



REVIEWS INTERVIEWS A.V. UNDERCOVER 2011 LOUD MY FAVORITE MUSIC YEAR SET LIST THEN THAT'S WHAT THEY CALLED MUSIC! THIS WAS POP WE'RE NO. 1



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LOUD

May 2011



By Jason Heller May 4, 2011

Punk, hardcore, metal, noise: Music shouldn't always be easy on the ears. Each month, Loud unearths some of the loudest, crudest, weirdest, and/or heaviest sounds writhing beneath the surface. The world's not getting any quieter. Neither should we.

Stream of the month: *Dwarves*, *The Dwarves Are Born Again*

Since the Dwarves' 1990 masterpiece of perversion, *Blood Guts & Pussy*, the band has manipulated its scabrous punk formula to varying degrees of offensiveness. But founders **Blag Dahlia** and HeWhoCannotBeNamed have convened the group for the new, aptly titled *The Dwarves Are Born Again*. It's the best album the band has made in years; crude yet catchy (and not above flinging yet more jokes about sluts and AIDS), *Born Again* may not reinvent anything—but it shows that the Dwarves still know how to shit out potent loads of disgusting fun.

Dwarves, "The Dwarves Are Born Again" by TheAVClub

And now for our regularly scheduled program of loudness. (Please note: I'll be reviewing the anticipated new full-lengths from **Liturgy** and **Jesu** for *The A.V.*

Club's regular music section. Look for them later this month.)

LOUD: May 4, 2011 by **TheAVClub**

Despite the preponderance of so-called metalgaze bands over the past few years, there's still plenty of gold to be mined within the overlap of heavy music and shoegaze. For proof, look no further than **Roads To Judah**, the debut by San Francisco's **Deafheaven**. While owing a clear debt to forebears like **Wolves In The Throne Room** and Celeste, the band's suffocated underlayer of epic, melodic hardcore adds immediacy to the swells and releases of white noise, blackened screams, and hailstorm beats. Regardless of any hairsplitting and genre-dissection it might inspire, *Roads To Judah* is a beautifully moving and devastating record, period.

A band that's clearly in a league—if not a genre—of its own is **Krallice**. And with **Diotima**, Einsteinian guitarist Mick Barr has finally crafted the masterpiece of his post-Orthrelm outfit. Even more than on previous Krallice releases, Barr and his fellow riff-chemist Colin Marston have churned blurred fretwork and apocalyptic gloom into a shimmering aurora of dread, majesty, and seething otherworldliness. Truly these guys are operating with one foot in another dimension—and they're dragging the thunder of both heaven and hell through the portal.

unspools an operatic, sci-fi song-cycle that pits metaphysics against intricate prog riffage—in other words, more of what you love about BTBAM. A full-length sequel to *Parallax* is due later this year, but in the meantime, this is a gorgeous stopgap.

The progressive streak of Between The Buried And Me has never owed that much to classic prog—but **Last Chance To Reason** revels in the genre's traditions, from the plangent godliness of Dream Theater to Yes' dream-world ornamentation. On its new album, the tellingly titled **Level 2**, LCTR welds those influences to a backbone of video-game conceptualism and 8-bit-soundtrack flurries that pick up where 2007's *Level 1* left off. The result is soaring yet coldly cybernetic—which is probably just what the band had in mind.

Blut Aus Nord has tinkered freely with black metal over the course of its existence—but the French band has distilled such noisemongering and mainlined it straight into the meat of its latest album, 777 **Sect(s)**. The first of a trilogy of interlinked albums due this year, the disc dispenses with elegant intros or any semblance of mercy as it reduces its Crowley-inspired menace to an almost industrial onslaught. Even the songs' sporadic ambient stretches are heavy enough to collapse quasars—or at least cranium bones.

Comebacks can be sketchy affairs—and on paper, **Pentagram**'s hasn't been promising. Singer Bobby Liebling has been scrambling like Axl Rose to keep a consistent lineup together recently, but he's managed to pull off ***Last Rites***, the doom veteran's first album in seven years. Despite the revolving-door roster, the disc is actually pretty good: The production is bludgeoning, if a little too crisp, and the songs aren't afraid to crutch themselves up on the band's formidable blues-sludge legacy.

