooks and sing-alongs. This is the kind of record that you know right away if it is something that is staying or going. For me, it's staying. I get the feeling that the LAST RESPONDERS put on a good show and a raucous party atmosphere, but mirroring that, I am willing to bet that if you are a friend of one of these guys and you find yourself in a bind that you have them on speed dial. There's something familial and supportive in the songwriting and delivery that transcends the common "down in the dumps" nihilism that usually accompanies this style. Look, the LAST RESPONDERS aren't going to change your mind, introduce you to new ideas, turn you on to a new sound, or pry a little smell that good when you're in the same room with them, but I suspect that they will have your back if things get shitty, and that's more than good enough. Check it out. You won't be sorry that you did.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: B-Rad



THE SACRED – About You / Resistance 7"

An explosive debut from a Los Angeles band that takes inspiration from the BAGS and the GERMES. The raw guitar riffs are accompanied by biting femme vocals delivered like the AVENGERS' Penelope Houston. Outside of some YouTube clips of their live shows, there isn't much of a digital footprint of their music, and the album isn't streaming anywhere. Rumor has it that you can only get this record at one of their shows or at the Funhouse, the restaurant the band works at in Little Tokyo.

Reviewer: Tim Janchar
Label: Funhouse Records



THE STRESS BALLS – Wildcat Sessions EP

There's something nostalgic going on here, and I don't think that's the intention. THE STRESS BALLS play straight-up old school punk. It's lo-fi, no-frills, and it scratches the itch. They aren't trying to reinvent the wheel, but give you what they've got and have a lot of fun doing so! They remind me a lot of Chicago punkers PURE INTENTION, both in delivery and attitude. "2026" is my favorite track here, just dumb punk fun. It reminds me of a vanilla ice cream cone that you're going to have 60 times this summer. Simple, fun, and classic. Could it be improved? Sure. Does it need to be? Fuck no.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Stuffys



THE VORS – Boss LP

I'm not sure I can accurately describe how much I hate the opening track, "Human Being (Jelly Bean)." I'd be cool if I never heard it again. Dumb idea, great execution. THE VORS play the type of punchy indie rock that can easily be called punk by publications and fans, but it isn't punk! But it isn't all bad, either. The second track, "You Treat Me Like an Asshole," is three-and-a-half minutes of perfect summer fun. It's somehow surly and beachy without relying on any associated tropes. In another life, this chorus would slam and exert a little aggression, but that's not what they do well! THE VORS don't need the aggression to keep you in. It's sunny and fun while still retaining a rock edge. This is music for a beach party or a summer drive with friends smoking cigs and drinking warm beers.



Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Cheersquad

TOXIC MENACE – By Any Means Necessary CD

Sometimes all you need is ten minutes of ripping, thrashy hardcore played with conviction, and *By Any Means Necessary* gets in, wrecks the place, and gets out. Texas' TOXIC MENACE comes out swinging with four tracks of filthy, crossover-leaning hardcore that owes as much to CRYPTIC SLAUGHTER, CRUMBSUCKERS, and DRI as it does to UK82. Fast parts crash into chunky mosh riffs without getting bogged down, and the whole thing has that loose, beer-soaked energy that makes you want to dive head first into a crowd. Touches on violence, urban decay, and general societal collapse without pretending to reinvent the wheel.

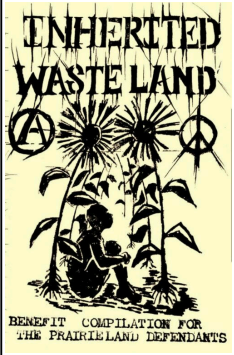
Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Hey Fuck You



V/A – Inherited Wasteland: Benefit Compilation for the Prairieland Defendants cassette

Opening a comp with YELLOWCAKE, following that up with PHYSIQUE, then including local hellions HEX and DUKKHA is wild, but also guaranteed to get me to buy it. That fact that it supports the righteous cause of the Prairieland Defendants, victims of the present and ongoing political witch hunt, is something that I can absolutely get behind. Literally every active band that I've enjoyed over the past few years has a spot here, the flow is perfection, and the breadth of punk included means everyone will find something that hits.

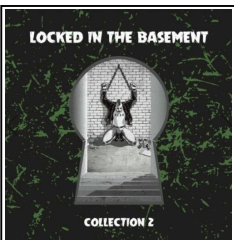
Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: self-released



V/A – Locked in the Basement, Collection 2 LP

DCxPC Live's commitment to the craft is admirable. Sixty some-odd releases in just five years, all vinyl documents of live performances from mostly slightly lesser-known and mostly current DIY bands. With the second *Locked in the Basement* compilation, DCxPC Live crams twenty acts onto a 12" slab, grabbing melodic punk, hardcore, ska, doom/sludge metal, and seemingly everything in between. The complaint (if there was one) would be that the result is somewhat incohesive, but that's exactly what makes the label itself so interesting—there's not a "sound" here, and going from FUCKSAKE to TARNISH PREVENTER starts to make sense before the first side wraps. Other notables include NO COMPLY, RBNX, BLANK CHROME, DISOVIET, and CHRIST PIPE. This was my introduction to most of the bands (except NO COMPLY, R.I.P. Justin), and that's exactly what comps are for. Good job DCxPC, and don't you even think about stopping.

Reviewer: Robert Collins
Label: DCxPC



V/A – Never Mind 50 Years the Kids EP

Is this a tribute to Antwerp legends the KIDS? Or is it new recordings from the band in celebration of their 50 year anniversary? It's both. This celebratory EP sees the mighty KIDS re-recording a couple lesser-heard tracks, including an old live number called "No Work," giving fans something nice to add to the band's long-dormant catalog. These tunes are mixed in with experimental covers from three other Belgian groups who have come to pay respect to these O.G. punk'n'rollers. HETZE offers a violent rendition of "Fascist Cops," KOTSKAT takes "For the Fret" into the realm of minimalist synth, and COLERE adds new speed and fury to the classic "Do You Love the Nazis?" It's a great excuse to revisit and rejoice in the KIDS, and it's worth picking up for the first track alone.



Swedish trio SLUTA LJUG's *Brinn* is a collection of three dark and grim tracks that leave you wanting more. The band manages to dial in an old school but modern and raw but spacious hardcore punk sound decorated with D-beats. Guitars drenched in flanger, heavy distorted bass, energetic drums, and beautifully hysterical vocals all add up to the drowning atmosphere of this great EP. Highly recommended.

Cool little three-song EP out of Cincinnati. The first song, "Lick the Fist," reminds me a lot of the heavily metal-influenced punk I'm seeing a lot of locally and regionally in the Midwest. It's a minute-and-a-half of TURBONEGRO-influenced rock'n'roll that's as dumb as it is fun. "Make Something Happen" is a catchy take on action rock with a chorus made for '90s college radio, like a catcher and less explosive NEW BOMB TURKS.

