



Ostrich

[Crack the Sky](#)

Aluminum Car Recordings - AC99692

Available from [Crack the Sky's web site](#).

A review written for the Folk & Acoustic Music Exchange
by **Mark S. Tucker**
(progdawg@hotmail.com)

I almost passed on this disc. Thank all the gods in all the heavens I didn't, but let me tell why that nearly came to pass.

If you're not familiar with Crack the Sky, well, they were a band set to bust out big time in the 70s. Even *Rolling Stone* had 'em slated for a glorious future, and then the boyz went the way of all flesh, shockingly slitting their own throats following a four LP blaze of brilliance, slabs of drop-dead killer material. The years that followed went from mediocre to wretched...and I mean b-a-d! Personally, I was so miffed at their ongoing puff work that I penned a complete overview of the band with a rather scathing conclusion (<http://www.furious.com/perfect/crackthesky.html>). Nor, while I was writing it and desirous of discerning how such marvelous genz could come to so milquetoasty an estate, would any of the bastards respond to requests for interviews. Nathless, ironically, the band had become its own self-parody much in line with what lead guy John Palumbo had once so amusingly excoriated all too knowingly.

During those dark days, the front man pooted out a couple of solo albums that were absolute drek, akin to Adrian Gurvitz's pair of crap-slabs following his highly satisfying piledriver earlier career (Gun, Three Man Army, Baker-Gurvitz Band, Graeme Edge Band). I mean, it was insane. John possessed an acid wit and a highly polished multi-approach to solid rock and roll, yet here he was, aping Barry Manilow and John Tesh combined. All we Crack Addicts wept bitter tears for many long years, decades in fact, buying clunker after clunker only to be frustrated to the point of purchasing a crossbow from Ted Nugent and going hunting in West Virginia, home to the aggregate. There was, it appeared, no God. Nietzsche was right.

Ah, but now comes a fresh day, and I have the extreme pleasure to be a harbinger of the NuGospel: the latest CTS CD is out, and it's a complete return to the heavenly strains of the founding days. Oh sweet Jesus, take me now, 'cause it don't get no better than this!

No, seriously, I know we crit fanboys have a tendency to waft rhapsodic a trifle too much, but I think history supports that I'm fairly merciless when it comes to musical fuck-ups (read the second half article in the link above and see ifn dat ain't so, Jeeter!), and I'm telling you I had to launder my jeans after only first few cuts of this disc. I'd—pardonnez-moi mon francaise—shat, pissed, and creamed 'em simultaneously. I was **that** astonished. Almost no one can pull off this kind of comeback, but *Ostrich* is a gem of the highest order. In fact, it's the logical true 5th LP after *Crack the Sky Live* (1978—the mysterious 3rd LP, btw, was a bootleg live gig from WRAB radio, now very hard to get ahold of) and a righteous evolution beautifully cohered, executed, and recorded. Lord have mercy, but there IS life after death, hallelujah! I've got me that old-time religion, y'all.

The sole disappointment is the absence of Jim Griffiths on second guitar, but God almighty does Rick Witkowski ever step into the breach and deliver the goods! The guys on fire just like he used to be (Griffiths and Witkowski were, back then, one of the cleverest two-guitar-attacks in rock and roll, and highly in style with City Boy's Mike Slamer—and, man, could that guy kick ass!). There are now three six-stringers in the ensemble (Palumbo, Witkowski, and Bobby Hird, who ain't no slouch), and the sound's insanely solid, Hird filling Griffiths' magnificent python boots with narya pause. Then there's the heavenly Crack Pack horn section re-asserting Palumbo's old magnificences as an arranger.

Every cut here is a revelation from the gospel of St. Cynicus. Palumbo's voice has suffered not a whit nor has his Swift-ian crow quill...nor even that delicious wont to exotica, as the arabesqued *Under the Hood*, an eerie laid-back follow-on to the esteemed old *Animal Skins*, demonstrates. Each selection is tight, convoluted, layered, and polished to a degree only Donald Fagen could match...were he, that is, a good deal heavier than he's ever been and a fuck of a lot more complex. John cribs from every cultural artifact imaginable, collides them with his singular vision, and the band crafts every note and line to a fare-thee-well. What one ends up with is what the 60s gave the 70s, with Johnny P pulling the trad sound into a progressively slanted proper new incarnation, one too often overlooked by all and sundry.

I swear to God (okay, okay, I'm an atheist, but I'm tellin' ya I'm feeling giddy as a born-again parishioner on Christmas eve here) I had no clue this could ever occur, but, trust me and nail my carcass to the bodhi tree if I lie, *Ostrich* is going right to the top of my Top 20 of 2012 List, brothers 'n sisters, and don't try to stop me: I have an evangel to deliver, and neither the devil nor waters high will prevent its dissemination! If you see some raggedy, aging, balded-out hippie ranting on a street corner near you, waving a small square sporting the sun-glassed pate of the aforementioned weird bird on its cover, that's me, and I'd appreciate it if you'd cool yer heels for a few minutes while I convert ya to the light and the way: Crack the Sky reborn. So, if you'll open your rock 'n roll hymnals to page 1,538, where we find the lyrics for The Prophet Palumbo's *Ice*, we'll sing that apocalyptic refrain of the times and.....

Track List:

- The Box
- Holding My Breath
- Happy Happy Happy
- Pole Dancing at the Hollywood

- Your House is on Fire
- King of the Rodeo
- Big Elephant
- Under the Hood
- Don't Ask
- Ali's Song

All songs written by John Palumbo.

Edited by: David N. Pyles
(dnpyles@acousticmusic.com)

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DNPyles@acousticmusic.com
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