

by Claudia Ward de León



www.blacktopmourning.com

## Blacktop Mourning No Regret T-RECS



What makes this album from newcomers Blacktop Mourning more palatable than your run of the mill emo CD is the lack of a whiny voice jockey. If you like your tunes served as polished and fresh scrubbed as, oh, the pages of an American Eagle catalog, then you'll be in for a nice treat.

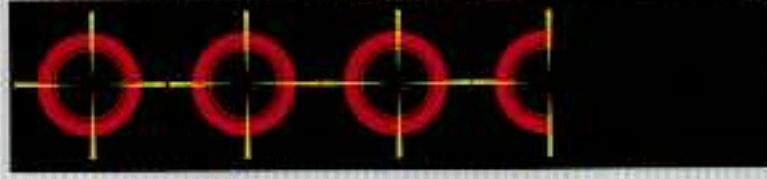
This album has the poignant swells and thoughtful lows of your typical high-school day, both from a melodic and lyrical perspective. Led by guitar prodigy Max Steger, the Chicago outfit was plucked from obscurity by 90s icon Adam Duritz of the Counting Crows and subsequently signed to Duritz's label, Tyrannosaurus Records (T-Recs). Unfortunately, you won't hear any of the guitar playing that made Steger a bit of a legend in Chicago's blues clubs. What you'll hear is your standard tightly engineered and cleanly produced pop punk with each of the dozen songs on *No Regret* neatly dovetailed into the other, and packaged to end on ear-pleasing symmetrical notes.

Though nothing like the Counting Crows in sound, you can hear some of Duritz's creative influences meander through tracks such as "Your First Crime." The opening, with its jangly guitar intro, segues to an upbeat rhythmic guitar, sounding like a b-side that would have fit well on *August and Everything After*. There are no bad songs on this album; each is solid and perfectly measured out in regard to instrumentation, arrangement, and melody. But then again, there is nothing outstanding about any of the songs, either.

by William Pitcher



## Blood Sweat & Tears Spinning Wheel CHERRY RED RECORDS



It is impossible to characterize music with a single word, but despite its clichéd overuse, "fusion" does well in this case. Music is, after all, the combination of various sounds to produce a coherent song, and Blood, Sweat & Tears is a fine example of fusion's perpetual existence throughout the history of music. Blood, Sweat & Tears is widely accepted as the first popular jazz-rock group, and their combination of wildly oscillating brass and funky rock guitar remains one of the most successful experiments of the late 60s. Aficionados argue the merits of Al Kooper and David Clayton-Thomas, but both frontmen led the group with equal success. *Spinning Wheel* is footage from the group's live performance at the Civic Theatre in Halifax, UK on April 9th, 1980.

Blood, Sweat & Tears may have dissolved under the strain of success in 1978, but Clayton-Thomas' reformation of the group in 1980 to record *Nuclear Blues* shows no on-stage turmoil. A hirsute Clayton-Thomas appears clad in a satin Blood Sweat & Tears jacket and *Spinning Wheel* is under way. Clayton-Thomas' trademark raspy voice and flippant stage presence are befitting of each track's eclecticism, and it is easy to see from where modern mega-groups like The Red Hot Chili Peppers draw influence. While their cover of Jimi Hendrix's "Manic Depression" is little more than an interesting failure, standouts on *Spinning Wheel* include "Hi De Ho," "Spinning Wheel" and "You Make Me So Very Happy."

by Todd Skornicki



www.bloodjinn.com

## Bloodjinn The Machine Runs on Empty PLUTO RECORDS



Some might think the metalcore scene is a tired genre, full of a bunch of bands playing the same type of music over and over: stuff with screaming vocals, rapid fire drumming, and monotonous riffs played ad nauseum. Thankfully, the North Carolina outfit Bloodjinn has not fallen into that trap, and a listen to their latest release *This Machine Runs on Empty* shows why.

What makes the ten-track CD admirable is the subtle way in which the band attempts to mix up their music without alienating any of the genre's passionate fans. For instance, the songs "Mirrored Human" and "A Moment of Clarity" are actually rather melodic, an accusation rarely levelled at metalcore.

The most impressive aspect of *This Machine Runs on Empty*, however, is the guitar work by Kyle Rakes and former He Is Legend member McKenzie Bell. The riffs supplied by the two can be both nasty and harmonic, and they speak volumes of their talent.

If there is a drawback to that, the music sometimes sounds more interesting than the vocals. Lead vocalist Joel Collins, the only original member of the band, should not be faulted for that; his passionate screams and grunts are exactly what you expect in a metal band. Still, his delivery is the same throughout, and it ends up feeling rather unoriginal.

Bottom line though: *This Machine Runs on Empty* will please many hardcore and metal fans, and it just might win over a few hard rock music lovers willing to listen to something new.