Como, Italy's SPECTRE does god's (or perhaps, satan's) work by bringing deathrock back to the table with their second album, *Twisted Visions*. It's a de-ranked cabaret of gloom and doom where the gothic atmosphere is masterfully blended with the explosiveness of punk rock. Tastefully tribal drums and rock-solid bass are responsible for the ritualistic feel of this record. On top of this unbreakable backbone, guitars soaking with various effects supply abrasive textures amidst waves of feedback. And the cherry on top is, of course, extremely expressive and proportionally dramatic vocals that just work perfectly with this style. It might sound like I'm exaggerating, but I believe that if this record had been released at the prime of the genre, we would be calling it an essential classic. Absolutely a must-hear record.

SPECTRE



TWISTED VIEWS

Rough, shambling guitar riffs, clunky primitive drums, and spitting raw vocals with the minimalist heart-on-sleeve honesty that you'd get from RIVETHEAD and GOD EQUALS GENOCIDE. This EP has the excited spirit and energy that you'd expect from a band's debut release, but this Fukui, Japan-based band has been releasing records since the mid-'90s, which is inspirational in and of itself.

San Diego's SUBVERSIVE INTENT deals with fast, stomping hardcore, and they do a great job at it. They go for a NEGATIVE APPROACH, CARRY ON, and PUNCH kind of sound, with just enough youth crew bounce to keep every moment memorable. With a punchy production, SUBVERSIVE INTENT keeps it short, pissed and loaded with hooks. The kind of record that'll get rinsed a dozen times before you even realize that you've been listening for two hours.

SI
SUBVERSIVE INTENT

The logo features a stylized 'SI' monogram above the text 'SUBVERSIVE INTENT'. Below the text is a graphic of a skull and a gas mask, both rendered in a high-contrast, stencil-like style. The skull is on the left, and the gas mask is on the right, with a gas canister visible at the bottom.

Watching the evolution of egg-punk has been somewhat fascinating, particularly its appeal to indoor-kid weirdo punkers finding an outlet and a connection to a scene through their solo projects. At its best, the genre walks a line between memorable songwriting and cartoonish novelty. Something of a celebration of limitations: cheap gear, lo-fi DIY recordings, strange ideas, often with just a single songwriter. In many ways, it has become the punk equivalent of bedroom pop. It's no wonder the appeal of egg-punk has spread so far and wide. Unfortunately, this debut cassette from SYFON of Warsaw, Poland contains very little of what I enjoy about the genre. Sure, there's the occasional catchy synth lick, but mostly I hear obnoxious plink-plunking, nu-metal chugging, B-rate CAPTAIN BEEFHEART-style freakout nonsense, and a lack of substance. The tape starts intriguingly enough with their DEVO-esque "Intro," but it winds up feeling like the peak rather than the starting point, so the intention here was to slow things down while keeping egg-punk tonality, as if SYFON wanted to make a post-punk egg record. Forget what came first, what comes after the egg? It's an interesting idea in theory, but the lack of memorable songs on this cassette shows that there's still a ways to go before that code is cracked.

Curiosities abound in the approach this English group has taken on what I perceive to be their debut LP. A ragged street rock foundation underpins the album, yet with each track, they stab out in disparate directions. The opener, "Haircut," offers a punchy four-chord romp that, albeit repetitive, is catchy with a distinct hook and showcases the APPALLED's most effective weapon: a powerful vocal delivery. This bloke has a set of killer pipes on him. Next song pulls the wheel towards the pub, with a melodic undertone poking out. No radical departure from the formula there, but as the songs wear on, the genre-hopping becomes more apparent, touring through hardcore, UK82, '77 punk, Oil...the potency begins to dilute. Nothing egregious, nothing shocking, and I'll spare you the pun and just say that if they were to pick a lane, the APPALLED could probably leave a more memorable mark.

West Coast to Third Coast, Rotten Princess puts out a terrific variety of punk, noise, hip hop, etc. that seems to always, at the very least, keep my attention all the way through, and at their very best, doesn't leave my stereo for weeks to months. The DOWNSTROKES are a mid-tempo, Northern East Coast garage/punk/power pop band with hooks by the handful. Personally, I wish the production was a little muddier, but that's a me thing. I can't help but feel like there's something lacking. Follow me here—the music is tight, the lyrics are thoughtful and tuneful, and all together, the songs are melodic and have tons of catchiness, so maybe the lack of the whole feels like it's lacking conviction, and moreover simply plodding through. Most of the songs come

THE FIVE HOURS

What began as a somewhat fresh take on punk has become just another ingredient on the menu. I have started to notice a pattern recently where egg-punk is treated less like a genre and more as a component in a fusion dining experiment gone wrong. This is certainly the first time I have encountered the combination of egg-punk and cowpunk. What does that equate to, farm-fresh punk? It is an odd flavor profile, that's for sure. Perhaps stranger still is that BUG SWALLOW seems to be a Muppets-themed band, with a particular focus on Kermit the Frog. This Calgary outfit has all the expected egg-punk ingredients of guitars, bass, synth, and drum machine, but the addition of twangy banjo and fiddle pulls things into bluegrass/jug-band territory. Eight confusing songs make up this self-titled debut cassette. To the band's credit, there are moments where the recipe comes together—whenever BUG SWALLOW eases off the novelty, the songs become considerably more palatable. Unfortunately, they lose me whenever they lean too heavily on the gimmick, particularly on the banjo-heavy, sweetie-voiced "Rover and Round" and the hoedown entitled "Way Back Here." I am solely understand that egg-punk is a silly genre and should not be taken too seriously, but I guess when it comes to egg, I prefer it as the main course, not as a novelty side dish scooped up at the buffet line.

This is ferocious, this is from Cleveland, and this is hard-as-nails powerviolence. Released on the prolific hardcore label Delayed Gratification, this is the first demo tape from CENSER, who are certainly not here to spread joy and happiness to the punters. I am sure the members of the band are experienced and have been doing the same thing for some years, as the music is perfectly executed and excellently ticks all the powerviolence boxes you'd expect of a top band, from the heavy moshing moments to the blasting madness. I am not the biggest fan (or indeed connoisseur) of the genre and I wouldn't personally pick up the tape, but this is brilliantly done and I can imagine the fans of this peculiar subgenre that has survived a couple of decades now going crazy for CENSER.

DENSE!

Third release from Cincinnati's CHONCY. Their angular approach, with clean, frenetic guitars (think D. Boon tone) and lightly distorted vocals, is at the forefront of this album. 2023's *Community Chest* and 2024's *20X Multiplier* offered a wider range, with more full-belly guitar distortion and hardcore arrangements, but also plenty of the angularity and sharp rhythm changes that are evident on this release. If *Trademark* is a move towards honing their sound, I don't mind. These songs are fast, catchy, and driving, if not a little needling with those piercing guitar riffs. The vocals are provocative in a comedic way, and the whole package reminds me of (a slightly less serious) STRAW MAN ARMY. Apparently, their members now split time between Cincinnati and New York, doing remote recordings and phone calls—but distance be damned! They've put out a solid record.

