

WOODEN WAND
JAMES & THE QUIET
 (ECSTATIC PEACE)



James Jackson Toth goes country: not such a strange move given the current rise in country-influenced/inspired songwriters like

Carla Bozulich, Bee and Flower, Jesse Sykes and the work of the recently revived Tarnation, to whom this album owes a huge debt. In forsaking his earlier psychedelic releases, Toth (and a retinue of familiar sidemen including Steve Shelley and Lee Ranaldo) as Wooden Wand crafts a series of dark songs that curl with sharp simplicity and evocative lyrical explorations that are allied as much to the gothic country shades of Paula Frazer as the storied legacies of Toth's favourites Waylon Jennings and Kris Kristofferson. Highlights are many: the hard wisdom-blues of 'We Must Also Love the Thieves', the mordant tableaux of 'Blood', the spry vocal harmonies of Jessica Toth and all-round delicacy of instrumentation throughout. This is an unreserved delight of an album.

Kevin McCaighy

XXL
SPICCHIOLOGY?
 (IMPORTANT)



First up, it's probably best to iterate that XXL is a fusion of two bands, Xiu Xiu, pronounced "shoe shoe" and the members of the

band Larsen. Formed around Xiu Xiu staple, and its only original member, Jamie Stewart the music jumps from overtly experimental sound collages to shoegaze and beyond employing

banjo and viola melodics as much as conventional guitar lines. Spicchiology? is described as an album concerned with sadness, violence and history and around half the tracks lay those sentiments bare from the off twisting the sorrow into the music with every string plucked. There are moments of semi-elation like 'Last In The Society' with its mellow organ-led melody and 'King Of Koalas' with its militant drums and harmonium combination, although it's when the distain and heartbreak pours that the really engrossing music flows. 'So Easy, So Cheap' and 'Daydrinking' may lay the somber walkways for the more conventional 'song' constructs but they seem to set a mood that yearns to be explored further. Shining as instrumental beacons, the latter descends into glitch drum, uplifting string territory whilst the former fuses obtuse feedback with percussion ever so dramatically that it seems a sure fire shame that these kinds of avenues were not pursued in more depth.

Oli Marlow

Z'EV
FORWAARD
 (KORM PLASTICS)



Sounding like it was 90% liquid sourced, this 40-minute piece of drift isn't what you'd normally expect from percussionist Z'EV. Tak-

ing field recordings made by Korm label head Frans de Waard, this is a record melted into a continuous slew of glassy underwater chimes. But instead of the album revealing itself as a colourful horizon of glinting chrome waves, Forwaard merely morphs back and forth between alike recorded elements. On the rare occasions when the sound sources are crystal clear—actual water drips or the click of recording equipment—there seems to be a little more life in Forwaard. The mid-treble of muffled underwater metal clangs and the drag of slow drone result in a two-tone grey metal record. The vast majority of this rud-

derless slow drift isn't black enough to unsettle or busy enough to intrigue. There's a glimmer of a heavier-handed Z'EV about two-thirds of the way through, as the digital dispensation becomes a little more obvious. Ironically it's this rough processing of signals and frayed frequencies that show a human input to Forwaard; actual involvement and moulding instead of plain layering. While much of the album may sound like it was recorded in a waterlogged 4x4, it's nowhere near as exciting or dangerous a listening proposition. The sounds of the stomach of some dumped processing plant near the end are more interesting than the previous stagnant watery drones, however. So enjoy the last third, but do remember to flush afterward.

Scott McKeating

THE JESUS LIZARD
 LIVE
 (MVD)



When will The Jesus Lizard revival begin? Hopefully, with the release of this DVD. This previously unreleased live footage is a precious time capsule, capturing Chicago's toughest noise-rock

group tearing up a packed and ecstatic Venus De Milo club in Boston in October 1994. The group's ramming, heart-crunching songs are like a series of hooks to the ribcage, with Mac McNeilly's gun-shot drums and David Wm Sims' skeins of saturated bass acting in pole-axing rhythm. Duane Denison's taut shreds of guitar agitation flank and screech like daggers, and all of it is commanded by one of the greatest front-men rock has ever witnessed; David Yow, your worst nightmare of a bar-room provocateur. An uncontrollable blood-spattered cyclone, he is the crowd invader - so rapt are the crowd that no-one dares to stage-dive. This is the grime and the glory of noise-rock, like a hollow-point bullet to the skull. Cool bonus features includes songs from a CBGBs show from '92 and a droll post-gig interview with Yow.

Kevin McCaighy