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muzikman84@hotmail.com*

"My Siren Song"- **Juliet Lyons** www.julietlyons.com

This album by the very talented American songstress has a very mysterious, other worldly and mysterious tone. It also features strong, able vocals that boast a great range. Overall, it is beautiful and atmospheric. Some of the songs lack a hook, and therefore end up being slightly forgettable, however this is compensated by excellent musicianship. This album, to me, evokes images of castles 'n candles; an approach that was perfected all those years ago by the likes of Chris De Burgh and Kate Bush (this sound is especially evident on tracks like "The Quest"). The title track, like many of the songs, is rather filmic, with a torchy, romantic undertone. This is music that is tailor made to accompany wine and fireplaces. It should also be noted that the material on this disc is lyrically good, especially on tracks like "Behind The Future", which takes a biting look at all of humanity's mistakes. Overall this recording represents flashes of world music infused with soft pop. The promo sheet that accompanied the CD mentions that it is sure to be hailed by people in the "Yoga, spa and meditative circles". I couldn't have said it better myself! This is very calm, soothing music for quiet, romantic nights.

"Memorandum"- Document No. 5

Here we have another recording by the great Moncton band, and sadly it appears that this may be their last offering. Their drummer Chad has decided to move back to the Halifax area, so perhaps this is their swan song. If so, they did a great job recording their last hurrah. "DRB" is a great rock anthem. It is very memorable and powerful. And interestingly enough, the band pulls off a cover of the Human League's New Wave classic "Don't You Want Me?". They give it a raw, punky edge. Devin sounds a bit like Iggy on this one. "Brood of Vipers" is very doomy and dark. It struts along with a grim swagger. It is a very cool track. I am very sad to see another great band come to an end, but at least we have this great final recording to immortalize their sound.

"MC Money"- **Peter P and The Bridge Street Crew**

I was fortunate enough to play a house party with these guys last summer. Their show was hilarious and tons of fun. I think I had a constant grin on my face during their entire set. "MC Money" is an amusing disc proving that these guys do indeed have a killer sense of humour. It's so refreshing to see a band like this that doesn't take itself too seriously. And to Peter P's credit, the raps here are very well written. The guy is a funny urban clown who is evidently having fun, inviting anyone to come along for the ride. The music is catchy and well put together, giving the CD a pulse that can be listened to repeatedly. Tracks like "Smack Yo Ass" are a party waiting to happen. The vocoder on "Cold Rokkin" sounds great, and "Straight Up Nerd" is

hilarious. There does indeed seem to be a method behind all this madness. This disc upholds the great tradition of early De La Soul. Great stuff.

"Keeping It Salty"- DJ Salty Flavor
www.djsaltyflavor.com

Matt Bryant is a very talented electronic musician from Austin, Texas. He excels at creating crisp, infectious grooves. It is literally impossible not to move to his material. "Keeping It Salty" continues to provide us with great synth textures, killer beats and catchy melodies. While listening to this, it's easy to see that the studio is DJ Salty Flavor's playground, and he's not afraid to have fun there. "Undignified" is a great opening track. It would easily be at home on any dance floor. The air of positivity on this album is also very disarming (especially evident on track titles like "Dare To Dream"). "Hot Or Cold" is also another great track, very glitchy and anthemic. It sounds like an updated version of the classic sound of Devo. Things never get predictable on this CD. DJ Salty Flavor is obviously a gifted master of the electronic beat.

"To Myopic Mutts"- Zwerg (independent)

Zwerg is the alter-ego of Eldon Thiele, a very unique and artistic young man from Moncton. I was lucky enough to meet him briefly at a show I did in November of 2008 in the Hub City. He was kind enough to give me copies of two of his CDs, including "To Myopic Mutts". I had no idea what to expect in terms of the type of music he did, yet I can safely say after listening that I am very impressed.

Zwerg's vocal style is highly distinctive. He casually sways from a smooth croon to guttural moans and growls. His eccentricity is winning...this is evidently the work of a true artist. Tracks like "Great Grief" remind me of Tori Amos. It is an emotionally charged piano ballad that is gleefully left of centre. It is clear from the roccoco designs in the CD insert and the neo-classical musical phrasing that Zwerg has a penchant for olde worlde theatricality.

"Azure Empyrean" is a beautiful ballad featuring piano and mandolin. It is highly filmic and haunting. After a while, some of these tracks do start to sound a bit alike, but that is a very minor observation. Overall this is a breathtaking, glorious effort.

"This Is Serious Business"- Q Ball (Bald Freak Music)
baldfreak.com

Hailing from the east coast, Q Ball is an interesting artist whose music is quirky and catchy. There is without question an 80s feel on many of these tracks. Q Ball takes the idiosyncracies of New Wave and welds it to a modern computer-age beat. To call this dance music would not be completely accurate (although many of the tracks could easily be played in any night club). There is a distinct pop flavoring here as well, along with plenty of rock attitude (no doubt thanks to guitar work from Bumblefoot).

The opening track "His Name Is Goliath" overflows with energy, while the title track sounds like it would easily be at home on FM pop radio. "Freak Out, Rock Hard" is terrifically old school and infectious. Q Ball definitely understands the value of the hook; there are catchy melodies aplenty.

It should also be noted that the guy can definitely sing. His vocals are clear and they cut right through the mix. One must also appreciate the 70s "classic rock" vibe that runs throughout. Q Ball also has a great sense of humor as evidenced by tracks like "Pez Dispenser" and "Music And Pizza Boy". If the latter doesn't make you move, you don't have a pulse. I predict big things in this guy's future.

"The Fisherman's Daughter"- Joy Shannon and The Offering (independent)
theoffering.co.uk

This CD is a collaborative effort between Joy Shannon, a resident of California, and Mark Sheppard, the brains behind The Offering, who are based in Cambridge, UK. Immediately, anyone listening to this will be taken away to a swirly, "fairy tale" type soundscape. The overall sound of this CD is very seductive and emotional, and it boasts an immaculate production. This is a highly introspective recording loaded with orchestral strings and permeated by stylish electronics.

"Your Lies" immediately brings to mind Sarah MacLachlan's better work. Joy's beautiful voice mixes well with the sumptuous chords and understated beats. Her delivery is slightly reminiscent of Madonna, but with a much wider range. "The Day You Knew Me" also delivers this calm, lullaby-esque feel. Like most of the tracks, it is highly romantic. The title track features a gritty guitar crunch, while "Halfway

There" sounds a lot like Tori Amos. It is moody and heartfelt, like much of the album.

Throughout the disc there is a recurring theme of longing and desperation. "The World I Knew" is an absolutely gorgeous track, worthy of standing right alongside Enya's best work. "Of Angels" is also a stirring finale to the album. Overall this disc is wonderfully deep, full of feeling and a perfect disc to accompany quiet nights alone with the soul.

**"Disappearance"- Copernicus (Moonjune records)
coperniconline.net**

After treating us to his wonderfully challenging music for over 20 years, it's fascinating to see that Copernicus is still as daring as ever. Make no mistake, "Disappearance" proves that Copernicus can still rattle cages like no one else. Right away, the first track ("12 Subatomic Particles") shows that he is still fascinated with what goes on at the subatomic level. The vocals (and the music itself) sounds drunk with a higher truth. To the average listener, Copernicus may sound like a madman. But for the rest of us who find him mesmerizing, this is truly engaging stuff.

"The Quark Gluon Plasma" continues with themes that Copernicus has previously explored. Here he sounds like a tortured soul, sitting by himself in the corner of a dark, seedy dive bar. Here, like previous Copernicus offerings, the music is skeletal and the spoken word delivery is feverish. You know when "Humanity Created The Illusion Of Itself" begins, eventually it is going to explode into a wall of sound, which it does. This is classic Copernicus: chaotic, yet still highly intelligent. "Poor Homo Sapiens" is a sobering critique of modern man. It sounds like a modernized update on the work of T.S. Eliot. It is lyrically bleak yet musically appealing.

Past Copernicus collaborators such as Pierce Turner and Larry Kirwan help to maintain a sonic consistency. In relation to past efforts, this does sound familiar, however that's not to suggest this is just a xerox of previous discs. Indeed, this could in fact be our favorite existentialist's best work. More than ever, Copernicus comes across as a sage prophet, delivering his insightful odes to anyone brave enough to listen.

"Into the 4th Dimension"- Zwerg (independent)

Zwerg is nothing if not unique. Looking like a lost Nordic tribe from a futuristic parallel dimension, Zwerg is quirky to the nth degree. But aside from striking visuals, the music within is very well done. This CD is certainly more lively (and rhythm based) than "To Myopic Mutts".

"Unwavering (We're Done)" features a classic pop flavor, as well as pristine vocals and tasty electronics. The production is loaded with numerous audio snaps and flourishes that come and go. The mix is very textured and multi-dimensional. "Lucky To Be An Alien" is musically robust and full of energy. And the lyrics! Never have I heard lyrics such as "The creator of creativity grants literary construction blood on Campobello". "Test The Spirits" is loopy and infectious, sounding like an acid-tinged variation on Van Dyke Parks' solo work from the 70s.

Take the quirkiness of Bjork, marry it to the eccentricity of Sparks, and you probably still won't be near the brilliant oddity of Zwerg. If you are open minded and embracing of music that is left of centre, this disc is just for you.

"Yo, It's Christmas!"- HeatherSong.com (independent) cdbaby.com/heathersong

HeatherSong is the alter-ego of Heather Pahl, a musician from California. This CD features her own quirky interpretations of classic Christmas songs. The result is a real mixed bag. The tone of the CD is established right away with the opening track "Merry Christmas". It is cute but cluttered.

I applaud Heather for seemingly having fun with this disc. There is certainly a playful sense of humor throughout the recording. This actually reminded me of something my elementary school music teacher would have played for my class. "Good King Hiphop" is a curious oddity, complete with a rather serious and stiff "rap" by Thomas (the same can be said for "Housetop HipHop"). It actually appears that Heather's husband, children, and a variety of relatives and friends appear on this disc. This is certainly a family affair, it seems.

I cheer Heather for doing something that is very "do it yourself". Kids will more than likely enjoy this disc, however many adults probably won't be as amused. The music sounds rather cheap and canned at times, and the production is shallow at best, but there is still something about this CD that is fun and intriguing. Heather has a pleasant voice, and the innocence and naivete of this CD is charming.

"The Bedroom Demos 2008"- Terminal Influence
Coma Pop Records myspace.com/terminalinfluence

Terminal Influence is the alter-ego of Chad, a creative young musician from the Moncton area. This CD is a collection of home demos, and it offers a fascinating glimpse into the world of a true poet and musician. Things start off with "Hide Ma Shame", a dramatic, sincere track that features a good use of echo effects. Like many of the songs featured on the CD, it is a very sparse example of a bedroom recording. There is nothing fancy here. The minimal nature of this entire disc is very appealing. "Deadthings" has very good acoustics, as well as mysterious and resonant vocals. I like the ambient noises on the disc. The stuff that most artists would try to delete (such as coughing) are left in here, which makes the work that much more honest and real. "Circle of Fiends" is another excellent track that shows a highly perceptive view of group politics, and "Freak" is yet another song that is captivating and brutally true. "Somebody..." is also quite "to the point", while "Priss" is very revealing and features a good use of flange. "Echoes of Dismemberment" shows a quieter side to Terminal Influence. It is very stirring and introspective. Overall, this is a highly intelligent offering. Terminal Influence is not only a gifted musician, but also a talented wordsmith. Highly recommended.

"The Bedroom Demos Volume 2"- Terminal Influence
Coma Pop Records myspace.com/terminalinfluence

It really is amazing sometimes to consider the power of music that can be accomplished between just a guy and his acoustic guitar. This is exactly what can be said about the music of Terminal Influence. There is certainly no lack of feeling in his material. On this disc, we are treated to even more bedroom demos, and it is a great continuation of the first recording. "Sunrise" is very atmospheric and moody. On this disc, I noticed that the recordings sounded just a bit more polished than what we heard on the first volume. Also, the playing and the vocal phrasing seemed just a bit tighter. On songs like "My Angel", Chad sounds like a world weary troubador, kind of like Springsteen after a drunken night of wandering empty streets. "Ugly" offers great echo effects; the song is very snake-like and eerie. "The Pain Remains" is anthemic, and anyone who has ever felt the hurt inside will relate to this. Another great recording from an artist you should keep an eye on.

"Cold City"- Oblast <http://www.myspace.com/beamandpulse>

Here we have an intriguing collection of electronic drones that immediately draws the listener into a clinical alien landscape. The title of this work could not be any more appropriate, as the sounds within are indeed very cold, and they also conjure up images of frosty, lonely, concrete cityscapes. The ghost of bands like Suicide is alive and well in this recording. The title track is scary and empty, and abounds with a mechanical nervousness. "Kandahar" is blissfully chaotic, with a never changing beat. "Flaming" is a great cover of the Syd Barrett tune, and provides a good closing to the tape. I loved this work from beginning to end. For the most part, it is extremely devoid of any emotion or feeling at all, yet this coldness and detachment is itself the reason why this is so unique and compelling to listen to. Oblast has succeeded in creating a sound all his own. Excellent.

"Debt From Above"- Add Higga
<http://www.myspace.com/addhigga>

The title track for this album kicks off with a sample from Tennessee Ernie Ford's classic recording "Sixteen Tons". You know right away this is not going to be a standard issue, run of the mill hip-hop offering. Add Higga employs lines like "Saint John is an exhaust pipe", proving that he is an able poet who does a fine job of capturing the world around him. Overall, this album is a grim portrait of a grey world- the opening track, like many of the songs, is very uptight (and honest). A recurring theme explored on this CD are dreams not achieved, a theme that is all too well known in the east coast. Add Higga comes across as a smart as hell wordsmith who is not afraid to be real and raw. His raps are delivered with conviction. "Waking Up The Dead" captures desperate people in desperate situations. "Soon Enough" borrows a sample from The Smiths (and sounds great), and "I've Waited My Whole Life" is infectious with great vocals by Mary Ferguson. "Debt From Above" is a frightfully honest and realistic disc loaded with smarts. Add Higga is a true urban poet.

"Ghost Stories"- Neil Campbell
<http://www.neilcampbellcollective.com/>

Neil Campbell is an artist from Liverpool, England, whose music is sure to stir the souls of anyone who listens. "Ghost Stories" is eerie, evocative and entrancing. The opening track is a 29 minute sprawling suite that salutes shadows and darkness. A highly talented guitarist, Campbell collaborates on this disc with Anne Taft (voice) and Michael Beiert (electronics) to create a haunting sonic melange. His guitar work is stirring, and it mixes so well with the beautiful vocals drifting in the background, and the weird electronic treatments add just the right touch. As I listen to this, I imagine grey clouds whirring by in stop-motion frenzy, or a vampire crying as the October sun rises. This is simply so romantic and resonant. A perfect album for quiet nights alone with the soul. "Ghost Stories" manages to be ambient, instrumental, and goth all rolled in one. Highly recommended.

"Evidence"- Document No. 5
<http://www.myspace.com/documentno5>

Have I mentioned how much I love this band? These guys are experts at doing songs that feature tight, punchy beats and simple, memorable basslines. "Evidence" is essentially a three track EP, but it manages to pack so much into three little songs. "Black Widow" is dark and brooding. Devin's vocals conjure up memories of Joy Division. It is catchy and well composed. "Sore" is manic and neurotic, mixing post-punk angst with excellent musicianship. The vocals drip with an eerie chill that sounds great. "The Duke Needs A Home" plods along with attitude and power. Check these guys out, you won't be disappointed.

