

Jim Kirtz's REV-O-LECTIONS ALL THAT METAL IS... AND WAS

It's hard to believe there was actually a time when metal heads were just happy being metal heads. Way back in the day, during the late '70s and early '80s, metal as we know it, was still a fairly undeveloped commodity. Sure there were the legacies of original heavies such as Black Sabbath, Deep Purple and Led Zeppelin, but these artists largely stood apart in a sea of radio rockers that may have touched on the genre but were too mainstream to really qualify. True metal was strictly an outsider's club and when bona fide new bands began to pop up at the dawn of the '80s, fans craving the hard stuff would flock for a sampling, not so concerned about trends or subgenres. That would eventually change as the scene grew and things got more segregated. The New Wave of British Heavy Metal (NWOBHM) was the leading light of the new scene, while over in these parts there were similar rumblings, plus those of a different sort. As of late, there've been loads of killer reissues from the period that fit right in with what I'm talking about. Let's check 'em out.

One of the more colorful bands of the era was the oft-misunderstood Satan. Yep, you read that right, the brazen moniker actually belonged to a little band from Newcastle, England that would go on to release the notable, semi-thrash opus *Court In the Act* on Neat Records in 1984. But the band had actually been around for years, plying their trade under various names, swapping out lead vocalists and changing their mind about musical direction on a weekly basis. That aside, *Court In the Act* was an important release, positioning the band as a defining force—initially—in the blossoming British metal scene. But it must be said that the band's name, album artwork and even song titles are more than a tad bit misleading. On the surface, the name "Satan" conjures up imagery of black-metal chaos, animal sacrifice and an ungodly sense of fashion. In reality, *Court In the Act* is closer in style to Priest, Maiden and dare I say, even the first Def Leppard album. Brian Ross's vocals are fairly dry and uninspired, with the occasional annoying scream thrown in to compete with his contemporaries. But, songs such as "Broken Treaties," "Blades of Steel" and "Hunt You Down" are solid power-metal gems with blazing riffs and more than a few hints of thrash. The band also benefits greatly from the dual guitar work of Priest disciples Steve Ramsey and Russ Tippins.

This stellar reissue (*Metal Mind*) comes remastered, with



faithfully restored artwork in a numbered digipack. After *Court In the Act*, Ross would soon depart and in a positively boneheaded move, the band would change its name to Blind Fury and release *Out Of Reach* in 1985 (also recently reissued), casting aside any momentum Satan had built up with *Court's* release. When that didn't pan out, the band got another new singer and became Satan once more (!), releasing the uneven *Into the Future* in 1986. Before

long, Satan the band would hang up its horns.

Another Neat Records band that initially showed promise was the UK's Jaguar.

Jaguar's first album *Power Games* (1982), set standards high for the band with fast and heavy numbers that bordered on thrash, while maintaining a brazenly bad attitude throughout. The band's second album *This Time* has just been reissued courtesy of Metal Mind.

Those expecting *Power Games, Mk II* will be sorely disappointed. In an abrupt about-face, the band shifted gears entirely with a collection of AOR-flavored, mainstream numbers à la Foreigner that would ultimately alienate its loyal base. It's not all bad though. There is some decent commercial hard rock to be found in the form of "Last Flight," with its vaguely Maiden-esque wallop and the speedy six-minute opus "(Night of) Long Shadows." Much like Satan, the once-promising Jaguar would confuse and confound fans and critics alike with its inability to stick to its guns. This Metal Mind reissue features four bonus tracks of demos and live cuts.

Danish band Artillery perfectly encapsulated the reckless, nihilistic attitude inherent in early thrash and the NWOBHM. Obviously emulating the Bay Area thrash contingent, the band put its own quirky Euro-spin on the proceedings, releasing three albums of varying quality, that have now been reissued by—you guessed it—Metal Mind. First album *Fear Of Tomorrow* (1985) stands as its most primal offering. With some technical limitations, the band puts forth a volatile, punk-infused performance with songs "Time Had Come" and "The Almighty."

Flemming Ronsdorf's distinct vocals run the gamut of gruff growls to high-pitched King Diamond-esque runs, further enhancing the chaos. Second album *Terror Squad* (1987) boasted improvements in terms of production

and saw the band get more ambitious with its arrangements on songs such as "Let There Be Sin," and "Therapy." But in the end, it all gets a bit busy

and loses some of the raw sonics of the first offering. 1990's *By Inheritance* was far more ambitious than the first two, integrating more complex melodies, Eastern-flavored accents and texture into the mix.

