

TROUBADOURS

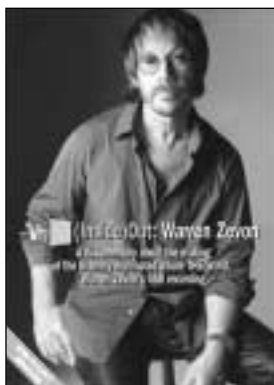


Steve Earle

Just an American Boy Artemis / Sony

Drugs. Money. Guns. Prison. Fad diets. And more marriages than a Las Vegas showgirl. Roots-rock rebel Steve Earle has had one helluva life. And he deserves one helluva great documentary. Sadly, *Just an American Boy* isn't it. But then, it isn't trying to be. Shot by videographer Amos Poe — who prefers to call his fly-on-the-wall film a "portrait" — *American Boy* follows the pugnacious troubadour around as he deals with the fallout from his controversial American-Taliban ode *John Walker's Blues*. Along the way, you get plenty of great footage of Earle in concert — both solo and with his trusty band The Dukes. Despite all his access, though, Poe never gets close enough to the true story of this American Boy. Still, until the definitive biopic — or at least the definitive *Behind the Music* episode — comes along, this'll do nicely.

★★★ out of ★★★★★ — DS



Warren Zevon

(Inside)Out Artemis / Sony

Death was always a big part of Warren Zevon's artistic life. So when the black-humoured singer-songwriter was diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer in 2002, it was hardly shocking that he wrote about his own impending demise — and did so with tenderness and eloquence. *The Wind*, released just before Zevon's death in September, found the wry troubadour reflecting on his life, saying goodbye to loved ones, having a last laugh with old friends and bowing out with courage and grace. All of which he does very in front of the cameras on *(Inside)Out*, an hour-long documentary on Zevon that aired on

Seen & Heard

VH1 last year. Watching Warren struggle against the ticking clock and his own failing body to complete the disc almost makes you wish they had turned off the camera; but watching him continue to crack wise and smoke unrepentantly ("Hey, what would you do if you had a month to live?") makes you glad they didn't. Bonus footage includes an hour of unedited interviews, music videos and old home movies that make it easy to fulfil Warren's final musical request: "Keep me in your heart for awhile."

★★★★★ — DS

PUNKS



The Cramps

Live at Napa State Mental Hospital Target / MVD

It doesn't get any freakier than this. Believe it or not, back in 1978, New York psychobilly punks The Cramps really did put on a show for residents of a mental hospital in California. Lord only knows what staff were thinking. We're just glad someone involved was thinking clearly enough to document the bizarre proceedings on video. The infamous result — grainy black-and-white footage of the band gamely bashing through an eight-song mini-set as patients cavort spasmodically in their faces and try to wrest the mic from singer Lux Interior — is perhaps the weirdest and most compelling music video ever produced. Sure, the quality sucks, the editing is atrocious and it's barely 20 minutes long. But trust us: It's worth every penny.

★★★★1/2 — DS

NoMeansNo & Hanson Brothers

Would We Be ... Live? Punkervision / MVD

For years, people have been asking why you never see pictures of NoMeansNo and The Hanson Brothers together. Well, now you can. *Would We Be ... Live?* brings you two, two, two gigs in one from

The latest crop of music DVDs

these Canadian indie-punk icons. First up are Victoria's awesome NoMeansNo, whose bizarre hybrid of punk riffs, jazz licks, funk beats and poetry-slam lyrics keep a dingy London club crowd stoked for nearly two hours — and will have the same effect on you. Then, in a separate gig at the same club, you get a furious hour of puck-rock riffage and high-shtiking antics from The Hanson Brothers — who bear an uncanny resemblance to NoMeansNo, even with the taped-up glasses, hockey jerseys and goalie masks. Who wins the face-off? The fans, of course.

★★★★ — DS

CLASSIC ROCKERS

Brian Wilson

Pet Sounds Live in London Sanctuary / EMI

The superb CD version of this event — recorded over the course of several shows at London's Royal Festival Hall in 2002 — came out almost two years ago. Why it took so long for the video is anybody's guess. But Beach Boys fans will find it worth the wait. *Pet Sounds Live in London* delivers what it promises: The classic 1966 album, performed in its entirety and in order by Brian Wilson and his unbelievably tight backing band, who reproduce every note, overdub and vocal harmony with flawless precision. Granted, Brian's robotic stage presence and slightly diminished voice leave a little to be desired. But the sheer power of the material — not to mention the inclusion of the magical *Good Vibrations* and the impressive 5.1 audio mix — make this a keeper.

