MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL REVIEWS #521

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MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

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Matt Casteel
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João Seixas
Sir Bobos
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Romain Basset
John Villegas
Willis Schenk
Daniel Z.
Jake Joyce
Dom Tyer
Gonza Perez
Alex Howell
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THE COUNTERFORCE

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VARIATIONS OF MAY – Volatility LP



Terrific mid-tempo punk with a melodic quality leaning more toward the alternative side vs. the pop punk side of things. Catchy songs with easily sing-along-able lyrics reflecting personal experiences and experiences that are maybe not so personal. This reminds me of a lot of great bands in overall sound, but nothing specific enough to say if "you like this, you'll like that." I'll say take some chunks of early SOCIAL DISTORTION, STATUES, BANNER PILOT, IRON CHIC, and JAPANDROIDS, blender it up with a couple other secret ingredients, and here ya go. My only critique would be that the fourteen songs run a bit long; coulda edited out one or two tracks. Other than that, this is a good, layered listen that might take a few plays to completely take in everything that VARIATIONS OF MAY is offering up for their latest release.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Transcendental Revolution

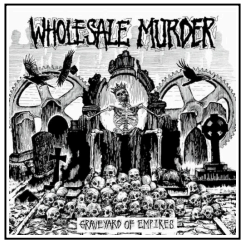
VOLK SOUP – 10p Jazz LP



Leeds band (or rather, a whole orchestra) VOLK SOUP releases their extremely fluid and beautifully chaotic debut LP, *10p Jazz*. I wasn't sure what to expect when I read the premise of the band and started listening. As of right now, I still don't know what to expect from the next song, and I mean it in the best way possible. This eight-piece (yes, you read it right, folks) has everything, singing saw included. I know what you're thinking: "Psshh, Mama. You're exaggerating again. They can't have everything." And you smirk as you add, "What about an electric drill? They have that too?" Why, yes dear. They do. This is one of those albums I don't want to reveal too much about. But all that I can say is I'm very impressed by all those clever compositional choices, intense layers, and commitment to genre-bending. Check it out yourself and thank me later.

Reviewer: Mama Goblin
Label: Dipterid

WHOLESALE MURDER – Graveyard of Empires 10″



Solid if not simple hardcore from So-Cal. WHOLESALE MURDER leans in a slightly thrashy direction with service-able riffs and some nice bouncy bass. The drumming is great and the vocals have a snotty delivery that maybe reminds me of the VANDALS. Lyrics are righteous and urgent, speaking on the environment, empire, and corrupt media amongst other things. Overall, not entirely my wheelhouse, but a good soundtrack for a quick bowl sesh.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: self-released

WILLFUL DISOBEDIENCE – Self Checkout EP



Hardcore punk from our friends all the way out in the Atlantic time zone. Sloppy and fun—your standard lo-fi, local band affair. There are a couple groovy parts thrown in to break up some of the monotony, which gives the slab a nice ebb and flow. Two of the members share vocal duties (I think), but the one who dominates most of the record is my favorite. They've got this scrappy, wiry voice that would be right at home in the hills of Appalachia. This is a fun little 7" and well worth checking out.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: self-released

WILLIAM H. MICHAEL – Jazz Destroyer LP



Outta Cleveland, OH comes *Jazz Destroyer* by WILLIAM H. MICHAEL, hitting equal parts X (*See How We Are*-era), MOVING TARGETS, maybe even a little DEAD KENNEDYS here and there, and some of those melodic, mid-to-fast-tempo alternative/college rock bands that have a slightly darker tint. Start to finish, this is a great rock punk record that had a transportive effect on me, sending me back to the mid-to-late '80s of video-taping *120 Minutes* every Sunday night and being tired all Monday at school. I bet he woulda played by me and I woulda been too young to get into the bar and WILLIAM H. MICHAEL would have seen me sulking outside the venue and he'd have given me a CD and a three-quarter sleeve *Jazz Destroyer* T-shirt.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Big Neck

YLEISET SYYT – Saitte Mitä Halusitte 12″



Helsinki powerhouse YLEISET SYYT returns with nine tracks of hardcore of the highest order, which comes as no surprise considering the band features members of FORESEEN and KOHTI TUHOA. This isn't a run-of-the-mill punk record, and while influences can be fairly easily cherry-picked, YLEISET SYYT plays with so much style and has enough catchy riffs to really carve out their own lane. Favorite moments include the chugging urgency of "Aavekaupunki," the total swag of the intro to "Oikeutettu Tuho," and "Ansioton Köyhä," a track so catchy, it was bestowed with the rare honor of being played a second time immediately after the first. A delightfully unique and occasionally surprising record; for fans of LAMA, MINOR THREAT, and BOOTLICKER.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: Sorry State

ΦΟΡΜΌΛΗ – Tombs of Hell LP



This is the second album of Ακραίφνιο's ΦΟΡΜΟΛΗ (yes, that's in Greece, in case it was unclear), a band I had read about, because the fantastic label Extreme Earslaughter contributed to the project, but never listened to. But as ZOUNDS said, "there's a new band every day," and one does not have endless time even for quality grinding crustcore like this. If you dislike heavy and disgusting music with blastbeats and growling cavemen on vocals, ΦΟΡΜΟΛΗ will not be for you, but if, like yours truly, you can take the punishment, this band proves to be very enjoyable. The production is rather clear, but the music is hard-hitting enough for me to like, and I am really reminded of bands like MASSGRAVE, MASS EXTINCTION, and MASSDEAD (or even TERRORIZER, although the Greeks do not deal in metal). My one main critique is that the production should be more organic and dirtier (punkier, maybe?) in order to sound more savage, but I'll still take it as it is.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Aspects of Noise Distro / Extreme Earslaughter / Gore Kitty / Nothing But a Nightmare / Septic Aroma of Reeking Stench

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- **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!)

ABIZMO / S.O.H. – Japan Tour '26 split CD



Turning frustration, anger and social malaise into music has always been one of hardcore's central purposes. S.O.H. and ABIZMO join forces to achieve this purpose in a very strong way. S.O.H. , from Los Angeles, bring their claustrophobic and super tight brand of hardcore to the table, taking some cues from Japanese hardcore like GAUZE, the STALIN, and the COMES and mixing it up with some UK82 "danceability" and groove. Their musicianship is incredible (members are also in the ranks of ARRĒT, ARTIFICIAL JOY, and REPEAT OFFENDER), and the inflections on the vocals make every moment count. ABIZMO, from Aichi with ex-members from SYSTEM FUCKER, responds with fast, intense DOOM-styled hardcore with vocals in Japanese, English, and Portuguese, aimed towards broken systems, fascist leaders, brainwashing, buried truths, and the rich getting richer while everyone else gets pushed towards the cliff. Two bands taking the classic hardcore vocabulary and putting it straight through the fucking wall.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Strong Mind Japan

ABSOLUT / DESTRUCT – Deafen and Disarm split EP



This is a record I was, of course, looking forward to, as a person of verified good taste. I mean, the room for error with Richmond's DESTRUCT is non-existent: they are hot as shit and one of the best hardcore bands right now. These three new songs sound absolutely devastating, like a steroid-addicted FRAMTID with a touch of traditional Japanese hardcore and a pinch of SVART PARAD and BOMBANFALL; manic crasher Scandicore for the masses. This band smokes, but they are a very tough act to follow. It's a bit like being asked to juggle a football just after Lionel Messi. I had no idea that ABSOLUT, from Toronto, was still going, and I was curious to hear what they would come up with. Their three songs are decent slices of raw, Japanese-style metal punk with extravagant soloing and evil vocals (ZOUO or the CLAY are certainly on the band's playlist), but they do come short after DESTRUCT's relentless punk mayhem. But then, most bands would. The incredible artwork, courtesy of Sugi, looks fantastic and should be more encouragement to grab a physical copy of this noisy fucker.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Acute Noise Manufacture

ACE OF SPIT – Ace of Spit II LP



An experimental unit out of St. Louis, Missouri, ACE OF SPIT embraces atmosphere and organic decay on their second full-length foray. With roots firmly planted in minimalist guitar rock, the group's raucous spirit and raw rumble pulls their sound over to the punk side, making for a rich listen. Just as soon as the melody of "Broadway Babylon" draws you in, the tribal drums and wandering leads of "Cole's Chopper" leave you questioning just exactly where you are. The record is full of surprises like that, with basement-born buzz achieving unexpected range. The band reaches into the depths of instrumental surf rock and comes up to the surface with weird artifacts seemingly rescued from the bottom, as exemplified by the SHADOWY MEN-esque "Diaspora Rock" followed by the pulsating synth of "Parts List." By the time we get to "Esther's Room," the waves are reduced to moonlit memories in the bleak, black expanse.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Sinkhole / Wombat Cock

