

Jim Kirtz's REV-O-LECTIONS

ALL THAT METAL IS... AND WAS

For fans of metal's seamy, unsavory past, this is a great time to be alive. To start with, there are a slew of fresh reissues to gnaw on, and we'll be doing plenty of that in just a few. And then, there's the reemergence of a few past key players that I also wanna touch on. So with that, grab a chair, or a blowtorch, or whatever else helps you relax, and let's get moving.

The New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) movement that emerged during the early '80s was a massive cultural force. Punk was now dead and this new scene was the closest thing to counter-culture that aspiring rebels had to work with—even if it did focus more on booze and birds than anything remotely political. And it was far-reaching; spawning different subgenres and spurring bands outside of Britain to

sharpen their axe blades and join the fray. One such outfit was German band, Accept.

Accept was formed during the '70s by pint-sized shrieker Udo Dirkschneider and released a few sub-par, proto-metal albums before solidifying the lineup that would release its milestone album, *Restless And Wild* (1982), opening the doors to international stardom and projecting an impressive sphere of influence.

The album opens with the joyous tones of a playful German folk song before a scratching needle and the ominous screams of Dirkschneider rudely interrupt the proceedings. All hell soon breaks loose in a barrage of charging riffs and breakneck double-bass kicks before climaxing with a sing-a-long chorus. I know what you're thinking, and let me assure you, it truly is *that* bizarre. Seen by many as the first recorded speed metal number, it was a

volatile sign of things to come. Largely taking its cues from Judas Priest, the rest of the album is awash in razor-sharp riffs, dual guitar harmonies and fist-pumping anthems as exemplified in the title track and "Shake Your Heads." The album ends on a high note with the goth-tinged "Princess of the Dawn," a phantasmic epic that culminates in a haunting, medieval guitar refrain courtesy of axe-master Wolf Hoffman.

The groundbreaking album has recently been reissued in remastered form with expanded artwork by Revolver Records. And I'd highly recommend it, even

if the band did become a bit of a homoerotic joke a few years later—with its ample use of gay innuendo in such numbers as "London Leather Boys," "Screaming For A Love Bite," "Midnight Mover," and "Balls To The Wall." Jeez, if the predominantly homophobic metal kids of yore only knew what they were listening to...

Revolver has been hard at work lately reissuing other treats from the era that span the spectrum, from the likes of tacky glam

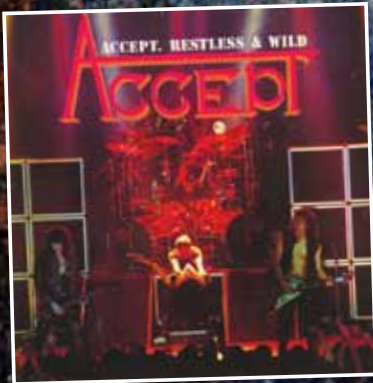
harlots Wrathchild to animated Sabbath fanatics Witchfinder General. Led by the cleverly named Rocky Shades, Wrathchild's *Stakk Attakk* (1984) sounds as if it was recorded in a toilet.

Nevertheless, it features a few stomping, pop-metal nuggets in the form of the sprite "Sweet Surrender," the slightly seedy "Trash Queen" and the messy-but-fun Gary Glitter cover "Alrite with the Boyz." The band would go on to release two more albums with a dirtier, more street-oriented sound that lacked the personality and cheap charm of the first LP.

Witchfinder General borrowed their riffs from early Sabbath, dressed up in Victorian-era costumes and posed with nude women on their album covers for a truly oddball presentation. The band's second album *Friends Of Hell* (1983) has also been given the ace reissue treatment and alternates between doomy Sabs terrain ("Quietus Reprise") and commercial hard rock ("I Lost You"). Vocalist Zeeb Parkes' limited range does the songs little justice, but the band's material is an early example of the post-Sabbath doom trend that has become pervasive in metal circles—even with the band's unintentional comic edge.

Another early example of Sabbath-influenced goof metal was Witchfynde. Even though these cantankerous Brits were one of the first to openly display Satanic imagery on their album covers, their music was hardly extreme, and compared to diabolical noise merchants Venom, they were downright tame. The band's first—and best—album *Give 'Em Hell* has recently been reissued by Cherry Red Records. While entertaining in spots, *Give 'Em Hell* is a confused hodge-podge of high-concept progressive rock flourishes and punkish barroom jams, all sprinkled with quasi-Satanic lyrics. But silly numbers such as the dire "Pay Now-Love Later" quickly neutralize any fleeting flirtation with the dark side. Bummer.