"Seraphim"- Feedback Scars
<http://www.myspace.com/feedbackscars>

This is a 6 song disc from the husband and wife duo of Devin and Tanya. It's great to see that these guys are still cranking out their unique brand of punk-infused pop. The distortion effects on Tanya's voice (on "Equinox") sound very cool. Feedback Scars' sound is primal and powerful- it is full of loud, crash filled beats and ultra gritty guitars. And then, from out of nowhere, along comes a soft, pretty track like "Waiting", which provides a pleasant break from the more serated tracks. It is a truly poignant song. "Grey Goose" makes me grin, and the disc ends with "Lullaby", another pretty track. I look forward to many more recordings from this talented band!

"Plastikdisc"- Samplescience

Brown Coffee Records

This is an excellent disc by Samplescience (also known as Pierre Parenteau). I have been listening to Pierre's music for years and I have been consistently impressed by the quality of his compositions. This disc is a great example of strong, very well put together, home-made electronic music. "Bamboo" is lush and inviting, with a very fat bassline. "Minimal Automatik" harks to the grand tradition of Kraftwerk. It is an excellent brew of electronic sounds. Tracks like "Vintagius" are moody and stylish, while "3S Ambient Work" is brilliant. "Magic Spell Pounder" is another mysterious and moody track, with great old school 808 drum machine sounds. "The Final Notes" is an excellent finish. It sounds big, serpentine and slightly eerie. There is a touch of medeival in this track, and a juicy analogue bass. I also love the echo effect on the percussion sounds. Overall this disc is highly inventive, and very smart. The proceedings never get boring. I would highly recommend this for fans of YMO, later Depeche Mode and Aphex Twin. This is DIY electronics at its best.

"Into The Hive"- The Offering

The Offering Official Website

This latest disc from the great British act The Offering has been in the works for quite some time, and has been well worth the wait. This is definitely a band whose creative output just keeps getting stronger and stronger. The Offering excel at purveying dark goth-tinged pop which skillfully marries electronics with an awesome rock guitar sound. "48 Hours In Tokyo" features slick production, great vocals and cool electronic flourishes. Like many of the tracks, songs like "Damaged" and "Golgotha Falls" have a clean, uncluttered sound and a very polished, smart production. "Luna" is hooky and infectious, while "Of God and Gasoline" is looser and almost jazzy. "Love Song" is very minor sounding, with lilting vocals and a mechanical patchwork of exquisite sounds. This is an album that is very melodic, to-the-point and not overlong. The Offering are very talented at crafting music that is the aural equivalent of black silk....stylish, sensual and dark. Very well done.

"Wrecking Havoc"- Minimal Frank

Wreck Age Recordings

I'm glad to see that Wreck Age is still at it. This is a reworking of tracks by various

artists, previously released on this daring little Montreal based label. Behind all of this is the mastermind known as Minimal Frank (or also called Francois Marceau by his friends). This is a gleefully noisy mish-mash of sounds and soundscapes, all brought together into one adventurous sonic brew. "A Beer, A Laptop and Some LSD" sounds like a drum machine breathing its last breath. Minimal Frank is not afraid to mix things up and be downright spooky at times. Sometimes this is chaotic, but in a good way. The key word here is "experimental". The CD features layer upon layer of destruction and orchestrated distortion. "What's Left of the Leftovers" sounds a bit more "song based", if that is possible, while "Another Tough Hangover" is absolutely nightmarish. Suggestion seems to be very important- the pieces can be interpreted in many ways, which is why this disc is so interesting. This work is creative, dark, mechanical and non-musical. I hope Frank keeps letting us peer into the fascinating (and eerie) recesses of his mind.

"The Soft Focus Sound of Today"- Dreamsploitation

[Dreamsploitation's MySpace page](#)

What I love about Dreamsploitation is that the music is glorious, celebratory, and positive without being campy. This is not easy to pull off, yet Dreamsploitation do it in spades. There is a high level of sincerity that runs throughout the entire album. "The Night Everything Changed" sets the tone- it is frivolous, flippant and playful. Chuck comes across as a sonic auteur, mixing and matching forgotten string flourishes with gorgeous melodies and infectious rhythms. I love the dizzy, almost euphoric quality of the music. I've heard material in this vein before, but nothing exactly quite like this. "Anxious Lullaby" sports gorgeous vocals and pseudo far-eastern undertones. It is smart and artfully beautiful. Blips like "Monochrome" waft by like a half-remembered dream. The songs culminate in an album that is jazzy, cinematic, worldly and pop infused. This is the sound of a technicolor 1950's Hollywood, modernized and spiritualized by the hand of technology. I so enjoy how this album floats by on a breeze of whimsy. Excellent.

"Visions and Dreams"- Catherine Duc

[Catherine Duc Website](#)

Catherine Duc seems to be very adept at creating calm, soothing, beautiful music. This work is very well assembled and musically pure. It is resonant, heartfelt music that pleases the ears and the soul. This is a masterful combination of ambient, celtic, electronica and world music. There is also a very visual quality to the music...I'm sure Duc would have no problem moving into the realm of film scores. There is a wide palate of sounds in the mix: voice, strings, pan flute, guitar and a myriad of other instruments. "Essence of Dreams" is just that- grand and stirring. Tracks like "Evocation" are sultry and mysterious. In general the album is skillfully composed and played. Duc's musicianship is exquisite and a joy to listen to. Highly recommended for fans of Enya, Deep Forest, Ennio Morricone and the Tea Party.

"Goth Core"- Document No. 5

[Document No. 5 MySpace](#)

Here is the latest 5 song EP from the new Moncton band Document No. 5. It is a genuine mixture of various sounds and styles, and ultimately a very enjoyable listen. Things kick off with "Sensory Overload", a track that is pure punk rock. It is very primal and full of energy (and at one minute long, short and sweet in the good old punk tradition). "Sunset" saunters along with plenty of attitude, while "This Song Sucks" (it doesn't) features more punky gusto. And then from out of nowhere comes "Murder Mystery", in all its Poly 800 glory. It is a huge contrast to the other tracks, but it works. The synth sounds great meshed with the live acoustic drums. This is a very cool track....it achieves a very distinct and resonant atmosphere that many bands will never reach. "The Duke Needs A Home" is the sprawling finale. This band does a great job at creating a simple, straightforward DIY sound that I love. The basement quality that runs through the tracks makes this EP so genuine and real.

"Electronic Messages"- Various Artists

[Brown Coffee Recordings](#)

Brown Coffee is a new indie label in Montreal, specializing in underground electronic music. This compilation features an assortment of bands and solo acts from around the globe. "One Dream Day" by the UK's John Havelock-Moore is serious and stiff, starting out as a spoken word monologue. The track by Ian SDHZ is ambient, with leanings towards Aphex Twin. 3AM provide a cut that is weird, spooky and glitchy. Some of the tracks are more memorable than others, but that is to be expected. Carlos Natale's song is dreamy and ethereal, while Samplescience's track is futuristic and dancey. Victor Eijkhout also provides a selection that is atmospheric and evocative, while Necrosensual give us two tracks that are both raw, dark and danceable. I applaud Pierre for including a real variety on this compilation. It is definitely varied, which makes it a highly enjoyable listening experience. Many tracks

seem to boast a distinct Boards of Canada influence. This compilation is excellent and very well-rounded. I look forward to further releases from Brown Coffee.

"Only Science Can Tell Us The Truth" - Radium 88
radium88.net

This is an album abundant with good, pure electronics. It sounds very slick and modern. Swirls of electronic liquid beautifully frame this introverted classic. Songs like "Nocturne" are exceptionally beautiful, and remind me of Bleep and Booster. Overall, this album is very moving and full of melancholy and insightfulness. The title track evokes images of the Fall, complete with dying leaves and grey skies. "Nostalgia For A Time That Never Was" features a great synth melody and is very infectious. This is a sumptuous masterwork full of feeling. Whoever said that electronic music could not resonate with heart needs only to listen to this.

"Dicotomia"- Project Morfeo media@trostlos.org

I was pleased to receive a package of CDs from a label based in Alberta called Trostlos. It seems they specialize in music that mixes electronics and ethnic music from other countries. "Dicotomia" is very beautiful and poignant. It features a high degree of musicianship, and has an undeniably cinematic quality. The songs are very emotional and heartfelt. Obviously, this is the work of craftsman. It is very well produced, with a good mix of sumptuous string sounds, graceful piano and crunchy guitar. The music is often rather dark with a strong Euro feel, and the mix is very well balanced with distinct vocals. If you are into bands like the Tea Party who mix middle eastern sounds with western rock structures, you will love this.

"The Acid Cowgirl Audio Trade"- Salme Dahlstrom

This is a name that I'm sure will be on the lips of the masses in the not too distant future. Salme excels at purveying great, energetic electronic pop with a very distinct nod to Fatboy Slim and his ilk. Salme is very "in your face" with tons of edge. The album is comprised of slightly distorted textures and punchy loops, and pop songs with plenty of power. Salme is a one-woman dynamo who is very, very close to exploding into the realms of mass appeal. Songs like "Superstar Car Crash" (which was featured on the TV show Big Brother Australia) are very radio friendly, while tracks like "C'Mon Y'All" are cute, spunky fun. Salme has a very sharp ear for popcraft (evidenced on songs like "Hello California") and "Popwreck" is hooky fun. This young lady definitely knows how to get the party going. A winning effort.

"Tripas de la Miseria"- Christian McKee christianmckee.com

This offering opens with "Disappear and Don't Return", a well crafted pop song with pleasant vocals. Like many of the songs, it is hummable and unique. The song "Marlane" is informed by decades of rock wisdom; McKee comes across as a modern poet with a terrific sense of melody and hooks. "Don't Say" is an excellent track, while "Pop Song" is pure Casio-pop candy. Overall the album features a great mix of acoustic guitar and electronics. McKee has a distinct and likable voice, suitable for mainstream radio. His songs are affable, smart and heartfelt. McKee does an exceptional job of mining the warm 70's classic rock vibe, yet he does it with an elevated degree of sensitivity and smarts. This is the work of a gifted artist with an undeniable talent. I have no doubts that this recording will be appearing on my Top 10 Albums list of 2008.

"Tunsi Wrap"- Tunsi

Tunsi is an American rap artist who has no shortage of attitude. The first thing that struck me while listening to his latest effort "Tunsi Wrap" was how strong his lyrics were, and how clear his delivery was. The album boasts a very good level of production. I'm definitely not an expert on rap, but I can easily recognize the merit in this offering. Tunsi's raps are delivered against a background of inventive music tracks. He captures the world around him and delivers it to us in all its grittiness. My only complaint about the CD is that it did start to sound a bit samey after a while. More variation in rhythm would be good. The best track is probably "Planetarium", while "Tell Me Something" is sweetened with female backing vocals. "Rat Man" is somewhat comical. All in all, this is an excellent disc from a very brave artist.

"Document No. 5"- Document No. 5

Here we have an EP from a new Moncton band. I liked this right away. The music is gloomy and doomy and very Joy Division-esque. The opening track ("Mainline") really comes to life at the 3 minute mark. The song has good lyrics that perfectly showcase desperation. "Girlfriend of the Grave" is punky, and the flange treatments in the song sound great. "Grey Goose" is a Leadbelly cover that really shows that the band has a sense of humour (I was previously unfamiliar with this track, but it did remind me of the old classic "The Preacher and the Bear"). This disc reminds me that this is what it's all about: good friends getting together to make noise and having fun with it.

"Trust In The Lord"- DJ Salty Flavor

DJ Salty Flavor does a very good job of creating dancey, upbeat electronic music with Christian values. This is very reminiscent of New Order. It is positive and bright with lots of captivating electronic textures. The music is very suitable for dance clubs (especially tracks like "Hey Ashley"). While listening to this disc, I was frequently reminded of the golden era of late 80s/early 90s club music. This work is full of references to bands like The Shamen. "Deep Inside" is well produced with excellent rhythm sounds, and "No Good With Girls" is a club anthem waiting to happen. It is a very fun track that reminded me of the Robin Gibb classic "Boys Do Fall In Love". "Outerspace Jam" is a more pensive moment, while "Just Another Day At Sonic" is hilarious! Fan of intelligent, catchy dance music should definitely check this album out.

"Traffic"- ABC abcmartin.fry.com

Finally, after an 11 year wait, diehard ABC fans now have a new album to clutch to their hearts. And this one was definitely worth the wait. Martin Fry (the only remaining original member of the band) is better than ever on this one. As I listen to this, I feel like I'm sitting down with an old friend, sipping a cup of tea and talking about the old times. It is a very warm, welcoming disc.

Martin rocks out on the opener "Sixteen Seconds to Choose". It boasts a full, polished sound and a great mix. "The Very First Time" is an excellent pop number that harks back to ABC of yore. It is hooky with exquisite strings. "Ride" is another catchy winner. "Caroline" sounds like nothing ABC have done before. It is very bittersweet and sincere, with a sensual summertime feel. It is on tracks like "Life Shapes You" that the listener realizes just how far Fry has come. The last album (1997's "Skyscraping") was airy and dreamy. "Traffic" is much more pedestrian.

Another song of note is "Way Back When". Here Fry plays historian, looking back on rock and roll's brief history. His passion for the genre is so evident. And I was pleasantly shocked to hear an ABC song that referenced Elvis! "Fugitives" is quirky, funky and slightly sinister. It crawls along with the swagger of a predator.

This is an excellent entry in the ABC story. Fry displays a maturity and wisdom (and a knack for melody and experimentation) that is incredible. People who grew up with ABC will not be disappointed, and newcomers will also love the undeniable ABC pop zeal, which is present in abundance. "Traffic" is modern, yet infused with the classic ABC flavour. A great return to form.

"Funplex"- B-52's

Right away, the door to this album opens wide and BOOM..."Pump" kicks things off with vigor. It is an infectious, pounding track, much like the rest of the album. Most of the tracks on this "comeback" album are downright lively and fun. It is difficult not to move to these goodtime classics! Listen up party people, the B-52's are BACK!

The classic B-52's sound has not changed much over the years. They still do a great job of mixing twangy surf guitars with electro dance beats. And the lyrics are still just as kitschy and nonsensical as ever. And the 60's tinged vocal harmonies are still as sweet as ever. And just like past efforts, these guys embrace life with all the "carpe diem" they can muster. They still know how to keep things light and fun. Sit back and enjoy the familiar layering of textured guitars, nice harmonies and touches of electronics.

I'm not sure if there are any obvious hits on this album, but that doesn't matter. The title track features classic rock chords, and it is nice n' linear and catchy. Overall the album never strays too far from a stomping 4/4 party vibe, a domain the B-52's practically perfected. This may not be their best album, but you'll be having too much fun to actually notice. Put this on and a party will be born, guaranteed.

"Ethnic"- Shiva In Exile media@trostlos.org

This is a disc of "world ambient" music. It features lots of strings, and a dramatic mix of middle eastern melodies and foreign language lyrics. The album is beautifully realized, stylish and overflowing with emotion. Every corner of every song is soaked with atmosphere. As I listened to this, I was frequently reminded how much it sounded like a motion picture soundtrack to me. "Breathing" is a sumptuous, resonant track that conjures up exotic imagery. Like many of the songs, it features a good mix of traditional instruments and electronics. Overall, this offering is dark, evocative and slightly eerie. Highly recommended.

"Femtastic"- Jennings jennings-music.com

Mary Jennings has a distinct, robust voice that has no problem delivering a melody. Her album "Femtastic" abounds with pure, well crafted pop songs. The opening track "Falling Higher" is a great track, primed for mainstream FM radio success. Her music could be described as Sarah MacLachlan with a bit more edge, however it must be noted that Jennings has a sound and style that is all her own. It is evident that lots of

time went into the songs and the production, plus Jennings has an obviously keen ear for melody and popcraft. The title track ups the tempo nicely, as does "Do Or Die". Also included is a second disc ("Stripped") that features "piano and voice" versions of selected songs from the album. Very nice. This album is smart, energetic and poetic. I sense big things in Jennings' future.