ADDED DIMENSIONS – Added Dimensions LP



Sharp, homemade garage pop with every seam showing. The first ten tracks are Sarah Everton's 2022 demo tape, and for something this DIY, the recording sounds pretty good and is easy to listen to. Everton (formerly of BLOWDRYER, READING RAINBOW, TELEPATHIC) started ADDED DIMENSIONS as a home project after leaving Philadelphia for Virginia, leaning on a drum machine for some of these tracks, and it's since grown into a full band, but on these recordings, her voice is the thing that holds everything together. In her *MRR* review of the original tape, Erika Elizabeth floated "a Kim Deal-fronted URINALS?" and I couldn't shake it the whole time I listened, which is about as good a pitch as a band could ask for. This HoZac LP fills out the B-side with a BLOWDRYER practice take of "Default Mode" and five alternate demos of songs from the A-side. Those extras are all a big step down in quality, so they're mostly for completists. The front half is the reason to pick this up.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: HoZac

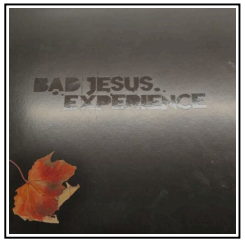
BACKFIRE! – The Last Confession LP



Final offering from the Netherlands' BACKFIRE!, who have been active on and off again since 1993. Fast metallic riffs, plodding breakdowns, and gruff vocals call to mind the usual suspects of this style like MADBALL and CRO-MAGS. I wasn't particularly moved by any of these tracks, but I trust there's a fanbase who will appreciate a swan song from this legacy act.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: WTF

BAD JESUS EXPERIENCE – VII 10″



It seems that BAD JESUS EXPERIENCE has been around for a while, though this is my first encounter with their brand of chaotic, emotive hardcore. Off-kilter, angular, and discordant, BAD JESUS EXPERIENCE is the 2026 Finnish response to '90s screamo like ONE EYED GOD PROPHECY, OTTAWA, ORCHID, THREE STUDIES FOR A CRUCIFIXION, etc. The most abrasive aspects of the genre propel this forward at a pace that feels pregnant with urgency and franticism, rooted in what was called emo before the term became associated with swoopy haircuts and teenage mall goths. Tough to endorse a band that calls themselves BAD JESUS EXPERIENCE, and the cover art is equally atrocious, but if you get down with any of the aforementioned bands, then you can probably look past those transgressions.

Reviewer: Matt Casteel
Label: Puukotus-levyt / Suspected of Arson / Vapaa Päivä

BIGTOP – A Congess of Baboons CD



Sludgy punk thrash and trash tunes that hit all the buttons. Apparently, these folks had been making these plops of punk joy since the late '80s, through tragedy, a reformation, and a handful of changes, to this final 2026 release. Some choruses are shouted, some aren't shouted, but you can sing to everything. Song topics ranging from monsters to just about everything else. The one thing that is clear is that these folks are probs great friends and had a real hoot putting this together. *A Congress of Baboons* has something for almost everyone, from standard sludgy punk rock, pogoing ability, humor, fist-in-the-air-style songs, KBD attitude, a Mystic Records quality, some slap bass, and a couple other things, too. There are twenty-six songs in total that range in length from twenty seconds to five minutes. Check it out!

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: PIG

TEAM WORK – Somebody's Gotta Do It LP



Transatlantic collab between Lise Sutter (MARAUDEUR, the STACHES) and Ronni What (SPLLIT, FAKE LAST NAME), with our two intrepid teammates exchanging ideas and inspirations between Leipzig and Louisiana over the course of three years to construct TEAM WORK's debut, *Somebody's Gotta Do It*. For as long as I've been aware of each of their respective projects, Lise and Ronni have struck me as kindred spirits cut from the same abstractly patterned cloth, so it's extremely cool to be given this keyhole glimpse into their long-distance friendship and the richly creative musical partnership that has blossomed from it. The dominant traits of both MARAUDEUR and FAKE LAST NAME's specific art-punk eccentricities have very much been passed down to TEAM WORK—rubbery bass lines, cut-up lyrical poetry, clattering wood-blocks, wonky electronics and tape manipulations, dubbed-out echo and delay. There's reverberations of LIZZY MERCIER DESCLOUX in the ass-shaking mutant funk groove and playfully taunting doubled vocals of "I Burnt My Tongue With Ficience This Morning," and without overtly referencing the RAINCOATS, "(Bring More This Time)" still evokes their devotion to rhythm (shaky or not), their ability to conjure a sound that is simultaneously haunting and joyful, and the power of individual voices dissolving into each other to gain even greater strength as collective chants. A record that genuinely creates and inhabits its own world; a desire path splitting off from the established routes of so much point-A-to-point-B modern punk.

Reviewer: Erika Elizabeth
Label: Feel It

THE CARP – Tangled Up with the Two Tailed Rat LP



Like CRUELSTER but not as cruel. Like PERVERTS AGAIN but sadly less perverted. I don't know if they share DNA or if it's the same band and I don't really care. In fact, I wasn't even going to mention those other bands, but if you're a fan and you've missed this, get it now. If you're not familiar, this gang is banging out some of the best punk this side of the Mason-Dixon, and you'd better listen up. If you take your garage punk sardonic and delivered to you via marching orders, this is for you. Every time I listen, I pick out a phrase or lyric that I didn't hear before, and it either makes me laugh, do a deep dive on Eastern European economic policies, or both. There aren't a lot of records that make me want to learn about economics while at the same time making me shake and beat my steering wheel like a goddamn lunatic, and this one does it. Totally Punk!

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Total Punk

THE RINDS – Everything Dimed LP



They're not the first, and they won't be the last, to grab big handfuls of the RAMONES for inspiration, but the RINDS push beyond the standard template on their fourth album, *Everything Dimed*. It's there in the "uh-oh"s on "Little Vibration" with its fuzzed-up solo, or in the new wave-y "Getting Told Off." There's also punk'n'roll from "We Own the Night" and its tale of partying in the witching hour, a song given a horror-punk injection on "We Own the Night (Reprise)". The two tunes tap into similar themes to "I Love the Midnight" and its witches in the nighttime. But the variety can lack coherence and start to pose questions about what the Oakland, CA band—not to be confused with the San Diego, CA band of the same name—is aiming for. Moreover, at fifteen songs spread over thirty-nine minutes, *Everything Dimed* has perhaps two too many songs and runs about five minutes too long. Nevertheless, when it's good, which is more often than not, they hit MEAN JEANS heights. Sure, it's music that operates within a template, but there's enough innovation around the edges to keep things interesting and prove that *Everything Dimed* is, mostly, well-thought-out dumb punk.

Reviewer: Dom Tyer
Label: self-released

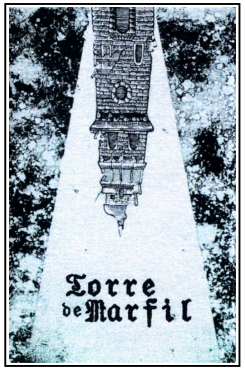
THEE OUTLETS / THE THINGZ – Chaputa!'s Double Feature, Vol . 6 split 2×7″



I knew exactly what this was going to sound like the moment I saw the album cover. The THINGZ play a BOBBY "BORIS" PICKETT version of surf punk, while THEE OUTLETS...well, they kind of play the exact same thing. The only difference is that THEE OUTLETS are a bit poppier and feature a dedicated organ throughout, while the THINGZ rely heavily on synth and sound a bit more retro. Otherwise, this is your standard Halloween punk affair. It's an easy listen and actually quite fun. Perfect for the upcoming spooky season.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Chaputa!

