

Album Reviews

Reviews by B. Love, John B. Moore, & Lee Valentine Smith

The Dean's List

CLAY HARPER – Old Airport Road (Terminus)

The return of an Atlanta alt-rock legend



BL: Though best known these days for his Fellini's and La Fonda Latina restaurant chains, Clay Harper also played an influential role

in Atlanta's alt-rock scene, first with iconic '80s band The Coolies and later alongside Rob Gal (now better known for producing Sugarland) in Ottoman Empire.

Old Airport Road marks his first new album in over a decade. But, if the endless stream of expletives that blues belter Sandra Hall utters on the funky opener "Ole Ray" is any indication, he hasn't lost any of his counter-culture edge in the interim.

Harper handles vocals himself on the laid-back shuffle of "Roly Poly," the horn-laden balladry of "Beautiful," and the bluesy closer, "They Played Amazing Grace." But half the album finds him sharing the spotlight with a diverse variety of special guests. The hip-hop-influenced "Get That Money" features a brief appearance by female MC Slim Red; the haunting title track features Errol Moore on vocals and Glenn Phillips on guitar; and the skronking "I Can Find You At The Airport" features spoken word by ATL legend Colonel Bruce Hampton.

Still, despite the disparate vocalists and genres explored, Old Airport Road almost feels like a concept album, with beautiful songs that explore the seedy underbelly of 21st century city life. In short, it was well worth the wait.

I CAN LICK ANY SONOFABITCH IN THE HOUSE – Mayberry (Sad Crow)

Northwest cow-punks hitting their stride



JM: In addition to having one of the best band names going right now, I Can Lick Any Sonofabitch in the House also has the musical chops to back

up their in-your-face moniker.

With Mayberry, their fifth studio album, these Portland boys can easily have you believing that's actual Texas dust on their boots (to be fair, I think at least one of the members did actually call the Lone Star State home for a while). Their latest is a complex blend of alt-country and punk rock, which is kind of like pairing a faded Clash t-shirt with a pair of hole-in-the-bottom, duck-taped Justin boots.

The opening title track is decent enough, if a little rambling, but it's the songs that follow that remind you why these guys are among the best at what they do (right up there alongside Lucero, the Old 97's and Supersuckers). Lyrically, Michael Dean Damron has always been impressive, cramming their records with the kinds of lines other bands go their

whole careers wishing they'd written. This album is no different: "Me and Judas got the shit end of the deal/like any good soldiers, there's folks to be killed," he croons on "Liars," while on "From Bad to Worse" he sings, "Don't give that Redneck a beer/David Allen Coe is all the boy will want to hear."

After listening to the baker's dozen of songs that make up Mayberry, you'll be knocking back the long necks and looking for the next fight to pick. You may get your ass kicked, but at least you'll have the perfect soundtrack to go with the punches.

LOVERS WITHOUT BORDERS – Detective

(K Records)

Auspicious indie-pop debut



LVS: From the fringes of the International Pop Underground comes the debut 7" from Lovers Without Borders, a pop trio featuring

Karl Blau (saxophone, vocals), Alex Parrish (guitar) and Jessica Bonin (vocals, drums).

Formed as a reaction to a wedding party, the trio—which is anchored by the beat of Bonin's tiny drum kit—takes the usual K Records mindset and adds a delicate pop flourish. "2nd Most Beautiful Girl In The World" (which, fittingly, is the second track), written by K mainstay Lois Maffeo, gets a brazenly pop spin. "My Harem Shall All Have Hashbrowns," which would be good for the title alone, swings with loose harmonies and Blau's sinewy sax. The garage rockin' "Eddy" echoes the '60s with a decidedly modern slant, rounding out the 4-song platter.

Worth seeking out at retail or via mail order, the record's deceptively low-key melodies and clever lyrics marks it as one of the best new releases of the year. The promise of a full album to come from the band is anticipation at its very best.

Rest of the Class ==

THE BLOW MONKEYS – Feels Like a New Morning (Cherry Red)

'80s New Wave band struggles to remain relevant



has certainly been making up for lost time. Feels Like a New Morning marks the band's fourth release since getting back on the bike. And, while they have settled into a much more mellow vibe, they have likely aged right alongside their core fans.

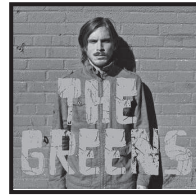
It's clear the band pretty much stopped listening to new music right around the time they first called it quits in 1990. This latest

record is pretty uneven, vacillating between decent songs ("Said Too Much" and "Icarus in Flames") and just plain boring ditties ("Chained" and "Feels Like a New Morning").