Unlike Pentagram, **Graveyard** wasn't around in the '70s—but it sure wishes it had been. The Swedish group's overdue sophomore full-length, ***Hisingen Blues***, is a dark, swaggering, proto-metal monster that sounds like Budgie minus the progressive tendencies and heavy on the 'shrooms and spiked leather. At the same time, the band's cheeky sense of humor—included here are tracks titled “Uncomfortably Numb” and “Ungrateful Are The Dead”—shows that Graveyard is fully aware of how occasionally (if enjoyably) ridiculous it is.

Wooden Stake, on the other hand, is not joking around. The New York duo's debut full-length, ***Dungeon Prayers And Tombyard Serenades***, summons B-movie Satanism while keeping the low-end horrendously infernal. The band is fronted by bassist Vanessa Nocera—also of the blackened thrash outfit Scaremaker—whose voice flutters from unearthly grunts to melodic, banshee-like wails. Draped in moss and cobwebs, *Dungeon Prayers* expands the promise of Wooden Stake's earlier splits and 7-inches to deliver a sick slab of blasphemous doom that dwells proudly in the basement.

One of metal's most frighteningly awesome female singers, Kat Katz, left her band **Salome** just as it was building on the acclaim of its 2010 tour de force, *Terminal*. The future of Salome may be in doubt, but Katz will undoubtedly surface again in a band of her own. In the meantime, she's still one of the three vocalists of **Agoraphobic Nosebleed**, the long-running side project of **Pig Destroyer**'s Scott Hull. Agoraphobic's new release, *And On And On...*, is a split with the coed crust-core outfit **Despise You**—and it's the latter's first output in a decade. Both bands bring the belligerence as if it was their first time out, and Despise You even smuggles in a scab-caked rendition of Fear's "I Don't Care About You." Like the split itself, it's a match made in hell.

Singapore's **Wormrot** made a splash last year with its debut, *Abuse*. But the grind trio tops itself with the new *Dirge*. A veritable fugue of jackhammer treble and ping-ponged vocal obnoxiousness, the album cheerfully annihilates itself as it goes along. (Case in point: "You Suffer But Why Is It My Problem," a four-second tribute to **Napalm Death**'s "You Suffer.") Plus, with song titles like "Destruct The Bastards" and "Meteor To The Face," you just know these dudes have the whole human species on their shit list. It's a beautiful thing, really.

Naming your band after a Disrupt song is a sure way to get me to love it. **Faction Disaster** has done exactly that—and sure enough, the group's new *Smoking Sherm With Corey Haim's Corpse* is right up my alley. Tinny and shitty to the point of being no-fi, the 12-song, 10-minute release by the blast-happy duo doesn't have a shred of Disrupt's self-seriousness (as if the title wasn't a tip-off). But as far as shameless stoner imbecility goes, it's a fun ride.

Drummer Eric Hernandez was only in the mighty **Kylesa** long enough to record *Static Tensions*, after which he refocused on singing and playing bass in his main band, **Capsule**. The outfit just released *No Ghost*—and while it may not satisfy a certain section of Kylesa fans, the disc is a nourishing serving of blistering, oh-so-slightly technical post-hardcore that owes much of the melodic side of its sound to fellow Miami group **Torche**—which isn't surprising, seeing as how Torche's Jonathan Nuñez helped produce it.

Grizzled, gnarled, and guzzling cheap whisky: Sure, it's a cliché. But Portland's **Red Fang** actually has more going for it than that. The band's new album, *Murder The Mountains*, touches on everything from the Melvins to Queens Of The Stone Age, but it finds its own viciously melodic hard-rock niche while keeping the slurred riffs positively tectonic. As with Red Fang's self-titled debut, there isn't a shred of hipness or flash here—just an avalanche of pants-shitting volume smothered on top of some solid, chunky song-spewing.

Until now, Louisville's **Young Widows** has been content trawling the murk left by The Jesus Lizard as well as the band's own past projects (primarily Breather Resist, one of this century's best, mostly unsung post-hardcore groups). And Young Widows did it well. But on the band's third album, ***In And Out Of Youth And Lightness***, things have downshifted; skeletal and elemental, the songs are shrouded in a dusky exhaust that feels more akin to Swans and even Bauhaus. In fact, the haunted beat of "The Muted Man" could be an homage to Bauhaus' "In The Night." Overall, though, Young Widows has triumphed at reinventing itself as ghoulish caretakers of the twilight while retaining the bleak intensity of its early work.