★★★★1/2 — DS



King Crimson

Eyes Wide Open Sanctuary / EMI

Not one, but two full gigs from prog-rock guitar technician Robert Fripp and his latest reconstituted lineup of the Krim, featuring gui-

tarist frontman Adrian Belew and the crack rhythm section of Trey Gunn and Pat Mastelotto. Purists and diehards may quibble over set lists dominated by recent works — you won't find *21st Century Schizoid Man* or *Elephant Talk* here — but it's tough not to be won over by the stellar musicianship of *Level Five* and *ConstruKction of Light* or the playful brilliance of Zen-prog like *Happy With What You Have to Be Happy With*. So be happy.

★★★★ — DS



Big Brother & the Holding Co. with Janis Joplin

Nine Hundred Nights Eagle Vision / EMI

After watching *Nine Hundred Nights*, we've decided the guys in Big Brother were either the luckiest musicians in the world — or the unluckiest. On the plus side, they were fortunate enough to stumble on to a little-known blues belter in Janis Joplin, who transformed them from a second-rate acid-rock band into '60s music icons. On the downside, the ride didn't last long — after stealing the show at 1967's *Monterey Pop Festival* and making one classic album in 1968's *Cheap Thrills*, Joplin went solo, derailing the band's career (and, some say, her own; many believe her later records never had the same spark). This hour-long doc tells the tale in full detail, with plenty of vintage footage, extensive interviews with all surviving members and complete live performances of old faves like *Ball and Chain* and *Piece of my Heart*. Their luck (and Joplin's) may have run out, but if you're a fan, this is your lucky day.

★★★★ — DS

Paul Weller

Live at Braehead Sanctuary / EMI

The former Jam master and Style Councilman delivers some-

thing old and something new on this live set, peppering tracks from recent albums like *Illumination* with classics like *Pretty Green*, *Town Called Malice*, *In the Crowd* and *Man of Great Promise*. No, he still can't get arrested in North America — but he does turn in a fairly arresting performance here.

★★★★1/2 — DS

HEAVY METAL

Lamb of God

Terror and Hubris Epic / Sony

"Due to government regulations and CNN restrictions, penalties and fines, the video for the track *11th Hour* ... has been removed from this DVD," claims this disc from Virginia metalheads Lamb of God. That sounds pretty nefarious — until you view the video at their website and realize it's a bunch of recent Iraqi war footage the band likely couldn't (or didn't) get clearance to use. Still, that's only the second-goofiest thing about this standard set of video clips, live footage and interviews. The goofiest bit? Watching a Roseanne-like family lip-synch to a Lamb of God track in order to win backstage passes for life. There oughta be a government regulation about that.

★★ — DS



Opeth

Lamentations: Live at Shepherd's Bush Empire Music for Nations / Koch

Talk about ruining your image. Listening to the symphonic death metal of Sweden's Opeth on CD, you could imagine them to be mighty Swiss gods with flowing blond locks and rippling biceps capable of crushing your skull with ease. Seeing them live on the concert DVD *Lamentations*, however, you realize the truth: They're just scrubby nerds who spent their youth locked in their bedrooms playing scales. The singer is even — egad — polite to the audience. Thankfully, though, Opeth never fail to meet your musical expectations. On the first half of this two-hour set, they recreate last year's *Damnation* album in all its epic prog-metal grandeur. Then they kick out the jams with a set of furious epic metal culled from their earlier albums. If you listen without watching, it just might be enough to crush your skull after all.

★★★★1/2 — DS

& DVDS

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PUNKS



Descendants 'Merican Fat Wreck Chords

Just when we needed them most, they're back. Seven long years after their last disc *Everything Sucks*, Milo Aukerman and his off-again, on-again Descendants have returned to active duty — and not a moment too soon. In these dark days of shallow corporate punk, discs like the EP *'Merican* — a precursor to a forthcoming album — ring with the authenticity, intelligence and commitment that have been missing from the ranks for far too long. The title cut collapses the sad, sordid history of the U.S. into 1:51 of buzzsaw guitars, charging drums and singalong hooks; *Nothing With You* and *Here With Me* are mosh-pit odes to love and lack thereof; and if you believe the lyrics of *I Quit*, the seeds of this long-awaited reunion's demise have already been sown. Better enjoy it while it lasts.

★★★★ — DS

IN THE CLUBS

Our Mercury Your Medicine Farway

Back when they were still way too young to drive, these Edmontonians were already recording and touring in indie-punk band Misdemeanor (not to be confused with the chick-rock band of the same name). Now, nearly a decade later, these lads

Probot Probot Southern Lord

Dave Grohl may be a grunge icon and an alt-rock hero, but deep down inside he's still just a teenage metalhead at heart. And like every teenage metalhead, he has dreamed of making an album with hard-rock heroes like Lemmy, Cronos, Tom G. Warrior and Wino.