Mammoth was a British super group of sorts formed by ex-Gillan bass player John McCoy and vocalist Nicky Moore, who had previously replaced future-Maiden star Bruce Dickinson in NWOBHM band, Samson. This truly larger-than-life outfit ran into to trouble at shows as its collective weight surpassed 1000 pounds, putting some of the more fragile stage sets in



Raven



jeopardy. The band released one bluesy hard rock album in the late '80s to little fanfare and soon went belly up due to a lack of label support. But McCoy has kept busy and after raiding his vaults for demos and unreleased tracks has put together the comp *Leftovers, Relics And Rarities* (Angel Air). Songs like “Bet You Wish ‘Too,” “Bad Times” and the shrewdly

named “Fatman” are strident hard rock numbers that should pacify those who can’t find the official album on CD—it’s a rare one.

No conversation on the subject of NWOBHM is complete without touching on Raven. Talk about a let-down. At the onset of the movement, the energetic power trio mixed the thrashy aesthetics of vintage Motörhead with blazing speed and a highly athletic stage show. The band’s first three albums for the seminal NWOBHM label Neat Records (*Rock Until You Drop*, *Wiped Out* and *All For One*) are all proto-thrash classics. But band leaders Mark and John Gallagher began to tire of being an indie band and signed with Atlantic Records in the mid-’80s, churning out bad—very bad—commercial rock while adorned in football-inspired, athletic gear(!). But just prior to the band’s stylistic shift, it released one hell of an impressive live album, *Live at the Inferno* (1984), reissued on CD

by Megaforce Records a while back.

The album features tracks culled from the Neat catalog, plus the title track that serves as both the show’s intro and outro. John Gallagher’s rabid screams and manic delivery on songs like “Take Control,” “Crash, Bang Wallop” and “Break the Chain” are beyond rational explanation, and it’s no wonder the band would fail at crossing over into polished, pop metal territory. Once the trio did try to recapture their thrashing glory days in the latter part of the decade, the public had moved on. Pity, that.

One of my favorite albums of last year was that of Sinner’s straight-up, heavy metal joint *Crash and Burn*. Turns out these Teutonic rockers have been releasing albums for over 25 years, going back to the glory days of metal’s first renaissance.

Led by vocalist Mat Sinner, the band actually broke up in 1988—when he went on to form Primal Fear—but regrouped a few years later, releasing several albums throughout the 1990s and beyond. Three albums from the period—*The Nature of Evil*, *Judgement Day* and *There Will Be Execution*—have seen reissue through Polish metal experts Metal Mind Productions. My fave is 1998’s *Judgement Day*. Aside from its gloriously Spinal Tap-ish cover, it contains a fist-pumping set of anthemic, ’80s heavy metal, complete with razor riffs, pummeling beats, lightweight lyrics and big choruses. But this is no throwback; the production and tones are quite contemporary

and Sinner’s gravely vocals are warm and authentic. For those looking for the spirit of the glory days in a bold, remastered package, this one’s for you.

Back in the day, it was not uncommon for metal journalists (especially British ones) to speak about Southern Rock bands in the same breath as the premier metal acts of the period. In general, the Brits have always seemed fascinated with the American South—just look at the Rolling Stones and their usurpation of blues and country for proof. In salute of the glory days of metal journalism, I’m closing this installment with none other than Southern rock’s greatest progeny, Lynyrd Skynyrd, who just happens to have a new album out—*God & Guns*.

While the band is but a fraction of its former self, after having endured a devastating

plane crash in 1977 and tons of lineup debacles, its core of guitarists Rick Medlocke, Gary Rossington and singer Johnny Van Zant (younger brother of deceased former singer Ronnie) still rock hard. But rather than trying to sound “now,” by adhering

to the more metallicized Southern rock blueprint popularized in the early ’80s by Molly Hatchet, then resurrected by Raging Slab and now perpetuated by the likes of Blackstone Cherry, this new album has a

definitive, straight-up rock edge. But there are some undeniably heavy spots—opening track “Still Unbroken” with its chunky riffs and powerful refrain is a decisive statement of intent if there ever was one. And “Floyd” is an eerie, Southern-fried metal number with backing vocals by Rob Zombie. The song was co-written by guitar journeyman John 5 (Rob Zombie, Marilyn Manson), who worked closely with the band on the entire album. With numbers like these along with the scrappy “Storm,” *God & Guns* may well put Southern rock back on the metal radar. Either way, it’s kinda cool to see these weathered cats with new leases on life—and a kick-ass rock album under their bullet belts.

For questions, comments, or something you’d like to see, drop me a note at Retrohead77@yahoo.com. See you next time, JK. 