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### OPENING ACT By [Alex Rawls](#)

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**Gwen Stefani -- *Love, Angel, Music, Baby* (Interscope):** This disc might be lightweight and too fashion-obsessed, but it's still conceptually and musically more interesting than anything No Doubt has done. Stefani treats herself like a Barbie doll, allowing a handful of producers to musically dress her. That sounds a little passive, but she chose the producers, so she knows things will end up sounding more or less like the aural equivalent of an anime. The results recall '80s electro-pop -- someone in the office overheard it and asked if Roxette released a new album -- but good '80s electro-pop. Or, in the Andre 3000-produced tracks, good '80s electro-funk a la Prince.

**Nick Cave -- *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre of Orpheus* (Anti):** Disc one is everything I find interesting about Nick Cave. The songs rock, and where possible, he undersells the drama in his songs. The spirituality of "Get Ready for Love" is secondary to thundering rush of the song. The sleek hooks in "There She Goes, My Beautiful World" and "Nature Boy" make it irrelevant to puzzle over whether or not the "she" in the songs is an earthly love or Christian grace. If *Abattoir Blues* were the only disc, this would have been in my top albums of 2004.

Unfortunately, disc two -- *The Lyre of Orpheus* -- is everything annoying about Cave. The songs are self-consciously artsy, scandalous, and too intent on being meaningful. The tempos slow down and the songs lose muscle as Thomas Wydler replaces Jim Sclavunos, who drummed on disc one.

**John Lennon -- *Acoustic* (Capitol):** A working class hero is not only something to be, but something you can be too, thanks to the

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liner notes. With chord charts, the changes and the lyrics, you and your friends can sing along to "Imagine," "God," "My Mummy's Dead" and "John Sinclair" while blaming Paul and Linda McCartney for breaking up your band.

Lennon's work tapes are more engaging than you might expect, and the version of "Cold Turkey" suggests the myth that acoustic versions are the "authentic" versions is a lie. He bleats at the end of each line, mapping out not just the melody but how the voice was to sound on the final version.

**The Dead Boys -- *Live at CBGB'S 1977 (MVD)*/ Wire -- *Wire on the Box (Pink Flag Archive Research)*:** These two DVDs capture as well as any what punk rock in the mid-70s looked and sounded like; it wasn't pretty, but that was the point. Watching Stiv Bators flailing spastically and running around the stage like a hyperactive child in *Live at CBGB'S 1977*, it's easy to imagine he was the dweeb in high school who got picked on for being weird and bad at sports. Punk not only said, "F--k you" to conventional musical values but to social values as well, redefining "cool" in a way that embraced the socially marginal and left out anyone who owned *Hotel California*.

The performances are ragged versions of many of the songs from the Dead Boys' first album, *Young, Loud & Snotty*, with a version of the Stooges' "Search & Destroy" as an encore. The songs themselves are catchy enough, though nothing is as interesting as "Sonic Reducer," the David Thomas-penned track guitarist Cheetah Chrome brought with him from Cleveland's Rocket from the Tombs. The fun of the DVD is the low-rent spectacle -- Bators' antics, the onstage spitting, the fans watching with equal parts puzzlement and fascination at the juvenile exuberance of it all.

*Wire on the Box* presents a slightly different vision of punk two years later. Rather than react to the cool kids in high school and the culture, the uncool members of Wire seemed to ignore their existence. The songs on *Pink Flag* and *Chairs Missing* suggest a band that turned its back on all convention, emerging with aesthetics so personal that the songs often didn't even have choruses. It's the material from those albums and the soon-to-be-released 154 that's featured on this recording of a German TV show. This is punk at its most uncompromising, so much so that in an interview included on the DVD, the members' hostility for convention even extends to light shows. Unlike the Dead Boys, the members of Wire did little more than stand there, but the show is never boring. Colin Newman, with a white shirt and tie done up, is the picture of repressed emotions that only find expression in the

songs.



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