The CD also comes with a solo acoustic record from frontman Dr. Robert, playing 10 unplugged versions of the band's best-known songs (like "Digging Your Scene," "It Doesn't Have to Be This Way" and "Springtime for the World"). Of the two, the solo disc is definitely the one worth keeping. (C)

THE GREENS – Serial Killer W/A Heart of Gold (Self-Released)

Experimental singer/songwriter shows promise



BL: Kellan Meador is best known as a playful jester on Atlanta's improv comedy scene. But all it takes is one listen to "Landry"—the hypnotic,

echoing, piano instrumental that opens his debut album as The Greens—to realize that the guy is decidedly more serious about his music.

"Stay" reveals a dramatic, theatrical voice that falls somewhere between Rufus Wainwright and Depeche Mode, building to a dynamic crescendo of lovelorn emotion. "Got Something" brings electric organ and subtle percussion into the mix, giving a catchy melody that could easily be a modern-day pop song a more retro, almost jazzy feel.

At times, Meador's experimental tendencies get the better of him, with "Well" approaching Steve Reich territory and the droning "Hurricane & Sea" bordering on monotony. But when the groove, melody and passionate vocals all click together, as they do on "Fountain," the results show plenty of promise. It will be interesting to watch where Meador's arty aural experiments lead him next. (B-)

DOYLE WOLFGANG VON FRANKENSTEIN – Abominator (Monsterman)

Am I evil? Yes, I am



LVS: Cartoonish and hell-dwelling punk guitarist Doyle Wolfgang von Frankenstein's new album features luminaries Alex Story

(Cancerslug) on vocals, "Left-Hand" Graham on bass, and Dr. Chud (Misfits) on drums. With Abominator, the former Misfits guitarist has crafted a riveting and thoroughly unsettling narrative, framing the songs around Story's shrill vocals. The first single, "Valley Of Shadows," has been creeping around the horror metal scene for a few months, but the full album fleshes out the details.

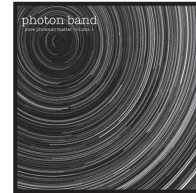
The prerequisite brooding imagery outlines the basis of a depraved love story. The tracks dwell on murder, disembowelment, necrophilia and other pleasant and uplifting tales of the macabre. Obviously, the horror metal genre will embrace the grotesque epic, which features a number of grindingly horrific and oddly catchy melodies and hooks.

All the expected tales come to life (...er, death), with standout cuts including the riveting title track and the effectively moody shadows of the growl on "Land Of The Dead" and "Love Like Murder." On

this volume, he takes the horror factor to a new level, leaving the Misfits legacy behind and taking the listener even further down into the bowels of the depraved human condition. Recommended for darker-minded Dragon*Con fans and lovers of undiluted evil in general. (B)

PHOTON BAND – Pure Photonic Matter, Volume 1 (Nod & Smile/MVD Audio)

Solid release from Philly's psychedelic indie-rockers



JM: Psychedelic indie-rockers the Photon Band have been at it since the early '90s, and they remain just as hard to categorize as they've ever

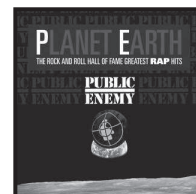
been. Sounding like the MC5 on one track and The Smithereens on the next, the band seamlessly skips from one genre to the next.

Their latest album starts off with "What You See," a swirl of electronic noise and what sounds like a creepy child's voice counting that segues into a "Kick Out the Jams"-worthy drum beat topped with Beatles-esque vocals. Therein lies the charm of this band, which features members of Lilys and War on Drugs: There's something for everyone.

You ultimately get the feeling that they could not care less if others are along for the ride or not. They're simply playing music that they enjoy, be it a radio friendly sing-along or a Syd Barrett-inspired psychedelic gumbo. (B)

PUBLIC ENEMY – Planet Earth: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Greatest Rap Hits (MVD Audio)

Best-of collection for one of hip-hop's greatest acts



JM: I'm not going to wade into the debate of whether or not Public Enemy actually belongs in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame (they do). But their

recent induction is obviously the impetus behind this new collection of re-mastered hits. And if it took a Hall of Fame induction to get these songs on vinyl again? Well, hell, it was worth it.

Yes, it's frustrating that only 11 songs from their expansive catalogue are represented here, and that it largely ignores their revolutionary first two albums (what, no love for the groundbreaking It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back?). But there is no single track on this record that doesn't deserve to be here. From the stellar opener, "Welcome to the Terrordome," to the triumphant "Fight the Power," there is no filler at all on this album.

Lyrically, the band could not be touched, deftly rapping about politics and social issues, and coming out with some of the most original samples of their era. At a time when the genre seems to focus way too much on shout outs to luxury brands, a song like "By the Time I get to Arizona"—still remarkably relevant even now, decades later—rings out like a clarion call for progressive action.

Though it may have its faults, Planet Earth is still a superb celebration of one of the most important bands to come out of the '90s... in any genre. (A)