"Synch up your bad dreams," croons **Dead Rider** leader Todd Rittman on "Mother's Meat," the opening track of the band's new full-length, ***The Raw Dents***. And that about sums it up; the band, until now known as **D. Rider**, has been a departure from Rittman's past projects—most notably the godlike, microtonal noise cell **U.S. Maple**—by employing sparse textures and a slinky, sultry surrealism that borders on goth-R&B. The mix is nightmarishly unsettling, but Rittman still finds space for random stabs of guitar supervillainy amid the mutant grooves.

Like some unholy death-metal mating of Melt-Banana and Lydia Lunch, Italy's **OvO** has been unhinging the sanity of listeners for years now. But the duo has topped itself with ***Cor Cordium***. Ditching its usual ramshackle aesthetic for a sleeker, deeper, more sinister sound, drummer Bruno Dorella and singer-guitarist Stefania Pedretti carve misshapen sonics out of calculated atonality and neck-snapping abandon. Some of the tracks on *Cor Cordium* hit like a burst of nerve gas—but others, like the insidiously beautiful and incantatory "Marie," infect you virally. By the time the noise and beats start to bludgeon, it's too late to escape.

On the other end of the Italian spectrum, ***Per Proteggere E Servire***—the debut album by Venezia's **Smart Cops**—is salvo of upbeat garage-punk with a smart, sharp pop edge. But these kids do more than shit out great tunes; dressed like cheap, gum-snapping hoodlums from *West Side Story* and eager to cultivate a cartoon image as a switchblade rock 'n' roll gang, the crooks of Smart Cops aren't afraid to bring a little showmanship to their defiantly timeless punk.

Timelessness, of course, isn't something all bands can pull off. **Swingin' Utters** was once a shining beacon of retro-'70s punk back in the '90s, when most of its peers were trying to sound like Green Day and NOFX. (Not that there's anything wrong with Green Day or NOFX.) Swingin' Utters hasn't released an album since 2004, but even seven years ago, the band had started to sound tired and watered down. Sadly, **Here, Under Protest** is not the comeback it should be. Singer Johnny Peebucks has never sounded more bored with his own gruff voice or less convinced of his own lyrics—not that the album's plodding riffs come anywhere near the blazing, Stiff Little Fingers-like fury of Swingin' Utters in its prime.

A full-blown reunion of pop-punk heroes The Ergs may still be yet to come, but of all the band's offshoots, **Night Birds** is the most thoroughly ass-kicking. The Jersey group's collection of demos and singles, **Fresh Kills Vol. 1**, has an old-school, Orange County vibe that cribs from '80s trailblazers like Agent Orange and **last month's Retro Loud pick, the Adolescents**. Subject matter runs the gamut from alien abduction to the upside of global warming ("The end for you! / More room for me!"), but it's the disc's twangy, melody-splashed knack for punk anthems that makes Night Birds sound like a long-last classic rather than mere revivalists.

Seeing as how **Something Fierce** is signed to Dirtnap, I expected it to be another gaggle of tight-pantsed Pacific Northwesterners. Turns out the band is a trio of scruffy, big-boned Texans. Not only that—they defy expectations by turning their debut full-length, **Don't Be So Cruel**, into a slightly arty, minor-key showcase of hooky rock that draws from '70s punk oddballs like Skids and *More Songs About Chocolate And Girls*-era Undertones. In other words, *Don't Be So Cruel* fits in Dirtnap's wheelhouse—but at the same time, it's a quirky and unpretentious take on the skinny-tie sound.

P.S. Eliot started out as a scrappy pop-punk band with a tinge of '90s indie rock—particularly Superchunk—that fell along the same lines as contemporaries like Lemuria and The Measure [sa]. But with P.S. Eliot's new full-length, **Sadie**, singer-guitarist Katie Crutchfield and crew have taken a deep breath and slowed down for a little introspection. That kind of move is usually called "maturation," and it's far too often the death knell for a great punk band. But *Sadie*, despite its lower level of caffeine-and-hormone jitters, is a sliver of eloquent songcraft and bittersweet soul-searching.