"Technologic Epoch 2000" - David Monte Cristo
montecristorecords.com

Straight out of New York, we have this disc of techno/dance tracks mixed with New Age riffs. I enjoyed this disc from beginning to end. It features an old school vibe that is irresistible. "B-52 Runway" is a minimal, engaging track that flows along, waiting to erupt. There's some great dance tracks on this disc- "Limelight DJ" manages to capture all the dizzy euphoria of a blissful night out dancing. Moroder's influence can be heard throughout, especially in the opening of "Rave Chant". The disc is full of good, crisp electronics. Monte Cristo is a great label that specializes in quality electronic music. I loved all the chimey synth pads, organ sounds and minimal sequences offered in this recording. It is unique and highly listenable. Very well done.

"Underground" - David Monte Cristo and James Michaels
montecristorecords.com

Make no mistake, this disc is aimed directly at the dance crowd. It features original tunes and a variety of covers. I did think that some of this was a bit campy and over the top, but still very well done. Released in 2000, the technology on this all ready sounds dated in spots. The echoes of disco that run throughout also adds an outdated (yet charming) quality to the recording. There is no shortage of melodramatic vocals. Many of the tracks are dancey, yet there are also some atmospheric moments, such as "Resurrection". "El Bimbo" is rather cabaret, like something you would hear walking into a smoky night club in Berlin. Also featured is a curious cover of the Depeche Mode song "Sweetest Perfection". "Led Zeppelin" is a beautiful, poignant track. A bounty of analogue juiciness punctuates several of the tracks. Overall, this is a fun disc that fans of electronic dance music will love.

"Toolbox Hero" - Toolbox Hero
myspace.com/jukeboxhero2

This was NOT what I was expecting. I received a very unspectacular looking home burnt CD-R in the mail, slipped into a red paper sleeve with hand written song titles scrawled across the envelope. Immediately (don't ask me why) I imagined some glitchy, artsy noise that some kid recorded on their PC. How wrong I was. This is a 5 song demo of songs by Toolbox Hero, the alter ego of Zeke Sayer. All of the tracks are highly touching and haunting. "Between the Earth and Moon" is beautiful; a mix of acoustic guitars, electronics and gentle male-female vocals. Like most of the tracks it is very thought provoking and introverted. "Free Now" is a catchy and melodic slice of indie pop. It features a neat mix of simple piano melodies...and is that an SK1 I hear in the background? Toolbox Hero kind of reminds me of Hayden, but only if Hayden used electronics. "Having Fun Can Be Dangerous" sounds a bit like early Talking Heads, while "Now Is The Time" mixes things up with a bit of rap. Zeke does a great job of creating soft, gentle and smart pop tunes. This is a brilliant disc. I can't wait for the full-length release!

CD Reviews by Jill Davis LeBlanc

"She Wants Revenge" (2006) - She Wants Revenge
"This is Forever" (2007) - She Wants Revenge

Do you remember the David Bowie movie, "The Hunger", where in the opening scene the vampires are hanging out at a nightclub, dancing to "Bela Lugosi's Dead" and sexily hunting down their prey? If you thought that was cool, then keep that image in mind and read on...

These two albums are virtually identical so I'm going to review them together. In fact, they are so much alike, that they even sport the same cover photo -- just one is white (2006) and the other is black (2007). To carry the black & white analogy one step further: it seems this is either a band that you love or you hate. For some, She Wants Revenge are simply vapid retro 80s - Joy Division wannabes who have apparently been quoted as saying "We just wanted to make a record that would make girls dance and cry." Fair enough. The comparisons to Joy Division, Depeche Mode & Bauhaus have been made and are obvious. It's my opinion, however, that if you're going to imitate someone, why not imitate the best? So I really don't view this as a bad thing. Admittedly, there is more style than substance here but there's nothing at all wrong with the style -- dark, brooding, catchy as all hell and extremely repetitive. Musically, the delivery is very monotone -- never deviating from the heavy beats, heavy bass, rigid vocals and danceable synth lines. If you like one song, you'll like them all because honestly, it is a bit difficult to tell them apart sometimes. Every song delivers basically the same thing: the imagery is full of loneliness, lust, betrayal, rough sex, and dance floor crushes gone wrong. For example, in "Monologue", the lines:

"This is the time of night when the moonlight shines down
and we can reveal who we truly are
Within the darkest most depraved
Of joys
If you're afraid to say
But you'd like to try
Just give me the safe word and take your hand
And smack me in the mouth , my love"

(Remember what I said about "The Hunger"?) There isn't a lot of growth between these 2 albums, and I'm guessing that the closeness in their release dates suggests that maybe these songs were all composed around the same time. They found a groove & stuck to it -- there's really no discernible difference between these 2 albums -- or even much difference between songs to be honest. But, if you love it, like I do, that's a good thing. Stand out tracks for me are "Red Flags and Long Nights", "Monologue", "Out of Control" and "Tear You Apart" from the "white" one. On the "black", I like "What I Want", "Checking Out", and "It's Just Begun".

"Silent Shout" - The Knife

Although I later learned that this album was the 2006 Pitchfork Media's "#1 Album of the Year", I had previously been unaware of The Knife. I came to this album through sheer serendipity, searching for Jay-Jay Johanson. The Knife are an enigmatic electronic duo of siblings from Sweden, and admittedly I know very little more about them. They would appear to be the black sheep in the same musical family as Mum. This album is very avant garde. Some tracks are slightly more poppy and accessible than others ("Forest Families", for example), but overall the tone & atmosphere is elusive and creepy. The word "defeat" keeps coming to mind. To me, the theme of the album seems to be skeletons in the closet: it carries you through a winding mystery wherein you become convinced something terribly wrong is going on, but you can't quite figure out what it is. Or, maybe I just don't understand it. Jay-Jay Johanson lends his ethereal voice as guest on "Marble House", which obviously is my favourite track (God, but I love that man's voice!). Lots of choppy noise and bizarre vocal distortions add to the confusion/illusion (see "We Share Our Mother's Health"). Some of it is just downright strange. Mewing kitten-like vocals in "Na Na Na" squeak out lines like: "Every month I've got my period to take care of and collect in blue tampons Na na na".

"Disco 4" - Pet Shop Boys

Sadly, I kind of lost interest in the Pet Shop Boys sometime around the mid to late 90's. The last album of theirs that I recall enjoying was "Nightlife". But after that, they didn't seem to captivate me that much. But I'm happy to say that "Disco 4" is a great return to form for the classic synthpop duo. This collection of remixes overflows with the Pet Shop Boys' signature sound: stomping 4/4 beats, hookish synth melodies and infectious basslines. Track one is a remix of The Killers' "Read My Mind", and it sounds great. Brandon Flowers' vocals mesh perfectly against the synthetic background. "Hallo Spaceboy" features a classic dancefloor groove, while the remix of Yoko Ono's "Walking On Thin Ice" is very old school. The remix of "Sorry" by Madonna is dance gold, while "Hooked On Radiation" has a delicious Giorgio Moroder feel. This is exactly the sound that the PSB are known for, and they keep delivering it with style. This may not be as melodic or memorable as past efforts, yet it stands as a necessary disc for the night club crowd.

"New Man" - Sonic Hub (CD single)

Here we have a collection of remixes of the song "New Man", by the band Sonic Hub. I was initially drawn to this release because it features lead vocals by none other than Martin Fry of ABC. It should also be noted that the song is a re-working of the track "Cars" by Gary Numan (hence the painfully obvious title). Although this track is moderately catchy, this is only due to the fact that it lifts the classic melody from Numan's best known track. Other than that, this is not a very noteworthy disc. Track one is a good remix, and track two features a more poppy, radio friendly version of the song. Fry's voice is great as always, but not even his immense talent can salvage this forgettable footnote. In the end, this song only re-invents "Cars"....or at least it tries.

"No One Is To Blame" - Evan Cowden

Prior to quite recently, I had never heard of Cowden and had no idea who he was or what type of music he did. Apparently, he is well known in dance-pop circles, and has a penchant for doing covers of classic 80s songs. On this disc, we are treated to ten remixes of his cover of the classic Howard Jones song "No One Is To Blame". Now, I

don't want to totally trash Cowden...he does have a very pleasant, disarming voice. And his cover of the Jones song is actually quite good at times. All the versions of the track feature uptempo drum machine beats and crisp synth sounds. This is good music for dancing or driving. Ultimately his sound is very Erasure-esque, and his cover is rather different from the original version. It has been totally revamped for the modern dance crowd. Again, Cowden's voice is pleasing, but I've heard so many other artists who sound just like this.

"Vision Correction"- Be Bad (Divorce) divorcerecords.ca

Be Bad are nothing if not original. Honestly, this has to be one of the most unique discs I have experienced in quite some time. The bands hails from Halifax, and they specialize in epic, powerful music that comes in for the kill and never relents. The title track kicks off the album, and it sets the tone very quickly. The tracks features layer upon layer of distorted, twangy guitars and pounding tom drums. "Dead Head" has incoherent lyrics and energy in abundance. It is chaotic, but in a fascinating way. Desperation seems to be the key word, which is heard in lines such as "push the needle in!". "White Tongue" goes off in numerous directions, yet ultimately this is a smart move, since things never get predictable. "Back To The No Future" starts out with a curious intro and then gives way to a full-out sonic assault. "Battledick" is the sprawling climax of the album. It is epic and droney and features wave upon wave of sound. This simple and pounding track sounds like a phoenix arising from some molten metal sludge. "(I've Got No) Positive Vibrations" starts out like a Cure song. It has a familiar chord progression and proves to be a good conclusion to the disc. It should also be noted that the drums on this album sound great. They sound very clean, and stereo separation is clear with an overall excellent production. I also must say that this album boasts some of the most original artwork I've ever seen. This is a very cerebral, high octane effort from a very daring band.

"Murder Mystery"- Antarctica

Antarctica is a side project of Devin Quinn, a very creative and prolific musician from Moncton. I was actually very pleasantly shocked the first time I heard this, because it felt like I was listening to some long lost recordings that were made on a reel to reel four track way back in 1981, in someone's bedroom studio somewhere in England. It really does have a very authentic, minimal and dark sound that harks a bygone era. It sounds great. The title track is doomy, chilly and a great example of minor electropop. One could essentially refer to this as Coldwave...all the songs are smart, minimal and melodic. Devin's vocals sound great too. This reminds me of Modern Eon, Robert Rental, John Foxx and all that great early Euro New Wave. The Poly 800 definitely shines through on many of these tracks. "Mainline" is absolutely desperate, and "Long Long Night" is dark electronic brilliance. "For The People of Ireland" conjures up the ghost of Ian Curtis. The music is gloriously weird and nightmarish. The disc ends with a live cover of John Lennon's "Working Class Hero". It is a good ending, which contrasts the previous dark electronic tracks. This is a vivid and brilliant CD that is destined to be on my Top Ten list for 2007. Highly recommended.

"Sunday Girl" (Discs One and Two)- Erasure

Here we have a recent CD single from the kings of synthpop Erasure. Now, first of all, before I say anything else, I must let it be known that Vince Clarke is one of my Gods. I mean really, nobody has ever done synthpop as well as him. He is the undisputed king of the genre. Plus, I also think it is super cool that he now lives not that far from me, and it blows my mind to think that the latest Erasure album was recorded in Portland, Maine, a city I have visited several times and thoroughly love. Hopefully I will run into him someday on a future trip to that city.

But anyway, that's beside the point. "Sunday Girl" is a classic Erasure song. As always, there are many melodic hooks and chirpy analogue synths. As in the past, there are riffs a-plenty. But it cannot be denied that this does sound dated, and one can't help but think that the Erasure sound hasn't changed much since 1986. This does sound quite samey after a while. CD 2 is more of the same. Of all the mixes, I think the single version (is this the same as the album version?) is probably the best. Erasure may sound the same as they did 20 years ago, but maybe that's the whole point. As long as there are droves of people who are ready to consume their classic synthpop sound, the band will always be in demand.

"Storm Chaser"- Erasure

Here is another collection of remixes and various other new tracks from Erasure. This collection opens with "Storm In A Tea Cup", which is a good example of minor electropop. "Sucker For Love" is punchy and full of fat synth sounds. It is the classic Erasure sound. "Early Bird" is a great duet with Cyndi Lauper, which is good, bluesy fun. Track 6 is yet another remix of "Sucker For Love" which is guaranteed to get people dancing, and track 7 is a nice and moody remix of "Storm In A Teacup". Overall, this disc is dancefloor filler that no DJ should be without. Diehard fans will love this, while others may find it a bit too unidimensional.

"2007 Demo"- Painful Defecation

I've been in touch with Kurt from Montreal for quite a few years now. His music is nothing if not brave. This is essentially a collection of 17 tracks, most of them only one minute in duration. One gets the impression that these are basically not songs, yet more so ideas. They are comprised of warped soundbites, mangled dialogue and noise upon noise. The end result is provocative and beautifully weird. The listener is assaulted with chopped up beats and sped up recordings from God knows where. "Christo" is a great track....it is very ambient and spooky. "Rastlet" is eerie as well. Kurt tells me that Painful Defecation is on hold until he finds a way to make it "progress". Let's hope the sabbatical won't be too long.

"Year Zero"- Nine Inch Nails

I was quite a fan of NIN back in the day, when I was a teenager who first discovered "Pretty Hate Machine". Reznor seemed to know exactly what I was going through. And he seemed so gifted at welding angst with doomy electronics. Fast forward to 2007, and we have the latest disc called "Year Zero". "Hyperpower!" is a great opener, with plenty of grit. It features the typically angst ridden NIN sound. "The Beginning of the End" is an anthemic, Bowie-esque pop tune loaded with hooks, while "Survivalism" recalls "Pretty Hate Machine". "Vessel" is a good track, yet in a small way it underlines the fact that Reznor's sound hasn't evolved much. "Me, I'm Not" sounds like "Songs Of Faith and Devotion" era Depeche Mode, and "Capital G" is dark, buzzy and a little silly. "Another Version of the Truth" is quiet, emotional and piano based. It provides a welcome respite from the clunky beats of the other songs, but it comes too late in the sequence of the album.

"Year Zero" is well produced, features an uncluttered production, and is not quite as noisy or layered as NIN's past efforts. The band maintains its fascination with the same topics explored on previous discs: religion, politics and isolation. It must be noted that many of the beats on this album sound software based, and after a while they do start to sound the same. Almost every track starts with, and maintains a stiff, computerish beat. But this is a small complaint. Reznor still remains the poet laureate for an army of pasty faced angry goth kids. Those obsessed with his dark world will inhale this gleefully.

"Thinking Cap"- Neo Cortex

Here we have the latest collection of Neo Cortex's synthpop. They excel at making music with quirky lyrics, and bright catchy melodies. This is essentially earnest, well made electro-pop. It is well produced and well structured. Some of the songs are a bit too short, however, there's something to be said for a band who knows how to keep things short and sweet. "Can't Not" and "Piece of Work" are great dance tracks, and the Euro influence is very obvious in these tracks. There are nice, lush sounds in "Practice Youthful Spirit", and "Privacy" is a pleasant, understated track. "Old Bard" is probably my favorite...it is delightfully strange, as is "And Introducing Salvador Dali", which features great Simmons drum sounds. "May Day Calamity" is probably the rockiest Neo Cortex song I have ever heard! This album is bright space-age pop, and probably their best CD so far.