CHONGYI
®
TRADE MARK

The A-side here is a straight classic. No-bullshit bass and drums lay down a foundation that is so gloriously simple—they don't need to do anything else, and you don't want them to do anything else. Storytelling vocals are barked passively while the guitar spits repetitive hooks into the verses, and then the chorus drops and all of the simplicity coalesces while the guitar takes off, refusing to play a power chord at any point on the damn record. The flip is a slower, gloomier take on the same formula, a re-interpretation of the freak-out A-side from their 2003 "Criminal IQ" 45 that I haven't listened to so long that I feel like I'm rediscovering them all over again here. It was great then, but this version of CLAW TOE lands even better. BIRTHDAY PARTY, PHANTOM LIMBS, and BUZZCOCKS fans will rejoice.

I am not often taken by surprise when it comes to raw punk music, and I always manage to conceal it whenever I am so as not to spoil my cool blasé look, but CLEAN NEEDLE is a pretty good surprise. It is a one-man hardcore operation from Texas as I understand it, and this is the project's first vinyl output after a couple of tapes. Unsurprisingly, the main focus is to unleash raw (and I mean proper raw), direct, and fast '80s hardcore punk for the unwashed. The vibe is clearly old school, especially on the fastest (and best) numbers, while others can be said to be more pogo-oriented and spikier. A fan of CHAOS UK would enjoy this a lot, I reckon, and because of the organic, primitive sound (not to mention the visuals), you could be tricked into believing that CLEAN NEEDLE is a much older project than it actually is. The vocals are very gruff however, to add some extra aggression I presume, but I don't think it works well with every song. A very fun EP on the whole.



Just what exactly is CREAM SODA *Serving You*? How about fifteen gleaming garage pop freakouts from the mythic Medway Delta? This debut LP showcases the band's sharp take on the '60s-inspired rock'n'roll sound that the Kent, England area is famous for, and these three lads are certainly old souls. They're only in their late teens, and this classic type of racket usually doesn't originate from such spry young upstarts. Are they the illegitimate children of Billy Childish? If not, he may want to adopt them. They've followed in his footsteps brilliantly, adding in a few new moves along the way. Check out "Victim of the Medway Towns," "On the Side of Evil," and "2 for 1" for a proper taste.

CREEPLY FUTURE comes out swinging with lo-fi-ish, high-energy, catchy-ass sing-along punk rock. Fourteen songs in under twenty-eight minutes that go by as if it were only thirteen minutes (or maybe even six-and-a-half minutes), seemingly over as soon as it began. Parts of *Brace Yourself* remind me of SUPERNOVA, TOYS THAT KILL, and bands that have taken elements of pop punk but made it their own. From start to finish, CREEPLY FUTURE have created a perfect LP to kick off summertime.

CRUELLY – Ugly Behaviour 12”

While the definition of “grungegaze” isn’t hard to understand, it is a new-to-me term. And if this record is any indication of the genre, I’ll say I fucking love it. Pónske, Aotearoas (Wellington, NZ) CRUELLY are out with their debut EP, showcasing noise, melody, bleeding-reverb guitars, and sun-soaked female vocals. Do you need an aggressive cry? Maybe to light a candle, stomp around in your boots, and scream into a mirror? Then this record may too be for you. High energy and venom; dour mood and heartache. If you’re left wanting more, they have a *Live at San Fran + Bonus Tracks* CD out (the sound quality of which is quite good), and hear rumors of an LP?? Watch this group. They may be your new obsession.

Reviewer: Willis Schenk
Label: Mpls Ltd



DEAD END LANE – Crush LP

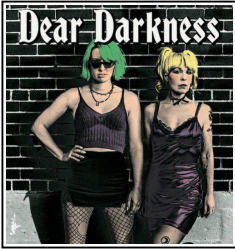
Pop punk/ska in the vein of many Fat Wreck bands, yet keeping their own original and fresh approach. Erin’s singing style and her lyrical content hold a unique perspective that help to move the *Crush* LP above similar-sounding bands. “Anti-social,” with an intro nod to J. CHURCH, propels you through common antisocial feelings, while being so catchy that you wanna run around and sing it with a chorus of strangers at the top of your lungs. Overall, these ten songs take enough twists and turns to not only keep your interest, but a few may even make it onto your summertime mixtape for driving around to get a 3 am Slurpee with friends or alone, perhaps.
Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Shakin’ Hips



DEAR DARKNESS – Gold, Guns, N More! cassette

DEAR DARKNESS really embrace their Motor City roots and come out swinging with a solid three-song EP. Dark, groovy no wave with haunting vocals and buzzed-out, fuzzed-out guitars. The tape goes by quickly, so I recommend giving it a couple of plays. Really great stuff here.

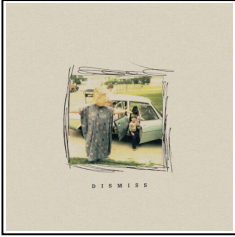
Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Remove



DISMISS – Lost Transmissions: 1995–1996 LP

Now it all makes sense! I always wondered why/how No Idea Records was so tight with PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS, and now that I’m hearing this pre-PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS band, I get it. This falls perfectly in line with MOVING TARGETS, DOUGHBOYS, SERPICO, SLEEPER, etc. This DISMISS demo is hard-driving and melodic, and the songs are tinged with enough aggression that were this to have come out in 1995 or 1996 as a full-length rather than as a demo cassette, well, who knows. We would not have had PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS, but we would have had one hundred more DISMISS tunes. Look, I need to be clear that I’m not a nostalgic dope looking back on yesteryear with fogged-over memories. I like this because of attentive song structures and raw-nerve quality, perhaps in part due to the poorer recording. Nonetheless, I feel it’s rare these days to hear something as impassioned as these DISMISS demo songs from thirty years ago. It looks as though physical qualities are limited and will pop in your box on a random vinyl color. If I said anything that taps your interest, then you should check this out and go start a band.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Snappy Little Numbers



DIÄT – S.O.36 Berlin Sept ‘22 LP

I’ve been a fan of DIÄT since the *Positive Energy* LP—I’m a sucker for their cold punk rock. When I saw Iron Lung had released a live recording, well, let’s just say I was stoked. S.O. 36 is a legendary Berlin venue, and the night that DIÄT played there in September of 2022 was most certainly a special night, as the recording is alive with frenetic energy. The setlist included some of my favorites like “Foreign Policy,” “Dogshit,” and “Dead Body,” all of which sound accurate, fresh, and dynamic in their live presentation. If you’ve never listened to DIÄT, this is a great place to get started, as this recording covers material from the band’s near-decade run. As a fan, this is an unexpected gift and a perfect encapsulation of DIÄT.

