



- Left of the Dial Magazine

October 31, 2007

[Bruce Springsteen: A Critical Review: MVD](#)

Filed under: [Reviews](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 11:39 pm



Though not officially sanctioned by anyone within a stone's throw of Springsteen, this critical appraisal does offer up insight, ranging from anecdotal to philosophical, from a wide range of players, including his biographers, early band mates, rock critics, and contemporary singer songwriters. Using footage culled from BBC archives and snippets from VH1 performances, it weaves together a tapestry that covers roughly '78-82, the heady days that made records like *Darkness at the Edge of Town* and *Nebraska* possible, not to mention *The River*. However, the arc also does include a few brief overviews of records before and after, but the deep, profound, analytical views cut their most incisive furrow across the period in which Springsteen, thrust into the limelight with sudden national upswing, has to grapple with the ins and outs of integrity, storytelling, and professionalism as the heat turns up, both from an expectant public and a money hungry industry. Sure, he cut his first huge hit "Hungry Heart," but the film neglects to mention that he might have intended it for the Ramones. It also ignores how he gave songs to Patti Smith and the Knack, at a time when most Americans knew him as a brooding, salt-off-earth, surf city New Jersey poet laureate, not a proto-new music icon. ([more...](#))

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October 15, 2007

[Automatic 7/At Funeral Speed: Mental Records](#)

Filed under: [Reviews](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 8:11 am



It's been twelve years since this band hooked mid-1990's listeners with their *BYO* debut, which, it seems, is a distant kind of past now, clouded by the intervening years of band haggling, big ugly corporate cut-throatness, and even worse, the crushing influx of drug abuse, like manacles holding back the men of this band, who finally re-emerge now. Sure, they are a different breed of punk now, aiming for a more mature sound that feels like newer *Social Distortion* and *Generators*, and they don't try to escape honesty either, as "Start Over" attests, noting that the singer wants to "take all these memories and lift them off my shoulder." Whether or not this rock'n'punk approach will appeal to their old fan base, who knows, but at least we'll have to look 'em square in the eye and heed their directive to "take me as I am." As a sign of their change and growth, they do a rather uncomplicated, tough but melodic, and keen version of Springsteen's bareboned "Atlantic City." No, don't think this is like *Face to Face* ironing out hammy versions of *Blondie*. This feels in-tune with Springsteen's tense, writerly tale and his cynical Jersey saga, adding just enough bar rock that would make the best years of the *Smithereens* jealous. On "Sunday Eyes," they rely on some simpler — ringing verse-chorus bouts — an ode to saying the hard things and making the saddest songs. Not exactly *Steinbeck*, but pleasant. In contrast, the darker, more self-exploring "Ghost-Like" exposes the ability of people to deny their own metamorphosis into raccoon-eyed drug users flopping flat-out on dirty beds while "satellite-high." Eventually, it all catches up, and they end up "on a bended knee," copping a plea.

It's a slow, churning, sober look the black hole of dope and displeasure. ([more...](#))

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October 7, 2007

[The Dauntless Elite/Graft: Plan-It-X](#)

Filed under: [Reviews](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 9:21 am



The band readily admits that they pull a sense of fierce pressure from the likes of Leatherface and American Steel, not to mention EMF (OK, blame the drummer!), so no wonder this gruff, working class post-hardcore also seems to go well with Dropkick Murphys and older The Generators. Time, or the lack of it, or the toil of it, seems to be the nexus of "Running Battle," which reminds us that "Time waits for no one," and you might be left with lapload of "impatience ending in the roadside heat." It's gruff, pressing, and a defoliated kind of poetry, mid-paced and catchy with being ruefully by-the-book. There's enough changes, variation, and reinvention to keep the train on bound to a fresh destination. The more vindictive "Gina U R A Bastard" comes off as a bit near-psycho, as they describe stalking targets and "showing no mercy." They admit losing their way between work and play, so at least their self-awareness of the vehemence is chewing on them from the inside out. The song sticks to the plan, offering a tight, rolling and weaving bass and a barking/gravelly vocal kind of rock sensibility that ain't going to be mistaken for metal mullets or emo face paint. "Close but No Seagal," with its allusion to Steven Seagal, actually lyrically seems in bed with Springsteen as they attest: "it's the ordinary days that break you/we walk like backstreet kids, in petty victories." However, "I am Ninja, My Life is Lonely and Difficult" has a title that actually seems to have little to do with the lyrics, unless an examination of the homoerotic nature of soulful warriors lies between adages like "the power and the glory/the slogans only bore me." Meanwhile, "It Takes a Ship to Sail" shows a sense of diligence, home-bound honor, and hope, as they insist there can be a renewal in the seaport with the ripped streets. Sure, there's lots of Leatherface guitar echoes, and textually they are a bit like poet-heroes William Blake as they immerse us in the "beating heart of a nation left to bleed and decay," which really does convey his sense of Jerusalem, just with out the images of blackened churches and children-workers. ([more...](#))

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May 13, 2007

[Jesse Malin live review!!](#)

Filed under: [Reviews](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 3:24 pm

The Spring and Airbrake - Belfast, Northern Ireland

By LOTD correspondent Paul Cooper (check out his interview with the Straps too!)