"Tomato Soup For The Damaged Soul"- Cryptic

Cryptic are a great band from Moncton, NB. I received this disc from them quite some time ago. Immediately, this disc establishes the fact that these guys are heavily influenced by all the great alternative music of the 90s. "Coming Down" sounds like early Nirvana. It is very well done, with lots of power. This reminds us of alternative back when it was still actually alternative. "Let Her Go" is not as loud....it is more controlled, with plenty of emotion. Again, the 90s influence is HUGE. "This Song Sucks" displays the band's sense of humour. The song makes me grin from ear to ear. "Tomato Soup" starts with Devin saying "here's a story about being in sixth grade". This one is funny as hell! Throughout this disc there are many melodic basslines, lots of hooks and memorable songs. The album cover artwork is great too, and Ryan can definitely scream. I love this CD.

"Stomp Atlantica Compilation" (various artists)

This is an excellent compilation put out by The Sharpie Fumes Collective. Its purpose was to help raise funds for the collective to travel to Halifax to protest the Atlantica summit. If you haven't heard of this proposed amalgamation, and you are a citizen of the east coast, please educate yourself immediately. In a nutshell, the Atlantica proposal suggests that the maritime provinces should amalgamate with the north eastern United States, forming one huge super-state. Essentially, this would have a devastating effect on local economy, health care would be privatized, and the only people to benefit would be huge corporations. Not good, folks.

Anyway, this compilation is very smart, and put out by a brave group of artists and activists. Outspoken Wordsmiths give us a very inventive and unique track. Petunia sounds like an artist straight out of the 1930's, and The Fool delivers a simple, heartfelt track with good lyrics and vocals. Team Rocket are raw synthpunk, and Flags of Convenience do Casio-pop that is lo-fi as hell. Olympic Symphonium contribute an excellent track with outstanding vocals, and The Farm Nikita provide an interesting noise collage. This compilation is extremely varied and fun to listen to,

with generous dashes of punk, hip hop, folk, and jazz. It conjures up images of tape recorders, bedroom studios, basements, and underground locales. Fascinating.

"Jam Jams" - various artists

Here we have an excellent compilation of music from Newfoundland, compiled by zinester and musician Curtis Kilfoy. To be honest, I don't know much about the Newfoundland scene, so this comp is a great introduction. Some of this is from vinyl, along with various other sources. "A Beautiful Dialectic" by Rory Hinchey is a great opener. Good Kids Pretend They're Bad have an excellent track called "Single Room", which is one of the smartest and most moving tracks I've heard in a long time. No Trolls More Souls give us a comedic, spoken word cut, while the Linger Effect (a band I've heard before) provide a great electronic pop instrumental track. There is also social consciousness on this CD, and nowhere is this more apparent than on the track "Frank Sobey Ain't Gettin' This House" by Liz Pickard and Christine Taylor. This track is brilliant, and shows off the resilience that Newfies are famous for. Headcleaner provides an epic, 10 minute dramatic soundscape. This is definitely a great collection of music from a land that is very musically rich.

"Kitty Smack" - Kitty Smack

Well, after a very anxious wait, I was enormously excited to get my hands on a full length Kitty Smack CD. It was worth the wait. I finally hold in my hands all those great songs that I heard the synth duo perform live back in the day. Ah, 2003, I remember it well. Back when there were actually bands in Saint John who played synths.

This is very well produced. It is good, no-nonsense, percolating, crisp synthpop. I almost feel like there is sunlight pouring out of my speakers when I listen to this. There are loads of juicy synth bits, and a strong melodic sense. "Hey" sounds like "Construction Time Again" era Depeche Mode. "Alex" is brilliantly modern, buzzy and smart, and has a just-right tinge of darkness. "Weave Sunlight" recalls all the great 80s New Wave bands at their peak. "The Future" has a very memorable piano melody; it reminds me of a cross between the Psychedelic Furs and Bowie. "Spacey" is a bittersweet and poignant ending. Such a great disc. My musical life has been indelibly enriched by the magic of Kitty Smack.

[Listen to the music of Kitty Smack! Click here.](#)

"Bleed The Constants" - We, The Undersigned

We, The Undersigned are a metal/hardcore band hailing from Fredericton, New Brunswick. After hearing the tracks from their debut EP, I predict these lads will make many new fans over the next while. Considering that they will soon be heading out on a tour that will take them from their native Maritime soil all the way to Ontario and back, I'm sure they will leave a trail of incendiary metallic fire along the way. These guys are definitely onto something good.

Tracks like "Tonight I Dine On Turtle Soup" establish the WTU sound immediately. It is rousing, high energy and delightfully gritty. There are screaming, tortured vocals that are delivered with tons of gusto. Also, the band makes the smart move of having their songs take dramatic shifts in direction, making the proceedings that much more interesting. The songs also boast a very high degree of production values. "Interlude in C# minor" is a great track, maybe even the best. It is a fine instrumental, replete with an abundance of musicianship and feeling. It is overall a very pleasant and thoughtful track which compliments the grittier songs very nicely.

The title track comes in for the attack and goes straight for the jugular. "Of Suns and Dunes" features very impressive vocal harmonies (not only can this band play, they can definitely sing as well). I can hear an old school metal edge on this track, and I like how the song shifts gears dramatically at the end. "TFRMM" only emphasizes further that this is a band that pours 110% of their heart and soul into every song. This EP overflows with energy and power. If We, The Undersigned ever come to your town, check them out. This band pumps out pure, no-nonsense metal and hardcore and they do it well.

"The Long Term Physical Effects Are Not Yet Known" - Jay-Jay Johanson

Jay-Jay Johanson has no fear of intimacy. Using self-exposition as a means for self-exploration, The Long Term Physical Effects Are Not yet Known lays bare all of the artist's memories, dreams, and insecurities and draws the listener in. There is a wonderful coherency to this album, which marks a return to Jay-Jay's jazzy, trip-hop roots. His confessional style and ethereal voice weave us between moments of regret and optimism. Dreams are a recurring theme throughout. The opening track, "She Doesn't Live Here Anymore", a haunting track about loneliness is underscored by an impossibly beautiful and catchy xylophone line. "Time Will Show Me" features clashing guitars & organ contrasted by a soft-focused chorus. "Coffin" paints an eerie picture of hopelessness with the poignant imagery of a raft and a desert island.

In the jazzy & catchy "As Good As It Gets" , he lays bare his insecurities for all to see by sharing some highly personal dreams which poetically illustrate a fear of failure and both the frustrations and triumphs in trying to overcome it. A sexy, James Bond style guitar & lilting flute spices up the track "Jay Jay Johanson Again". (Yes, this is at least the second self-titled song he's done in his career. I repeat, his style is highly personal!) "New Years Eve" features a gorgeous organ line that you can almost visualize (to me, it sounds like rain on the windshield at night). It's followed by the companion piece "Tell Me When the Party's Over". In my opinion, The Long Term Physical Effects Are Not Yet Known is Jay-Jay's best work to date. The only curiosity is the brief "Prequiem", a short acapella bit followed by helicopter and orchestra sounds, leading into the sweet & quirky love song "Peculiar". These seem to break slightly with the overall album, but since they come at the end, perhaps the break is intentional. -reviewed by Jill Davis LeBlanc

"Sing, Memory" - Sarah Nixey

This CD breaks my heart. I wish I could say that's because it's delicate, subtle beauty hits me on a deeply personal level as only art can. But I can't say that. It's not that kind of heartache at all. This CD disappoints me the same way as when you see your childhood heroes in TV commercials and realize they're not really cowboys but just aging actors trying to make a living. This is disappointment on the "there is no Santa Claus" level. That's because the darkly glamorous Brit trio Black Box Recorder has had such a profound impact on me. BBR drew me into their spider web of class consciousness, manipulation, murder, black irony and the stiff upper lip and I loved every damn moment of it. So, upon receiving the first solo effort by former (<sob!>) BBR vocalist Sarah Nixey, I was expecting more of the same dark majesty. What it delivered was repetitive, vapid electro-dance cabaret. Sing, Memory makes lofty promises: the CD liner notes lays out a pretentious manifesto -- it even lists for you (in point form, no less!) the 15 themes of the album. And twice on the CD, Sarah tells you these points again in her breathy, spoken word style: once at the very beginning to introduce the "Sing" side of the album (presumably the lighter, dancey portion) and again later to lead into the "Memory" side (the introspective dancey portion?). Not surprisingly, the album seems to lack focus. I prefer to be "shown", not just "told" what a work is about, and here I just don't see anything concretely demonstrated. Musically, there are some good, catchy hooks and I do like that the album is purely electronic. "Nightshift" is blippy a la "Asteroids" on Atari 2600. The lead single of the album is "Strangelove" which boasts such meaningful lyrics as "Gonna stir it around - Hey! Hey! Turn it upside down - Hey! Hey! Push it right & twist it inside out. This is love - Hey! - A strange love." So, if you are expecting "England Made Me" calibre BBR you won't find it here. This is more Grace Jones, or perhaps even Madonna or Gwen Stefani. "When I'm Here With You" shows a conscious Leonard Cohen influence. "Endless Circles" is perhaps the most BBR reminiscent track but it doesn't leave a lasting impression. The album ends with a cover of the Human League classic "The Black Hit of Space". Hopefully her next CD will show us the more distinct personality & clarity that we know she is capable of giving. (I am so sorry, Sarah!) -reviewed by Jill Davis LeBlanc

"Are You Listening?" - Dolores O'Riordan

You may be asking yourself this same question, only prefaced by "Why". After a 6 year sabbatical, the former vocalist for the 90s pop-rock band The Cranberries, Dolores O'Riordan returns with her first solo album. I am not sure what it was about this album that required 6 years to gestate, or why she decided that 2007 should be ripe for a come-back (apart from the fact that it seems absolutely everyone is releasing a new album this year!). The liner notes provide a myriad of excuses for her absence, and she apologizes to her fan base stating that her isolation has been "the only means where upon I can grow...I hope I will not let you down." I'm guessing that she did. To be honest, I don't see much growth here from her 90s material. Are You Listening? is a bit of a mish-mash of pompous pseudo-classical piano, harsh guitar, grating vocal exercises and twee Celtic pop. Believe it or not, I had a weakness for The Cranberries back in the musical black-hole that was the 90s. They could sink to the depths of misery pop that would rival Morrissey himself. There are several tracks on Are You Listening? that sound like they could have been leftovers from The Cranberries cutting room floor: opening tracks "Ordinary Day" and "When We Were Young" are very Cranberries-like and are decent tracks. The rest of the album is pretty much a mixed bag. "In the Garden" is marred by frequent tempo shifts (pompous classical-style piano in the verses/frantic screaming guitars in the chorus); this is a musical trend which I often associate with nu-metal that has never impressed me. "Loser" is a bouncy, poppy melody but with angry lyrics sung in a cutesy, quaint Celtic style that seems to implode on itself, defeating its own purpose (imagine the lyrics "Die loser die/Why loser why" sung in a typically sing-songy Irish way.) This album probably would have seemed more relevant 6 years ago, but with the 90s just an unpleasant memory to me now, the moment has passed. I just don't feel like listening. -reviewed by Jill Davis LeBlanc

"Of Toasters and Burnt Toast"- Leper Collective (Wreck Age)

This album is comprised of minimal noise, which is manipulated to produce a very daring and experimental soundscape. This is the sound of dying machines and electronic insanity. Leper Collective is the work of Maim Patterson from Boca Raton,

Florida, and Francois Marceau of Montreal. These guys are definitely not afraid to be weird or inaccessible, and I applaud them for that. There are many twisted soundbites which combine into a multi-textured stew. "Melting Pot Sewage" is a brave mix of distortion and manipulated noise. It sounds like Kraftwerk having a bad acid trip. "Dan Buck" is probably one of the most fascinating recordings I've heard in my life. It is slightly eerie, realistic beyond belief and a great ending to the CD. It's nice to know there are still brave souls out there who challenge us with their genius, and it's also nice to know that labels like Wreck Age are still around to release it. This is a fascinating listen that conjures up a jumble of surreal, mangled images.

"Channel Zero"- Leper Collective (Wreck Age)

Here we have more great experimentation from Leper Collective. "Channel Zero Introduction" is GREAT- it is doomy, scary and weird. "A Wolf's Fairy Tale" creeps along very quietly. It is unpredictable and delightfully strange. I can almost imagine that this is the sound of appliances coming to life late at night in a dark pawn shop. "Something Terrible This Way Comes" is a sprawling 21 minute epic. "Cartoons About Cannibals" is very funny. Like many of the tracks, it is comprised of characters, distorted noises and distorted realities, along with spoken word rumblings. "Owner of the Black Hole Universe" is also a good representation of the duo's sound- it is smart, thought provoking and very adventurous.

"Computer Generated Shit Noise Attack"- Flesh For Frank (Wreck Age)

I applaud this guy. In a world where eccentricity is seldom rewarded, and strange sounds are often met with sneers, this guy deserves major kudos. Frank (Francois Marceau) is a guy who is not afraid to dabble in the avant garde. He does not run in fear from the strange. He embraces it. His compositions are collections of mangled found sound. While listening to these tracks, one is bombarded with the sounds of machinery, digital hiccups, and a "cut and paste" mentality that is perfectly suited for the modern age. Soundbites from bargain bin cartoons and long forgotten documentaries can be barely heard in the mix. "Outro" is an honest spoken word piece that features Francois giving his real opinion on noise. Very well done! I wish there were more brave souls like him in the world of electronics.

"How Men Are" (REMASTERED)- Heaven 17 (Virgin)

I bought this album on vinyl way back in the early 90s. After listening to it a few times, I determined that I liked it. However, compared to "The Luxury Gap", it just wasn't as impressive. So, unfortunately, I put it away and haven't listened to it since. But now, listening to the remaster, I realize my error in judgment. This is, in fact, a brilliant album, and certainly much better than I remember. It is brazen, bold, intelligent, and extremely well produced. Many of the songs, including "Sunset Now" sound very dated now, but that only adds to the charm. Truth is, this album glows. It is blue-eyed electronic soul, a genre Heaven 17 practically perfected. Glen Gregory sounds great as always, and there are gorgeous vocal melodies. There are also some b-sides and alternate versions included on this CD. I still don't think this is Heaven 17's best album, but it's far from their worst.

"420"- The Dry Heeves (VVUU)

The Dry Heeves are a great band from Cape Breton. They do energetic, ballsy post-punk type music that sounds great. I can tell by listening to this CD that the band has seen their fair share of garages and crowded bars. "Oh Candahar" is a brilliant, gritty song that exposes the ugly truth. This is obviously a band who are not afraid to say how they feel. The whole CD is full of great musicianship, tight playing, excellent vocals and strong lyrics. Anjali Heble provides memorable vocals on "Bras d'or bu". "Son Of A Gun" continues with the band's political awareness, and it does so with sincerity. "Reggie" is terribly original, and "Myspace Girl" is freakin' hilarious. There are many very good instrumentals on here as well. I love how this album never repeats itself. It is refreshingly varied and off the wall. Highly recommended.

"South Dakota Baby"- Tony Kenyon and Mark Sheppard (Fierce Kitten Records)

This is a CD single featuring one track, "South Dakota Baby". The song represents a combining of talents between two men: Tony Kenyon (lyrics) and Mark Sheppard (vocals and music). Of course, many of you will be familiar with Mark's work in his excellent band The Offering. Well, prepare yourselves, because this sounds nothing like your typical Offering song. I was delightfully surprised to hear this song for the first time. It's obvious Mark is not afraid to dabble in different styles of music. "South Dakota Baby" is a rocker, make no mistake. It is a good old, no-nonsense, radio friendly, southern rock tune that is guaranteed to make you feel good and get you groovin'. This song actually reminded me a lot of all those great American southern rock bands, like CCR and Lynyrd Skynyrd. And that's definitely a compliment. Tony has done a great job capturing the feel of this genre in his lyrics, and Mark has really brought it all home with an excellent (and uncluttered) musical background. The song is incredibly sunshiney and feel-good, and I can easily imagine it being played on mainstream FM radio. Way to go, lads!

