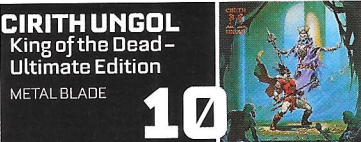


sentiment a smidge too much, *Chin Up*, Kid makes up for this minor shortcoming with insanely catchy melodies reminiscent of New Found Glory and Yellowcard. "Yesterday" earns the A Day to Remember comparison, while "Daydreamer" fulfills the softer side requirements. Absent is the self-deprecating vibe that accompanies most of this genre's resurgence. Rather, *Swing with Your Eyes Closed* demands independence and clarity, a confidence giving this release an upper hand in the crowded world of pop punk. The title track is the record's best, with a hook primed to occupy the brain's need for repeat listens. The entire record feels like a summer drive, boldly honest and forward-thinking without neglecting its forerunners. *Swing with Your Eyes Closed* is carefree adolescent storytelling at its absolute best. ~ Jameson Ketchum



CLASSIC EPIC METAL: When Mötley Crüe, Ratt, and Scorpions were ruling the airwaves and thrash was still in its infancy, Cirith Ungol unleashed its second record and couldn't have been more out of step with the times. Lengthy, complex songs, lyrics inspired by Moorcock and Tolkien, and a vocalist that could peel paint off your house with his acidic shriek added up to an album that found a few loyal fans, but didn't make much of a dent with the metal public at large. Over the years, however, the impact Cirith Ungol has had on other artists that came in their wake has been substantial, and *King of the Dead* is often hailed as the quintessential release of the band's four albums. Bassist Michael "Flint" Vujejia had a unique sound, was always forward in the mix, and came up with basslines that operated in their own space, giving the songs a three-dimensional feel much like Geezer Butler did in Black Sabbath. Jerry Fogle's guitar had a gorgeously raw tone that matched Tim Baker's vocals perfectly, and the whole thing was capped off with a dry, no-frills production that gives it an authentic cult feeling. Bonuses include four live songs (including three from the recent reunion show in 2016) and an alternate version of "Death of the Sun," not to mention a full concert from 1983 as a bonus DVD. ~ Daniel Hinds



PSYCHEDELIA SHOEGAZE: With its second album, *Time Well*, Cloakroom improves upon the blueprint of its impressive debut, even though the band's ultimate destination remains unclear. The Indiana trio plays big amplifier rock that's equal parts psychedelia and shoegaze, with tempos that are faster than heartbeats but slower than standard rock. The saturated guitar tone is reminiscent of stoner and post-metal, and the song structures rely on extended rock and pop conventions. As a result, Cloakroom has a great sound, overall, but the simple, repetitive nature of the songs over the course of a full-length album can be a bit exhausting. *Time Well* is still, however, better than its predecessor in this regard. Cloakroom once famously described themselves as stoner emo, and that pretty much fits the bill. Two early, memorable songs, "Big World" and "Seedless Star," have stellar hooks, but it's easy to lose sight of them in the rolling cacophony that surrounds them. Guitarist and vocalist Doyle Martin has some nuance and depth beneath

the pastiche of Midwestern post-industrial blues. On "Concrete Gallery," his singing sounds like someone's playing a post-punk 45 at 33 rpm. On "The Sun Won't Let Us Go," his singing sounds like someone's playing a vintage folk album through a shitty stereo—good stuff. ~ Nick DeMarino



DOOMY DEATH: A band largely comprised of current and former members of Homewrecker is never going to make for mellow listening, and it's unlikely that many will throw on *Embryonic Devils* while chilling out in a bubble bath with a romance novel. Though comprised of 10 tracks, every other one is a segue—which are mostly filled with eerie horror film sound effects, because they're not going to let anyone all the way off the hook—in between the savagery that thunders down around them. Following an intro, "Chapters of Torment" is one of the most gloriously and unrepentantly violent openers you'll hear this year. Its machine gun drums, breakneck thrashing, echoing vocals, and titanic presence are almost overwhelming when first encountered, and they seem intent on achieving nothing less than bringing the sky crashing down. Elsewhere, though they do not remain in high gear throughout, there is plenty more destruction to behold. "Scaphist Waste" delivers the goods, drenched in doom no matter what gear it's in, and the guitar leads unleashed are perfectly hideous, and it is different to the more brooding and atmospheric strains of "Pit of Morbidity." Rounded off with the devastating "Internal Organ Feast," it makes for a vicious first salvo from a band that certainly makes its mark. ~ Dan Slessor