Luckily for him, he happens to be a teenage metalhead who grew up to pound the skins for Nirvana and top the charts with Foo Fighters — so not only will those heroes return his phone calls, they'll line up to be part of Probot, Grohl's new side project / solo album / tribute disc / supergroup / whatever.

The formula was pretty simple: Grohl wrote, played and recorded nearly all the music in his home studio, then FedExed the tunes to his favourite '80s metal and punk singers, who added vocals. For such a Frankensteinish approach, the results are surprisingly solid. Naturally, Motörhead's Lemmy is the ace of



Dictatosaurus; and Mercyful Fate's King Diamond mines his own unique vein of quasi-operatic insanity on the power-ballad closer *Sweet Dreams*.

If there's one quibble, it's the production — with their compressed dynamics and muddy tones, some of these tracks sound a little too much like the home-recorded demos they originally were. Next time out — and we hope there is a next time — Grohl should spring for some time in a real studio.

After all, he's a grunge icon, an alt-rock hero — and, as of now, a heavy metal god.

★★★★½ out of ★★★★★ — Darryl Sterdan

have grown up — and so has their music. Rechristened Our Mercury, the trio have embraced an anxious, emo-fuelled sound. Their debut EP *Your Medicine* presents five short, sharp shards of their sonic invention, bristling with sawtooth guitars, fuelled by a yearning bellow and propelled by tense, deliberately paced rhythms that are engagingly complex without becoming annoyingly mathy. While it's easy to hear echoes of Jawbreaker, At the Drive-In, Hot Water Music and Fugazi in these tightly wound efforts, it's also easy to hear something else — enough individuality and musical maturity to help them slip between categories and defy easy pigeon-holing. In other words: *Your Medicine* is good for you. Get a taste of Our Mercury tomorrow at the Royal Albert.

★★★★½ — DS

Big John Bates Mystiki Devil Sauce

Innovative rockabilly acts come along about as often as gangsta rappers with PhDs. For every distinctive outfit like, say, The Cramps or the Rev. Horton Heat, there are scores of imitators — like, say, psychobilly Vancouver singer-guitarist Big John Bates. It isn't that the former Annihilator member hasn't got the hang of the genre; if anything, he's learned his lessons a little too well. His second album *Mystiki* — that title alone should be a tip-off — is a predictable affair that determinedly delivers every psychobilly cliché in the book. Revved-up rockabilly a la Horton? Check. Bo Diddley beats and twangy guitars? Check. Hiccapping vocals soaked



with reverb? Check. Campy, Crampy cartoon-horror cuts like *Crankenstein*, *Vampire Lezbos* and *Bad Girls Go to Hell?* Check, check and check. Toss in a pair of burlesque dancers dolled up like evil nurses and sure, you might have an entertainingly raunchy show — find out for yourself tonight and tomorrow at the Pyramid. But you sure don't have a CD that's gonna make Lux Interior lose any sleep.

★★ — DS

AMBIENT

Harold Budd La Bella Vista Shout / Sony

Some believe the truest art is made unintentionally. *La Bella Vista*, the latest CD from ambient neo-classical pianist Harold Budd, seems to support that argument. According to the liner notes, many of these 10 solo improvisations were taped surreptitiously during impromptu performances by Budd at the home of producer Daniel Lanois. Doubtless, their pal Brian Eno — the avant-garde producer who encourages this sort of weirdness — would approve. But you probably will too; filled with sombre moods, lingering notes and contemplative tempo, these compositions — to call them songs would be demeaning — possess a quiet beauty and Zen-like grace that is as starkly beautiful as a winter landscape. If this is the result of a little eavesdropping, Budd should be bugged more often.

★★★★ — DS

Tarbox Ramblers A Fix Back East Rounder / Universal

Think hard, now: When was the last time you heard a new album that made your hair stand on end? Even better, when was the last time you heard a new blues trio — led by a doughy, balding white guy from Boston, no less — that sent shivers up and down your spine?

In our case, it was a couple of weeks ago — the first time we listened to *A Fix Back East*, the mesmerizing sophomore album from Michael Tarbox and his Ramblers. And it's happened most days since, chiefly because Tarbox and his music have taken root in our Discman and our psyche like kudzu in the ditch by Route 66.

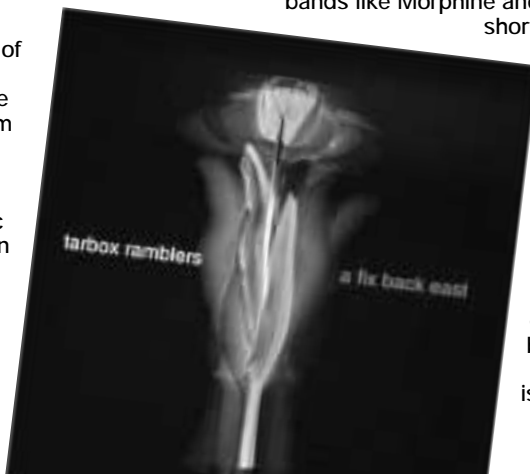
For our money, Tarbox is the most evocative and distinctive blues-roots artist to come down the pike in ages. How do we love him? Let us count the ways. First,

there's his electrifying voice, a rusted, ragged rumble that fuses the best qualities of Keith Richards, Tom Waits and early George Thorogood. Then there's the gritty power of his guitar, a cheap-sounding instrument that growls with distortion, moans with ominous tension and reverberates with the spirit of the Delta.