Sam's Town- The Killers

It goes without saying that I was quite anxious to check out The Killer's follow-up to Hot Fuss. That album made me quite a fan of the group. Anticipation for this sophomore effort was high. Sam's Town definitely displays a notable level of growth. The boys don't seem content to just repeat the approach of their debut, which ultimately proves to be a smart move.

Many critics have been quick to compare this album to the likes of Bruce Springsteen, and other earthy purveyors of Americana rock. This comparison may not be totally off base, since thematically The Killers are delving into more pedestrian subject matter on this effort. Yet that is not to say that the group has decided to totally neglect their New Wave pedigree. There is still lots of glitz and polish, and the synths are a nice compliment to the crunch of the guitars, just as they were on their debut. There is lots of energy and hooks aplenty (When You Were Young being a good example). But Sam's Town does come dangerously close to being a tad too self-absorbed, a bit too much the work of guys who are excessively trying to outdo their last effort, which ultimately is not necessary.

This is a fine follow-up, replete with style and emotion, yet it is shame that the band has seemingly neglected, ever so slightly, the economical pop smarts that were such a benchmark of their debut.

Deep Fried WWKA- Women With Kitchen Appliances
myspace.com/womenwithkitchenappliances

I was blown away last October when an odd collective decided to visit my sleepy little town. Make no doubt, you have probably never seen anything quite like Women With Kitchen Appliances. They take to the stage (which could literally be anywhere, both indoors or out) and proceed to assault the audience's senses with a barrage of processed noise. More specifically, they use contact microphones, which they directly place on a myriad of kitchen appliances, which they then run through various effects. The result is eerily fascinating. It is the sound of your refrigerator's worse nightmare. And to make matters even more interesting, the performance is delivered with a high degree of theatricality. The Women stand there with blank looks upon their faces, going about their business in a truly clinical and sterile fashion. What results is a stark critique on modern society and our reliance on the all mighty machine. This is absolute genius. If WWKA come to your town, please go check them out, and be sure to bring that can opener you don't use anymore.

Crions Notre Joie- Genevieve et Matthieu

At the same show where I was lucky enough to perform with WWKA, I was also ecstatic to meet and perform with Genevieve et Matthieu, a highly quirky and fun duo from Rouyn-Noranda, Quebec. These guys were amazing. Genevieve pranced around on stage frequently yelling at the top of her lungs, banging a toy drum and acting seductive for the crowd. Matthieu eventually revealed that he was wearing a full body speed skating outfit underneath his clothes, and his guitar provided a perfect compliment to Genevieve's beeping Casio sounds. Musically, the duo reminds me a lot of Lederhosen Lucil: it's a mishmash of cooing vocals, clap-along Casio beats and simple electronic hooks. Histoire d'amour is a great song that actually reminded me of the legendary French synthpop band Bal Pare. Overall the duo's sound harkens back to a classic French motif, complete with accordions and dramatic vocals. This is fun, lively music that is highly entertaining, almost as entertaining as their live shows. The songs are never delivered on auto-pilot, you can tell that a great deal of attention and thought went into the songs and the production. Highly unique.

Black Cat- Siamese www.myspace.com/siameseband

I reviewed Siamese's first album "2600" on here a while ago. I was waiting impatiently for something new from the band, and lo and behold, along came this fun little mini CD. This disc contains four new tracks. All the usual Siamese trademarks are here: weird, spacey sounds, songs that are highly off the wall and a quirky sensibility that is loads of fun. The thing I loved about their first disc, and what I love about this mini CD is the fact that Siamese definitely march to their own drum. Musically, the band is very original, and this offering is enhanced by the addition of new member High Commander Mittens. The additional guitar flourishes sound very cool. Songs like Maneki Neko (Beckoning Cat) are very cute and cartoonish, and the disc ends with the classic Siamese Cat Song from the Disney film The Lady and the Tramp. I do hope Siamese do stay here on planet Earth for a long time. They provide a very welcome alternative to all the bands out there with no sense of humour.

The Luxury Gap (Remastered) - Heaven 17

The Luxury Gap is one of those pivotal albums that I discovered in my early twenties that has gone on to be a true favourite of mine. What always impressed me about this album is the sheer intelligence that it displays, yet at the same time things never get too cerebral. This album, above all else, is funky. The grooves are loose despite the abundance of electronics used in its production. And the danceability of the tracks is gloriously complimented by the bold political commentary the album boasts.

In the space of one album, the band talks about the perils of technological progress, the breakdown of relationships, the evils of temptation, and the breakneck pace of modern life. Heady subject matter, to be sure, yet Heaven 17 discuss it in a delectable framework of 808 beats and lush synth backdrops. This is, without question, a timeless classic.

Being a hardcore fan of the band, and particularly this album, I was very excited to hear that it was going to get the remaster treatment. This was long overdue. And now the album can finally be heard the way it was intended. Nuances that were previously muffled now fly out of the mix, textures that were somewhat bright before are now absolutely brilliant. The mix shimmers with a bold new zeal. The synth sounds are so crisp now, and overall the mix is highly punctuated and vibrant. There are some great bonus tracks (including some remixes that I had never previously heard), as well as gorgeous and smart liner notes written by John Gill. Overall, a superb packaging of an excellent album.

Ilyria- The Offering <http://theoffering.co.uk/>

Last year I was delighted to get in contact with a very creative and brilliant young man from Cambridge, England by the name of Mark Sheppard. I came to learn that this musician was involved with a group called The Offering. In time I would realize that the music of The Offering is dense, well crafted, atmospheric and highly evocative. These are not merely songs that tell a clear cut story, nor do they follow any safe formula. This is the sound of dark country roads on a moonlit night, the sound of ghosts walking along a forgotten shore, the sound of wind blowing through black curtains. The music is dark, mysterious and sensual. Ilyria was released in 1999 and features some of the earliest work by the band. Alive brings to mind the work of Kate Bush. How Far continues this sound, with dreamy female vocals and deft guitar playing. The beats are irresistible, and the music is resonantly good. My Love reminds me of the Disintegration album by The Cure. This is music tailor made for fans of Depeche Mode's &Black Celebration. Excellent.

Three Broken Threads- The Offering (2001)

The guitar playing on the track An Angel Who Fell is pure rock and roll. Like other outings by The Offering, this is music that is as black as silk, and a pure joy to listen to. Percolating synth sequences are married to cutting beats and fiery guitars. The band must also be commended for the fact that they stress suggestion over statement. Rather than employing lyrics that are easily accessible, the words used by The Offering are ambiguous and open to interpretation. Evca saunters along with a sultry sway, it is a lush soundscape full of sumptuous layers. Tears and Chocolate introduces the listener to Mark's mysterious and dark vocal stylings, which goes along perfectly with the female vocals.

Light In The Darkness- The Offering (2003)

This mini album by The Offering includes a somewhat upbeat and bouncy track, Chameleon. The overall feel and mood of the album is still rather dark, yet there seems to be more percolating melodies and a general playful air that is infectious. Nataline is another light, breezy song with plenty of nice acoustic guitar riffs and airy synth chords. Dreams of the Red Chamber brings to mind classic 80s bands like Cocteau Twins and The Smiths. It is full of emotion. Ephemeral starts with a dark edge, yet eventually morphs into a pretty number replete with pizzicato strings. Fans of artists such as Kate Bush and The Cure will love this.

The Particle Garden- The Offering (2004)

Big Bubbles is an odd, loopy track that floats through the air like ether. Mark's voice is pleading and enigmatic. This is the sound of an indecipherable dream. By this point, it seems that The Offering's overall sound had become considerably more mellow and introverted, especially compared to early works like Ilyria. Rather than the electric guitar being right up front in the mix, it has become much more complimentary (and much less aggressive sounding). In this album, Mark sounds like a mad scientist, concocting his brilliant opuses in a dark studio overlooking the sea. Electroshock has traces of Nine Inch Nails, it plods along like a great evil monster lurking in the dark. Join The Dots is gleefully insane, while Petroleum features a great, stuttering beat. It is clear that The Offering is not content to just fall back on safe rhythms that have all ready been used by a million other bands. The female vocals that were such a part of previous discs are definitely absent from the mix, yet Mark's voice is captivating enough to more than compensate. This album exhibits real growth for The Offering.

Monsters and Angels- The Offering (Fierce Kitten records) (2006)

The latest effort by The Offering makes reference to their past sound, yet also improves upon it. The production is even better (which is no small feat, since production on prior efforts were excellent to begin with). Things get started with a great opening track called Killing Time which is loaded with crunchy guitar sounds, Mark's slightly eerie vocals and plenty of heavily processed electronic sounds. Golgotha Falls is a beautifully sumptuous track that casually moves along at its own

pace. Soundlands is a wonderfully warped track with grunting horn sounds. When I Sleep commences with a very evocative intro that sounds like something from a Tim Burton film. It perfectly suits the theme and feel of dreams that often punctuates The Offering's work. When The Earth Met The Sky is a brilliant closing track, it is full of sitar like sounds and a slightly psychedelic flavour. Make no doubt, The Offering is a gifted band that consistently just keeps getting better and better.

Unrelated Work Tapes 11/25/06- The Infant Cycle b/w
Beyond The Garden- Antmanuv theceiling.ca

Thank God for people like Jim DeJong. The guy has been running The Ceiling for several years now, and it has proven to be at the forefront of experimental and avant garde music in Canada. I have been familiar with this operation for a number of years, and I am consistently impressed by the daring sounds it promotes and distributes. Jim really must be commended for all his hard work. Daring, hard working souls like him are becoming more and more of a rarity.

Here we have a mini CD featuring the work of two experimental outfits: The Infant Cycle and Antmanuv. The work by both of these artists perfectly represents the output of The Ceiling. They are both minimal, highly evocative pieces that shun any conventional trappings. These are essentially soundscapes that transport the listener to other environments. Overall, this collection is also titled Periodical Three, and it appears that a series of these mini discs are going to be released over time, each one featuring the work of "artists in the southern Ontario region of Canada". I look forward to further releases in the series!

Be Bad/Attack Mode split 7" divorcerecords.ca

The great thing about 7" releases, at least from my perspective, is that they seem to act as perfect snapshots of a given moment in time in any local music scene. You get together a bunch of friends, make some noise, record it, press it on vinyl and get it out to the masses. The 7" format has a long standing tradition as being the perfect document of indie cool. And as long as there are underground bands who are proud to be independent, I don't think this format will ever die. I certainly hope it doesn't.

Here we have a split 7" between two Halifax area bands, Attack Mode and Be Bad. They are both punk outfits who do not hesitate to pulverize the listener with a powerful, primal blend. The music of Attack Mode is doomy and desperate. It resounds with an intense feel of nihilistic woe. As they state in Piece of Shit: "I am just a piece of garbage on the side of the street". They also get their message across very succinctly in the ultra short song Society's A Prison. Distortion is always cranked to maximum, and the beats feature plenty of crashing cymbals. A sense of total isolation can be heard in Straightfaced: "By yourself/ little hell/ no one else".

Be Bad exhibit a somewhat similar approach. Tracks like The Slaves Who Buried The Pharoah are firey and insistent. There is a breathless energy on their songs that is undeniable. There are also flashes of lyrical brilliance which continue a stark commentary on modern society: "invisible reigns, but they're there". Ruin Your Life is also a gloomy track. With twisted bliss, the singer claims "I'd love to ruin your life". It is explosive and sounds like the aural equivalent of a nervous breakdown. The packaging for this split 7" is very cool, and all in all this is a noteworthy release from an exciting label.

Penthouse and Pavement- Heaven 17 (remaster)

This is the very first Heaven 17 album, released way back in 1981. After all these years, it has finally been given the remaster treatment. And this is definitely a treat for fans of the venerable electropop band. When I interviewed Martyn Ware last year, he commented that this album was always intended to sound a little punky and raw, and now, finally, I totally understand what he means. Unlike following discs by the band that would assume an ultra-lush and lavish production, this one does sound more rough and ready. It is the sound of young, intellectual punks who choose to deliver their message with synths rather than electric guitars. This album had loads of political commentary and a wide-open awareness of the global scene that was way ahead of its time. The first half is jazzy and funky, whereas the last half is inundated with raw electronics. Geisha Boys and Temple Girls sounds better than ever, and The Height of the Fighting is resplendent with divine simplicity (and a cutting commentary on war).

There are also many great bonus tracks, including some very hard to find B.E.F. tracks, and some great tracks that I simply had never heard before, like Are Everything. Make no mistake, Heaven 17 were absolute sonic auteurs. A crisp remastering job, along with very nice liner notes make this an excellent disc for diehard fans, as well as a good primer for those who are just beginning to discover the band.

Retrospective- The Offering <http://theoffering.co.uk>

This is a fine collection of The Offering's work, dating from 1999 to 2006. Many of their best tracks are offered, including Nataline, Pray For An Angel and When The

Earth Met The Sky. One could refer to this collection as a good summation, and also an excellent document of the progression of a great band. The album cover artwork is very well done, and overall the packaging is stylish and uncluttered. If you haven't all ready discovered The Offering, this album is an excellent introduction and overview of their work up to the present day. Do yourself a favour and check out their entire catalogue. Fans of Depeche Mode, NIN, and The Cure will not be disappointed.

"Disabled Controls"- Art Damage <http://www.myspace.com/artdamage000>

This effort was released by Atlantic Canada's electronic guru in 2003. It features a fine collection of lively, energetic music that glows with feeling. Much like Art Damage's past efforts, this one proves that the man has a true knack for coming up with a great sonic mix. "Controlled Entry" is a lush, sensual opener, while "Modicum" is an expressive and unusual song that brings to mind the early Human League. "Hit on the Head" sounds like some of the stuff that Flood was doing with Depeche Mode in the 90s (which is definitely a compliment), while "Apatheory" is a delightfully minimal track. "Tweaking Fusion" is gloriously glitchy and robotic. Overall, this disc is very intelligently produced, and proves to be an excellent collection of audio landscapes. Sometimes it's quiet, other times gritty, which makes "Disabled Controls" all the more varied and interesting. A great work.

[Buy Art Damage's CD here!](#)

"Hot Action"- A/V <http://swordfight.org>

"Hot Action" marks the return of Gaspereau Fork's one and only synth maestro. And tracks like "The Clumsy Surgeon" pick right up where his previous disc "Control Change" left off. Make no mistake, this is good, raw, punchy New Wave. It's damn near impossible not to move to this.

Philip displays an attack on this disc that is absolutely relentless, both in the arrangement and the lyrics. His vocals are intensely feverish, and tracks like "Phantom City Wants To Hurt You" comes in for the kill and rarely comes up for air. Much like previous offerings, there's a ton of swift sequences, loads of hooks, plenty of distorted synth bits and great singalong choruses. Philip's knack for simple, catchy tunemanship is displayed here in spades. The songs speak of everything from urban carnal manoeuvres to interpersonal politics. There is a genuine urgency on "Hot Action" that cannot be ignored.

Much like his live shows, A/V discs are pure fun. If this doesn't make you move, you must be comatose.

"Electric Blue"- Andy Bell

"Electric Blue" is the debut solo CD from Erasure frontman Andy Bell. Yet make no mistake, this disc doesn't stray too far from the Erasure formula. Immediately, the plethora of synth sounds that the duo made themselves famous for are still heard on Bell's effort. Perhaps this is a bit more dancey that recent Erasure material, yet that is only a fine distinction. "Crazy" is a bright and upbeat number, and you can hear Vince Clarke's influence all over it. "I Thought It Was You" is nothing more than late-model disco, while "Love Oneself" features such painfully trite lyrics as "We only have one life/ this is not a rehearsal". "Runaway" could be a pretty track, if the incessant 4/4 beat was put on hold. "Delicious" is destined for club play the world over.