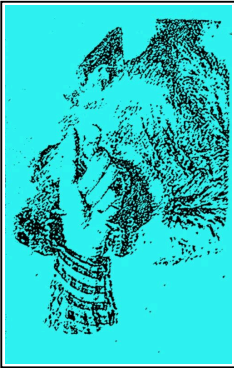
Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Iron Lung



DOG HEX – Dog Hex cassette

Billed as a fusion of egg-punk and dungeon synth, there is absolutely no information about DOG HEX that I can find other than the fact that this was recorded “in a hot room.” While I am not a dungeon synth expert, as a punk with a solo synth project that occasionally gets lumped into the dungeon synth genre, I have listened to enough to understand the basic idea. It seems like a lot of people think that the use of any cheap keyboard automatically qualifies your music as dungeon synth—which brings us to DOG HEX. This debut seven-song cassette features mostly spastic, aggressive egg-punk, but does have a few instrumental synth tracks, hence their attempt to claim both genres. It is my understanding that dungeon synth is fundamentally an atmospheric genre, with long compositions built around the slow cultivation of mood. With the longest song on this cassette being under a minute, it’s difficult to imagine what atmosphere can truly be built within such a timeframe. Looking at DOG HEX’s instrumental tracks through the lens of building an immersive world through their soundscapes, these songs essentially amount to a quest to the fridge. This cassette is actually pretty ripping, with “Mantra” being the standout track, blistering through verse/chorus repetition enough to get stuck in your head even at only 45 seconds in length. The band’s self-posed question of “What do you call a mix between egg-punk and dungeon synth?” feels like the build-up to an incredibly niche one-liner. I suppose I would say that “dungeon synth as played by ADHD-riddled egg-punkers” works as a description for DOG HEX. Personally, I would view things a little differently. This omelette of darkness seems more like the mashup between egg-punk and mysterious guy hardcore, as there is no information to find whatsoever on the project, its members, or anything else. The eggs are undeniable, the dungeon is still under construction.

Reviewer: Biff Bilaro
Label: XTRO



EFFIGY – Burnt Offerings 12”

Sealed digs way deep into the ‘80s UK punk archives with this one, a first-time vinyl redux of the five-song 1983 demo from Aylesbury’s EFFIGY, so obscure that “it wasn’t even uploaded to YouTube” (take that, RUDIMENTARY PENI and DOLLY MIXTURE). Much like LOST CHERREES, RUBELLA BALLET, and other similarly-minded bands of the era, EFFIGY haunted the liminal space between anarcho-punk and danceable, goth-tinged post-punk, with relentless fixed-beat drums, propulsive bass lines, lyrics largely focused on paganism and witchcraft which further an air of mystique, and vocalist Nett’s defiant, fiercely melodic vocals guiding the way like a beacon through fog (machines). “Reaching for the Light” has all of the dark, anthemic drama and searing hooks of a femme-punk should-have-been classic (the MO-DETTES and SIOUXSIE dwelling in the same squat?), and the wound-up pop blitz of “Ghost” is almost BUZZCOCKS-esque, complete with scrappy guitar solos, while “Isobel” trades off between sparse, guitar/vocal-only verses and more urgent, desperate choruses in a way that brings to mind FATAL MICROBES/early HONEY BANE. Has my name all over it, a total no-brainer.

Reviewer: Erika Elizabeth
Label: Sealed



PIG RIDES – Rides Again, Again EP

If you’re into hardcore punk and hear the word “pig,” two things typically come to mind: the cops, and POISON IDEAS’ legendary guitar player. Cleveland’s PIG RIDES acknowledge both on *Rides Again*, *Again*, an ode to the illustrious guitar hero and hating the fuzz. Full of fury and snot, PIG RIDES rage through five hectic tracks that aren’t the most dynamic songs I’ve ever heard, but they do feature some cool guitar work and tons of energy to spare. If you like CHAIN WHIP, this will be right up your alley.

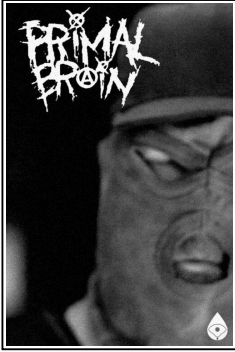
Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: Color and Time Tonight



PRIMAL BRAIN – Live at OBNE cassette

Three live cuts from OKC punks PRIMAL BRAIN, whose noisy, hardcore lends itself particularly well to being heard from a “run-down room.” Recorded back in 2023 at the Oklahoma Opry, one of these tracks was from their 2022 tape *It’s Still All a Game*, with the other two seeing the light of day on their 2025 tape *Is It All A Game?* These songs all sound great on their respective releases, but like most good hardcore, they benefit from the extra grit the live treatment provides. Bonus points for the QR code on the front of the tape that leads to footage of the performance; a neat touch and the first of its kind that I’ve seen.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: self-released



PRIVATE PRISONS – Prison Planet LP

I have mixed feelings about Cleveland’s PRIVATE PRISONS and their debut LP *Prison Planet*, a decent record with some very good songs and also some not very good songs that unfortunately hold it back from being great. Opening with the thrashy “Dead Peasant Policy,” the band showcases solid riffs, vocals, and rhythm section. It’s a promising start that’s derailed as they go on to introduce heavy-handed metallic elements like sluggish, mid-tempo breakdowns and low-register growled vocals, both of which put a damper on things. The overall effect comes off as two competing ideas of what this band could be smashed into one not-so-cohesive record. There are about five songs I’d cherry pick from this LP to make an excellent EP if given the chance.

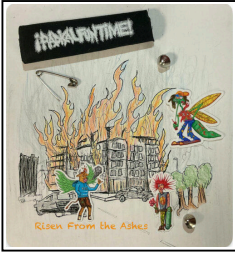
Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: self-released



RADICAL FUN TIME – Risen From the Ashes CD

Holy crust, this is something else entirely. RADICAL FUN TIME is currently in Minnesota, but from what I gather, they have been traveling around quite a bit as a duo. I am sure they are indeed fun and radical as punks, and anarchist politics clearly pervade these fifteen songs. This is a joyfully chaotic recording with a lot of heart, but probably not enough direction. There is some basic ‘90s crust punk here, some anarcho-punk, some fastcore, but overall, it sounds like a big collective soup for the punks. It might not be the best meal you’ll ever have, but it is warm, organic, and made with heart.

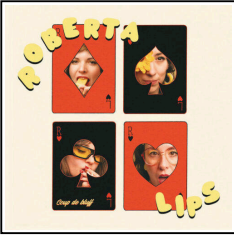
Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Dilapidated



ROBERTA LIPS – Coup de Bluff / Como Tu 7”

Another all-female four-piece, this time from Paris. Super catchy pop music, with the A-side zipping along and the B-side more measured. It’s also interesting to me that one cut is in French and the other in Spanish. There’s a definite garage feel going on here. You’re just teasing me with two cuts. I want more!