TORRE DE MARFIL – Torre de Marfil cassette



The album art had me thinking this was going to be some weird Italian metal album, but I was pleasantly surprised as it was not at all what I expected. This is Mexican Oil, no bones about it. And while the first track didn't initially do much for me, the chord change around 2:52 made me turn my head and commanded my attention. Over the course of the next seven tracks, they checked all the boxes from heavy street punk to a more danceable sound akin to modern bands like L.A.'s CRIMINAL. The heavier and faster tracks like "Para Que Es La Memoria?" showcase more of their punk and hardcore influences, but they always bring it back to a classic yet modern '80s-inspired sound. I appreciate the vocalist keeping it nasty when the tempo kicks up a few notches, too. No complaints here.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Decline Humano

TOTALIS – Griefstate 12″



A heavyweight crust "supergroup" bringing together members of bands that shaped the genre as we know it today. TOTALIS refines the atemporal DISCHARGE/ANTI-CIMEX/SKITSYSTEM lineage through crushing production, piling D-beat agility, apocalyptic riffage, and an unmatched vocal savagery. Barney Greenway (NAPALM DEATH) and Fredrik Wallenberg (SKITSYSTEM) split vocal duties, giving the record two distinct but equally vicious voices; each one does three tracks. Andy Lefton (WAR//PLAGUE) oversees the guitar work, while the rhythm section is skillfully handled by Kelly Halliburton (DETESTATION, SEVERED HEAD OF STATE) and Charlie Claesson (ANTI-CIMEX, the PARTISANS). Throw Swedish hardcore, UK crust, and early grindcore into a blender, and the result is *Griefstate*. Nothing more than veterans of the extreme underground staking their claim to the genre they pushed forward, and a very refreshing take on it.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Cimex / Organize and Arise / Phobia

TRASH SOUND CONGLOMERATE – Sophomore Slump LP



This is one of those records where each song has a different style that can range from '80s thrash, '90s SoCal skate punk, '00s crusty basement stuff like their fellow Seattleites SUX, Salinas Records-sounding indie punk, DIY scruff like GOD EQUALS GENOCIDE, and electro deathwave. And this is one of those records where it works so well that the band isn't "pulling it off," because it's obvious that that's just how they do music. It all fits together and feels singular in its attitude and self-deprecating anti-swagger. Every one of the three members sings, and I'm assuming they all contribute to the writing process. The alternating vocals and shifting sounds make the record move and never feel rote. The album art, with its Franklin Gothic typeface, may be an homage to Roberta Bayley's work from the RAMONES debut, or maybe not, but it's cool.

Reviewer: Tim Janchar
Label: Moodkiller

SONNAM – The Chains Will Break and I Will Overcome All Sorrows cassette



Portland's SONNAM works with doom, post-metal and ambient space, giving these six pieces time to unfold. There's a political weight to the words that makes the title's promise of release more interesting. "Aguas y Púas" turns the border into a ghost story, while "Hymn of Martyrs" confronts state violence and the machinery of empire. Against that, "This Fragile Body" makes a small, stubborn affirmation of being alive and loved. That movement from collective brutality to bodily vulnerability gives the release something worth sitting with. The closing "Wall of Unforgotten Misdeeds" runs nearly ten minutes, so leave the quick-hardcore expectations at the door. Heathen Fawn's cassette includes an extended "Liminal Haruspex." Heavy music with enough room for grief, and enough resolve to imagine getting through it.

Reviewer: Gonza Perez
Label: Heathen Fawn

SPION – Spion cassette



Four-song debut cassette out of Vienna, Austria, which is also the first release on a brand new label, Aus der Kälte Records. No internet presence for the label and very minimal presence for the band, which is fitting considering the artwork for the tape, which features perhaps the most minimal artwork imaginable, a fully white J-card with only the band name in small lettering at the bottom right corner. Mid-tempo, chanty punk with reverbed-out, single-note surf guitar solos. Infectiously catchy. I was excited when I saw that there were four more songs on the B-side of the tape that were not to be found anywhere online. Flipping the tape while skimming the all-German tracklist on the inside of the J-card, I could tell something was amiss. I may not speak much German, but what language puts their capital letters at the *end* of words? Just before the first track started, it came to me. These were the same track names, but written entirely backwards. Sure enough, the B-side of the cassette is not four additional songs. It is the same songs as the A-side, played entirely in reverse. A funny concept, but the novelty wears thin incredibly fast. I got through a song-and-a-half , then I jumped up and stopped the tape before the repetitive backwards swish of the snare drum made me hate this recording. Played in the correct direction, SPION is incredibly catchy mid-tempo punk rock and I greatly dig it. If I woke up in that episode of *Red Dwarf* where everything is in reverse on planet htraE, I would not go see NOIPS play.

Reviewer: Biff Bifaro
Label: Aus der Kälte

SPIRITUAL LAW – Spiritual Law LP



Bavarian hardcore that goes straight for the jugular. SPIRITUAL LAW locks into the late '80s crossover blueprint and turns it into a claustrophobic D-beat hardcore attack, with the stompier side of newer bands like IMPALERS and HALSHUG shining through, and the rapid-fire violence of some of the NWOBHC bands lurking in the riffs. Their sound is hard to pinpoint as there is so much on the table: hardcore, thrash, and some more hardcore. The dynamics are constantly shifting, and they show a wide range of tricks. "Pressure Stomp," "Man With a Mission," and the closer "The Cleansing" hit like concrete through a windshield. The artwork by Nathan Ward looks as vicious as the record sounds. This is hardcore for people who want their punk dangerously unpredictable.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Broken Skull / Discos Enfermos / Human Future

SPREAD JOY – III LP



Rejoice, SPREAD JOY is finally back to bless us with a new LP! I don't think there has been a single release of theirs that I haven't adored, so you can bet your sweet bippy that I'll be biased. So what? Sue me. Anyways, their tried and true formula is still here: you take these funky drum beats, add some groovy bass lines, lay a thin layer of jangliest guitar riffs, and don't forget the signature vocal style as the cherry on top. *Aaand voilà!* You got yourself a total bop. To me, these guys are the spiritual successor of ESSENTIAL LOGIC, LIZZY MERCIER DESCLOUX, and the bunch, with a modern, more widely palatable sound. This new LP shows that SPREAD JOY is doing what they do best: spreading joy.

Reviewer: Mama Goblin
Label: Feel It

SUBVERSIVE RITE – Apocalypse Zone LP



Upon seeing a brand new album from these New York punks, the old heart started beating faster, because not only did I thoroughly enjoy their first offering, but I also thought the band was no longer. They actually are, as *Apocalypse Zone* is a posthumous album, ensuring that even if you love these songs, you are guaranteed to never see them live. I loved the band's spontaneous and rather fresh sound blending early SACRILEGE, ANNIHILATED, POTENTIAL THREAT, and pogo-compatible metallic, spiky punk like BLOOD SPIT NIGHTS with ace shouted female vocals, allowing the studded brigades to listen to the band and keep pretending to not really like metal. This album is built on the same foundations, but I would argue that the metal influence (precisely) sounds more prevalent, and above all, much cleaner. While the first album remained raw and had that dirty, thrashy organic punk feel, the sound here is not as distorted, and I personally miss their original aggression although I am sure that many would favor the latter over the former. Many punk bands seem to go for that specific brand of solo-inducing metallic punk these days, and I just think I am craving dirtier, heavier, more primitive sonorities. That said, SUBVERSIVE RITE's farewell is indeed a good one, and if the band has gone to sleep, they nevertheless were in perfect control of what they wanted to achieve in terms of songwriting and sound. Still a strong album that made many happy in 2025, but I wasn't totally convinced. What a party-pooper.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Acute Noise Manufacture

SUICIDAS – Canciones Malditas LP



The first full-length from Barcelona's SUICIDAS, who rip out fast, melodic punk. This may be their first full-length, but they've released over a dozen 7" over the years, and while I've heard them referred to as RAMONES-core, I beg to differ. The fab four are clearly an influence, but the production is sharper, and they lack that distinct NYC edge. That's not meant to slight SUICIDAS, but I feel like there is a little more going on here than just RAMONES worship. "Paz Y Tormento" bears influence to LOST KIDS with its tight percussion and steadfast, down-picked guitar parts. The music is tight, the production is polished, maybe even slightly over-polished, and the double vocals are top-notch. It all works in their favor. Cool stuff!

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: La Vida Es Un Mus

BLEAK STREAK – Peak Bleak LP



An overall fantastic album out of Stockholm, Sweden that anyone who digs Sarah, K, or Slumberland Records will surely be fond of immediately. The diversity of sounds may cause a kneejerk read of a lack of cohesion, but by the time the listener is deep into album centerpiece "Imposter," that thought will have become a distant memory. BLEAK STREAK finds their highest highs when they let things get a little shambling and loose ("Peak Bleak," "Loser Band Plays Rock n Roll"), and that includes their C86-ified take on SNAIL MAIL's early single "Thinning," which works so damn well. BEAT HAPPENING, LOS CAMPESINOS!, and HEAVENLY will all come to mind throughout these tracks, and it just makes for a wonderful listen. Not every track works, and they actually lose me a little when they ramp up the aggression ("I'm Not Jealous") or the art ("Loser Band Plays På Tisdag På Torsdag"), but those are small prices to pay for such a great ride.

Reviewer: D. Gregory
Label: Svart Ljud

BLITZER – The New Conspiracy LP



New LP from Berlin's BLITZER that delivers a tight mix of brisk garage punk with a light egg topping, like the SAINTS meets R.M.F.C. with Peter Hook's bass tone settings. The title track opens the record with a fast snare roll and post-punk guitar/bass interplay before erupting into some serious classic rock action, albeit reverbed to the center of the Earth and back. This band rips. They also bounce, like on the more playfully catchy tunes like "Dumb" and "Pylon." BLITZER does a great job of refreshing the tried and true without falling into wacky schtick territory, and *The New Conspiracy* is a great punk record.

