

Hit List

Garcia and Saunders began a weekly jam session in 1970 at San Francisco's Matrix that soon expanded into two gigs at the Keystone in Berkeley. Selections from those shows were released on the Fantasy label in 1973 as a 2-LP set that became a classic among Deadheads.

Concord has now compiled the band's Fantasy recordings into this lavish 4-CD box set with remastered tracks including seven previously unreleased tunes. The set also features the requisite liner book with extensive photos and memorabilia from the sessions, such as a poster, coaster, button, and "scratchbook" replicating the design of the original album's promotional matchbooks. At the same time, the label's re-releasing the original *Live at Keystone* on multi-colored double vinyl.

The quartet included bassist John Kahn and drummer Bill Vitt backing Garcia and Saunders. Long-time bluegrass cohort David Grisman sat in on mandolin for their cover of Bob Dylan's "Positively 4th Street." The band's repertoire spans the blues, rockabilly, jazz, funk, Motown, even Broadway show tunes.

"Laid back" only begins to describe Garcia's guitar work, whether it's with the Dead or in his side shows. And as with the Dead, Garcia here stretched the songlist of covers out to many times the length of the originals as he twisted and turned through his solos and jammed with the band. On Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come," Garcia made a reggae beat even more relaxed with a spacey solo atop Saunderson's B3, turning the rebel call into a hippie anthem. But the band's never sloppy or dispassionate: it's simply that sense of Bay Area cool, made into music.

Garcia's version of Arthur "Big Boy" Crudup's blues/rock and roll classic "That's All Right, Mama" recasts the song as mellow stoner rock in a way Elvis could never have imagined. In Garcia's take on "Mystery Train," you can hear the influences of the Dead's "Truckin'" and *American Beauty*; Garcia could play some mean Travis picking, but without the sense of urgency or edginess Scotty Moore added to the song.

These two collections are wonderful period pieces. Just lay back and listen. — **Michael Dregni**



Ry Cooder Election Special

Nonesuch/Perro Verde

In his 40-plus years as a solo artist, Cooder hasn't shied away from political stances through music, although he often expressed his views by reviving older songs—by Woody Guthrie ("Vigilante Man"), Leadbelly ("Bourgeois Town"), or traditional folk songs like "Taxes On The Farmer Feeds Us All." In recent years, however, his own compositions have left no doubt where



Ry Cooder

he stands (on the left, in case you were wondering, typically giving voice to the down-trodden and disenfranchised).

Chavez Ravine, from 2005, was a concept album about the Mexican-American area of Los Angeles that was bulldozed to erect a new Dodgers stadium. In '07, *My Name is Buddy* was set in the Great Depression, with originals like "Strike!" and "J. Edgar." But with titles like "No Banker Left Behind" and "John Lee Hooker For President," 2011's *Pull Up Some Dust and Sit Down* could be the soundtrack to a Michael Moore documentary.

If *Dust* was Cooder's most overtly political album, *Election Special*, pulling even fewer punches, is doubtless his most timely. Writing all nine songs, playing guitar, mandolin, and bass with just son Joachim's percussion as accompaniment, Cooder has a lot on his mind that he obviously wants to get out in advance of November's presidential election. Protest songs? Sure — but ranging from humorous to poignant, and always featuring great grooves and fine playing.

"Mutt Romney Blues" is sung from the perspective of the dog that Mitt Romney infamously strapped to the roof of his car for a 650-mile vacation drive. "Not in the front, neither in the back," Cooder sings over a J.B. Lenoir, voodoo-evoking rhythm, "Up on the roof like a cotton sack."

Elsewhere, right-wing contributors the Koch brothers make a deal with the devil (shades of the Robert Johnson myth); the Occupy Wall Street movement gets a spirited rallying cry; and a 12-bar blues with minimal backing (and Cooder's trademark slide) is sung from Obama's perspective.

With the songs' messages the priority, solos are reined in, but Cooder and Cooder prove themselves a formidable "band," embracing blues, bluegrass, Celtic, and myriad stylistic hybrids.