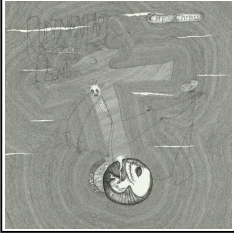
Reviewer: Kenny Kaos
Label: La Cepe



RUDIMENTARY PENI – The E.P.’s of R.P. LP reissue

Between 1981 and 1982, RUDIMENTARY PENI released two recordings: a twelve-track tome of an EP self-released through their own Outer Himalayan imprint, and the *Farce* EP released through Crass Records. These recordings were combined in 1987 and recorded through Corpus Christi as a document of pre-*Death Church* activity. Fast forward to 2026, where Sealed Records has reissued *The E.P.s of R.P.* complete with the original Nick Blinko-drawn sleeve, and even more fresh Blinko work on the inside. In my mind, RUDIMENTARY PENI has always represented a tectonic shift in punk—the architects of a new framework, an often-imitated but impossible-to-duplicate template, the next frontier in punk dissidence, and that is why *The E.P.s of R.P.* is such an important document for highlighting the band’s developmental period. A reissue like this is truly a must-have for fans, but also an incredible collection of punk.

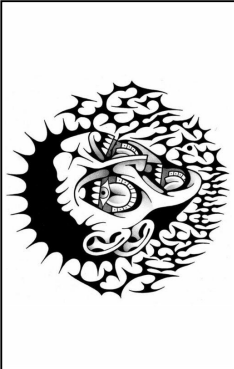
Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Sealed



SCREAMING EYES – Screaming Eyes demo cassette

Four cuts of French SxE hardcore punk that alternates between quick, pissed-off blasts and atypical dissonant breakdowns. Rapid-fire vocals inject an energy that drives the songs and gives them character. The riffs pull from post-hardcore, but this isn’t skramz. Hardcore with jagged edges and a seething disdain for injustice. This demo is a solid foundation for a group that is clearly aiming for something outside the standard hardcore slop.

Reviewer: Matt Casteel
Label: Noise Merchant



SELF INCRIMINATION – Recreation of an Empty Space LP

SELF INCRIMINATION is a transatlantic assembly with members spreading from Seattle to London, playing synth-out, melancholic punk that cites everything from the GO-GO’S to SIOUXSIE SIOUX to XMAL DEUTSCHLAND. *Recreation of an Empty Space* is a ten-song recording on which SELF INCRIMINATION lays out a sound that combines spectral, riff-driven guitar work with noisy synth, and vocals that frequently recall Lydia Lunch. Post-punk at its core and with extensive citation of cult-level artists, *Recreation of an Empty Space* becomes expansive as it progresses.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: No Front Teeth



MID RATS – Enemies Within LP

MID RATS' opening track "No Kings" sets the stage for the following seven melodic punk and hardcore songs. MID RATS and President James Buchanan, the US's only bachelor president and who almost had a bunch of elephants delivered to DC to frolic about in the forests near the capitol, both called Lancaster, PA their home. Tight tunes and politically charged lyrics steer this record perfectly, down a well-balanced path of thoughtful and interesting songs that could easily fall off into the Fat Wreck camp. However, *Enemies Within* powers through with purpose and conviction. MID RATS have been a band for six years longer than President Buchanan was in office, and although the last song is over five minutes long, it goes more to prove the resolve of the band to assemble something memorable for the right reasons. This MID RATS release is a whirlwind 25 minutes that will be over before you even know it.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Fall Harmonic

MIDDLEMAN – Following the Ghost LP

MIDDLEMAN's *Following the Ghost* is nine tracks of guitar-forward alternative rock from this London four-piece, and if, like me, you spent the '90s actively avoiding this brand of emotionally-exposed, nasal-tenor alt-rock, congratulations! Your instincts were sound. The singer brings Doug Martsch to mind, which is either a selling point or a warning label depending on your relationship with BUILT TO SPILL. The band occasionally locks into something worth hearing, but that juice is definitely not worth the full 26-minute squeeze. They're supporting SUPERCHUNK on tour this month, so maybe if you like that kind of music you'll dig this release?

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: Evil Speaker

MOLBO – Mol-bot cassette

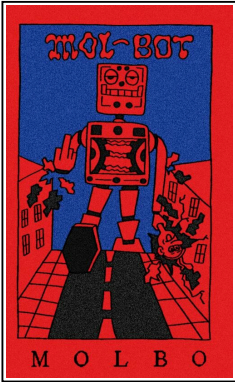
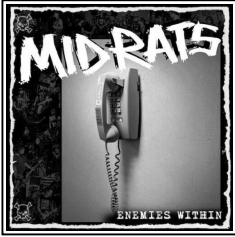
Hailing from Oslo, MOLBO's *Mol-bot* is a beautifully chaotic combination of razor-sharp guitar melodies, driving bass riffs, expressive vocals, and straightforward drum beats. Though it can fundamentally be categorized as egg-punk, it is leaning a bit towards the chain side of the egg chain spectrum, which I really enjoy—and if you have a clue what I'm referring to, you're probably as insufferable as I am. It is a short and sweet collection of six really cool tracks, and definitely a great introduction to the band itself.

Reviewer: Mama Goblin
Label: XTRO

MUFFIN – Get Baked 12"

There's definitely a punk'n'roll and grunge feel to this six-song record. There's a sultry quality that can only be felt after last call and in the sticky and stinky breath of bars. I have the distinct feeling that MUFFIN woulda been on top of the college radio charts along with LT, MUDHONEY, HOLE, etc., in all the best ways. Heavy discount bass, and drums that hold back and then plop in to punctuate Madame Muffin's vocals when needed. Lyrically, they walk the line of wit and sarcasm while maybe leaving you wondering if you might get stabbed for not reading the room correctly. Also, MUFFIN ends this with a pretty great cover of a secret band and song that you've probs not thought about since the early '00s.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Psychic State



NAZI TAMPONS – Moon Invasion cassette

Just beyond the bizarre branding, you'll find a raging garage sound and '77 spirit delivered with a juvenile wink from Slovakia's NAZI TAMPONS. The fi is lo, seating these rocking songs comfortably within a thick nest of noise to complement their style. This should appeal to fans of the DISCO LEPERS and the ZO-DIAC KILLERS who don't mind a bit of dirt mixed into the merriment. It's a bloody good time.