Reviewer: Nick Odorizzi
Label: Mangel

BRAINWASH VICTIMS – Brainwash Victims cassette



Filthy hardcore for the paranoid, pissed-off, and those permanently tuned to the wrong frequency, made for a world already circling the drain. Milwaukee's BRAINWASH VICTIMS feature members of BIG ZIT, OOZE, and the CONEHEADS, turning eight tracks into just over sixteen minutes of absolutely noisy punk carnage. This is D-beat channeled through a Midwestern basement, the FIX smashed into NEGATIVE APPROACH sneering over the top and with DIE KREUZEN-style weirdness lurking in the riffs. Raw, ugly American hardcore with a serious D-beat infection. "Wasted Life," "World Destroyed," "Extraction," all killers, no fillers!

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Unlawful Assembly

CALICE – Calice cassette



A grimy, multilingual melting pot of Rust Belt hardcore punk, CALICE is precisely the sort of thing I'd come to expect from the always eclectic Swimming Faith Records. Sonically, CALICE plays speedy and loose hardcore dripping with disdain and attitude, led by twisted vocals that occasionally echo the spirit of Sakevi and, unbelievably, toggle between different languages each song, utilizing nine in total. It's remarkable how seamless the language-switching is, and while it's a novel idea, it never feels forced or jarring, an impressive feat that makes for one of this year's most unique releases.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: Swimming Faith

CELEBRITY HANDSHAKE – The Wrong Couch is on Fire LP



It's a muggy September evening. It's hotter than usual as I step onto the train platform. I wait for the doors to open, and I take a seat. The train cart is full. There's a group of teenagers all talking on their phones, there's a couple of random dudes listening to music without headphones, the train conductor is announcing stops over the intercom, and there's a crazy dude yelling a bunch of bullshit at me from five seats away. That's what this record sounds like to me. It's a mess of noise and weird vocals that falls somewhere between SONIC YOUTH, PERE UBU, and the MINUTEMEN, with vocals delivered by a manic railway pastor. It's weird as hell, and I can honestly say I haven't heard another record like it this year. That's probably a good thing, but I applaud their originality.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Eastern Prawn

CHERRY CHEEKS – D.O. and the Bytes LP



"Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in." Okay, Michael Corleone wasn't talking about synthy punk sounds, but he might as well have been. With the glut of eggy punk that's flooded the airwaves over the last half-decade-plus, it can feel a bit uninspired. But then CHERRY CHEEKS busts through the wall like the dang Kool-Aid man and gives everyone a reminder of how amazing this music can be when done right. On their third album, CHERRY CHEEKS opt for a concept record about the titular D.O. battling the evil Reapers set to wipe his memory, and it makes for nothing but fun from the drop. The juvenile, not so much snotty as they are nasally vocals blend so well with the catchy synth lines, and every song will have you bopping your head along. Songs like "D.O. Gets Hitched" sound like they could be the theme music for a cute platformer hero from a lost Sega Genesis gem, a subtle nostalgia that creates a comfort which never takes itself too seriously. Turn up the volume, go to the mattresses, and jump on the bed.

Reviewer: D. Gregory
Label: Total Punk

CHUMHUFFER / HALF DIZZY – DCxPC Live, Vol. 45 split LP



Whenever I have a DCxPC release come across my desk, I usually gush about the series for half the review before I jump into the meat of the album and talk about the bands. I'll keep it brief and let you know that I believe these DCxPC live releases are one of the coolest and most important things happening in modern punk rock. If this is your first time hearing of the series, I recommend checking out the whole catalog. However, before you run off on that assignment, this split is a great place to start. HALF DIZZY kicks things off with their brand of high-octane melodic hardcore. This would have been right at home on Nitro Records in the late '90s/early '00s. Super tight, so much so that I sometimes forgot I was listening to a live album. CHUMHUFFER is equally well-refined, but plays a more crust/D-beat version of the classic hardcore sound. The vocalist immediately stands out with their impressive melodic range, sounding a bit like Glenn Danzig without the attitude problem. Lovely work here all around, and well worth several spins. I almost can't believe they're already on volume 45!

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: DCxPC

CLOVEN FANG – Silver Bullet EP



Serious MISFITS worship via Melbourne. There's tons of fucking reverb, rudimentary power chord riffs, and horror movie inuendoes galore. "You are my silver bullet" is repeated like 50 times, and I want more! CLOVEN FANG gives you a hook and then murders you with it. The last track jumps off the MISFITS bandwagon, but it still rips and is full of ghoulish background vocals. This one's a no-brainer.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Meditate on This

CORNPONE / POCKET FISHRMEN – split EP



Call it serendipity, coincidence, or even something preordained, but here we are. Ya see, every so often, I like to have a few sips and be my own personal DJ for the evening, and just last night, I grabbed the "P" box of lil' spinners. Here I was, playing both POCKET FISHRMEN 45s from the late '80s, and now, fifteen hours later, this brand new record hits my inbox. Can I get a what-what? POCKET FISHRMEN's "Smash the Fascist" somehow reminds me of DEAD KENNEDYS, the B-52's, and NO SYMPATICO (Michigan band). While slightly different from the two records I listened to last night, these two tracks are on-point with twisty guitars, poignant lyrics, and Texas charm. Let's switch gears to CORNPONE. With the heaviness of all the best AmRep bands and a distinctive Texas swagger, their first song on here, "Too," has the pleading but not desperate (more, if you will, angry and jarring) vocal styles of Jennie Armour layered over a sludgy, pummeling, and powerful song that has me leaning forward out of my seat. "Mother's Cough," their second offering, has Anthony bearing the weight of the vocals with what starts off as a fast hardcore stomper and then, as is typical with Texas bands, they throw in some unexpected changes and make this a roller-coaster of a just over two-minute ditty. Both selections are perfect, and together, they cover a lot of ground in under five minutes.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Australian Cattle God / Elote

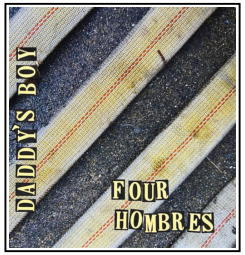
D.S.B. – Substitute LP



The excellent *Substitute* LP from D.S.B. (DEFIANCE OF SHIT BASTARDS) has some lore that deserves to be briefly mentioned here: the legendary Japanese band played a brief stint in the US in 2003, bringing their full-throated brand of hardcore punk to astounded audiences. As General Speech put it in their write-up, the band "basically blew the minds of everyone in the collective DIY hardcore scene at the time" (there is tour footage and audio available on the internet, I found it to be an excellent companion piece here). Feeling at the top of their game, D.S.B. went to the studio to re-record some of their tracks from previous releases like *No Fight. No Get* and the *One Shot One Kill* comp as well as some new tracks, resulting in their legendary second full-length *Substitute*. Until now, this was only available on a 2004 CD release, but thanks to the aforementioned General Speech, we can hear it in all of its glory on our turntables. Going toe-to-toe in the song department with nearly any of their peers, D.S.B. play fast, furious, and sound super revved-up across the entire album, particularly on standouts "死ぬまで戦え" and "Rebel and Protest," the latter of which sounds like a direct influence on many of today's latest and greatest "inspired by Japanese hardcore" US hardcore bands. Essential listening for fans of the genre, young and old.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: General Speech

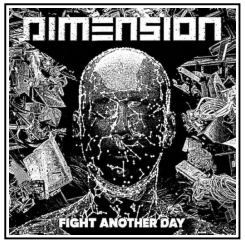
DADDY'S BOY – Four Hombres LP



Chicagoan band DADDY'S BOY has returned with another full-length after a few years away from the studio. The eleven-song *Four Hombres* LP is a chaotic rock'n'roll vision of the daily struggle. High-speed rhythms surge beneath vocals that occasionally remind me of PROPAGANDHI, but also have a unique stream-of-consciousness delivery with lyrics deriding modern development. Fuzzy guitars, jazzy song structures, and indignation against AI and data centers—sign me up.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Drunken Sailor

DIMENSION – Fight Another Day EP



At a glance, the freaky cyber artwork of DIMENSION's *Fight Another Day* may be misleading. There is no techno or EDM to be found here, just six tracks of pummeling '80s-style USHC that are generally very fast, occasionally slightly slower, and always totally ripping. KORO and NEGATIVE APPROACH are some sources of inspiration, evident in the breakneck riffs and brutal stomping; this shit is begging to be two-stepped to. Every song is a standout, highly recommended.