Cooder's body of work is so strong it's impossible to pick a "best," but this is probably Cooder at his most passionate. — **Dan Forte**



Bill Nelson & the Gentlemen Rocketeers Live at Metropolis Studios

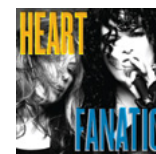
Salvo

Long acclaimed as one of Britain's finest yet most underrated axe slingers and songwriters, Bill Nelson led Be-Bop Deluxe in the mid '70s before suddenly shutting the band down, a victim of record-company greed. Now, the reclusive guitarist finally revisits the Be-Bop catalog, as well as songs from his acclaimed solo career, such as the epic opener, "The October Man."

It's hard not to feel a shiver of excitement when you hear Nelson's huge guitar tone, draped with tons of echo and chorus, and watch him rip into a screaming solo. Also note the wide array of Eastwood and Duesenberg guitars he uses, each decked out in retro/sci-fi designs and cool colors.

It's an even greater thrill when Nelson straps on a red sunburst Gibson ES-345 for the epic ballad "Adventures In A Yorkshire Landscape" and unleashes one of his spellbindingly melodic solos. As you watch his effortless arpeggios, fast legato runs, and tasty note choices, it's easy to see why the man was so revered in guitar circles back in the day. He also charges through Be-Bop Deluxe classics like "Ships In The Night," "Maid In Heaven," and "Sister Seagull," all prime examples of the Nelson guitar attack.

Another reason to grab this set is that not only do you get a full live CD with 14 tracks, but also a DVD of the entire concert plus a four-song bonus disc of studio tracks. While 1977's *Live! In the Air Age* remains the definitive Nelson concert album, this is a wonderful bookend from 35 years later, his guitar playing and vocals having lost none of the luster over the years. For fans of elegant British rock, this is a must-grab. — **Pete Prown**



Heart Fanatic

Legacy

Heart's 14th album once again gets some help from Grammy-winning producer Ben Mink (K.D. Lang, Bare-naked Ladies). Continuing with the success of their last album, *Red Velvet Car*, the new record rocks with a tough Seattle grit — Ann Wilson's mellifluous voice and a seamless blend of the band's patented electric-acoustic interplay.

Fanatic is Heart taking artistic steps outside their sonic comfort zone. It's a mix of the familiar and the new, employing edgier production. Songs such as the techno-influenced "Million Miles" sounds like something that would be played at a rave party, but the album also rocks. "59 Crunch," the title track, and "Dear Old America" benefit from Mink's "sonic mangling" with excellent dirty electric guitar work from Nancy Wilson.

The production and songs are integrated the best on the somber "Pennsylvania," with its plaintive lyrics and expert use of sparse guitar and keyboard placement. "Mashallah" is a standout track as well, building instrumentally with a Led Zeppelin feel that was a big part of Heart's early career. Nancy rocks throughout with some lowdown guitar, while Ann could sing the phonebook and sound amazing.

The production turns organic on "Walkin' Good" as Nancy whips out the acoustic, takes over on lead vocals, and gets some help from Sarah McLachlan. The blend of Mink on banjo, Ann on flute, and the viola/violin harmonization makes for soothing ear candy. "Rock Deep" gets a similar treatment and shows the Wilson sisters can still deliver the good stuff in the songwriting department.

Frantic is not as consistent as their previous album, but the Wilson sisters get points for stretching their artistic muscle. — **Oscar Jordan**



Stan Martin Distilled Influences

Twangtone Records

Stan Martin's music is a celebration of what's best about country music. His rolling, popping Telecaster runs are the kind that cause players to adopt that beloved plank as their ax of choice. This boy can sure play.

Martin makes wonderful noise on any guitar, however: his acoustic playing on "I Do" proves the point. But when he's playing his Tele, it sounds like he's on his horse and doing what he was meant to do. Even within "I Do," the electric solo feels like a none-too-soon return to the right way of things.

His country-rock licks in "He's Not