

music

cd reviews

MAKING THE GRADE: A EXCEPTIONAL
B WORTHWHILE | C MEDIOCRE
D SAVE YOUR MONEY
F WILL BE ON HELL'S JUKEBOX



BLACK LIPS
Good Bad Not Evil
(Vice)

Good Bad Not Evil would be a slight test for the band's audience were it the records and not the infamous live shows they craved. The band is now dabbling outside of its bluesy garage rock bubble, and though the humor mostly remains, the sloppy DIY mentality is somewhat laid to rest. Highly distorted, cheap production has given way to complete clarity, meaning there are now audible voices and lyrics to consider.

On one hand, Black Lips no longer remain a generic garage rock band — this release isn't just another in an unvarying, reliable line, though there are fuzzy drum rolls, bluesy bass lines and '50s harmonies as expected. But songs here like "O Katrina!" lack the urgency of, say, any live rendition, which captures much rougher harmonies and growls. And "Veni Vidi Vici" is a straight up pop song that somehow doesn't belong.

The men of Black Lips are no longer the (teenage) boys they were, and we've now got proof that they're finally being noticed after seven years of recording together.

Grade: B+

—China Bialos

Good Bad Not Evil is currently available.

music 101 | artist feature

ALL TIME LOW

Chart the Ups and Downs of Songwriting

BY BRIEN OVERLY

"IT'S NOT REALLY MUSIC AS much as it is scattered noise," says All Time Low drummer Rian Dawson of his band's latest album, *So Wrong, It's Right*.

Though joking, he and his band mates have heard far worse from critics and audiences and are no strangers to being both panned and lauded by both in the same breath. Nevertheless, the Maryland natives welcome what their detractors have to say about them.

In fact, "We celebrate it," says frontman Alex Gaskarth with a self-aware grin.

Even so, writing and recording *So Wrong* saw the band, including guitarist Jack Barakat and bassist Zack Merrick, take themselves outside of their comfort zone.

"It was different from anything we had ever done before; we'd never worked with a producer before. On the first day of production, [producer Matt Squire] was like, 'Yeah, we have to condense this.' Most bands do in with like 50 songs, have to cut it down to 25, then cut it down from there. We were working our way up from three," says

Dawson with a laugh.

"Going into it, we had this huge fear that a producer would be like, 'No, you're not doing that, do this instead,' telling us what to do, so we were really terrified of Squire," Dawson adds.

And though they may have gotten off to a rough start under his watch, the band found that, contrary to expectation, working under a producer wasn't such a bad experience after all.

"It was like having a loose second opinion; It really helped, especially when it came down to lyrics and the vocal stuff," says Gaskarth. "I always second guess myself, so I'd end up not being able to write the lyrics until the very last minute. I'd usually be in the vocal booth writing out a verse, but the added pressure worked out well."

"There was a lot of pressure, especially for Alex," agrees Dawson. "The music all fell into place, but when people listen to this music, they don't care about what the drums or guitars are doing, they care about lyrics and melodies. We stayed in the studio about two months longer than we were supposed to."

Ultimately, both Dawson and Gaskarth feel the effort was worth the final product.

"We set out to make a really solid pop punk record, and I think that's what we achieved," says Gaskarth. "We want people who didn't ever like pop music to like pop music. We tried to make something as ridiculously infectious as possible while maintaining that this isn't Hilary Duff."

"We're not trying to set ourselves apart as some crazy, innovative, groundbreaking band. We've never wanted to do that," he continues. "It was always to just have fun and have people put us in their CD player and say, 'I want to dance to this.' Maybe we're meant to be that cliché band, but as long as people like us, I don't really care."

That said, for all his confidence and proclaimed indifference to skeptics, Gaskarth admits a bit of anxiety while awaiting the masses' reaction to the album.

"We've built a lot of hype on this record, and I only hope it lives up to it," he says. "That's the one thing I'm nervous about. When you build up something so big, I just hope we don't disappoint."

If the exponentially growing number of kids who learned the words to "Dear Maria, Count Me In" weeks before *So Wrong* had even unofficially leaked are any indication, Gaskarth hasn't got much to worry about. And with a solidly booked tour



(l to r) Rian Dawson, Jack Barakat, Alex Gaskarth and Zack Merrick of All Time Low

schedule for the remainder of the year, those numbers are only looking keep growing.

Gaskarth wouldn't have it any other way: "The way I look at it is if the worst part of my job is being tired because I've been traveling the country, meeting all these people and playing for crowds of hundreds of people every day, then I have a pretty sweet job, so I really can't complain." ■

So Wrong, It's Right is currently available. The band will perform Oct. 20 & 21 at House of Blues Sunset Strip. For more information, visit www.alltimelow.com.

music dvd reviews

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
Under Review
1978-1982: Tale of the Working Man
(Sexy Intellectual)

This film doesn't try to recap Springsteen's entire career; instead it focuses on the period of maturation that came through the releases *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, *The River* and *Nebraska*. This was sort

of a make-it-or-break-it time for Springsteen — he had just had his commercial breakthrough with the *Born to Run* album, but a legal battle

with his manager caused him to not put anything out for three years.

Former E Street Band member Vini Lopez, musician Laura Veirs and journalist Robert Christgau are among those explaining why this blue-collar rocker is so endearing and why this particular period was so crucial to his becoming a superstar.

Grade: B

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Under Review 1978-1982 is currently available.



PHIL VARONE
Waking Up Dead
(MVD Visual)

At the very beginning of this film Phil Varone, former drummer for Saigon Kick and Skid Row, issues some advice for those considering a life in rock 'n' roll: "Don't do it!" Then the documentary shows Varone indulging in an endless parade of booze, drugs and eager women — hardly the stuff of discouragement for nascent rock stars.

The film is called *Waking Up Dead* so you would expect some real grit here. What is given instead is footage

of Varone snorting line after line of cocaine and fondling countless topless women; all the while carrying on a narrative complaining about how he's broke and has wasted his life with these antics.

Not all of the footage is vintage either — he's still snorting coke as the movie is being made. Varone intends for this film to garner him sympathy but instead he comes off like a total loser, not for his past but for his present.

Grade: B

—Kevin Wierzbicki

Waking Up Dead is currently available.



EULOGIES
Eulogies
(Dangerbird)

Whenever I think of the word eulogies, the thought of a funeral comes to mind. Unfortunately, that's also what comes to mind while listening to the self-titled debut album from the recently formed,

three-man band, Eulogies.

It's actually been awhile since I've been as bored with an album as I was with this one. Drummer Chris Reynolds produces some good beats, but it's frontman Peter Walker's dull vocals that lack the pizzazz needed to engage the listener.

Eulogies was temporarily redeemed on "Running in the Rain," a cool tune with smooth rhythms, but titles like "Blizzard Ape" and "Under the Knife" didn't help me connect with this album.

Grade: C

—Fay Rose

Eulogies is currently available.

ARI GOLD
Transport Systems
(Centaur)

Being an openly gay music artist and aiming to create songs and lyrics that reflect your community is a bold act for any emerging pop artist. Gold

CD REVIEWS CONTINUED >>