Reviewer: Eric Anderson
Label: Iron Lung

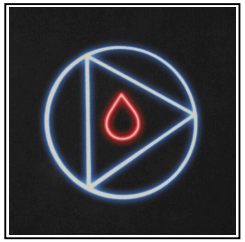
DIRTY KNEES – Dirty Knees LP



Whizzes and pew-pews in "Intergalactic Ladies" kick off this LP, but DIRTY KNEES then immediately pull you back from the edge to the great expanse of going to a quarry for a swim and all the random shit that can happen on a day that's supposed to be low-key fun with friends in the song "Summer Odyssey Fun." These songs are weighted with lo-fi, catchy punk, with enough inside jokes and humor to pull you along for the whole ride. Laura, Maggie, and Elizabeth all take turns writing and singing, completing a well-blended and rad listen. Some of the lyrics about sitting around and the design of the songs somehow remind me of J CHURCH in their bleak honesty and contentment. The song "CDK" is a great tune that's easy to remember and quote at parties, with the lyrics "If it has to be abbreviated / Must be evil." Closing this record is one of the best songs that will definitely make it onto the next few mixtapes I make for folks. This DIRTY KNEES LP would be the perfect accompaniment to a 25-minute drive or ride to anywhere.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: self-released

DRAKULAS – Midnight City LP



Midnight City opened with me thinking I had DRAKULAS figured out: another punk band raiding the '80s, except instead of the gloomy synths of HOME FRONT, they went for the party end of the decade, closer to OINGO BOINGO's nervous fun. The usual guitar, bass, and drums get a synth riding shotgun, along with the proto-punk and new wave touches you'd expect. But the deeper I got into the record, the more it sounded like the band a TV writer invents when the punks show up on *Quincy, M.E.*, music meant to sound dangerous that comes off pretty polite to anyone who's heard the real thing. That could well be on purpose. This Austin crew includes members of RIVERBOAT GAMBLERS and RISE AGAINST, folks who've put in decades on the road, and *Midnight City* sounds like a record that could easily reach past the punk crowd. There are some spicy tunes here, like "Head in the Clouds" and "Garbage Strike," but the whole thing just wasn't for me. Maybe I just don't like fun. If FRANZ FERDINAND ever made your playlist, you're probably the target audience, since both bands are knowingly retro and danceable. It's the first record I've reviewed for *MRR* that I wanted to pass along to my friends who don't like punk, and honestly, these guys have earned a shot at a bigger crowd if that's the goal.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: Dirtnap / Wild Honey

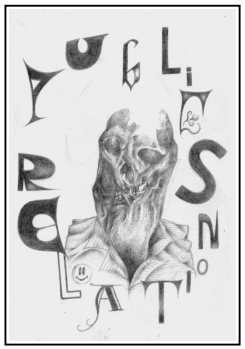
DREAM WORLD – Dream World LP



DREAM WORLD is out of Richmond, Virginia, and earlier this summer, they released their self-titled inaugural full-length through Sorry State. DREAM WORLD has a familiar feeling to their sound, with classic punk riffs laying the groundwork and a sense of distaste towards everything currently being promoted by the oligarchs—a message that is at the very heart of all that is punk. "Submission" is my favorite track with its anti-work morality, and is it just me, or is DREAM WORLD not so subtly nodding to the similarly named SEX PISTOLS song? Now before you roll your eyes and write this record off due to that reference, let me just reiterate for the thousandth time how much I appreciate creative, concise hardcore punk, and DREAM WORLD is certainly that.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: Bachelor

PUBLIC RELATIONS – Public Relations demo cassette



A four-piece out of Montreal, PUBLIC RELATIONS plays hardcore punk drizzled in deathrock vibes and mired in distortion. The singer's tortured wail echoes over the group's raw sound, creating a sinister presence across this six-song demo. If you're looking to add one of these tracks to an October mix, may I suggest the creeping swing of "Human Resources," whose name may or may not be some kind of macabre double entendre?

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: self-released

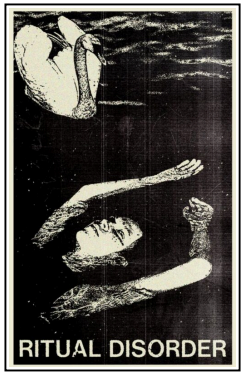
RASPBERRY TART – The World's Largest Raspberry Tart demo cassette



I was stoked when I saw a blurb that compared them to CHOPPER (the Connecticut band that had the *Real Genius* quote at the beginning of that one song on their 12"), but they meant the UK band CHOPPER, which is still good but different. And to be honest, I don't really hear it. I would place them more toward SNUFF, but on the more raw and aggressive pop punk end and almost a bit pub punk. Great gang vocals and the perfect amount of slop that makes this a chaotic and dreamy release that is budding with the energy and whirlwind vibes of seasoned veterans of the genre.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: self-released

RITUAL DISORDER – Ritual Disorder demo cassette



New demo from the Meanjin (Brisbane), Australia four-piece RITUAL DISORDER. This is a female-fronted post-punk group whose sound is immediately captivating. For a demo, I was expecting something a little rougher, but the recording/production is clean and sounds like they've been at it for years. Beyond Cate's soaring vocals, the rest of the band holds their own with beautiful guitar riffs, urgent, driving bass lines, and really exceptional drumming that some could say is on the brink of distraction, but I think adds a perfect frenzy beneath the drawn-out vocals. This is right up my alley, and I'll definitely be keeping my eye out for more.

Reviewer: Willis Schenk
Label: Noise Merchant

SHAVED APE – Love Letter to Hardcore LP



The LP cover is perfect; a picture of Riky Barnes in a RUDIMENTARY PENI shirt, mid-air, ripping a skate trick. Some records you know you are going to dig before you even hear them, and if I saw this in the bins when I was thirteen, I would have bought it, no questions asked. And when I dropped the needle onto this one, I didn't just dig it, I fucking loved it. Ten songs (the B-side has their 2022 demo in its entirety) in less than ten minutes, and they all rip with the ferocity of ten Rottweilers guarding a junkyard! It's maniacal, furious, and scary like good hardcore should be. And it was recorded on a glorious tape machine, giving it the perfect fidelity. All these key ingredients are necessary to make a stellar record and to pen an honest love letter to hardcore. Major props to the drumming on this one, too. Top-tier.

Reviewer: Sir Bobos
Label: Sorry State

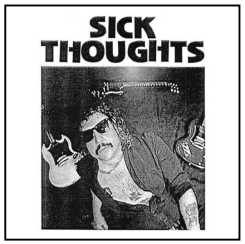
SHITCRITTER / WURRM – split LP



Two sides of ugly European punk, no ceremony required. SHITCRITTER brings filthy Dutch crust with D-beat drive, political disgust, and riffs built to flatten a room. WURRM answers from Duisburg with nine nervous, sub-two-minute bursts: wiry, fast, loose in the right places. Different accents, same bad mood. Play loud, flip it, repeat.

Reviewer: Gonza Perez
Label: Deathtrap

SICK THOUGHTS – Another Piece of Plastic 12" reissue



Slovenly gives last year's five-song SICK THOUGHTS EP new life with an alternate cover, a poster, and a choice of black vinyl or yellow (limited to 100). When Drew Owen started this project as a Baltimore teenager, he got called a JAY REATARD clone, but his sound has been maturing ever since, most noticeably on 2022's *Heaven is No Fun*, and this record pushes that evolution further. The foundation is still fast, melodic, hook-heavy punk with roots in garage, and he hasn't sanded off the grit, but he's doing more inside the songs. The pop-streaked ripper "Me and My Guitar" gives way to "19977," where his gruff lead vocal plays off smooth backing harmonies, and the title track opens with GANG OF FOUR-style guitars ping-ponging between speakers. Then "Just Die Fast" delivers an '80s hardcore blast before "The Doom" slows down and stretches into a heavy noise rocker. It all hangs together like it was written and performed by one person. Oh yeah, it was. Owen plays everything himself. He sings "Me and my guitar will never die," and I hope he's right, because I want him to keep pumping out good fucking music. What's this guy gonna do in his thirties? Catch him on his short October tour through the Midwest and Southeast.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: Slovenly

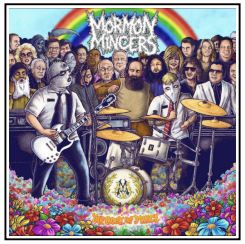
SLUGMILK – Salt Room Hardcore XXX cassette



Well, there's one tape in every batch that confuses me, and this one has me completely baffled. Despite the "XXX" in the album title, SLUGMILK from St. John, New Brunswick does not have anything at all to do with straightedge. No, that's actually the Roman numeral for 30, because this is the band's thirtieth full-length release since they formed in 2010. Yes, you read that right. These aren't short releases either, with 23 tracks on this specific tape. You know what else they aren't? A hardcore band, making this the most confusing album title that I can possibly imagine. I could see maybe calling them a punk band, but to me, it essentially sounds like an aggressive rock band with an edgy, quirky, bar-rock vocalist. Wait, make that two edgy, quirky, bar-rock vocalists, as two of their seven members are credited solely with vox. Seven people seems like a lot when you only hear drums, guitar, bass, and vocals. Looking at the insert, I have the answer, but I am no less confused. Four people are credited with playing guitar, and three of them are also credited with playing bass. Finally, a band that gets to third bass. Did I mention that this is their thirtieth full-length? If you happen to be looking for punk-adjacent music that doesn't take itself too seriously yet is serious enough to crank out release after release, you're in luck, because I have uncovered quite the rabbit hole for you to dive into.

