

## HEAVEN SHALL BURN

'Iconoclast (Part 1: The Final Resistance)'

CENTURY MEDIA

The only possible explanation for the continued reverence of German metalco-, sorry, *melodic death metal* outfit Heaven Shall Burn in the face of their crippling lack of anything even passing for progression since 2000's explosive 'Asunder', is that whilst they've pretty much trod water, albeit with greater production values and increasing Scandinavian influences, their contemporaries have either taken a scenic stroll around the mountain kingdom of Zingingbitzland (Maroon) or have overthrown its government in a bloody *putsch* (Caliban). Already bettering 2006's 'Deaf To Our Prayers' simply by making some songs other than the first few sound different, 'Iconoclast' is a thoroughly vicious outing that earns the 'melodic' tag with a galloping firestorm of riffs and an instrumental intro, that has the sad consequence of making the first 'real' song the most memorable regardless of its actual quality. It goes without saying that there's nothing in the way of surprises, unless you're either a serial amnesiac or discover that playing it backwards reveals a solution to the frustrating final boss battle in 'Metroid Prime', but after over a decade, Heaven Shall Burn have perfected the delicate art of putting a positive spin on 'more of the same'.

[7] JAMES HOARE



## LAVOTCHKIN/JOSEPH

'Split'  
MID MARCH

Splits featuring bands from disparate genres of extreme music are always a good idea *in theory*; unfortunately, the concept often tanks because it's difficult to get those less open to new experiences to part with the full price when they know they're only capable of putting away eight ounces of a sixteen ounce steak dinner. So, placing Converge-obsessed Northerners, Lavotchkin, alongside Joseph, York's most aggressive stoner rockers, may prove to be a money pit for Mid March when all is said and done. However, marketing woes and potential disappointing sales

aside, this is an impressive pairing. Joseph may very well be the one of the most violent sounding, fuzz rock motherfuckers around, as they mash the rock of the Palm Desert with metal usually associated with tectonic plate movement, while Lavotchkin can be described in three words: Converge, Converge and Converge. Lots of 'Jane Doe' riffing and imitation of Jake Bannon's drowning dog vocals to be had on their half. An admirable showing from both parties; let's hope the public thinks similarly and can get beyond the obvious differences.

[7] KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

## LAY DOWN ROTTEN

'Reconquering The Pit'  
METAL BLADE

Clearly a priority for Metal Blade despite having next to no profile in the UK, Lay Down Rotten have spent three albums evolving from clumsy but spirited to their current status as arguably Germany's most upwardly-mobile death metal band. 'Reconquering...' doesn't stray too far from the band's previous route, but there's an urgency and sense of craft to these songs that they have seldom exhibited before. If Cannibal Corpse were to make a melodic death album, it would probably sound a lot like this; the delivery is all floor-rippling bottom end and nose-flattening belligerence, but the songs themselves are deceptively accessible things, laden with hooks, soaring lead work and riffs that grow in stature with each cycle of repetition. At its best, this is like a glistening distillation of death metal's greatest hits: 'Sound Of Breaking Bones' brings to mind a less monochrome Bolt Thrower, 'Nihil is a bad trippin' At The Gates and the title-track sounds like Deicide channelling Motörhead. All in all, cracking stuff.

[7] GRAHAM ELLIS

## MANINKARI

'Le Diable Avec Ses Chevaux'  
CONSPIRACY

It's probably not a good sign when one has to play an album over and over again just to make sure it's 'challenging' as opposed to plain boring. Maninkari offer complex and elaborate, yet almost improv-sounding arrangements mostly based on jazzy/tribal percussion and a host of strings building Middle-Eastern structures that are constantly deconstructed, retreating from anything remotely traditional into the abstract and experimental. The result, while dynamic and even strangely menacing on occasion, pulls more to some freeform take on modern classical composition. It

## CANDLEMASS

'Epicus Doomicus Metallicus'/  
'Nightfall'  
PEACEVILLE

Candlemass' first two records remain mainstays of trad doom and still sound utterly contemporary, a measure of both how traditional the genre is but also how fondly the doom fraternity regards them. 'Epicus' lugubrious appearance in 1986, at the height of thrash's tyranny, earned Candlemass only mockery and obscurity from their peers, but after two decades its vibrancy and potency are unmarred while those scratchy second-tier thrashers are long forgotten. It's slightly disappointing that this reissue is, bar a gently spruced CD inlay and a few extra band photos (which are, admittedly, hilarious – doom or no doom, it was still the '80s), exactly the same as the Powerline reissue from 2001, but the live recording from Birmingham in 1988 is impressively powerful, and an opportunity to hear Candlemass' second and more acclaimed vocalist performing 'Epicus' material. [9]