In the end, this all adds up to an album that is a bit misguided. It is a moderately good album, yet far from original. But this won't matter to the club kids that the album is obviously aimed at. They need a good beat, and "Electric Blue" delivers it.

"Bipolar"- Cold Cluster and "Wring the Wrist"- Gerstein (split CD) www.chaindlk.com

This is a very unique split CD by two innovative acts. I love packages like this that give you a lot of great music all under one roof. I find that quite often, the rule of thumb with many split CDs is that one group will be somewhat good and the other will be forgettable. But this disc defiantly breaks that rule, which is good news for fans of independent electronic music.

Cold Cluster's music is moody, minor and understated. There are many catchy drum machine beats, and a general lo-fi European sound. All of the songs are gleefully minimal. This is excellent music for quiet nights alone with the soul. Gerstein's material is a bit more upbeat. The songs are well structured with cool synth sounds, and the sincere vocals are delivered with a captivating voice. "Tender" reminds me a bit of YMO or Japan. "Explanation" is a great song, and on this disc we are featured with cool versions of the song by both bands. This CD will inspire any underground electronic act to dust off their synth and create works of art. Highly recommended.

"Dana Is Gone / Eric Matolsci" www.astralplainrecords.com

I was ecstatic to receive this disc from Moncton's acoustic troubadour Dana. There is something hypnotic and twisted about this CD, and because of that I simply can't get it away from my stereo. This is basically a collection of recordings by both Dana and Eric, two acts who compliment each other very well, yet are certainly not copies of one another. This is a fun, sad, emotional collection of awesome bedroom recordings.

Things get started with a great cover of the Beach Boy's "Sloop John B" that is relaxed and informal, and boasts very sparse production. Eric's "How I See It" reminded me of Jonathan Richman. It brings to mind images of cramped bedrooms, cigarette smoke and drunken banter. There is a definite Johnny Cash influence lurking in there somewhere. His voice is vividly unique. And the same could be said for Dana. "Padded Walls" is (pardon the pun) gleefully insane, and it features the artist's strum n' whine approach. This is askew country music with intriguing lyrics. "Going On Too Long" sounds like a sincere nod to Daniel Johnston. Eric and Dana are definitely two tortured souls who make some of the most vulnerable and memorably frail music you will ever hear. This is genius.

"Human After All" - Daft Punk

I wasn't going to get my hopes up about "Human After All". I mean, this is the record that the fans loved to slander. In fact, it seemed to me that for about three months after this disc was released, all I heard were negative comments about it. "Oh no", I thought. "The great Daft Punk have gone downhill?". Don't believe it for a second, folks.

To be brutally honest, I thought this disc was great, and I was totally baffled as to what all the negative response was about. In fact, I was struck immediately at just how much this disc sounded EXACTLY like previous Daft Punk offerings. Read: good, simple, raw, dancey music. Just what you would expect from Daft Punk, right? Sure, this is definitely not as warm or funky as "Discovery", yet why would DP want to make "Discovery Part Two"? That's just boring. Maybe this album was just too simple and repetitive for most folks? If you need further evidence that this album really wasn't as different as their past material, "Human After All" ends with a long, mellow track ("Emotion"). Seems to me "Discovery" did too. Heck, "Technologic" sounds like something off of "Discovery" too (or even "Homework" for that matter).

"Robot Rock" is as infectious as hell, while "Brainwasher" is deliberately silly and dumb. "Television Rules The Nation" guarantees dancefloor movement. So please don't let yourself fall victim to all the bad hype surrounding this disc. It really is much better than most gave it credit for. I'm sure it will be ripe for rediscovery in about 15 years.

"Judas in Takkitakkiland" - DeHondenkoekjesfabriek <http://www.xs4all.nl/~tellab>

I received a quirky little package in the mail from the Netherlands. From what I can ascertain, DeHondenkoekjesfabriek is a performance art outfit who dabble in a little bit of everything.....zines, music, live performance, video, you name it. Almost everything I get from them is extremely left of centre, yet that is not a bad thing. I sincerely applaud these people for not being afraid to shake things up and be a little weird. We need more brave souls like this.

This little mini CDR is composed of juicy, fragmented noise. It is warped, organic and a little eerie. At times, the pieces sound like they are talking. This is in fact quite listenable for something from the noise genre. Track 3 starts abrasive yet gets

quieter. Overall, if you like noise, check this out. There is a real "let's push buttons and fuck shit up" attitude on this that I like. This disc is funny, weird, and highly original.

"Playing The Angel"- Depeche Mode

This latest offering from the great Depeche Mode was preceded with a glowing buzz. "This is the one we've been waiting for" was the cry that many diehard DM fans uttered over the internet. I heard some go so far as to say "this is the best DM album since "Violator" ". So of course, my curiosity was piqued.

So, does this really harken to the Depeche Mode of yesteryear? Sort of. It is definitely more melodic than their last three albums, yet I would hesitate to refer to it as a "classic". "A Pain That I'm Used To" is a great, gritty opener. Like many of the tracks, it is well produced and sincere. "John The Revelator" boasts a great vocal performance by Dave Gahan, whose voice blooms with feeling. "Precious" is a great, somewhat mopey single, while "I Want It All" is pretty and pensive. "Lilian" is a good, catchy pop number. The typical DM themes are here in abundance: falling from grace, and struggles with religious convictions.

"Playing The Angel" is without question a great improvement over "Exciter", but this is still not the Depeche Mode I keep waiting for.

"Speak and Spell"- Depeche Mode (2006 re-release- remastered with DVD)

"Speak and Spell" has been a favourite album of mine since I first heard it at the tender age of 17. This is without question one of the early classics of synthpop. Songs that are loaded with infectious hooks, buzzing synths and catchy "Brill Building" bubblegum flourishes that will make you smile. Ah, 1981 was certainly a much simpler, friendlier time.

So I was ecstatic when I found out that this album (along with many of their early albums) are being re-released by Mute with all new packaging, remastered surround sound mixes and a DVD. But I have to say that I was a little disappointed with this. It is disheartening when a true fan such as myself is treated to a reworking of an album you hold near and dear to your heart that isn't quite on the mark.

First of all, the remastering sounds great. However, I don't have a surround sound system, so I can't enjoy the surround sound mix. Oh well. But the liner notes were a big letdown. I would have liked a much lengthier booklet, perhaps featuring interviews with all the original members. Yet all we are given is a four page intro from Daniel Miller that doesn't reveal much that hasn't all ready been said. The photos included are nice, yet there's only a grand total of 7. Come on! Diehard fans deserve more than that. The DVD is nice, yet since it's only 30 minutes in length, it seems to finish before it even starts. I did get a laugh from the stories behind the creation of the album cover artwork, yet the rest of the footage is slightly forgettable.

There's a lesson to be learned in all of this. If you're going to do a repackaging, listen to the fans. In fact, why not let a diehard fan put it together? It would probably have a lot more heart.

"Consumer Vs. User"- Andrew Duke andrew-duke.com

Andrew Duke never disappoints with his music. The Halifax artist has been producing incredible electronic music for years, and on this outing he maintains his masterful approach. "Consumer Vs. User" is scratchy, cleverly orchestrated machine music. It is futuristic, daring and original. Duke once again proves his talent for audio manipulation.

There are many metallic melodies on this disc. "Buy First Second Free" is a great track. "Lucidril" is cool and devilishly Kraftwerk-esque. Like many of the tracks, it features the snap and buzz of raw electricity. "Frosting" is also a captivating, percolating track. Like much of this album, it is mechanical, yet certainly not without feeling. Duke's latest disc is a very artful, highly creative effort. Well done.

"State Of Nature"- Gilbert Switzer/ The Hold (split 7") divorcerecords.ca

No matter how widespread and all-encompassing various digital formats will become, nothing will ever replace the cool factor of vinyl. End of story. As long as there are cool young bands wanting to promote themselves and release their material on vinyl, the format will never die.

This split 7" by two of Halifax's finest punk bands is a prime example of just how much awesomeness can be crammed onto 7 inches of wax. The Hold's stuff is potent

beyond belief. The rhythms and the playing are tight, and the mix is very clean. "Criminal" is energetic and powerful, and the lyrics deliver unabashed social commentary. "Drunk" is a dead-on examination of isolation, and warns of the idiocy resulting from excessive drink. "Confidence" pulls no punches: "Confidence if yours/ tell them to fuck themselves". "Panic" is a song that every drone in every office building can relate to.

And then we have Gilbert Switzer, a band that consistently purveys a thunderous, gutsy (and intelligent) sound. "The Prowler" is superb. Here we are featured to Ube's unforgettable vocal stylings, complete with generous echo. The song is hooky and hummable. Poison and Ash keep the music simple and uncluttered. A "big n' doomy" sound rips through "Oh God"; Ube sounds like he is having a nervous breakdown. "Freudian Slap" further emphasizes Gilbert Switzer's unique identity. This band has definite influences, but they never sound derived. This whole 7" is excellent.

"Before After"- Heaven 17 ninthwaverecords.com

"Before After" is proof positive that Heaven 17 are still a force to be reckoned with. This infamous electronic trio has produced some of the finest, most intelligent dance music you will ever hear, and their latest album is quite possibly the strongest of their career.

"I'm Gonna Make You Fall In Love With Me" is an energetic, bright, soulful opener. Billie Godfrey provides backing vocals that exceed devinity. The rest of the album maintains the brightness of the opening track- overall the disc abounds with a vibe that is very fresh and full of life. "Hands Up To Heaven" is positive and funky. Glenn and Martyn's voices sound as good as ever, and there are many crisp synth textures throughout. "The Way It Is" proudly declares it's Giorgio Moroder lineage. Their cover of "Don't Fear The Reaper" is awesome... it maintains the magic of the original yet instills it with a new breath of life. "Into The Blue" is airy and warm, while "What Would It Take" is a dramatic and tense song with a nice harpsi solo.

"Before After" is exactly what you would expect from Heaven 17. Well crafted music that embraces a party attitude yet never checks it's intelligence at the door. Excellent.

"Sound Echo Location"- Honeyroot honeyroot.com

Honeyroot is the collaborative effort of Sheffield mates Glenn Gregory (Heaven 17) and Keith Lowndes (ABC, numerous other bands). It appears their collective goal with this project is to produce music of the most ambient leaning. Indeed, this album is very ambient, mellow and lush. It could also be referred to as mind-expanding, restful and shimmery. Right away it establishes a pretty mood, where atmosphere is king and emphasis is put on feeling, not traditional song structures. Either you will appreciate this or you won't.

"Falling", like many of the tracks, is beautiful and sumptuous, yet after a while this starts to sound a bit samey. This is very British, kind of a hybrid of Eno and Parliament that the Brits seem to excel at. Overall I enjoyed this album, and it is perfect background music for quiet nights of soul searching. My only real complaint is that they should have featured more of Glenn Gregory's voice, which in itself is amazing.

"Revolution Of The Heart"- Howard Jones

This one really blew my expectations out of the water. For some reason, I was expecting this to be a safe, middle of the road collection of bland adult-pop. So you can understand my total shock when I was greeted with a huge, stomping techno beat on many of the songs. Is this the same man who in recent years cranked out hit after hit for FM radio?

"Celebrate Our Love" is a good, spritely opener. Jones' knack for melody shines through on this track. "Just Look At You Now" is a throwback to the past which even uses snippets of lyrics from his early hits. His positive demeanour of yesteryear is still evident. The title track steps back and takes a long hard look at the world. It delivers a sincerity and a maturity that is pleasant and welcoming.

Jones has definitely grown up since the days of "New Song", yet his heart is still in the right place. If you're old enough to remember the 80s with fondness yet not willing to actually go back to that time, Howard Jones has grown up right along side you. The songs are graceful, yet at the same time the pounding techno beat keeps it far from boring.

"Minimum Maximum"- Kraftwerk

To see Kraftwerk live in concert has always been a goal of mine, which I hope to realize someday before the band calls it quits and sends their robots out on the road in place of them. This two disc live collection is probably the closest most of us will come to experiencing the live Kraftwerk show, and it certainly is an entertaining compilation.

There's plenty of lively audience reaction, and the entire set sounds amazingly clean. The sound quality is perfect. In fact it is so perfect I wonder how much of this is live or how much of it is backing tracks and/or sequences. All the classics are here, and after listening to this I just want to see them live that much more. Speaking of the show, as I listened to this I realized that visuals are probably a very important element in the Kraftwerk equation. I incessantly kept visualizing the stage in my head as the music played. Such is the vivid power of Kraftwerk's music...it always had a highly visual quality. Overall this is a good concert recording, yet without the rapturous applause of the audience, I don't think there would be much difference between this and 1991's "The Mix".

"Finis Terrae"- Masonic Youth and Fever Spoor masonicyouth.com

Here is another split CD (I seem to be getting many of these lately) from two bands who hail from the Netherlands. The music is bold and experimental, and definitely not for the weak of heart, nor the close-minded.

Tracks one to four are by Masonic Youth. Their material is spacey and minimal. It is also spooky and uncluttered, which I can appreciate. Sounds come and go from the mix, and many of their songs are mechanical and lumbering. Fever Spoor produce music that can best be described as industrial landscapes. The pieces are cold, robotic and empty. Ultimately the sounds are highly suggestive and open to interpretation. The uniqueness of this split CD makes it a good choice for those who like their music unconventional. I also give the bands kudos for the nice, handmade album cover artwork. Very DIY!

"I Hear A New World"- Joe Meek

Finally, after years of being nearly impossible for audiophiles to add to their collection, this brilliant masterpiece gets released on CD in a beautiful and lovingly assembled package. Make no mistake, Meek was so far ahead of his time it was frightening. Mostly known for his pop productions and his numerous hits in the UK ("Telstar" being the most famous), Meek released this concept album in 1960. His intention was to create a whole new world through sound, and he succeeded in spades.

The music in this collection is eerie, otherworldly and fascinating. It doesn't matter that some of this is laughably dated. Those moments are quickly compensated by flashes of true genius. This is twisted, eccentric and brilliant. "Orbit Around the Moon" has a classic 60s sci-fi sound, complete with twangy guitar. "Entry of the Globbots" is silly, yet this only adds to Meek's madman persona. Tracks like "The Bublight" and "Glob Waterfall" are sincere, and they act as a precursor to the work of Brian Eno. "Magnetic Field" is comprised of heavily processed sounds and is very cinematic, while "Disc Dance of the Globbots" is melodic and sincere.

Also included are some audio interviews that Meek recorded in 1962, plus an enhanced video interview that Meek did in 1964. This is a remarkable package that fans of modern electronic music should not be without.

"Love Yourself and Love Your Mom"- Mopey Mumble Mouse
collectivevoice.net/mopeymumblemouse/

I discovered the work of Mopey Mumble Mouse a few years ago and I'm glad that I did. This is the work of Curtis Kilfoy and his friends, a creative young soul from the wild streets of Saint John's, Newfoundland. Mopey's music is a breath of fresh air. I never know what to expect, and I so appreciate that.

"Stuff It Up Your Arts" is gleefully chaotic. Much of this cassette features music that is a curious mish-mash of high-strung vocals and programmed beats. It is severely unique and never boring. In fact, much of the songs on side one brought to mind the pomp and circumstance of Sparks. At times I could have sworn that Mopey sounded like Russell Mael, with the accompanying music being so incredibly manic. But then "boom!", the music takes an abrupt turn from a somewhat British glam rock sound to flat out punk. Again, the unpredictability of this work is probably one of its best assets.

Obviously, this is the work of eccentric souls. In fact, the tormented artist is fully present on side two when all hell breaks loose. The hyperactive, manic quality of this recording is great. Good work Mopey!

After having heard many of Neo Cortex's releases over the years, I am consistently impressed by the continual growth the band exhibits. This latest offering from the duo of Steve and Chris definitely shines as an improvement from their previous material. Growth can be heard in almost every track.

