

BOOK★Reviews

My Prison Walls

GG Allin

★★★★

(Import) Aggronautix, £50 (inc P&P)
ISBN 9780984212514, 208 pages

What jail is like

Terrorised in childhood by a religious fanatic of a father who originally named him Jesus Christ, New Hampshire punk GG Allin later gained widespread infamy from playing perhaps the most depraved shows ever in the name of rock'n'roll.

Rather than his execrable back catalogue, it's the legend of these excess-fuelled soirees (involving everything from Allin eating his own shit to acts of self-mutilation and assaults on members of his audience) that have sustained the singer's notoriety since his death – from a wussy heroin OD – in June 1993.

Allin's lifestyle ensured he frequently fought the law, though the law invariably won. Though they were never intended for publication, *My Prison Walls* now gathers together the journal entries, sketches and letters Allin wrote during the time he was incarcerated (after conviction on assault charges) from Christmas 1989 to the spring of '91.

Two decades later, much of it – not least Allin's correspondence with notorious child killer John Wayne Gacy – makes for stomach-churningly voyeuristic reading, though some of his detailed pencil sketches (including a fine portrait of an anonymous blues guitarist) disarmingly suggest some real talent lurked way beneath the degeneracy.

This macabre but compelling artefact is a beautifully bound hardcover suitably decorated with red foil blood stamping, but it's strictly limited to 2,500 copies, so dedicated nihilists must make haste to purchase. *Tim Peacock*

Michael Jackson: The Maestro: The Definitive A-Z (Volume 1: A-J)

Chris Cadman

★★★★

Bright Pen, £22.95

ISBN 9780755216093, 848 pages

Don't stop till you get enough



Michael Jackson's untimely death in 2009 left a global fanbase bereft. His looming This Is It residency at London's O₂ Arena promised much; having not released a full-length album since 2001,

like Prince fans wonder what's in the Purple One's infamous Vault (or is he just pleased to see you?), the King Of Pop's loyal subjects can now only ever guess at what might have been.

For collectors, the impulse is to fill those gaps with more: more vinyl variants, more signed memorabilia... anything that allows them to imagine they're that much closer to their idol. On this evidence, Chris Cadman is a man possessed. At over 800 pages, yet only getting up to letter "J" in the alphabet, the "definitive" title for his MJ encyclopaedia is more than earned. Open any page and you're likely to learn something, whether it's the young Michael's Moments To Remember from a 1971 article on Jackson 5, or that a more grown-up Jackson used to sing Led Zeppelin's Black Dog around the studio "from time to time". (Yes, there is an individual entry on Black Dog for that very fact.)

The amount of info here is staggering. You don't need to be told that Cadman's covered Jackson's own discography; he's covered every other song MJ sniffed at, too. And catalogued seemingly every known article about the man ever published. There's even an entry for "The Glove", with key moments in the history of that iconic accessory. Cadman's presumably working day and night on the second volume. Fans obsessive enough to need it won't have finished reading this one by the time that surfaces. *Inky Tuscadero*

On The Periphery: David Sylvian: A Biography

Christopher E Young

★★★★

Mailin Publishing Ltd, £24.99

ISBN 9780992722807, 384 pages

From pop idol to doyen of the avant-garde

It's little wonder that this is only the second attempt at a biography of the former Japan frontman, and the first to cover his solo years. The perennial enigmatic recluse and a notorious control freak, David Sylvian has shied away from the media spotlight ever since his decision to quit the band that made him a household name.

With an inevitable absence of contribution from the reticent artist himself, author Young has used a mixture of previously published interviews and a rigorous and lively dissection of lyrics to chart Sylvian's artistic, spiritual and personal journey. Clearly



David Sylvian takes the quiet life

thoughtful work that's strong on background details, with some illuminating notes on the various philosophies and spiritual disciplines that helped drive Sylvian's creative process.

While there are problems with the text size (try reading and digesting an explanation of the tenets of Kabbalism in 7pt type without giving yourself a headache) it delivers on its stated aim, giving a well-rounded picture of the motivations and working practices of a complex, esoteric yet compelling artist and his transformation from pop idol to doyen of the avant-garde. *Paul Bowler*

British Hit EPs 1955-1989

George R White

★★★★

Music Mentor Books, £23.59

ISBN 9780956267962, 318 pages

They're on his hit list...



That the month-by-month EP charts compiled by George White in this book come to an end in

December 1967 is both revealing and a bit of a shame. The extended-play format fell out of favour with record labels and consumers alike by the end of the 60s, presumably as purveyors of rock music came of age – or at least started to take itself more seriously, for better or worse – and the LP became the dominant format for the "serious" music fan. Yet the EP was the single's more heavyset cousin, and remains beloved by collectors craving eye-catching picture sleeves.

Clearly, the mid-60s was the format's heyday, but this

appearing on the same page as Generation X. It's a nice reminder that, following post-punk's DIY boom, the EP found favour once again, though there was no dedicated chart to track its fortunes.

White's artist-by-artist trawl offers track listings and chart performances of every British EP released between 1955-89, while his chart listings allow you to see who was doing what on a monthly basis. It's interesting reading for factophiles, but some information on each release's rarity would have been welcome; upgrading the tiny black-and-white thumbnail images to larger full-colour scans even more so. The EP's visual allure remains one of the format's biggest draws. It's a shame this celebration couldn't have made more of that. *Inky Tuscadero*

No Slam Dancing, No Stage Diving, No Spikes: An Oral History Of The Legendary City Gardens

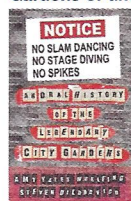
Amy Yates Wuelfing & Steven Dilodovico

★★★★

Di Wulf Publishing, £17.50

ISBN 9780971887077, 408 pages

Gardens of unearthly delights



Situated in the middle of the ghetto, surrounded by a landfill site and targeted by local undesirables ranging from bent cops to neo-Nazi skinheads, Trenton, New Jersey's City Gardens was never going to have the hip cachet of a CBGB or Whisky A Go Go.

Yet, against incredible odds, this downtrodden 1,000-capacity concrete barn

venues during its 1980-94 heyday. *No Slam Dancing* co-authors Amy Yates Wuelfing and Steven Dilodovico were both regular gig-goers and, through their series of frank interviews with ex-venue staff, tireless DJ/promoter Randy 'Now' Ellis and future-shaping refuseniks such as Henry Rollins, Jello Biafra and Grant Hart (who all regularly trod the boards), they've produced a compelling anecdotal history of this heroic rock'n'roll hovel.

It's hilarious, harrowing and hair-raising in equal measures. Learning of Glenn Danzig steaming through a set with his flies undone provokes merriment, while reading of Randy Ellis' eventual decision to quit promoting shows in the face of escalating violence and impending lawsuits brings a lump to the throat.

Ultimately, though, it's the chapter devoted to The Butthole Surfers' apocalyptic 1990 gig (naked bearded ladies, flaming drum kits and the rest) that will cause even the most excess-hardened rocker's jaw to drop. *Tim Peacock*

Noise Of The Valleys: A History Of Bradford Rock And Pop Volume 2: 1988-1998

Gary Cavanagh & Matt Webster

★★★★

Mutiny 2000, £25

ISBN 978 0 992675516, 300 pages

Anyone recall the song Over The Berlin Wall?

Back in the mid-80s this writer lived in Yorkshire: six months in Leeds and eight in Bradford. Bands ranging from Creation Roots to Ghost Dance gigged on the local scene, while Leeds University played host to the likes of The Christians.