Reviewer: Biff Bifaro
Label: self-released

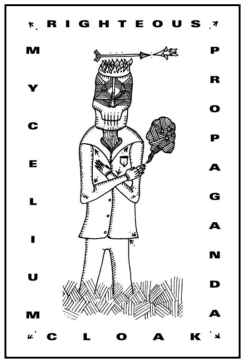
MORMON MINCERS – The Book of Mince LP



Your standard grind/mince affair (if the name didn't give it away). Pummeling, chaotic songs about all of our favorite cults and their leaders interspersed with the most crucial of *Monty Python* samples. As always with these types of acts, the drums are absolutely incredible. Punishingly fast and totally mad! Nothing super groundbreaking, but if you're like me and love shit like AGATHOCLES, LT. DAN, and MINIMUM WAGE ASSASSINS, then this will be right up your alley. These folks seem to tour non–stop and I bet they're a treat to see live. Get out and see 'em when they come through your local tabernacle.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Blackhouse

MYCELIUM CLOAK / RIGHTEOUS PROPAGANDA – split cassette



An interesting tape that features two bands with distinct yet complimentary sounds. I was fully prepared to dislike this for a few reasons. First off, I find the artwork to be quite lacking. It's boring and offers no indication of what the bands might be like stylistically. Strikes two and three are the respective band names. MYCELIUM CLOAK doesn't really roll off the tongue, and RIGHTEOUS PROPAGANDA is about as generic as it gets. The music supersedes all of this, thankfully. MYCELIUM CLOAK dishes out some left–of–center hardcore that skillfully incorporates elements of powerviolence, post–rock, and metal. A bit of a slow burn, but the band is tight and the tunes are well–constructed. RIGHTEOUS PROPAGANDA offers a more direct take on powerviolence, with a plethora of blastbeats and a killer fuzz–forward tone. The unexpected inclusion of a cover of "Daddy Never Understood" by DELUXX FOLK IMPLOSION won me over.

Reviewer: Matt Casteel
Label: Hip Kid

NEGATIVE RUNNERS – Nightmare Agenda LP



Hurtling out of the gate on second album *Nightmare Agenda* is France's NEGATIVE RUNNERS. They're proud members of their punk local scene in Saint–Étienne, the city that's home to the quartet, their studio of choice, and the record label putting out this album, which is a classic, rough–edged burst of melodic hardcore that tackles the joys and struggles of everyday life. Collecting ten songs into the album's twenty–three minutes, *Nightmare Agenda* doesn't wear out its welcome, and repeated listens slowly reveal meaning as its mix of gruff punk, hardcore, street punk, and even a touch of pop punk, thanks to some very well–placed organ, worms its way into your consciousness. The signposts to LEATHERFACE and HOT WATER MUSIC are clear, with one of the band's vocalists sounding like he's gargling from a glass of angry bees, but there's also the occasional nod to NOFX from his counterpart. Together, they and their bandmates have created some great, urgent punk that keeps you coming back for more.

Reviewer: Dom Tyer
Label: Kick Rock

OUST – A Girl Can Dream EP



Short and potent, this 7" from Amsterdam's OUST packs a lot of menace and frustration into its three tracks. Expressing disgust and disbelief in our current dubious world order, it's classic punk protest set to a strong modern hardcore sound. With a strapping back–and–forth beat, ripping sheen, and general atmosphere of malaise, the sound resonates in the vein of S.H.I.T. or BIB. After the brutal condemnation and revenge fantasy of the first couple songs, the decompressed "There is Only Hope in Action" is the real killer here, showcasing the band's artistic precision and ability to evoke mood while delivering a clear message:
they're pissed, but far from discouraged.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Rope or Guillotine

PLEASURE – Manic Phase 12″



BLACK FLAG on LSD. That's the image I'd put on this one, and I mean it as a compliment. PLEASURE takes hardcore into the kind of warped territory where a riff can get ugly and stay there, with two guitars pulling at each other and a vocal approach that adds to the unease. The BLACK FLAG connection is a starting point for that sense of friction; the acid is in how far out of shape the whole thing seems willing to go. Eight songs give *Manic Phase* room to stretch beyond the quick hit, with "Homeowner" and "Teenage Stoner Manslaughter Gang" taking up the most space at the end. There's something appealing about hardcore that makes you grin and feel slightly uncomfortable at the same time. This is the one for that mood. A suitably twisted title for a suitably twisted record.

Reviewer: Gonza Perez
Label: Brainrotter

PLETYKA – Kedves Kis Gonoszságok 12″



Debut vinyl release from this Hungarian trio, following a demo cassette that they released three years ago. PLETYKA, which translates as "gossip" in English, plays synth–y post–punk. I was tempted to throw in "brooding," since that's the typical descriptor you find attached to stuff like this—it probably didn't help that *Kedves Kis Gonoszságok* translates to something like "dear little evils"—but PLETYKA isn't really your typical post–punk band. They may use analog synths to provide a layer of gloom to the five tracks that make up this record, but that layer just ends up serving as a tether to vocals that might otherwise float away. At least two voices sing in unison and somehow manage to strike a balance between melodic and ambient, harmonic and dissonant, sweet and gently melancholic. At times it reminds me of the Australian act TERRY at their gentlest, or when the synth lines get a little more primitive, the great Flemish act VITA NOCTIS. Really excellent record!

Reviewer: Alex Howell
Label: Szégyen Kazetták

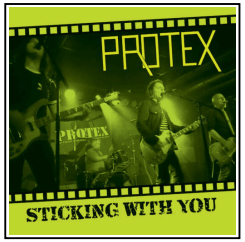
PRIVATE LIVES – Think I'm Coming Around / Television Faces 7″



Two songs, no wasted motion. On "I Think I'm Coming Around," this Montreal four–piece shoves the guitars right up front and lets them bite, and it had my head bobbing from the first bar. Their '70s–influenced mix of power pop and garage is catchy without feeling soft, and the A–side is fast becoming one of my favorite songs of 2026. Jackie Blenkarn (formerly of PALE LIPS) is a big part of why, holding her own against all those guitars with a confident, cutting delivery. Flip it for "Television Faces," which works the same territory but sneaks in some new wave and surf flourishes around the edges. I think both tracks pack more punch than anything on their 2025 full–length, and if this is where they're headed, I'm on board. These are pure rock'n'roll hit–and–runs: get in, light it up, and peel out.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: Bachelor

PROTEX – Sticking With You LP



PROTEX came out of late '70s Belfast on Good Vibrations, same as the UNDERTONES, riding a wave that was still fresh at the time, when bands like the RAMONES and the NERVES had shown that punk and power pop could live in the same song. Their 1978 single "Don't Ring Me Up" is the one people remember, since the album they recorded for Polydor sat in a vault for 30 years. They reformed in 2010, and this is their third album of new material, with guitarist and vocalist Aidan Murtagh the only original member left. What you get here is eleven tracks (most running past the three–minute mark) of pop rock played by a group of guys who have been doing this for a long time. It's laid–back and competently made, and there's clearly an audience for it, just not one that needs things to always be harder, faster, louder. The high point for me is the closer, "Slug City," the album's most rocking track and maybe the one that sounds most like the kids that they used to be.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Sorry State

EARLY GRAVE – Sewer Baby Eaten by Worms EP



Hardcore for the damned. Deranged, old–school–styled hardcore punk soaked in the dank atmosphere of early extreme metal. Sounds like they wrote this material in a basement in 1983 with a stack of horror films and a bottle of poison as a chaser. EARLY GRAVE smashes together warped USHC, some UK82 abrasion, and Japanese hardcore psychosis, then buries the whole mess in a grave of early black metal. I can hear the ACCÜSED, ZOUO, VENOM, and the ugly back catalogs of '80s American underground punk, but *Sewer Baby Eaten by Worms* never feels like a tribute. The riffs are stark black over mutated tempos, while the vocals sound diseased. The whole EP plays like the soundtrack to a midnight horror movie. Rotten to the fucking core.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Stupid Bag

ESPERANZA – Freedom and Equality 12″



The drums sound like drums. The guitar sounds like a real life guitar. And the bass, well, you get it. This is human music through and through. Raw aggression that cannot be faked. This sounds unique. You cannot pin this down, and it is all the better for it. Punk should sound like this. Like movement. Like an inexhaustible energy reminiscent of one's wasted or at least misremembered youth. This touches on UK82 but is not defined by it. This is its own well–cornered niche of punk. You can taste eclectic notes of their countrymen PAINTBOX, you can detect a little metallic flavor of ENGLISH DOGS, you can breathe in a whisper of IMPACT, you can close your eyes and wish they were coming to your town. Until then, this record will do a more than serviceable job and be well worth your time and money.

