

The album opens with "The Outsider" which finds the composer yearning for the spirit of a place and time that inspires him. "Blowing Through The Countryside" benefits beautifully from the lead guitar of Jean-Michel Kajdan, and the theme of self-realization carries on in stunning fashion in "Living From The Inside Out" with dramatic lead guitar statements from McCarty's old friend Steve Hackett (Genesis, GTR). Pianist Donald Quan graces the album throughout.

McCarty's voice is deeply expressive, yet he chooses to pepper the album with intriguing instrumentals that harken back to his 1987 new-age classic, *Moonstone*.

In a previous life, Jim McCarty could have been a Shelley or a Keats, and one wonders if he doesn't feel a kinship. It is a wonderful thing to climb to the top of time and find Jim McCarty already there, reaching out a hand to pull you up.

— Craig Moore

Fozzy

Chasing The Grail

Riot Entertainment (B002ZMZBHS)

Grade: ★★★★★

Fozzy's first serious album, *All That Remains*, is eventually going to be recognized as one of the metal masterpieces of the first decade of the 2000s. What utilitarian musical genius Rich Ward and killer vocalist Chris Jericho (in bands since 13; wrestling came later) hath wrought on that thing... well, having them back is cloud-busting.

And what have we here? Fozzy has bravely moved forward, or laterally, as it were. *Chasing The Grail* is interestingly more melodic, and there's even a ballad or two, one of them gorgeously southern, the other creepy Depeche. It's also weirdly synthetic in terms of studio trickery, which seems to be something applied to both vocals and the tornado-percussive flood of hits to the body. But the beauty of this hugely crafted metal spread is the gaping maw of dynamics, which gives it a relentless epic-ness. Forget that there's an actual 13-minute epic on it. Hell, much of it's a proggy blast at the face, from "Under Blackened Skies" to "Pray For Blood" and back again. And let's ponder that all of this actually doesn't add up to ballerina power metal. No, bloody Rich is to classic and doomy and rhythmic and all sorts of things (political, iron-pumping) that add to his raging musical genius. Chris nails

it, as well, when he says that this is a form of pounding metal with melodic vocals. And come to think of it, his love of Helloween, then — really, then — Priest or Maiden, man, it's massaged in like a fine stain on teak. Frankly, my first few spins of this accentuated the negatives, but after a few headphone-immersed revisitations, there are some bold, mature, 'I Am, I'm Me' qualities to this album that are missing from *All That Remains*. Fozzy should be... what? In this day and age, how big can you be? They should be in packages with Testament and Machine Head, basically, because of the high intellectual execution and taste and lyrics and vocals and the whole package of inspired metal-making all over this thing, melody bravely infused, critics of that be damned.

— Martin Popoff



The Pretenders

Live In London

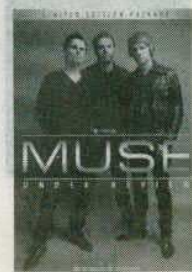
E1 (E1E-CD-4791)

Grade: ★★★★★

This splendid concert film captures The Pretenders in fine form. Filmmakers Pierre and Francois Lamoureux have gone back to basics, creating a film where the emphasis is on the music and the band's performance. They shoot in a theatre, not a stadium (London's O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire), keep the camera work simple and the editing even more so, meaning no rapid-fire cutting, as is too often the case these days. You actually get to watch the band play.

But all the preparation in the world won't help if the band doesn't come through. Fear not, The Pretenders are sizzling hot from the moment they take the stage. Lead singer/guitarist Chrissie Hynde sounds just as feisty as she did when the band first started in the late '70s (original Pretender Martin Chambers is also on drums), and turns in a set that's a good mix of hits, new material and classics. The set also comes with an edited version of the concert on CD.

— Gillian G. Gaar



Muse

Under Review

Sexy Intellectual (SIDVD554)

Grade: ★★★★★

Muse could have been a joke. Lyrics full of conspiracy theories and space-travel themes? A massive theatrical sound full of unabashed glam bombast that seemed to marry prog shape-shifting and clean metal with grunge's raw power?

Sorry boys, but that sounds a bit ... well, excessive. Leave it to Muse to pull this off handsomely. And in this installment of Sexy Intellectual's *Under Review* series, the story of rock's new great white hope is told from a number of well-informed perspectives, with plenty of colorful, over-the-top live footage.

Going deep into the details of the making of each Muse album, plus the behind-the-scenes planning of the trio's huge stage show, "Under Review" not only informs and educates, but it also will get you jumping up off the couch and cheering for a band that refuses to think small.

— Peter Lindblad



Neil Diamond

Hot August Night/NYC

Columbia Music Video (88697 56001 9)

Grade: ★★★★★

Diamond's 1972 album, *Hot August Night*, documented his performance at Los Angeles' Greek Theatre. Now comes a sequel, drawn from four shows at Madison Square Garden in August 2008 (and originally only available through Walmart).

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