"Pay Attention", the album opener, is upbeat, bright and smart, with its roots firmly planted in the 80s. On tracks like "Ponder" we are treated to the typically quirky lyrics that Neo Cortex have established as a trademark, and it is refreshing to hear new rhythm styles on this track. It's obvious that the lads are huge fans of New Order....most of this is very fun and dancey. "Music, Fantastic, Futuristic" looks back fondly at the 80s with a heavy Devo influence, while "Waves" is minimal and experimental.

This is without question the duo's best work yet.

"Jill Porter"- Jill Porter www.jillporter.com

Jill Porter is steadily creating a name for herself as a rock tunesmith who does good, energetic, old fashioned rock and roll. The Newfoundland guitarist, singer and songwriter should be proud of this disc, as it displays great musicianship, clean production and a style that is simple and to the point. I get the feeling that Porter has heard a lot of classic rock in her day.

The songs on this disc are tuneful and never forced. The lyrics are accessible, and she makes the smart move of throwing in a quieter track here and there, just to keep things varied ("I'll Be Fine" being a good example). There is a definite 60s pop influence all over this. Porter's voice is distinct, and the guitar work displays a supple prowess. Sometimes the same tempo keeps showing up throughout the album, but that's only a minor issue. Songs like "In My Head" are proof that this artist has genuine talent.

"2600"- Siamese <http://www.myspace.com/siameseband>

Straight out of Moncton, New Brunswick comes some of the quirkiest and funnest music I have heard in a long time. Siamese are the duo of Devin and Tanya, and you know that any band that wears cat masks on stage and plays a theremin is going to get my attention. Visuals aside, Siamese are also very talented at producing some very resonant, memorable music.

The key word with this duo seems to be "fun". They are happy to release cheery, upbeat music that bursts with rays of sunshine. Neat little production touches (such as the walkie talkie conversation on "Feline Transcendance") perfectly exhibit the duo's willingness to try new things and have fun while doing it. It is on this opener that the Siamese sound is established: gentle guitar melodies mixed with simple drum machine beats and electronic giggles. This is undoubtedly unique. "One Small Pounce For Cats (One Giant Bound For Cat-Kind)" saunters along at its own meandering pace. Like many of the songs, it is cute, warm and eccentric. "Siamese Cat Blues" is absolutely hilarious.

If you're tired of electronic music that is forgettable and contrived, do yourself a favour and check out Siamese. These guys are a breath of fresh air.

"The Bedsit Tapes"- Soft Cell

Serious fans of early 80s British New Wave have been treated to many great surprises over the last few years. A few years ago we were given "The Golden Hour of the Future", an excellent collection featuring the earliest home recordings done by the Human League, and the Deluxe Edition of ABC's "The Lexicon of Love" overflowed with early demos and outtakes. Right up there along side those releases is this collection of early demos by Soft Cell, one of brightest duos to ever emerge from the New Wave genre.

This collection is loaded with gloomy, buzzy, primitive synths and stiff beatbox rhythms. If you like your music raw, slightly twisted and entirely analogue, you can't go wrong with this album. This is a crucial document of the early days of a great group. The lyrics on many of these tracks are from way out in left field...just listen to "Cleansing Fanatic" for a dose of the ultra-weird. Yet on the other hand, tracks like "L.O.V.E. Feeling" are surprisingly gentle, and show flashes of their later pop sound. Considering that many of these songs were recorded on an old primitive reel to reel machine in 1978, the sound quality on this disc is excellent. Despite the limitations that the lads had to work under, this body of work is incredibly inventive.

"Hello Young Lovers"- Sparks

Everytime a new Sparks album comes out, I get genuinely excited. These guys have been cranking out highly eccentric, intelligent and artsy pop since the early 70s. It is impossible to sum up their entire career in just a few words, since it has been so varied and evolutionary. But it can be noted that since their 2000 release "Plagiarism", the band has taken on a distinct, highly orchestral sound that is one part Bernard Herrman, one part Cosmopolitan and two parts bombast.

Right away, it is obvious that "Hello Young Lovers" is not as repetitive as their previous disc "Lil Beethoven". In fact, at times it even gets downright sedate. Yet much like most material in the Sparks' canon, either you will get this or you won't. In typical Sparks fashion, this is undeniably eccentric. "Dick Around" is a great, dramatic opener, and "Perfume" is perfectly infectious. The band's trademark silliness is evident in songs like "(Baby, Baby) Can I Invade Your Country?". "Waterproof" harks back to some of their past songs (it sounds like a good companion to their classic track "Change"), while "There's No Such Thing As Aliens" is wildly paranoid and nervous.

The shifts in tempo on this album keep things interesting, but overall this is simply not as lively or wild as previous offerings. Make no mistake, this album is far from bad, and pretty much everything Sparks does will always be at least somewhat interesting, yet "Hello Young Lovers" is just not their most memorable outing.

"Six Song Demo" - The Trick thetrick.ca

Hailing from Fredericton, New Brunswick, The Trick is the alter ego of Patrick Reinartz. This young man has always shown a strong ear for popcraft and a talent for great melodies. Considering that this effort is supposedly a "demo", I am amazed, because it sounds great. I hope to see a full length Trick album not too far in the future.

"Out For Blood" will be stuck in your head for days. It is a winning mix of sounds and strong melodies, delivered with genuinely emotional vocals. Like all the tracks, the production values are impressive. "Rematch" is another great track, while "Grounded" is gleefully manic. This collection of tracks illustrates an understanding and a passion for pop music that does not come along everyday. It is smart, uncluttered, and the arrangements are stylish and clever. This is one of those rare acts that achieves a balance between indie cool and conventional pop values.

The Trick has no problem delivering songs that are undeniably fresh.

OLD REVIEWS

"Dear Heather" - Leonard Cohen

The latest offering by Canada's master of doom and gloom does not disappoint. "Dear Heather" is elegant, warm and mellow. But that's not to suggest that this is all softness. The sage may have mellowed a bit, yet he still has plenty of biting commentary on the human condition. Songs like "Because Of", with its pipey synth chugging in the background, is as maniacal, sexual and exposed as any of Cohen's greatest. His voice has only gotten more knowing and prophetic. The female backup singers coo in perfect unison, forming a pretty framework to Cohen's rough-hewn speeches. And there's lots of talking on this disc, perhaps more than any previous outing ("Villanelle For Our Time" being a perfect example). "The Letters" is as resonant and deep as any classic Cohen recording, "Undertow" creeps along with a gorgeous saxophone murmur; sleepy and intoxicating. "Morning Glory" sounds like the drunken ramblings of a man losing his mind- it would be perfectly at home in a David Lynch film.

There's something slightly askew about this album (just listen to the title track). It abounds with a ragged horniness and insanity that is gleefully infectious. This is classic Cohen.

"Kureteck" (Independent)

This is basically a demo that came out of nowhere, and I'm glad that it did. Kureteck is an American solo electronic act. It features a great mix of sounds, it is well crafted and easy to listen to. Plus many of the tracks feature a very infectious dance beat. This is primarily instrumental synth music, and it reminds me of 808 State, New Order, and at times even Cabaret Voltaire. "A New World Awaits You" is smart, produced with style, lush and stylish. Apparently Kureteck uses a variety of programs to create his tunes. This never goes on auto-pilot- just when you think you've got the groove figured out, a surprise comes from left-field. This is modern music made on modern machines for a modern age. "Transmit" has an eerie/ambient quality. And I like how the songs aren't just simply polished and nice...there's also good use of distortion on tracks like "Never Enough Ink". This is great, pure electronic music.

"Sound Sensory Information" - Moss Abu (independent)

Ah, where would we be without Moss Abu? This is a brilliant, well crafted electronic stew. Rather than adhering to a pristine, perfect approach as so many electro acts often do, Jakob makes the right decision and keeps things wonderfully lo-fi. This is four-track bliss. It is scary, misshapen, organic, and brings to mind images of monsters in the cellar. The beats are stiff and hypnotic and the soundbites are a mishmash of treated, unrecognizable vocal gibberish. Synth sounds swoosh by and blurry bass sounds give the proceedings a good sense of movement. This is blurry, surreal, heady sonic art. The wizard that is Moss Abu pulls it all together brilliantly. This album is terrifically unique and inventive. "Hoohahaha" is a sprawling lo-fi epic. Your speakers will get a great workout.

"Led Zeppelin" - Painful Defecation (independent)

From the mind of Kurt Beaulieu comes more sonic craziness. This is some of the weirdest, most unusual stuff I've ever heard. Crazy samples, processed with a PC, and haphazard little tinkertoy beats come and go. This sounds like distorted handmade Casio tones run through a food processor- it is the audio equivalent of ADHD. "Contrefixe" has a weird brilliance to it, as do most of the tracks. "Dead Eyes Closed" is the sound of your computer dying. The work is all over the place, and overall it adds up to the oeuvre of a truly original artiste. It is nothing if not experimental. It features short, blippy bits of half-songs that erupt and then quickly die. "Itch Control" makes me uneasy, while "Antenne2" is Kraftwerk on LSD. It's the moments of quiet brilliance that really showcase Kurt's warped genius, such as the quiet passages in "When I'm Dead".

"From These Ashes"- The Wiggly Tysons (Chickenface records)

Hailing from Sussex, NB, The Wiggly Tysons are a group of young men who can rock with the best of them. The instrumentation is pretty standard- guitar, bass and drums. I've heard so many local bands do this sort of music, but the Wiggly Tysons, for one reason or another, do it better than most. The music and the vocals are pretty much punk: ballsy and full of power. What I like about the Wiggly Tysons is that unlike other "punk" bands (I hesitate to call them this because I think there's more to them than just punk) these guys seem to really have their act together. And considering this was recorded live with no overdubs in one day, I am that much more impressed. The female vocals on "Million Men" (Jennifer Philpott) is a pleasant surprise, and "You're Late Asshole" positively jumps. It's great to hear "singing", and even better when it's done well, like on this track. Like many of the tracks it barrels along like a freight train. "Second Hand Toy" is manic and delivered with lots of stylish bravado. "It's Hot Up In This Kitchen" is perfect blues- again, the vocals are great. This CD proves to be a real mixed bag. There is also a hidden track at the end, featuring a young man singing Cher songs and doing a sendup of the Jerry Springer show. Good work, lads!

"Kutlul"- Fckn Bstrds (Independent)

From out of Holland comes some of the most fucked up noise I've ever heard in my life. Trust me, this is NOISE in the truest sense of the word. There is nothing musical about this at all. This would make Einsturzende Neubauten run and hide. It sounds like a huge trash compactator crushing an army of rabid, screaming robots. Death, carnage, pollution, metal. This is difficult music at its most difficult. It literally assaults your sense of hearing. For those of you into noise, pick this up. For others, well, you'll probably have a headache within 20 seconds.

Included on the disc are wild JPEGs of the band in action. They look like Gwar on acid!

Angelfire.com/stars3/FCKNBSTRDS

"Neuron" - Neo Cortex (independent)

This latest offering from New York state's Neo Cortex starts with "Imply Cool", a sultry, sassy song that struts along with plenty of cool. It displays Neo Cortex's sound perfectly: strong beats, a ton of neat synth sounds, a nod to the 80s and very witty lyrics. With 24 songs, this is a little too much to take in, and some of the songs sound a bit samey after a while. But there's enough gems here to make the collection shine. "Book Worm" is a sly track, "Dodo" opens with a nicely mysterious edge, and "Bubble City" and "Point Blank" have an experimental flavour (and provide a welcome respite from the beat). Fans of New Order and mid to late 80s techno dance music will love this. A lot of emphasis is on the beat- these guys seem to just want to make you dance.

I've said it before: this stuff is very good, but I think the boys should stop cranking out such a mass quantity of songs and focus more on refining what they all ready have.

"Essence: The Best of Anxiety"- Anxiety (Independent)

Ah, the 1990s. I remember it rather fondly, especially the first half, even though at the time I thought the 90s were dreadful. From out of that period of Kurt Cobain and Soundgarden comes Anxiety, a post-punk band from Ontario. And this sounds very much like something from that period, in fact images of smokey basements, plaid shirts, Doc Martens, long hair and four tracks ran through my head as I listened to this. It actually brought back some fond memories. This collection culls together a variety of tracks between 1993 and 1995 by the "black sheep of indie punk". The music is well played, uncluttered and introspective, and vocalist Jay Anxiety's delivery is clear and full of emotion. Other vocalist Jon Martyr is also a deft singer who effectively pulls no punches with his voice. Overall this is a perfect snapshot of a time when indie-punk was king. These guys were definitely onto something.

I get the feeling that this band may have lived a short life, but they had plenty to say in that time. "TSNGA" is a weirdly experimental little track, as is "Field Goal". Eventually the band took on a more electronic sound, but their core sound remained the same: moody, dark and cerebral. "The Anxiety State", a newer track recorded in 2000, ends the collection nicely. Perhaps this is where Anxiety was heading. Very intelligent and well done.

<http://www.geocities.com/jayanxiety>

"An Urbal Remedy"- Pimp Tea

Yo! Fredericton rap emcee Pimp Tea is here! Let's get tha party started! If you've never experienced the pure fun that is Pimp Tea live, well, his CD is the next best thing. It's nice to hear a rap/hiphop artist that doesn't take himself too seriously. "Super Dude" is catchy and clever- Pimp Tea proudly declares in typical hiphop fashion "I'm better than all the rest". All the while you can tell he's smiling to himself (and so are his fans). I recall loving De La Soul for all the same reasons. Rather than singing about gangstas and bitches, this is lighthearted (yet intelligent) fun. "Shake Ya Caboose" is a hit waiting to happen. No feet will be able to resist this groove. The whole disc is well produced and boasts a great recording quality. It is very "downhome", east coast, and has an undeniable white boy feel that just makes it all the more accessible. Lyrically, this is well crafted. "Sometimes" is genius; it is an ode to mental illness. Plus, it's interesting to note that the album is not all smiles. "Music Biz" is a biting commentary on the industry's corrupt ways. Overall this is an infectious, fun, well produced, intelligent collection.

"Fancy Ultra Fresh"- Freezepop

Make no doubt about it, in the modern synthpop scene, Freezepop stand above the rest. Their latest disc is clever, sincere, and upbeat synthpop. It abounds with a very clean and fresh production. The album opens with

"Stakeout", a perfect representation of the Freezepop oeuvre: beeping sequences, dancey beats, sighing synth sounds and Liz's cute vocals. This is a marked improvement over their previous album, and it harks back to the excellence of their debut "Freezepop Forever". It is very quirky and insubstantial, a welcome respite from the legions of modern synthpop whiners who take themselves way too seriously. Some may find this saccharine and twee, while others who aren't so demanding will just kick back and enjoy it for what it is: simple, disarming fun.

"I Am Not Your Gameboy" is silly, but that's the whole point. "Parlez-Vous Freezepop" sounds like something from a Parisian night club circa 1983. "Outerspace" mixes things up with a dark, slower groove. It's gorgeous. Too many synthpop acts try so hard to shove their oh-so-serious, neo-goth type tunes down your throat with all the melodrama they can muster. Thank goodness Freezepop do not.

"The Polygon Minute"- various artists- polygonnetwork.org

I was thrilled to hear about this website, which is dedicated to east coast electronic music. Well, they've started to release CDs as well. Elling Lien is the mastermind behind all of this, and he should be applauded. The concept behind "The Polygon Minute" is simple: included is a ton of tracks (48 in all) and every one is exactly one minute in length. The result is varied, to say the least. And this variety is exactly what makes the compilation work. There's dark, spooky tunes, hiphop, ambient, a bit of everything. I've never heard of anything like this being done in the past- it's a truly unique and engaging listening adventure. This is proof positive that the east coast is loaded with great electronic musicians. It makes me happy.