Reviewer: John Villegas
Label: Metadona

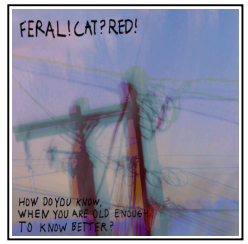
FEAR OF DARKNESS – Phobia 1986—1988 LP



Hailing from the Bristol suburb Yate, FEAR OF DARKNESS was active through the mid and late '80s. *Phobia* is a taste of the band's second iteration with original vocalist Dave Mac replaced by Richard Hulands, and with the addition of Angela Huggins on backing vocals. With his deep, rich, and sometimes sullen vocal styling, Hulands ushered the band towards a darkwave/goth sound that was admittedly halfway started in *The Virgin Land*–era. SISTERS OF MERCY make for an easy comparison, maybe like the slightly poppier *Floodland* album. And in general, that's what I hear here—fairly on–point second wave English post–punk that trades some of the more macabre feelings of the late '70s first–wavers for something sweeter; chaotic anguish for tenderness.The arrangements definitely reach out and grab styles from straight–forward pentatonic rock solos, to quasi–prog rock rhythms ("Friends Like You"), to new wave pop flashiness, to classic, downcost post–punk vocals and reverb–drenched guitar lines. I also think it's worth noting Angela Huggins's contribution to the record—her vocals add a lot of depth, and makes it stand out next to their male–only contemporaries. This album has all three tracks from their 1987 *Lay Me Down* single, and while the other songs were also recorded from '86 to '88 as the title suggests, it's not clear to me if there was another release besides Bristol Archive's 2008 digital release of *Phobia*. I inherently like this type of music, so when a group comes along from the archives that I haven't heard, I get excited. But at what point does a band go from pioneers or standouts in their genre to repeating a formula? Does the big hair and moody band photo feel a little trite? It's not my place to judge intention, so as far as I'm concerned, the music is good, albeit not boundary–pushing.

Reviewer: Willis Schenk
Label: Bristol Archive

FERAL!CAT?RED! – How Do You Know, When You Are Old Enough to Know Better? CD



This band blends punk, sludge, mathcore, hardcore, and kind of everything in between. The concept sounds like it shouldn't work, but holy shit, does it work. Annie, the bassist/singer, seamlessly moves her voice from screams to gentle doom vocals to punk yelling while anchoring the songs the way only a really good bass player can. She is outstanding. Drummer Sam is the source of most of the chaos, while guitarist Ben sounds like two or three players dragging the songs between all the genres they expertly mix. The energy here reminds me of bands like COMADRE—that heart–wrenching punk sincerity, but the sound is somewhere in 13/EYEHATEGOD foundations going to play with everyone from BOTCH to KING WOMAN. I fucking love when the punk scene produces something so clearly personal and original, I can't recommend this enough.

Reviewer: Daniel Z.
Label: self–released

FEVER VISIONS – This Place is Full of Noises LP



Montreal band FEVER VISIONS have released their first full–length, and it might just be the best thing I've heard this year. *This Place is Full of Noises* finds FEVER VISIONS firmly entrenched in the continuum of punk with riffs that are straight out of early '80s Southern California, vocals that sound very Jello Biafra at times, song structures that reflect the MINUTEMEN but also things like EMBRACE, moments that sound like the REFUSED, and even later post–hardcore. *This Place is Full of Noises* surges with adrenaline–inducing energy as rhythms linger but shift quickly and in unexpected ways. The closest comparison I might make is Temecula, California's jazzed–out punkers the COLTRANES, so if you like them, be sure to check out FEVER VISIONS, but you should also just check out *This Place is Full of Noises* because it's really fucking good.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: self–released

GENRE IS DEATH – Attractive People LP



No wave squall that punctures both eardrums and listener comfort as strongly as the good old bad days of '70s New York avant garde. Pulsing bass, sheets of atonal guitar feedback, and GLENN BRANCA–esque, high–volume drone are grounded by the march of a dispassionate drum machine. The duo of Ty and Tayler call and respond in hollers and sarcastic sing–song chants that recall the best of TEENAGE JESUS AND THE JERKS (the band has a friendly relationship with LYDIA LUNCH, which seems like a feat in itself) and MARS. If you like the "screwdriver jammed in the fretboard" sound of urban collapse, this is for you.

Reviewer: Nick Odorizzi
Label: In The Red

GIMIC – New Traditions LP



Killer debut LP from Bristolian DIY punks GIMIC that melds hardcore fury with math rock intricacy. At first listen, *New Traditions* recalls the jazz–inflected MINUTEMEN, but the clean, arpeggiated guitar work often bursts into frantic punk with vicious vocals. Imagine a moment where playlists crash and GEL plays out of the left earbud while DON CABELLERO plays out of the right, but in perfect synchrony. Now imagine following the link and listening to the whole thing right now, because it rules.

Reviewer: Nick Odorizzi
Label: Drunken Sailor

GROTTO – Targeted Solution 12″



Paranoid punk for a world that already lost the plot. Eight tracks of schizoid hardcore that take the twitchy aggression of RUDIMENTARY PENI, the frantic, angular attack of KORO, and the warped mania of early obscure hardcore. The songs are short and nasty. "Black Imp," "Dark Arts," and "Dogmen" strike with the kind of nervous energy that makes everything feel slightly wrong. Recorded at Pee Blood Studios and mastered by Will Killingsworth, the record has the suitably raw, abrasive finish this kind of psychotic punk demands. Neon Taste even pitches it at listeners obsessed with "media-induced paranoia," strange water, and the feeling that something is very, very wrong.

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: Neon Taste

GUIDING LIGHT – Fear On My Own Time LP



Incredibly lush and well-defined production on this collection of art-pop. The lineage of VELVET UNDERGROUND to CHRONOPHAGE to 2026 is complete with this one. Every instrument is showing you most if not all of their best tricks, but not at any detriment to the music. The songs are engaging and short enough that this one will be over before you realize it, and the only proper thing to do would be to listen again. The lyrics are mostly in German but sung at a frenzied canter whose exigency is reminiscent of Minneapolis' AQUARIUM. If you, like me, are a barely functioning adult with untreated ADHD, I would suggest you lightly jog through the streets while listening to this on a loop. It will make the world seem like a video game—a game whose ending will probably disappoint you, but until then, you will have a great soundtrack for this round of samsara.

Reviewer: John Villegas
Label: Post Present Medium

HAWEL/MCPHAIL – Sorrow Wonderland LP



Sorrow Wonderland is fuzz-caked garage rock that mostly rolls along at a steady head-nod pace, then every so often cuts loose with some flying saucer bleeps and B-movie space effects, just to take it a little over the top. The production makes everything sound huge, and the twelve songs, averaging three minutes apiece, keep moving without wearing out their welcome. The English-language vocals won't win any awards, but they don't get in the way, either. This is the second album from the Hamburg duo of Rick McPhail (MINT MIND, TOCOTRONIC) on drums and Frehn Hawel (TIGERBEAT) on guitars and vocals, and it's pressed in an edition of 250 on yellow vinyl. The building blocks are familiar, but they're stacked at enough odd angles to stand apart from the pile of fuzz pedal bands out there, and I spent the whole record wondering what the fuck they were going to throw at me next.

Reviewer: Jeff Cost
Label: La Pochette Surprise

HI SHERIFFS OF BLUE – Live: Mudd Club & A7 12″



HI SHERIFFS OF BLUE started out as more of a concept than a band. An experimental post-punk unit with a rotating cast of noteworthy NYC players including Lydia Lunch, Jerry Williams, and Neneh Cherry (of "Buffalo Stance" fame), the group initially incorporated wacked-out takes on jazz, disco, and noise into their performances. Eventually, they settled into a more permanent lineup, and in the process, forged the rootsy and charging off-kilter blues sound heard on these live recordings from '82 and '83. The resulting din is somewhat ahead of its time. If you close your eyes and listen, forgetting everything I just said, you can easily imagine this as an obscure entry in the '90s bastard blues revival alongside bands like the OBLIVIANS and JON SPENCER BLUES EXPLOSION. The tunes range from speedy ragtime jaunts ("Sloppy Drunk Again") to lurching disjointed dirges ("Wolf") and beyond, all of it caked in claustrophobic club atmosphere. They straddled the line between no wave art and the punk Southern gothic of the GUN CLUB like no one else, haphazardly paving the way for future Delta degenerates.