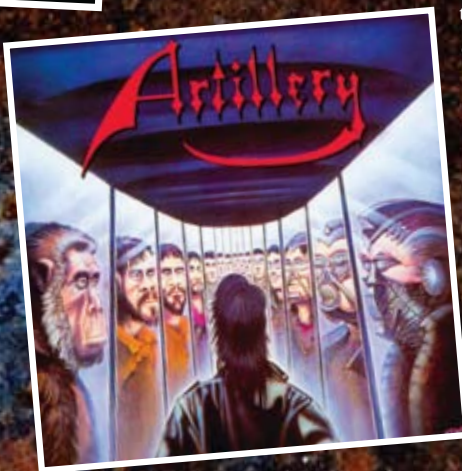
Depending on whom you talk to, it's either a thrash abomination

Anthrax, producing an EP for that band. Thrasher released one album *Burning at the Speed of Light* on Combat Records in 1985. Assembling a team of musicians, new and old, most notably singer and ego-tripper Brad Sinsel of the late-great TKO, the album is a mish mash of fairly common hard rock and traditional metal. By virtue of the project's name alone, I was a little suspect of the album when I picked it up in a used bin as a kid years later...it comes across akin to calling your band "Headbanger" or "Moshers." But some of the material isn't half bad, and for fans of the period, there are plenty of plodding riffs, screaming solos and cocky vocals. Standouts include the fast-and-furious "Widowmaker," the shifty blues of "Bad Boys"—featuring the great Rhett Forrester of Riot fame on vocals—and the all-out speed-fest of the title

track that has a rippin' solo courtesy of Anthrax's Dan Spitz. *Burning at the Speed of Light* has also just been issued for the first time on CD (Metal Mind) and is a must-have for Rods enthusiasts and metal completists.

Aside from a few complete societal outcasts, Twisted Sister is probably no one's favorite band. But everyone and their burn-out brother have at least hummed along with one of their infectious anthems such as "We're Not Gonna Take it." Beyond the hits, the band has

put forth some decent stuff that actually made some headway in the early UK scene we've been talking about. The recent CD/DVD combo *Live At The Astoria* (Demolition Records) presents the reformed band in all its twisted glory, live from the legendary Brit venue back in 2004. Each disc features the same 16 songs, but that's where it ends. Although the production is a bit spotty, the DVD is an entertaining view. Performing the hits as well as lesser knowns such as "Like A Knife In The Back" "Under The Blade" and "Destroyer" the band is in full spectacle mode. The audio disc is a different story. A little sloppiness often adds character to a band's repertoire—the Rolling Stones being the perfect example. But in this case, the Dee And the boys often seem as if they're on the verge of running out of steam. Some of the vocals and guitar parts sound a bit off, and the songs generally lose their dynamics in all the muck. In all, whereas the visual companion exemplifies the manic, over-the-top performances, the CD amplifies the sonic deficiencies. And unfortunately, Twisted Sister doesn't have nearly the clout of the Stones to make



or a triumphant expansion of the blueprint. Either way, songs such as the Middle-Eastern-ish instrumental "7:00 From Tashkent," plus "Beneath

The Clay (R.I.P.)" and "Don't Believe" and a raucous cover of Nazareth's "Razamanaz" make it the band's most well rounded work. After the tepid response by *Inheritance* ultimately received by metal consumers, the band would splinter and decade later to release partially reform a new material and a comp of early demos.

Here at home, a little studio project called "Thrasher" had been put into action by drummer/producer Carl Canedy of The Rods. The Rods were one of the early US bands on the scene, playing a raw combo of street metal and barroom boogie rock—before the new metal scene was even a minor blip on the radar. Canedy had also been instrumental in furthering the careers of newer bands such as

excuses.

Love him or hate him, Ted Nugent is a hard-rock force of nature. From early classic-rock-radio hits like “Cat Scratch Fever” and “Free For All” to his ever-present verbal tirades, the Nuge refuses to tone it down. But, there was a period where many thought Ted had gone soft and it’s no mystery that said era was right smack in the middle of the 1980s. The decade of excess would see many otherwise ballsy rock ‘n’ roll types get a little fickle in their quests to keep up with the new video age—and cash in on metal’s new mainstream appeal. Nugent had a new label (Atlantic) and a new mission—to conquer the charts, rather than the usual buffalo, deer or farm animal.