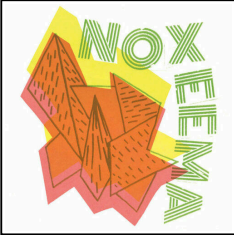
Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Knuckles on Stun



NOXEEMA – Sick EP

Lots of ties to MRR with this band Cissie Scurlock (bass) was an MRR coordinator for a while, and Erin Yanke (drums) reviewed demos and often contributes to our year-end top tens. Now, is that going to stop me from shitting on this record? No, it is not. What is going to stop me, though, is how much I love it. It's been seven years since their last release, but that's not at all apparent from listening to this. Sick picks up exactly where their debut EP left off, like a handful of friends who've never not been punks just happened to be together and got the urge to record some songs. The end result is nine one-minute tracks of trebly-as-hell punk (no subgenre necessary). It kinda sounds like Dangerhouse-era stuff mixed with something more melodic. Or maybe it's like 50% JFA, 50% SIN 34. It doesn't really matter—whatever it is, it's great, and never has a group's love of punk or DIY culture been more audible.

Reviewer: Alex Howell
Label: Raw Sugar



ODDFELLOWS – Oddfellows LP

Chris Pulliam, Mark Ryan, and Mike Throneberry first started as ODDFELLOWS in 1996, playing just a few shows. Their subsequent bands defined the Denton scene—the HIGH TENSION WIRES, the REDS, MIND SPIDERS, RADIOACTIVITY, and of course the MARKED MEN. They got back together and recorded some new songs that are an almost simplistic version of their other projects. They have the uncanny ability to make a C/G riff sound like the first time you ever heard it. The stripped-down and honest sound of the BATS or Portland's the BUGS is there, and then some songs take a slight anti-art psych angle like URINALS, basically anything off the *Negative Capability*... Check it Out! compilation album. It's like finding your weirdly cool uncle's old high school yearbook at a garage sale and seeing where it all started.

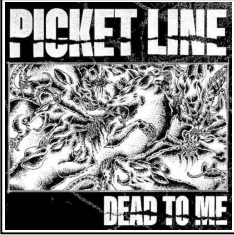
Reviewer: Tim Janchar
Label: Dirtnap / Wild Honey



PICKET LINE – Dead to Me LP

Labor politics, gang chants, and break-down-free hardcore punk—if any of these pique your interest, *Dead to Me* gets the job done. Seattle's PICKET LINE delivers blue-collar hardcore fueled by class resentment, betrayal, and a conviction that the people at the top deserve every ounce of contempt headed their way. They carry the same working-class anger that powered much of the late '00s hardcore scene (think AGNOSTIC FRONT, DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR, or even ROTTING OUT). The album feels less interested in personal grievances and more connected to collective struggle. Class-conscious hardcore that hits like a steel-toed boot.

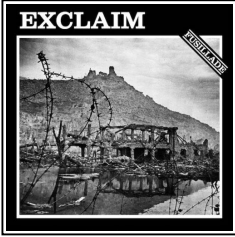
Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Mind Eraser



EXCLAIM – Fusillade LP

During the mid-'80s, EXCLAIM was creating punk based on the work of DISCHARGE, CRUCIFIX, and CRASS in Akita, Japan, far from the hotbeds of Tokyo and Osaka, which is also why their *Fusillade* LP is just now creeping out into the light of day. EXCLAIM captures the classic agro punk aesthetic of fellow countrymen G.I.S.M., but also occasionally hits a noisy garage sound à la TEENGENERATE, and there are even noise moments that immediately recall early MELT BANANA. In all, *Fusillade* is an engaging and enjoyable trip, and if you're into Japanese punk, this is a must-have.

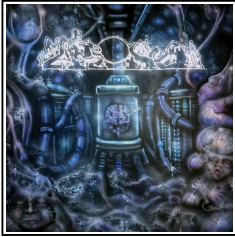
Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: General Speech



FAKE DUST – Decrepitizing Din of the Cerebral Psyopticon LP

FAKE DUST is out of Portland, Oregon, and has been grinding together as a four-piece for the last half-dozen years. *Decrepitizing Din of the Cerebral Psyopticon* is their latest release, with nineteen tracks of primo grindcore that harken back to the genre that created things like INSECT WARFARE, AGORAPHOBIC NOISE, BLEED, ASSJOCK, and GATE, so think guttural howls to falsetto screech vocals over blastbeats and heavy, tight guitar work. If you're into grindcore, then you're probably already onto this, but if you're uninitiated or curious, well, this is a great entry point.

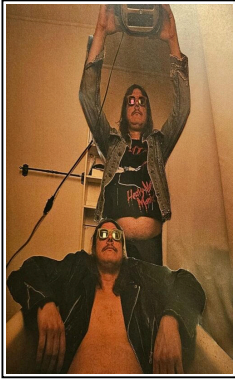
Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Iron Lung



FASHION BATHERS – III cassette

Solo project of Joe Warkentin from Winnipeg, Manitoba. From what I can tell, Canada Joe seems to be a grindcore/death metal/extreme music head, and FASHION BATHERS is his foray into synth-heavy power pop/pop punk. I've seen similar attempts a few times over my years in punk, where someone mostly known for making more extreme music takes the plunge into one of the poppier realms under the greater punk umbrella, and it often translates surprisingly well. This project is no exception. FASHION BATHERS sound a lot like the MARKED MEN, but you know, if their songs were performed by the animatronic robot band at an arcade. These nine songs were originally self-released digitally in 2020, but have now been given the tape treatment by Knuckles on Stun. If you dig this, you'll be happy to know that FASHION BATHERS have a bunch of other recordings out there. Whether or not the project performs live remains unknown to me, but I'd love to see them if they do.

Reviewer: Biff Bifaro
Label: Knuckles on Stun



FENTANYL – Fentanyl LP

Bay Area degenerates FENTANYL double down on everything that made the first LP so addictive, but the songwriting's tighter and the weirdness cuts even deeper. Eight tracks of off-kilter hardcore that mashes together the weirdness of UNITED MUTION, NO TREND, DIE KREUZEN, and SIEGE, with flashes of modern freakiness like SPV and GAG. The guitar lurches instead of chugging as every song throws in some left turn before it overstates its welcome, and the whole thing feels wired and paranoid. At barely twelve minutes, it never wastes a second. Twisted hardcore punk that is actively trying to make everyone in the room uncomfortable, exactly as it should.