Reviewer: Jason Harding
Label: Abaton Book Company

HISS – A Cheapened Crown LP



"100% Wool" kicks this off with a wall of guitars and heaviness on par with TORCHE, MELVINS, PLANES MISTAKEN FOR STARS, HELMS ALEE, AmRep, and so forth. I think you know where I'm going here. This is the kind of record I want blasting out of my garage when the door is open for ventilation while I'm building shit but want to keep the neighbors held at bay. I'd also want this record when I have an all-night project to finish. This is a record for slogging through the day-to-day with a slowly radiating focus, and I'll be playing it as it gets colder outside and my motivation starts to slip. I don't know what to say about this other than I like it. Chef's kiss.
Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Dipterid / Hex

INFURIATE – Scourge of Humanity ...World Funeral LP



As a faithful, staunch premium consumer of gruff Eurocrust, friends often try to exfiltrate to my collection perfectly fine, generic, and uncomplicated crust records that they want to get rid of (which is indeed baffling, but no one is perfect I guess). I am easy to please like that. On paper, INFURIATE from Minneapolis has everything that I am looking for in crustcore: growling vocalists, filthy, bleak heaviness, Scandicore pace, cavemen metal breaks, and a cool name. However, and as much as I want to like this first album, it doesn't click perfectly here. The production is lacking in energy, and the music doesn't quite have that galloping vibe that works well with the genre, which is a shame because the songs have the required simplicity and directness you'd expect. I am not totally convinced by the very grindcore-inspired and sometimes monotonous vocals that are low in the mix, either. A punker production might have solved these issues, because in terms of songwriting, I am reminded of great bands like MAN THE CONVEYOR or late 3-WAY CUM. An alright record that could have sounded more impactful.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Hey Fuck You

INFURIATE / SUBVERMES – split EP



Hot new EP seeing gruff crust machine INFURIATE from Minneapolis teaming up with SUBVERMES from São Paulo, and as expected, this is a by-the-book bollocking. I am not sure whether INFURIATE's songs were recorded after the ones on their new album, but in terms of sound, we are swimming in a very similar ocean of downtuned, old school crustcore with something of a grindcore edge, not unlike DISASSOCIATE grabbing drinks with DESTROY! and MAN THE CONVEYOR, but the rather muddy metallic production somewhat impairs the energy and impact of the songwriting to my ears. However, it is still heavy and hard-hitting enough, and the two numbers work perfectly on this format. Will certainly do the job for the crust army. The other side is graced with four songs of fast, punishing, and energetic old school Brazilian crusty hardcore thrash with those typically aggressive vocals and that distinct flow and diction. Classic angry and raw pummeling São Paulo hardcore with a spontaneity and straightforwardness that must be commended. Fans of vintage RATOS DE PORÃO should take note. This band smokes. A very cool split.

Reviewer: Romain Basset
Label: Hey Fuck You / Sotser Grinder / Subkultdethwish

KA-OH! – Ka-Oh! cassette



OH! This is absolutely lovely. Very FUGAZI/HAPPY GO LICKY-coded—the classic post-hardcore sound of noodly, dissonant guitar riffs, wandering bass lines, and syncopated drums that keep everything wrapped up in a nice little package. The singer has the standard Guy Picciotto energy that you typically see with these kinds of acts, but they have their own spin to it, adopting more of a hoarse barking style as opposed to Picciotto's sinister hissing. Maybe that's because it's all sung in German. Everything sounds aggressive in that language. This is really fantastic stuff and a must-listen for anyone who grew up loving the DC sound.
Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: self-released

KRONOL / RESISTANCE IS PUNK – split EP



RESISTANCE IS PUNK (or R.I.P.) is from Stockport in the UK, and plays gritty, aggro anarcho punk, while KRONOL is from Leeuwarden in the Netherlands and plays D-beat-driven hardcore punk. R.I.P. has two songs on this split, and both have a homebrew feel largely driven by the clean yet lo-fi production and noisy guitar work. KRONOL plays three songs on this split, and their set carries an even more aggro feel with rhythms that get your fist in the air. All in all, this is a really well-matched split with both R.I.P. and KRONOL bringing some great punk rock.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: Death Trap / Rejected Abused

LEFT OFF – God Hates Flags CD



There is a charm and earnestness to this tape that I haven't heard in a long time. The recording sounds like it was done in a bathroom by a buddy, the musicianship is sloppy and earnest, the lyrics are perfectly in time with the music, and the message is standard. All of it, the entire package, is what makes me love this so much. The songs themselves are pretty basic and mid-tempo in that punk lane. Through the speakers, I can feel how amazing it feels to be in a room playing music with good pals. I am certain that the longer this band stays together that they will become better songwriters, hone their lyrics, and develop a polished, cohesive sound and overall become a much better band. However, this first effort might be the punkest thing I've heard in a while.

Reviewer: Tony Party
Label: Bricc'd Up

LOOK AWAY – Look Away demo cassette



Stripped-down Bay Area hardcore. Oakland's LOOK AWAY comes out swinging with five pissed-off tracks that get straight to the point. Groovy yet viciously fast when it's called for, channeling the urgency of COKE BUST and CARRY ON with a killer nod to local punk legends GRIMPLE (last song is a cover of "Think"). DIY hardcore done right, with enough stomp to rearrange your teeth. Turn it up or get out of the way!

Reviewer: João Seixas
Label: self-released

LOWBALLER – Volvo 240 Wagon / No Hobbies 7″



My dream car growing up was actually a Volvo 240 wagon. Those things are like tanks and regularly last like 500,000 miles or more. Maybe it's still my dream car. They are "peak Swedish engineering," according to LOWBALL, a NYHC band that sounds like classic NEGATIVE APPROACH. This is artless, straight-up hardcore punk, without pretension or posturing; just a two-sided bruiser with gang vocals and ripping chords. As previously mentioned, "Volvo 240 Wagon" is about the Volvo 240 Wagon, while B-side "No Hobbies" is about not having hobbies. Check it out.

Reviewer: Nick Odorizzi
Label: self-released

MANTAROCHEN – Wellness Ward cassette



MANTAROCHEN is out of Leipzig, Germany, and they just released the *Wellness Ward* cassette, a jangling, five-song recording that explores various aspects of post-punk. A classic post-punk method blends with melancholic shoegazing to create a sound that is momentarily reminiscent of the REPLACEMENTS mixed with PAVEMENT. The opener "Hotel Hell" and the closer "Bored to Death" both bring a bit more swagger with the inclusion of some deathrock tones. In all, *Wellness Ward* is a gradual trip that feels like an earnest expression of emotions.

Reviewer: Seth McBurney
Label: It's Eleven

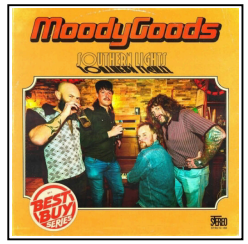
MARBLED EYE – Forever 12″



The best post-punk creates the best tension; an uneasiness the listener can feel pulse through their appendages. Modern bands like DIÄT and INSTITUTE are perfect examples. MARBLED EYE, having formed a couple years after their aforementioned peers, feel like they're chasing those tigers but never quite catching up. Their latest offering provides some of said tension, but there's a layer of detachment seeping through which feels more affect than effect. That's not to say these songs do not have merit. In a dark, cool room, these songs blasting from the speakers would surely create an atmosphere, but again that may be the rub here—the intent to curate sensation rather than a sensation naturally developing. Or maybe I'm the rub, the rube. What causes more friction to your ears, pageantry or pedantry? Turn this one on and decide for yourself.

Reviewer: D. Gregory
Label: Digital Regress

MOODY GOODS – Southern Lights LP



First off, I love the cover art for this slab. Just some blokes hanging out having a pint. It looks like a photo some random bar would post on their Facebook page, but there's an aura to it. I think it has something to do with the throwback Best Buy Series sticker pasted on it. Anyway, this is a really solid release here. Modern pub rock with a garage punk twist. Powerful vocals that bring to mind D. Boon paired with melodic, noodly leads. There's a violin intermittently thrown into the mix every so often, and it's such a lovely little addition that I wish it was featured more prominently. This might make me sound like a total dumbass, but I was a bit shocked to see these folks were from across the pond. This has a very North American sound to it. A little more aggressive, a little heavier on the power chords, with dynamics pushed into the stratosphere. They'd be right at home in Chicago. Spin this a few times and you'll see what I mean.

Reviewer: Jake Joyce
Label: Boss Tuneage / Outhouse