Newly reissued by Eagle Records, all four of Nugent’s ’80s studio albums fall into a fairly predictable sequence. First, the artist dips his feet into mainstream territory with *Nugent* (1982),

featuring the brash anthem “No No No” and “Bound and Gagged,” an early foray into political theater. In spite of some missteps, the album sounds the most undated of Nugent’s entire



’80s canon.


Next, 1984’s *Penetrator*, is an AOR-is, keyboard-laden attempt at mainstream acceptance, with a new singer in the form of future Bad Company

replacement Brian Howe. The bright spot is the pop-metal anthem “Tied Up In Love,” which benefits from a blazing solo courtesy of Mr. Ted.

If Nugent’s fan base were already feeling a bit out of sorts, 1986’s *Little Miss Dangerous* would be enough to put them over the edge. While not a bad pop-rock album by ’80s standards, it is chock full of synths, drum machines and studio enhancements, completely at odds with Nugent’s raucous hard rock of yore. The title track sounds more like Billy Idol, (think “Flesh For Fantasy”) with its ultraslick production and synthetic feel, while the high-tech cover of the ’60s pop standard “Little Red Book” is as bizarre as they

come, but strangely compelling in all the insanity. Realizing that he may have overreached in his quest for reinvention and global domination, Nugent went back to basics—somewhat—with 1988’s *If You*

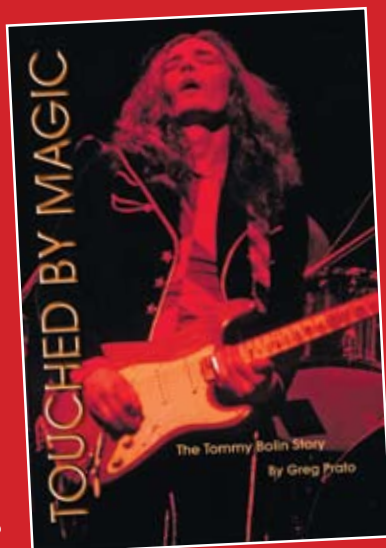
Can’t Lick ’Em...Lick ’Em. Produced by hit-maker Tom Werman, the album is Nugent’s attempt at redemption. And songs such as “Spread Your Wings” and “Bite The Hand” are a good start. But ultimately, the album comes across as a bit one-dimensional, even with guest spots from Jon Bon Jovi and Ritchie Sambora. Although most of the pop-determination of the prior couple albums was shaken loose, so was the sense of adventure and that’s what ultimately brings it down. It would take Nugent several years before releasing another studio album, and by that time, he’d reinvent himself once again as a spokesman for god, guns and conservative government. Who said heavy rock was small-minded?

For questions, comments or something you’d like to see in future columns, drop me a note at Retrohead77@yahoo.com. See you next month... JK. 



THE MAGIC OF TOMMY BOLIN

One of the most undervalued legacies in hard rock is that of guitar master Tommy Bolin. During the early ’70s, the flamboyant young axe-slinger literally had the world at his fingertips. A sought-after session player, Bolin got snatched up by major-label rock band The James Gang, before embarking on a brief, but notable solo career. While he’ll probably always be most famous as the one who



replaced Ritchie Blackmore in Deep Purple, his emotive style, jazzy embellishments and incomparable sense of flash have endeared him to axe disciples of all stripes. Bolin’s music was cut short with his tragic death in 1976 due to a heroin overdose. And sadly, that’s where the otherwise promising story ended.

Renowned music journalist Greg Prato has given Bolin’s story new life in the self-published *Touched by*

Magic: The Tommy Bolin Story. Rather than delving into an extensive written narrative on the lost hero’s biography, Prato has assembled a series of interviews and vignettes from the people who knew Bolin best: his family, friends and colleagues. Bolin’s brother Johnnie is full of great stories, while it’s intriguing to hear from David Coverdale and Glenn Hughes of Deep Purple as they talk candidly about what Bolin’s auditions were like. With a keen sense of timing and flow, Prato sifts through reams of interviews and presents the story in a cohesive fashion that’s easy to follow and even easier to get absorbed in. For info on the book, swing on over to <http://stores.lulu.com/gregprato>. JK.