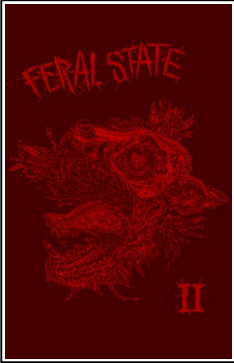
Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Convulse



FERAL STATE – II cassette

Relentlessly gnarly rippers from Leicester, FERAL STATE follows up their 2022 debut with a worthy sophomore release in *II*. D-beats galore and crusty vocals meet thrashy riffs, with some slower headbanging moments peppered throughout. I can see FERAL STATE having a pretty wide appeal—they even mix up the metal and the punk in their sound without ever getting too lopsided, especially on tracks like "Slow Decay," whose riff is certainly channeling a little bit of MOTÖRHEAD. Recommended.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: Noise Merchant



FOURTEEN – Hokus Pokus Vapor 22 EP

Sarah, Erica, Ruby, and Coach are FOURTEEN, and their *Hokus Pokus Vapor 22 EP* is eight songs of pure pop punk, the very best of the no-frills kind. If I had to put this onto a mixtape, I'd also include bands like SWEET BABY, BRENTS TV, VANBUL-DERASS, POOPIEHEAD, WHEN PUBERTY STRIKES, SEWER TROUT, KAMALA AND THE KARNIVORES, and so on. Lyrics taking on big topics in some tunes, while others distill had-to-be-there inside jokes that probs only the band and close friends are tuned into. I'm stoked on this record. In my brain, I imagine that these four friends went into a secret studio inside a cargo van that's been abandoned inside a parking garage, and for fifteen minutes, wrote and recorded these eight songs, then left and never talked about it again. And now we have this little regional important thing, like a dumb little town that has a special stone named after it to always remember that something great is always somewhere.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Chow Town



G.U.N. – Death Dealer EP

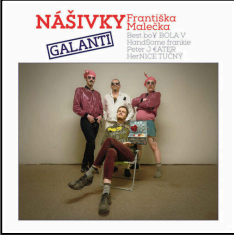
It's been three years since Nashville's G.U.N. dropped that smoker of an LP, and surprise! They're back with another short stack of straight killers. The blistering title track kicks off the festivities, serving as a reminder of the group's raging and uncanny 1980s sound, and it's only uphill from there. In recent decades, it's been increasingly rare that we see a new entry to the short list of true hardcore classics, but the next song, "Sex Tourist Blues" fits that particular designation swimmingly and is destined to appear on many a mixtape this summer. The final two songs further demonstrate the band's uniquely nuanced chaos. Did these guys get even better? I think so, and this Poison Vision label out of Pittsburgh is batting a thousand so far—be sure to peep it.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Poison Vision



GALANTI – Nášivky Františka Malečka LP

A discerning listen will leave you with more questions than conclusions here, but GALANTI is nothing if not compelling—a churning juggernaut of complex Eastern European hardcore infected with metalcore chugs and the kind of genre-bending diversions that make me think of the kids who got into heavy hardcore through SOAD (as opposed to SOA or SOD, if you know what I mean). Think about when Prank released that PESD album twenty years ago and it mostly flew under the radar, but the people who really listened to it got turned on their damn heads. Or the last PAINTBOX record (to continue the Prank theme), this sounds like neither, but it defies convention in the same way. *Nášivky Františka Malečka* will require repeated listens to fully appreciate it and I'm not actually sure if I'm going to end up liking it, but that's not the point. GALANTI is interesting, and they're making me listen.



Reviewer: Robert Collins
Label: Papagájův Hlasatel

GENTILESKY – Dream LP

This LP, the band's second, is the first I'm hearing of this Sardinian/Istanbuli act. I somehow missed their 2024 debut, so I was thrown for a bit of a loop when I got some sick-as-shit melodic post-punk instead of the BO DIDDLEY beats and SONICS-y yowls, maybe some harmonica I expected—you know, your standard Slovenly Euro garage fare. The band even has ties to the RIPPERS, who might be thee paradigmatic Slovenly Euro garage act! Bait-and-switch aside, this record has its moments. There's a big GANG OF FOUR influence running through the nine tracks that make up the record, and when they hew close to that sound, I'm into it. When they stray into math rock territory, I'm less interested. I do think the recording is a tad too polished, and the band has a tendency to launch into some relatively grandiose choruses that seem a little too "obvious" doesn't seem like the right word, but it's getting close. Still, some great songs here. Fans of their debut (which I've since gone back and listened to and is maybe more my speed) should find plenty to like.

Reviewer: Alex Howell
Label: Slovenly

GIGLINGER – Kasäkern LP

Post-punk from Finland that centers the locked-in bass and drums and moody vocals of the genre, while also incorporating heavy melodic moments that recall '90s alt-rock bands like a JOY DIVISION/FAILURE Blend. And it works! The spacey repetition of "Singularity" maintains its upbeat jam for over eight minutes and explodes with anthemic, fist-in-the-air choruses. "Holy Gasoline" takes a hooky lead guitar line and ignites it into the type of quiet/loud mega-riff that made Billy Corgan lots of money. I found myself waiting for the building crescendo of each song, the pounding tom and snare cadence and power chord chugging, to release into huge rock exultations, and it kept happening! It's a simple rock formula that tickles big-riff lizard brains, but when it works, it works so well. GIGLINGER has done an interesting thing by pairing the structure with post-punk lyrics and themes, creating a crisply produced and satisfying guitar rock album.

Reviewer: Nick Odorizzi
Label: self-released

GIVE OVER – Done In EP

The sudden tempo changes, metalcore riffs, and desperate screams call to mind bands like EVERYTIME I DIE or KNOCKED LOOSE. I'm not here to judge, so I will let you decide if that's a good or bad thing. The production is slick and the band rips; the drummer is a goddamn maniac, but there is nothing really memorable about the songs and it left me asking "where's the punk?" It's aggressive and as fast they come, and the way they shift from tempo to tempo at the drop of a hat is impressive. But in the end, there is no escaping the metalcore breakdowns or death metal growls. It's not for me, but if you're a fan of that stuff, I think it would be worth checking out.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Jungle Noise

HEAD CLEANER – No Truth EP reissue

There have been and are a lot of bands named HEAD CLEANER, but this one, from Tasmania, was active during the mid-'90s and played crusty youth crew, complete with thunderous bass, primitive drums, and in-your face vocals, making this HEAD CLEANER a memorable one. This twelve-track reissue is over in twelve minutes and was originally released by Fear of Children in 1996. If you're a fan of early powerviolence, this one's for you. However, fans of posi hardcore, crust, and DIY punk will want to hear this as well.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Solar/Sonar

IF I COULD JUST GET SOME SLEEP – Dead Nerves, Numb Hands CD

Whoa, I fuck with this hard. Classic screamo energy paired with a layer of synths and cascading drums. This reminds me of coming home from some random party in the year of our lord 2006, drunk off my ass, scrolling MySpace, and discovering some musical duo who just bought their first Moog and decided it was time to start a band where they sang about old Nintendo games or some shit. This has I HATE YOU WHEN YOU'RE PREGNANT, HORSE THE BAND, and MAGIC CYCLOPS energy all over it, except IF I COULD JUST GET SOME SLEEP takes itself a little more seriously, which I guess solidifies the modernity of it all. Things aren't as devil-may-care as they were twenty years ago and it's reflective in the art. Anyhoo, this guy is from Illinois, so that gets extra points from me. A+, fantastic work!