5th May 2007



There are very few artists that would make me want to fly from England to Northern Ireland just to catch a Saturday night gig. Jesse Malin inspires that sort of devotion. I bought his debut solo album "The Fine Art Of Self destruction" and enjoyed the rootsy rock 'n' roll vibe but didn't completely get with his program until I saw him live for the first time in Oxford the following year. The stage is his domain, he oozes rock 'n' roll charisma, you could imagine him spending his whole life playing intimate gigs, traveling from town to town in a beat-up van.

His new record though could change all this, "Glitter In The Gutter" features an array of musician buddies dropping by to add their talents to

his most commercial collection to date. Bruce Springsteen duets on “Broken Radio” which is play listed on the UK’s biggest radio station Radio 2, Josh Homme adds guitar flourishes to “Tomorrow Tonight,” Ryan Adams adds vocals and guitar to several songs, Chris Shifflet from the Foo Fighters and Jakob Dylan also appear. ([more...](#))

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February 17, 2007

[An archive interview with U-Ron from Really Red! Part I!](#)

Filed under: [Features](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 9:44 pm

Deep South Punk Legends from Ozone City:

One Eye on U-Ron from Really Red (photo by Ben DeSoto)



From Lightnin’ Hopkins to Roy Head and Townes Van Zandt and Steve Earle and ZZ Top (OK, Dallas should get some credit too...) even Kenny Rogers, Houston has been the home, at one time or another, to a myriad number of artists. When you started listening to music in Houston, were you at all aware of the city’s rich musical history? What was local music like when you were growing up; for instance, Steve Earle sings of Telephone Road and the gritty honky tonks...

First off, it is very flattering to be asked to do this interview 25 years after the release of Really Red’s first LP. It’s even odder that Empty Records wanted to re-release it 25 years after the fact. I’m pretty stunned. Really Red never thought that we would be remembered 3 years after we broke up. All that said, I have no idea who in the hell would want to read this but at the risk of being totally boring I’ll try and give you the best answers I can. I have to point out that this will be my perspective and recollections. In no way should any of this be taken as reflecting the opinions of Bob, John Paul or Kelly, the other three former members of Really Red. They might remember things in a whole other way. Maybe no one will care about or remember these people and places, but they were all involved in Houston’s formative punk scene in one way or another and they do deserve to be mentioned. This is about a scene that is long gone, but it took a lot of brave and unique people to make it happen. They deserve credit. I appreciate the chance to give it to them and to tell our story. ([more...](#))

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October 3, 2006

[An archive interview with Junior Brown!](#)

Filed under: [Features](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 1:17 pm

Honky Tonk Savior: This is Old Country with Jr. Brown



This archive article was originally published in Thirsty Ear magazine in 2001.

Can you tell us about the new record?

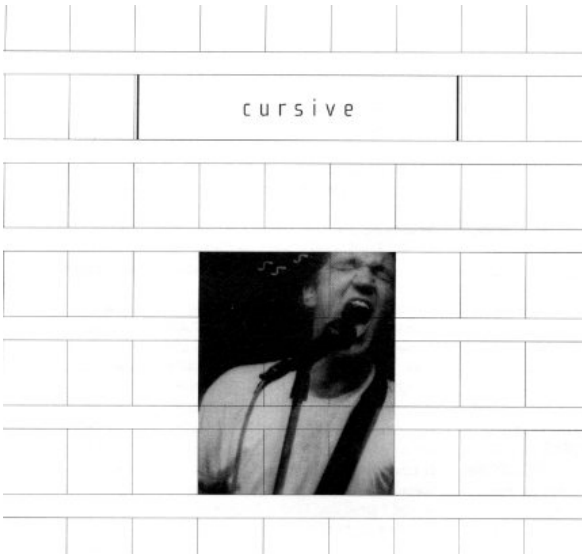
It'll come out in the middle of July on Curb. Well, the title is "Mixed Bag" and that's exactly what it is. There's quite a few different kinds of music. I've written most of it. As I do with most of my albums, I write most of the songs. It's very strong on the lyric end, there's some very good ballads on there, and then there's some sorta different things like a river boat shuffle, called "The River Boat Shuffle", an old New Orleans jazz song. There's some horns. I went down to New Orleans to do it. So there's a variety of things on it. There's a blues song. [\(more...\)](#)

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August 28, 2006

[Tim Kasher's Got the Not-so-Good Life: An LOTD Archive Interview with Cursive](#)

Filed under: [Features](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 1:20 pm



That's right, Happy Hollow has reared-up on the new release plate, but Saddle Creek has yet to bless us with a copy of the record, so while we tap our fingers patiently, we'll unleash this archive interview with the man with the plan.