For something so unreservedly raw, **RVIVR**'s new collection of singles and EPs, **The Joester Sessions**, is surprisingly well written and cathartic. The coed outfit's ragged, crusty pop-punk reeks of sweat and rust, but it's all the better for it; this is the kind of anthemic knuckle-dusting that once made bands like Fifteen and Inquisition such a revelation back in the day. But RVIVR totally owns this sound—and this anthology should satisfy until the band's next full-length comes along.

A band that seems to make no bones about its love of the past is Philadelphia's **Restorations**, whose self-titled debut full-length recalls latter-day Samiam and Jets To Brazil in its intricate (but never showy) melody and raspy, bile-scarred vocals. More strikingly, the group's spaciousness and jangle veer from the post-hardcore glossary that's been far too overused for the past decade; running roughshod across genre boundaries and scene expectations, **Restorations** is the kind of simmering, nostalgia-steeped record with the power to creep up and haunt you.

For all the excitement surrounding the releases of **Shed**—the long-anticipated debut album by another Pennsylvania punk band, **Title Fight**—there's very little about the disc that stands out as remotely original. Then again, who needs originality when you've got tunes this tight, punchy, and perfect for both heartfelt sing-alongs *and* circle pits? Every square inch of *Shed* oozes bruised sincerity and huge hooks—and it picks up exactly where Lifetime and other such champions of melodic, emotive hardcore left off.

Even as Deathwish ventures into hitherto unknown territory with the release of Deafheaven's debut, the label is issuing an album that couldn't be more stereotypically Deathwish-y: **A Dissident**, the fourth full-length from **Victims**. It's yet another square meal of thick, gravelly D-beat from this group of hardcore vets—although the production is a bit less bloody and blown-out this time around, which isn't necessarily a good thing. Still, the power can't be denied, and it's good to know not every band is caught up in being all innovative and shit.

Retro Loud: X-Ray Spex, *Germ Free Adolescents*

Last week, my fellow *A.V. Club* writer Sean O'Neal **eulogized Poly Styrene** better than just about anybody. But I have to add my two cents. Yes, Styrene was a punk icon and an inspiration to riot grrrls and a restless artistic soul whose new album, *Generation Indigo*, is just further proof of what an unfairly neglected figure she'd become as years and trends flew by. Yes, she flouted the guidelines of genre and gender. Yes, she penned far smarter songs than 90 percent of her punk peers in the late '70s. But she also *fucking rocked*. Her debut album with X-Ray Spex, 1978's *Germ Free Adolescents*, is a front-to-back masterpiece of welt-raising punk—but lest you think I'm just spouting more hyperbole in the wake of Styrene's death from cancer on April 25, let me add that the album is also a deeply, grandly, ambitiously flawed work, groaning under the weight of over-the-top saxophone, jarring atmospheric interludes, and Styrene's snotty, bratty screech. These, though, are the things that make *Germ Free Adolescents* such a desperate, go-for-broke classic. At the wise old age of 21, Styrene clearly already knew she was going to have one shot at pop immortality; after all, her lyrics on the record are fixated on the ephemerality of our perpetually obsolete culture. But the cynicism and weariness that lurked beneath her obnoxious precocity marked her as an old soul—despite the braces and Day-Glo dresses. It's hard to pick one track from *Germ Free Adolescents* that best represents her vision, but I'd have to go with "Art-I-Ficial." "I wanna be Instamatic / I wanna be a frozen pea / I wanna be dehydrated / In a consumer society," she sings, aiming her ridicule and rage inward as much as outward. As it turns out, she got her wish; she's preserved now in the cryogenic mausoleum of pop culture. Here's hoping each new generation wakes her up from time to time.

Next month: New releases by **Marduk**, **Anaal Nathrakh**, **Hate Eternal**, **Pulling Teeth**, **Tombs**, **A Storm Of Light**, **Across Tundras**, **Touché Amoré**, and more—plus a full stream of ***Like Shadows***, the long-awaited debut album by **Ampere** (featuring Will Killingsworth, formerly of Orchid and Bucket Full Of Teeth).

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