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: self-released

INTENSIFIED CHAOS – That's Not Freedom 1982 LP

Arisen from the punkest of graves, this recently rediscovered artifact of early '80s hardcore is a serious trip. The story of INTENSIFIED CHAOS traces all the back to the inaugural issue of this here institution, *Maximum Rockroll* #1, which was packaged in with the Alternative Tentacles compilation *Not So Quiet on the Western Front*. Most of y'all familiar with this band will recognize them from having contributed the opening track of said comp, with their eponymously titled ripper "Intensified Chaos." As the story goes, the group's demo evaporated into the ether, lost to the spikes and studs of time all the way up until, well, now. So, here in all its glory is the official document of Orinda, California's INTENSIFIED CHAOS, represented by the six songs from the original demo and nine live tracks to round things out. The obvious burning question is, of course, if this is worth its weight in wax, and I'm happy to dutifully report that it fucking rips! The influence of GBH is quite apparent, but geography fleshes out the context, calling forth the energy and savagery of CRUCIFIX and BLACK FLAG. I'll dock them a point for the contrived British snarl, but that's because I fucking hate John Lydon, and the guys probably didn't. All said, this is an intriguing piece of punk history, and it holds up just fine 40+ whatever years later.

Reviewer: Matt Casteel
Label: Nausea

INTIMIDATION – Cheap & American 12"

Right off the bat, these guys let you know where they are coming from with the cover art featuring a bunch of empty Budweiser bottles and cans. It's rough-and-tumble American Oil, fueled by cheap beer and ready to throw down in the gutter. The vocals are gruff, there's a classic feel to a lot of the riffs and laments, and there's not a song over three minutes. No complaints here. Turn it up!

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Mister Face / Try and Stop Me

JAY REATARD / LINDSAY SHUTT – In Heaven (Lady in the Radiator) / His Uniform 7"

In 2008, the late JAY REATARD and then-girlfriend LINDSAY SHUTT did a home recording of the song "In Heaven" from David Lynch's *Eraserhead*. They crafted their own stripped-down, spooky anti-folk gothic version of the song that is actually more ominous than the original, given his death a short time later.

Reviewer: Tim Janchar
Label: Trust Fund

KAOSQUAD – Absolute Imbalance LP

KAOSQUAD out of Czechia returns with a full-length entitled *Absolute Imbalance*, and if you're in the mood for grind-core, this is for you. Elements of stench-core, death and black metal, and D-beat are embedded in the KAOSQUAD sound, as chugging riffs transfigure into searing runs, and vocals range from classic pig snort to banshee-on-the-moors to deliver brutal verbal attacks. Thick, primal rhythms undergird the whole ensemble and present in powerful, stompy beats and lightning-fast blasts. For many, *Absolute Imbalance* may lean too much towards the metallic side, but KAOSQUAD maintains the punk with social criticisms and absolute D-beat barnburners like "Shock!" If you're looking to get your hackles raised and add a little stomp to your walk, then *Absolute Imbalance* is the way.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Phobia

KLÄPTRÄP – The Infernal Machination... LP

There are bands whose style you can guess with ease just by checking who's playing in them. With Stick (from DOOM, EXCREMENT OF WAR, and RUIN) and Steg (from the seemingly immortal VISIONS OF WAR) being involved in KLÄPTRÄP, even slow-witted punks can understand that crusty käng hardcore is close on the horizon, and that deodorant will not be necessary to enjoy the music. This first LP released on the always reliable Phobia Records is the next logical step from their highly enjoyable 2023 demo. It is recorded better, more energetic, more aggressive, and there is (a bit) more variety. Have no fear though, the band's dirty compass firmly points to DISCHARGE-loving Sweden with classic riffs played convincingly. Galloping Scandicore not unlike EXCREMENT OF WAR (duh), with brilliant female vocals reminiscent of early SACRILEGE and early PINK TURDS—powerful shouts of anger rather than growls or shrieks—that set the band apart for me. I am sure that you already made up your mind as to whether or not you are going to enjoy this, but I suggest you give it a go. Old crusties never die.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Phobia

LA GACHETTE – Une Vie à Défendre LP

First of all, shoutout to any band still making tunes after over two-and-a-half decades. Whether you like the music or not, it's objectively impressive to keep at it that long. Oil from Montreal has a storied history, with countless bands having contributed to the sound and the scene. Now for the actual sounds here—I must say I wasn't feeling great when this thing started. The slick production and the vocals being right at the front was almost a little jarring. By the second track, I got my sea legs and allowed myself to settle in and take in what was happening. By the fourth track or so, I was over it. Speaking of the sea, this thing just feels a bit too shambling for my taste, almost like it was indeed meant for pirates? Oil Oil Captain!

Reviewer: D. Gregory
Label: Randalé

LEIBNIZ – Promo cassette

LEIBNIZ describes themselves as "queer grungecore," and that tag is surprisingly accurate. This is pure DIY punk minimalism, a band whose identity is rooted in queer punk, hardcore, and grunge. The fact that the release was recorded live only adds to the rawness. The blown-out guitar tone and wounded vocal delivery evoke early HOLE and BABES IN TOYLAND, while the stop/start aggression and DIY urgency recall MELT-BANANA stripped of the hyper-speed chaos. There are also traces of NIRVANA's abrasive punk side, especially when the songs pivot from dissonant verses into unexpectedly memorable hooks. Across the brief runtime, *Promo* feels like a snapshot of a band figuring out exactly how much noise three people can make in a room together.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: XTRO

MASS HALLUCINATION – Mass Hallucination cassette

Damn this is a short one: three songs in a little over three minutes! Leeds-based MASS HALLUCINATION apparently don't have much time to arise around here but, playing fast abrasive hardcore, I guess it still does the job. This tape is the band's first recording, and despite the rather limited length, you can tell they aim for a modern take on noisier hardcore punk with some USHC and käng influences, although you wouldn't really place the band in either category. I don't dislike it and it is by no means unpleasant, but I struggle a little to know what they are really up to and where they are actually heading to. The production is good and so is the playing, the vocals are strong too, but overall, it feels like it is still missing something.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Makeshift Swahili

MEDIA PUZZLE – New Racehorse cassette

You know something, folks? I thought I was getting sick of egg-punk-adjacent bands. I'm now realizing that I've been bored with egg-punk bands who thought that sounding like an egg-punk band was enough to make them an interesting egg-punk band. You understand what I mean, bud? While *New Racehorse* features some of the classic egghead tropes (DEVO-esque drum machine, chorus pedals, timid and mousy vocals, high-octave synthesizers), MEDIA PUZZLE does a great job utilizing their space by incorporating samples and a horn section (for only a handful of tracks, but it's a substantial difference). And while this isn't breaking ground for the genre, it's quite clear that a lot of care and time went into the structuring and writing of these songs, with nuanced swaths of atmospheric soundscapes mixed with the familiar twangy guitars and topics of angst and unrequited love. Thank you, MEDIA PUZZLE, for restoring my faith in the power of the oval. Of course this comes straight from Australia, the modern kingdom of rock'n'roll.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Knuckles on Stun