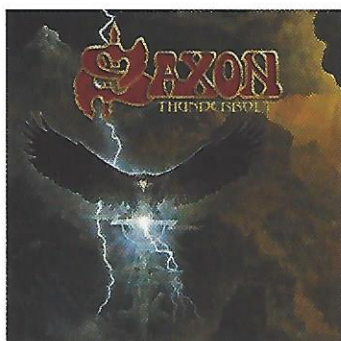
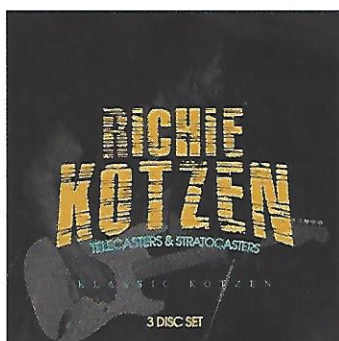


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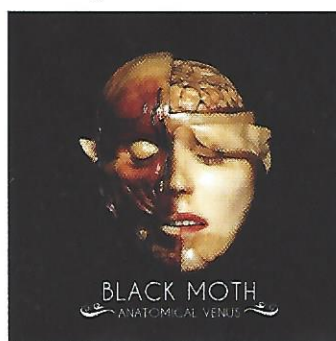
Saxon Thunderbolt (Silver Lining Music)

At a time when rock and metal is losing too many icons, too often, it's reassuring to know that Saxon are still going strong. A flurry of box sets and re-releases have served as a timely reminder that the NWOBHM pioneers played a key role in propelling balls-to-the-wall metal into the public consciousness 40 years ago. And *Thunderbolt* - as the non-nonsense name alludes to - is proof that Biff and the boys still have a key role to play in their fifth decade. *They Played Rock And Roll* sounds like the natural successor to 1981's *And The Bands Played On* but Saxon don't live in the past. *Thunderbolt* goes back to the future with an almighty bang. **SR**



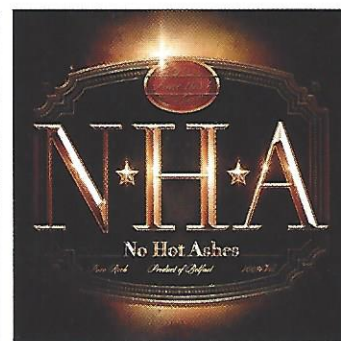
Richie Kotzen Klassic Kotzen (Store For Music)

Perhaps best known for his short-lived spells with Poison and Mr Big, the remarkably talented Richie Kotzen boasts a wealth of solo material that's screaming to be heard. Thanks to this three-disc collection - dubbed *Telecasters & Stratocasters* - the very best of his late 90s work is given due prominence. 1997's *Something To Say*, 1998's *What Is* and 1999's *Break It All Down* showcase an outrageously talented six-stringer who has always been happiest ploughing a lone furrow and digging up uniquely affecting melodies from the depths of a sublimely creative mind. Bonus Kotz from *Wave Of Emotion* complete a compelling insight into a genuine trailblazer. **SR**



Black Moth Anatomical Venus (Candlelight Records)

Black Moth have gathered serious momentum over the last two years - and *Anatomical Venus* should see the band fly even higher. Why? Well, they've perfectly blended their deep, Sabbath grooves and garage attitude with a shiny metallic twist (thanks in part to Italian guitarist Federica Gialanze). And they also rock. Really, really rock. *Istra* is one hell of an opener, *A Lovers Hate* is a quick-fire, retro stomp through four decades of glorious, riff-centric noise and *Pig Man* is like NOLA-fried stoner spliced with spikey post punk. And they're just a few of the highlights... 2018? It could be the year of the Moth. **RH**



No Hot Ashes NHA (Frontiers)

Thirty years after inking their first record deal, No Hot Ashes have finally dropped their debut album. And a back story rooted in bad timing, brooding frustration and broken promises never boasted such a feelgood conclusion - *NHA* is worth the wait. And then some. That Northern Ireland's answer to FM lost bass player Paul Boyd to cancer last year is a tragic and untimely footnote but there could be no better tribute to the much-missed rhythm king. Like Little Angels, Gun and Dan Reed Network? You'll love this. The Journeyesque *Souls* is a sensational AOR anthem as Eamon Nancarrow sings from the heart and captures the mind. **SR**



Testament

Live At The Fillmore/Demonic/The Gathering/First Strike Still Deadly/Live At Eindhoven '87 (Nuclear Blast)

The release of 2016's *Brotherhood Of The Snake* proved that Bay Area thrash royalty Testament are in no mood to bookend their famous *Legacy* just yet.

Three decades after the band's blistering 1987 debut suggested the Big Four required rapid expansion, Chuck Billy and his buddies are enjoying an Indian summer. In the late 90s, however, it was a very different story. Testament were fighting to turn the tide in the face of a metal evolution and both *Demonic* and *The Gathering*

are the bullish sound of a band battling to stay relevant and scrapping for survival. The former is an angry affair leaning towards darker, death metal-influenced themes. Billy is in furious form on the foreboding *Hatred's Rise* but *Together As One* confirms a band unified and unfazed. *The Gathering* (1999) introduced Dave Lombardo to the mix and the drummer's unflinching rhythm is writ large across one of Testament's outstanding albums. Billy still recounts how Slayer's legendary tub thumper bounced ideas off

Eric Peterson to create a beast of a metal album - *Careful What You Wish For* and *Allegiance* are just two examples of record so heavy it hurts. The live double of *...Fillmore* and *...Eindhoven* demonstrate what Testament do best as the band feeds of two typically frenzied audiences baying for blood. And if *First Strike Still Deadly* is an odd amalgamation of the old and new then both Billy and original frontman Steve Souza deliver the thrash metal goods on a collection of re-recorded rapid-fire classics. **SR**