Most important, of course, are his songs, which run the gamut from spiky, choogling juke-joint raveups and swampy, hypnotic hoodoo drones to gothic Americana ballads and surprisingly tender country gospel — when they don't remind you of hipper bands like Morphine and Firewater. But let's not give short shrift to the raw energy and garagey immediacy of his no-frills rhythm section, not to mention the lively underproduction of Memphis music guru Jim Dickinson. They were obviously instrumental in helping Tarbox forge an unforgettable stunner of a disc that belongs in the collection of every roots music fan — and has already earned a spot on our year-end best-of list.

That's right, folks — the *Fix* is in.

★★★★½ out of ★★★★★ — Darryl Sterdan



Top Tens

Pop Singles

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------|
| 1. HEY YA! | OutKast |
| 2. MY IMMORTAL | Evanescence |
| 3. BABY BOY | Beyoncé |
| 4. SUNRISE | Simply Red |
| 5. 2+2=5 CD1/2 | Radiohead |
| 6. SOMETHING MORE | Ryan Malcolm |
| 7. ME, MYSELF & I | Beyoncé |
| 8. SLOW | Kylie Minogue |
| 9. BRING ME BACK TO LIFE | Evanescence |
| 10. ME AGAINST THE MUSIC | Britney Spears |

Source: Nielsen Soundscan Canada

Local Best-Sellers

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. A CROW LEFT OF THE MURDER | Incubus |
| 2. CLOSER | Josh Groban |
| 3. THE LONG ROAD | Nickelback |
| 4. THE VERY BEST OF SHERYL CROW | Sheryl Crow |
| 5. 2004 GRAMMY NOMINEES | Various Artists |
| 6. FALLEN | Evanescence |
| 7. THREE DAYS GRACE | Three Days Grace |
| 8. MUCHDANCE 90S | Various Artists |
| 9. SPEAKERBOXXX / THE LOVE BELOW | OutKast |
| 10. MUCHDANCE 2004 | Various Artists |

Source: Nielsen SoundScan Canada

Country Singles

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. AMERICAN SOLDIER | Toby Keith |
| 2. REMEMBER WHEN | Alan Jackson |
| 3. WATCH THE WIND BLOW BY | Tim McGraw |
| 4. I WANNA DO IT ALL | Terri Clark |
| 5. LITTLE MOMENTS | Brad Paisley |
| 6. THERE GOES MY LIFE | Kenny Chesney |
| 7. IN MY DAUGHTER'S EYES | Martina McBride |
| 8. HOT MAMA | Trace Adkins |
| 9. I LOVE YOU THIS MUCH | Jimmy Wayne |
| 10. PERFECT | Sara Evans |

Source: Billboard Online

Christian

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. WORD OF GOD SPEAK | MercyMe |
| 2. YOU ARE MY KING (AMAZING LOVE) | Newsboys |
| 3. SING A SONG | Third Day |
| 4. IF WE ARE THE BODY | Casting Crowns |
| 5. WHATEVER IT TAKES | Nate Sallie |
| 6. SHOW YOU LOVE | Jars of Clay |
| 7. YOU ARE A CHILD OF MINE | Mark Schultz |
| 8. PRAY | Darlene Zschech |
| 9. LEAVING 99 | Audio Adrenaline |
| 10. HERE I AM TO WORSHIP | Phillips, Craig & Dean |

Source: Billboard Online

Underground

- | | |
|---|--------------------|
| 1. MARGERINE ECLIPSE | Stereolab |
| 2. GHOSTS OF THE GREAT HIGHWAY | Sun Kil Moon |
| 3. THY KINGDOM COME UNDONE | Head Hits Concrete |
| 4. STILL NO FUTURE | Under Pressure |
| 5. RIPPLE ROCK | The Evaporators |
| 6. THE ISOLATIONIST | Beef Terminal |
| 7. UNDERACHIEVERS PLEASE TRY HARDER | Camera Obscura |
| 8. BOY IN DA CORNER | Dizzee Rascal |
| 9. WINTER HYMN COUNTRY HYMN SECRET HYMN | Do Make Say Think |
| 10. UNDER THE WATERLINE | Hinterland |

Source: UMF 101.5