

Conny Ochs

"Raw Love Songs" CD

(Exile On Mainstream Records)

★★★★★



Debut solo release from a German singer/songwriter who recently toured and collaborated with doom/stoner metal legend Wino, "Raw Love Songs" is a rich and sonorous collection of just what the title implies. "Stampede, Stampede" is a lovely acapella opener, leading into the moving "Lily Of The Valley", which channels Jeff Buckley. "Angels And Demons" reminds of both Buckley and Nick Cave, being full of tortured dark and raw emotion. "Good House" could almost be H.I.M. minus the glitter. The almost-blues of "Waiting For The Monster" are also effective. "Raw Love Songs" is quintessentially a dark acoustic folk album, and a good one at that.

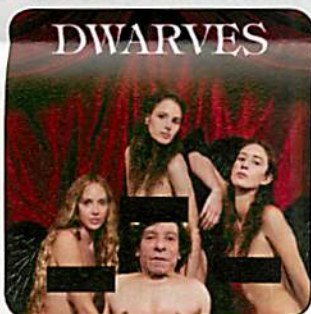
— Todd Zachritz

Dwarves

"Born Again" CD

(Greedy/MVD Audio)

★★★★★



The classic gutter-shock punk band is finally back, with their first new album since 2004. Including longtime members Blag Dahlia and Hewhocannotbenamed, among a cast of, well, many, it's an energetic, trashy, and well-played selection of 18 sleaze-inspired rockers.

There are a plethora of great, catchy, and under-two-minute pop-punk songs here. In fact, there are 18 songs of them, all well-written and concise. Self-reverential? Sure. Indulgent? Not really. Dwarves' strengths are their ability to write great songs while maintaining a real f-u attitude.

The bonus DVD (included in some copies) is an extensive collection of live bootleg footage, promotional videos (both censored and uncut), and TV interviews. A worthy set from one of American punk's most notorious acts. All hail the Dwarves! — Todd Zachritz

Post Mortem

"Message From The Dead" CD

(Taboo Productions)

★★★★★



Hailing from Boston, this classic and early death/gore/punk metal band returns anew with this 11-song release (plus bonus unlisted tracks). But as new as this material may be, vocalist and founder John McCarthy passed away during the recording, so several cuts are present with guest vocalists respectfully finishing up in his absence. Despite this discontinuity, the album works well as a whole.

Tracks like "Human Pinata" slow it down to almost doom-metal levels. "Pray Before You Die" echoes this sentiment...a churning metallic riff with more than a nod to classic punk ala Black Flag. "Field Trip" rages with a thrash-punk tempo, like if Megadeth covered Minor Threat. This is old-school crossover that just isn't heard much anymore, and a shame that is, as "Message From The Dead" is a killer album.

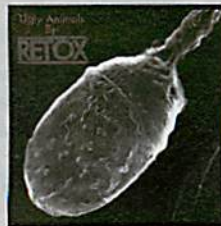
Post Mortem's punk-metal was never too well-known, but their legacy lives on, and here's to hoping this posthumous release garners them some well-deserved notoriety.

— Todd Zachritz

Retox

"Ugly Animals" CD

11 songs in 13 minutes, and fronted by Justin Pearson (The Locust), you know what to expect here. Yes, it's an earful of clotted punk/grindcore madness. You get screaming, nihilistic hardcore, abrasive post-punk, and more of the same. It's feral, anarchic, and primitive. "Ugly Animals" is an exercise in catharsis, pure and simple. Enjoyable. (Ipecac Recordings)



Soil Of Ignorance / Wadge

"Split 7"

This split 7" features a pair of underground Canadian metal/grind bands who can shred well, thank you very much. Soil Of Ignorance's side is a series of bursting, guttural grindcore blasts that remind me of classic, early Napalm Death. Wadge, on the other side, are more crusty speed/thrash metal. A lot of fun, for the 10 minutes you get. (Give Praise)



Burn Halo

"Up From The Ashes" CD

Fronted by former 18 Visions songwriter James Hart, Burn Halo's second album is a radio-friendly, squeaky-clean rock/metal album, readymade for FM play. I'm neither surprised or impressed by the same old vocals (thanks, Layne Staley, for the template) and recycled pop-metal rhythm section. This will find plenty of fans, but if you're looking for adventure in music, there's nothing you haven't already heard elsewhere, and better. (Rawhead Records, aka Warner Brothers)

— Todd Zachritz