'Nightfall', the follow up album and the first with former Mercy vocalist and certified nutcase Messiah Marcolin on vocals, is often singled out as the finest Candlemass moment, but in truth there's only a hair's breadth between the two in many ways. However, as well as having brass-plated battleship lungs, Messiah's portly but flamboyant mad-monk persona lent him a theatricality that brought out a hitherto dormant visual side to Candlemass. The songwriting is more compact than on the debut, which maybe makes 'Nightfall' more memorable, and there's a glimmer of hope amongst the despondency and tales of possession as 'Samaritan' celebrates an act of kindness to a stranger. The 'Nightfall' bonus material is also the same as the Powerline edition, and less musically interesting than the 'Epicus' extras – for example, the alternative studio cuts of 'At The Gallows End' and 'Mourners Lament' (Candlemass were never big on apostrophes) don't reveal anything new about the songs. On the other hand, the interview track's warm, laconic reminiscence is endearingly understated and the Jonas Åkerlund video for 'Bewitched' is a bizarre rock treasure, as mesmerisingly overacted as any Hammer flick. [9.5]

JAMES "HARRY" HINCHLIFFE

## CHTHONIC

'Pandemonium'  
SPV

Considering evolutionary Japanese black metallers Sigh managed to not only get the support of the late Euronymous but

may well have inspired him to crack his mouth upwards at the corners in something other than a mocking laugh as his death laser loomed ever closer to the goolies of a prone death metal scene, it's amazing that Chthonic from neighbouring (give or take a few thousand miles) Taiwan get treated as some kind of novelty act. Rather than the Cradle-aping, symphonic (p)opportunities that a quick glance at their sudden ascent would concede, they formed in 1996 and aside from a few rare appearances, stayed mostly in the Far East, making this luxury one-disc box of their highlights something of a sympathetic catch-the-fuck-up that nobody can afford to pass on. Containing tracks from as far back as 2000's '9th Emyrean', the eldest re-recorded over the last couple of years to bring them in line with the majestic tightness of 2007's 'Seediq Bale'. 'Pandemonium' is an introduction so perfectly structured and beautifully presented that those poor bastards in Taipei who were following them from the beginning must be insanely jealous. Well, at least you've still got your elitism.

[9] JAMES HOARE

## KULT OV AZAZEL

'Triumph Of Fire'  
ARCTIC

It seems rather strange to give this a second re-release; although an interesting debut from the USBM horde, it's hardly an out-of-print obscurity. What it does illustrate is a band who in their formative period had yet to discover *subtlety*. Compared to 2005's rather splendid full-length album 'The World The Flesh & The Devil', it is akin to an army yet to discover they can fire one round at a time, preferring to unload the whole magazine in ten seconds flat. Needless to say in doing so KOA unleash maximum devastation and this 'Triumph' presents an unfettered tsunami of genocide, barely slowing down for a second. This makes it all the more compelling and Xul's rabid shrieks, strafing guitars and drum salvos fly at you with military precision. Revelling in the misanthropic carnage is obligatory.

[6.5] PETE WOODS

## THE MOB

'May Inspire Revolutionary Acts'  
OVERGROUND

Of all anarcho-punk bands, The Mob are perhaps the most archetypal in the way their sound defined the movement that stood halfway between fury and compassion. This elusive mix of raw punk and skeletal proto-goth perfectly expressed not only

alienation and disgust but also a yearning utopianism. A sound carrying tangible smells of a squat's vegan kitchen on a cold winter morning, and the lush countryside, both experienced through an urgency and passion for change. An image in the booklet shows vocalist Mark and a punk friend sat on a scruffy sofa. Empty pint glasses and characteristically, depressively dingy wallpaper demonstrate just how much Englishness was present in that lifestyle no matter how hard these youngsters tried to rid of it. Having said that, this collection of rarities is not the place to start if you want to absorb the anarcho-vibe or familiarise yourself with this band. Containing impossible to find cassette releases and single outtakes (most notably their 'hit', 'No Doves Fly Here', pre-Penny Rimbaud production), this is strictly a collector's item. The curious should get the reissue of the band's landmark (and only) album, 'Let The Tribe Increase'.

[5] AVI PITCHON

## SIGH

'Gallows Gallery'  
THE END

Just two years after its release, 'Gallows Gallery' has been remastered (by James Murphy!) and reissued with bonus tracks (alternate takes, underwhelming remixes and disposable jazz doodles) and a different colour sleeve (that's 'revamped artwork', apparently). Evidently Mirai reckoned the original had bad production and this is how it should have sounded, but it doesn't really sound hugely different so if you own it already it probably isn't worth re-investing. If however, you haven't yet visited the 'Gallows Gallery', now's your chance. Seize it.

Mixing extreme, unorthodox heavy metal with the most free-range '70s prog, this album has ideas flying off it like sparks. Weird, spiky, beautifully-crafted anthems like 'Midnight Sun', 'Enlightenment Day' and 'In A Drowse' (featuring their most blissfully blatant James Bond theme lift yet!) share space with darker, more *avant-garde* tangents like the majestic 'Gavotte Grim' and the eerie 'Tranquilliser Song' in a righteous gallery of grotesque exotica where psycho-circus Hammond organs grunt over incisive twin-guitar leads, moody sax weeps over frantic thrash riffs and lord knows what else. Yet there's never a hint of contrivance or wackiness about Sigh – just a powerful imaginative flair and a unique musical personality that occasionally flirts with genius.

[8.5] CHRIS CHANTLER