"Brainchild"- Neo Cortex (Independent)

"Jack-Knifed Jackal" seems like a typical Neo Cortex song. But then towards the end, from out of nowhere, comes a scorching electric guitar solo. Very good, lads! This album shows a real growth for the two young men. "Studio Mike" is another strong offering with deft guitar work by Chris Theriault. Steve Bujanow delivers the quirky lyrics with verve.

Some of the tracks still sound a bit underdeveloped. I'd love to see Neo Cortex take a good year or two to put out an album with just ten very focused, fully developed songs. Overall, this sounds like sketches of songs that could be potentially great. "The Knight's Lesson" features juicy electronics, "UFO-IFO" is delectably experimental. Many of the tracks are funky and sly, featuring a ton of electro-soul. Neo Cortex do seem to be going in a brave new direction, and I couldn't be happier.

"Grey Matter"- Neo Cortex

This one opens with "Fate", yet another "new" song for Neo Cortex. It boasts a good mix of synth sounds. We hear lots of chattering synths and Steve's distinct vocals. It seems that Neo Cortex are moving away from the beat a little bit, but some of this is still rather samey. "Free Association" is a nice little track in the vein of Howard Jones, "My Zone, Your Zone, Ozone" slows things down nicely, "Reality Check" is a cool, dancey track, and "Robots Rejoice!" is too much of a good thing. Neo Cortex seem to be content purveying a very recognizable sound.

"Hot Fuss"- The Killers (Island)

This has New Wave written all over it. In fact, the opener "Jenny Was A Friend of Mine" sounds like an updated, revamped take on Gary Numan. It's damn catchy, as is most of the album. These guys excel at doing a catchy, radio-friendly, updated revision of the New Wave ilk. It's packed with hooks, and a perfect balance of synths and crunchy electric guitars. The proceedings are kept simple, melodic and uncluttered. Lead singer Brandon Flowers has a clear, energetic delivery that always cuts through the rest of the mix. The songs are crafted elegantly with feeling. This is awesome, to-the-point rock and roll with just the right amount of synths. Songs like "Mr. Brightside" and "Somebody Told Me" are brilliant and destined to be future anthems. My only complaint is that the second half of the album doesn't have the flow of the first half- things start to drag a bit. But no matter. This is still one of the strongest offerings to come along in a long while. The ghost of The Cars lives on with great bands like this.

"The Best of Fad Gadget"- Fad Gadget (Mute)

Long live Fad Gadget! Frank Tovey may have left us a few years ago, but his legacy lives on. For those of you who don't know, Fad Gadget was a weird and unusual one man band who emerged in the late 70s and was eventually signed to Mute, the same label that gave us Depeche Mode (in fact DM opened for Fad Gadget in the very early days).

This is a superb collection. It opens with the ultra synthetic epic "Back To Nature". It features a glorious collection of raw, primal, dark and weird synth tunes. Things never get too happy, but they do get very catchy (tracks like "The Box" are great), and "Ricky's Hand" has Daniel Miller written all over it. Just play it back to back with anything from the Silicon Teen's "Music for Parties" album. "Fireside Favourite" is an infectious ditty.

This awesome collection also includes a second disc of remixes, and a wonderful booklet with a quirky retrospective on FG with many great photos. If you're looking for buzzing synths, stiff beatbox rhythms and lots of artsy alienation, look no further. This collection proves that Mr. Tovey was indeed criminally overlooked.

"Wois-tu Ca?"- Alexandre Bilodeau-

This is the latest collection of electro/drum n bass/hiphop by Alexandre, a very talented young man from Nova Scotia. I've had the pleasure of working with this guy in the past, and his material is very well done. This guy is a sonic craftsman. Things start with "Braquement", a dreamy, sumptuous track that is a pleasure to listen to. This album actually reminds me of a softer, more mellow version of Daft Punk. Things never get too predictable or repetitive. Like a true electronic wizard, Alexandre always has a new trick up his sleeve. "Magie" is very tight, while "Quoi s'tu dit?" is also a joy to listen to; it features percolating sounds and a delicious rhythm, and the title track has a great horn sample. Hard to believe this whole album was executed live (!). This is stylish and masterfully done.

"Flesh For Frank"- Francois Marceau (Independent)

Imagine the Art of Noise on the edge of a cliff, with black thunder clouds billowing overhead and mountains of terror standing in the distance. That sort of sums up what this CD sounds like. This is pretty frightening stuff, but at the same time it's very listenable and well put together. This is primarily a noise project, and Francois proves to be very talented at putting all the right noises together. "First Song" is doom incarnate, while "Kinda Consumed, You Know" is positively eerie. "Maybe 1" sounds like a chorus of mechanical frogs in a swamp of oil. "Brain Piss" (all three versions) is a cacophony of complete noise.

I really liked this effort. If noise is your thing, this will tickle your fancy and assault your ears.

"And Two Photographs"- Beat Material (Independent)

Good lord this is a breath of fresh air. Not only is this one of the most rhythmically adept bands I have ever heard from out of the Maritimes, these guys display a musicianship and a willingness to experiment that is rather unusual and winning. "Say the Word" is perfect: clockwork, polyrhythmic drumming, echo guitars in the ska vein, and a manic, insane vocal delivery that comes in for the attack and never lets up. Not only is this well played, it's well produced. It is chaotic, yet far from being a mess. One could refer to it as controlled paranoia. It sounds like the music of a man whose just been pushed off the deep end and loving every minute of it. Indeed, the vocals on "Francis" suggest a manic power that is brilliant.

I was lucky enough to see these guys play live in Truro in the summer of 2003, and I was immediately impressed. Polyrhythmic, high energy, primal rock with vocals bordering ever so closely to punk seems to be Beat Material's goal, and they pull it off in spades. Recommended.

2086 Creighton Street #2, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3K 3R4

"Quantum Gravity"- Demi Fatlace

Late last year I got an e-mail from a nice young man out of Las Vegas. He eventually sent me his music, and I was impressed by his fresh approach to hiphop/house. This CD is a collection of 5 of his songs, and they are very well done. He seems to have a knack for producing smart hiphop with lots of atmosphere, great beats and unusual samples. "Good-ish..." is a fine example of his approach- it's very mysterious and tense. "My House" is a sprawling 15 minute epic...it is very dramatic and has an intense buildup. "Pink Elephants" is nothing short of genius. It features a sample of the Pink Elephant sequence from the Disney film "Dumbo". Also thrown into the mix is an officious, scientific speech from the 50s on molecular structures. Brilliant! This guy is definitely onto something.

"A Christmas Gift For You From Phil Spector"- The Port City All Stars and Friends

Portcityallstars.com

I feel kind of weird reviewing this disc at this time of the year, but so be it. Honestly, this disc is probably one of the best Christmas albums I have ever heard. And considering it is primarily comprised of local acts, that only makes me that much prouder (plus, I am honoured to have one of my own tracks on here too). This is the brainchild of the Port City All Stars, an unbelievably talented group of young folks who have singlehandedly brought fun back to the Saint John music scene. Their track "Christmas Dog" will be stuck in your head for days, I guarantee it. There's also great tracks on here by The Organizers, Katie Killen and Mike Peters, Edge on Spiral, Chris Daigle (a very musically resonant track...nicely done!) And countless others.

This is very impressively assembled! It stands up well to repeated listens, and is nothing but pure fun. Do yourself a favour this coming holiday season and get this. It's a hell of a lot better than the Kenny and Dolly Christmas album, that's for damn sure!

"A Candy Heart That Tastes Like Chalk"- Mopey-Mumble Mouse (Independent)

Talk about contradictions. Judging from the packaging of this disc (a cut n' paste assemblage of childish mouse faces and a valentine's candy attached to the back), I was expecting cute little songs about cute little kitties and unicorns. But not quite. Inside we find angst-ridden post-punk with whiney falsetto vocals. Distortion is almost always cranked. Make no doubt, this is an odd concoction, but at the same time, it is very intriguing. Mopey likes to use stiff beats courtesy of Fruity Loops 4, and the production on this is surprisingly well handled. I seem to notice a trend recently of punk bands using electronic percussion. This is full of typical punk angst, yet there are also quieter, acoustic numbers that provide introspection ("A Candy Heart With A Warm Goey Centre" being a good example). My only complaint is that it is very hard to hear the lyrics on most tracks, but I guess Mopey is going to post the lyrics soon on his website. And speaking of lyrics, this features words lifted from a Tears for Fears song! Many of the songs abruptly end and morph into the next number. Overall, this is an intelligent, well crafted outing. Kind of brings to mind a more pissed-off version of David Byrne.

"Gettin' In Over My Head"- Brian Wilson

I was a little skeptical prior to hearing this release. Reviews were mixed, at best. And it's no secret that Brian's solo work since his first solo effort in 1988 has been nothing if not sketchy. This is not a bad album, in fact at times it's pleasant and affable. Wilson may always have everything he does compared to his venerable masterpiece "Pet Sounds" (that's to be expected). But even though he may never top that one, subsequent efforts deserve at least an attentive ear. Therein lays the danger with genius: expectations become impossibly high.

"Soul Searchin'" is a warm, bluesy number, replete with those trademark Brian Wilson harmonies. There's many guest appearances on this album. Everyone from Elton John to Eric Clapton to Paul McCartney lend a hand. But even these veterans cannot save this album from very tepid, twee moments. "You've Touched Me" is dated and forgettable. Clapton does shine on "City Blues"- it's one of the edgier tracks on the album. "Make A Wish" is a nice, anthemic ode to positivity, although it also sounds positively dated.

Wilson seems very stuck in the past. "Desert Drive" could have been a Beach Boys song circa 1962. A little growth and change would be nice. But no matter. Wilson still remains a mythic rock legend, despite his weaker moments. This is total Americana.

"Collection Version 2.0: Chronology"- Images in Vogue (Carlos Monte Records)

This is the much anticipated follow-up to Images in Vogue's first "greatest hits" collection which came out in the mid 90s. I was always a huge fan of this great Canadian synthpop band, so when I heard about this second disc, I was very happy. And the great thing about this collection is that it is not simply a rehash of the previous disc. The only track that gets repeated is "Lust For Love", and seeing as where this was probably their greatest hit (and a damn good song, to boot), I can understand why it got included again.

The songs on here sound awesome. The opener "Travel", a previously unreleased track, is a great slice of vintage synthpop. It sounds so clean and crisp, as if it was recorded yesterday. The work of this band could easily be put on par with their contemporaries like Kraftwerk, Japan and The Human League. "Quiet Room" is a good track also, and finally, after all these years, we are treated to "For Germans" on CD. Sounds incredible! All the big hits like "Call It Love" and "Save It" are on here too, plus some other great, overlooked B-sides like "Masks". This was a very intelligent band that wrote great pop tunes AND wasn't afraid to take risks in the studio. A wonderful collection.

"Pet Sounds"- The Beach Boys (New Stereo Mix) (Capitol)

Okay, admittedly I may have taken way too long to getting around to review this disc (it originally came out in 2001). I heard about this new stereo mix of the classic "Pet Sounds" quite a few years ago, and I have been ultra curious to hear it ever since. Only recently did I finally get around to hearing it. Using computer technology, the old mono mix of the album has been tooled to create a new stereo mix. I was cautious not to get my hopes up....after all, how natural would this sound? We have only heard a mono version of this work since its original release in 1966, so would the stereo mix hold up? Surprisingly, yes it does. In fact it sounds completely gorgeous.

I was amazed at how the old mix took on a completely new dimension and depth. I could hear things that I simply couldn't hear before. There is more space in the mix, and things are spread out much more. The proceedings have a very loose, organic and warm feel that is very nice. Timpani sounds jump out of the mix now, and the harmonies sound so amazingly lush and beautiful. I was so pleased with this new mix. Plus, the stereo mix was supervised by Brian Wilson himself, so you know it's going to sound right. For those of you purists who still want to stick to the mono mix, that's included too on the same disc (the stereo mix plays immediately after the mono). So turn this on and be moved all over again.

"Thought Process"- Neo Cortex (independent) (www.neocortextheband.com)

"My Three Pound Universe" is a great opener. It features some of Steve's best singing to date. This is slightly minor, and kind of sounds like an electronic version of REM. I was immediately taken in. When Steve sings "Prolific is the term because of our energy", I completely believe him. These cats are wildly prolific, and with this work, they show a great deal of progress.

There is indeed real growth on this. The guys are pushing themselves in new directions with song structure and production. "Through the Microscope" is cleverly executed. There's lots of signature neo Cortex sounds- buzzy synth sequences, tight beats and unusual lyrics. "Fond of Blondes?" is a quirky, fun track very much in keeping with the Neo Cortex ilk. This kind of reminded me of something Sparks would sing. "Occasional Human" is a nicely experimental offering. This disc shows plenty of growth for the band. Well done.

"Enjoy The Silence 04"- Depeche Mode

Here we have a selection of new remixes of the classic Depeche Mode song. Like they say, the legends never go out of style. These are some very interesting interpretations of the 1990 hit. The Richard X mix has a neat snap to it....the synths are nice and raw, lots of cool sounds come and go, and it remains true to the feel of the original. The Ewan Pearson mix is much more dancey, with a very strong beat. I could easily imagine this one getting lots of play in clubs. This is probably my favorite remix of one of my all-time favorite songs. There's also a great remix of "World In My Eyes", and the revision of "Mercy In You" is also original. Highly recommended for any Depeche Mode fan.

"Emergency Band Meeting"- The Porcelain Gods (www.pgods.com)

This is a little 3 song EP by Halifax indie-pop band Porcelain Gods. I played a show with these guys back in May, and their musicianship was impressive. To be honest, I don't listen to a lot of this sort of music, but I can tell that the Porcelain Gods are very good at what they do. The lead vocals are a bit whiney at times, and it feels like I've heard many bands that sound like this, but overall this is earnest, resonant indie-pop. The title track is destined to be a favorite with college kids everywhere. Essentially, this is music tailor-made for campus radio and any nightclub near you that supports touring indie bands. Very good.

"East Coast A Go-Go"- various (VVVU Records) (www.vvvu.tk)

VVVU has a knack for putting out some great compilations that you will not find at your local record store. However, these discs are distributed to local radio stations, so please request something from a VVVU comp the next time you call! The theme of this disc is "party music", and it delivers upon that sub-title in spades. Put this on at your next soiree and people will move! There's a good mix on here too....great techno from Halifax's beatmeister Andrew Duke, cool surf rock from 3-Piece Suit and Windom Earle All Stars, fucked up glitch from Mescaline Worms, metal from Anvil Chorus, hip-hop from Pimp Tea, a crazyass tune from Syd Barrett's Privateers, and lots, lots more. This is a well put together collection that is wildly eccentric, fun and varied. It is a great snapshot of the current Maritime scene.

"This Is The Ice Age"- Martha and the Muffins (marthaandthemuffins.com)

This is an excellent re-issue of the classic New Wave album by Canada's highly cherished Martha and the Muffins. Here it is presented on CD for the very first time. For years, those "in the know", those with their ear to the underground or those who had an appreciation for intelligent pop knew just how great this album was. Yet unfortunately, those who were not familiar with the underground or campus radio may have missed out on this great offering. And that's a shame.

"Swimming" is a mysterious, flirtatious and cerebral track that pulls the listener right in. Martha Johnson's vocals are absolutely amazing on "Women Around the World At Work", and "Casualties of Glass" is sumptuous. In fact, the mix sounds GREAT on CD, and this stands as an early, powerful testament to the brilliance of producer Daniel Lanois. Nice liner notes also make this disc a real treasure.

This is a gloriously textured, beautifully askew work that is a delight to listen to. Arty, detached, self-obsessed

and distant, this work is proof that Martha and the Muffins were one very talented outfit.