A look back with Tim Kasher:

In your opinion, what's worse, pretentiousness, or self-consciousness?

Self-conscious is terrible I think. Or I should say self-consciousness in the negative sense. I mean I don't know, has anyone ever used the Kant system? I'm sure for the way you're asking it, that people who are too self-conscious can't perform what they really want to, what they really think is important to them — a good demonstration of what they considered to be art.

Why has the idea of being a rock n roll artist been debased?

[\(more...\)](#)

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August 18, 2006

[Making Music Madness: An Archive Interview with the MC5's Wayne Kramer.](#)

Filed under: [Features](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 12:02 pm

A LOTD flashback archive!

[\(more...\)](#)

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August 14, 2006

[Radio Birdman/Zeno Beach: Yep Roc Records, plus Rob Younger Interview!](#)

Filed under: [Features](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 4:15 pm

Talking about Radio Birdman is akin to talking 'bout God; I simply don't know if my language has the capacity to describe them without seeming puny and contrived. As proto-punks, primordial rockers, and pre-punks all wrapped into an Aussie/American surf-singed maelstrom, they burned bright and hard, like one of Kerouac's eager and antsy Roman Candles, except this one was fueled by sloppy barrooms and record deals that seem as distant as the empty moon these days. There's no need to address their past: that's been done. The question is, after innumerable projects like the New Christs and Deep Reduction and years of downtime, is this slab of palm-sized aluminum a venture into integrity and super-sized, sizzling soundscapes? [\(more...\)](#)

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July 31, 2006

[Battle of the Greg Graffin Solo Album Reviews!](#)

Filed under: [Reviews](#) — leftofthedialmag @ 11:15 am

Greg Graffin/*Cold as Clay*: ANTI Records/ Epitaph

Being a die hard Bad Religion fan (and saddened by no new album this year), I was excited about a new Greg Graffin release. On the other hand, I vividly remember what happened the last time he tried to make a solo album. For those of you who don't know, Greg Graffin defecated on a blank CD, and then Atlantic Records packaged it with cool cover art and called it *American Lesion*. On this effort, I thanked God for Brett Gurewitz's influence. There are a few "old-time" traditional Appalachian tunes that were well produced and sounded good but were downplayed by the "Napoleon Dynamite-esque" sound of Graffin's SINGING voice. The selection of these particular songs gives the feeling that the production team was trying a little too hard to sound Appalachian. On the other hand, that painful, moaning hum that is characteristic of Graffin's voice works wonderfully on the faster paced, alt-country tunes. The "rock" tracks SOUND like the American Midwest. That is not to say that it sounds like a John Cougar Mellencamp album, but listening to them reminded me of driving through Indiana with my wife and seeing the despair, pride, and pain on the faces of the average rural person. It's at these times when the album shines, and the bigger picture and concept can be appreciated. Graffin is backed by the Weakerthans on this album. They've abandoned their 1/2 punk, 1/2 country sound and in some instances give a few of the acoustic songs the simple feeling of Greg Graffin performing vocal duties on Nickel Creek album. Some will call it mediocre, some will call it *American Lesion Part II*, and some will call it genius. In other words, *March 16-20, 1992* by Uncle Tupelo it is not, but compared to *American Lesion*, it is the best "Just For the Hell of It" album ever made... And that my friends, is why ANTI Records was formed.

Lunchbox's rating: 3 out of 4 potato chips.

Another view from LOTD's June editor's review:

Graffin's second solo stab is a different beast than his first, a pared-down, song-in-the-creek type of venture, featuring the likes of Jolie Holland and the Weakerthans behind him, but for all his sincerity and scope, his gravel'n'nasal-poked voice, perfect for the zenith hardcore of Bad Religion, doesn't always fit the John Steinbeck-esque ("to spend the day like a farmer in debt...") folk, bluegrass, and rural rock, which might be embodied better by Last Train Home or the V-Roys. This is not to say that he doesn't have a knack for his subject matter, though I'm not sure that "the generals died by assassins/ the battalions dispersed on the fly" has a well-worn patina that one might expect from a song called "Rebel's Goodbye," which feels a bit stiff, and his spiritual stab at "Talk About Suffering," with its allusions to "trouble here below" and "the gospel train is coming" doesn't even feel as cathartic and converging as Bruce Springsteen. I can't quite peg where he goes astray, where the numbers don't fall in line, where the colors begin to blur instead of coalesce. Instrumentally, they are appealing, well-honed, but lack springing footsteps and grange halls lone light bulb Friday night harkening. Maybe there is a structural self-conscious at play, as if he is trying to inhabit the songs, rather than let them take hold of him, or a psychic distance, that despite his honesty, just doesn't let the material, whether it be about an Okie farm, labor camps, or soothing sermons, feel like the genuine articles. They're not cast-offs, or straight-jacketed by style, it's just, well, flat as a dust-caked salt lakebed. Too bad.

Worth two potato chips.

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