HORROR GARAGE PUNK: Sweden's The Dahmers and its sophomore album, *In the Dead of Night*, are nothing if not charming. The group's garage spawned brand of punk comes from a long lineage of bands inspired by the Ramones and, of course, the Misfits. And, much like their forebears, beneath that panache of grime, their songs are propelled by a mix of spastic energy and surprisingly catchy hooks. The horror shtick is appropriate, if a bit played out, and *In the Dead of Night* offers enough stylistic variation that it never gets stale. At one extreme, the band's ballads sound like forgotten gems from the 80s new wave scene, especially "I Wake Up Dead." At the other extreme, their pedal to the metal rock barrels in with immanent immediacy ("The Night Has Just Begun"), and in the middle, there are tastes of rockabilly ("To the Night") and key-tastic shanties ("It's Too Late"). The real achievement here on *In the Dead of Night*

is when all those styles meld together, as on "Beyond the Grave" and "Nightcrawler." What The Dahmers lacks in originality, the band more than makes up for in skillful execution and memorable melodies. *In the Dead of Night* has great initial appeal, but it's on repeat listens that the songwriting really shines and The Dahmers surpasses its contemporary peers. ~ Nick DeMarino

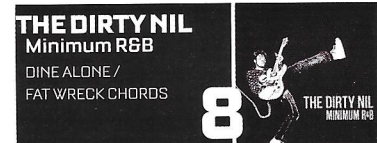


ALTERNATIVE STONER: Italy's Damned Pilots is a riff rock band, and its second album, *Overgalaxy*, offers a compelling, if quirky mix of styles. At its stoner best, the quartet evokes a grunge infused Orange Goblin or Monster Magnet. The Black Sabbath worship gets dialed up to 11 on "Gorguss," and there's some heavy psych tinge on songs like "Desert Europa." Though this is Damned Pilots' sophomore album, it's also their first worldwide release. *Overgalaxy* is a steam punk derived concept album of "post nuclear metal" that takes place in 2500 A.C. with a crew of cartoony characters flying through space on a "hippiebus" from the 1970s. With a fun concept and a couple of theme fitting songs, there are plenty of classic metal flourishes, and the riffs of guitarist Willer Hertz rule the day. Vocalist and guitarist Sgt. Ote sings raspy vocals, but doesn't shy away from melody on *Overgalaxy*'s two haunted ballads, "Just Another Day" and "People Don't Die." The curve ball is the drone metal finale, "MOS." Because of mixing and mastering aesthetics, you'll have to crank your stereo to get early Earth, Sunn O))), or OX-like results, but it's worth it. There's a lot to like about *Overgalaxy*, and Damned Pilots pulls off a surprisingly coherent and catchy album. You may shrug and smile on first listen, but this one's a grower. ~ Nick DeMarino



ART NOISE PUNK: The Guadalajara, Mexico based avant-garde sextet Descartes a Kant offers an exciting syntax of spastic punk, bi-polar melodies, and tragic characters on its third album and American debut, *Victims of Love Propaganda*. Vocalist Sandrushka Petrova is a charming conductor who starts the album in a gritty place, but as the 10 songs on the self-described "emotional porn album" wax then wane, she settles into her singing voice. It's a welcoming hook—like Ben Folds covering The Residents or Frank Zappa rearranging John Zorn's *Naked City*. The transition is actually best captured in an early song on *Victims of Love Propaganda*, "Motion Picture Dreamboy," which serves as a microcosm of the entire album. There's a flurry of noise followed by teasing croons, more pangs of passion, and

then finally full lounge fodder with swooning backup. Other highlights include the heavy, stop-go dynamics of "Summertime Rules" and the whimsical arrangements of "Apricot Dreams." Art should provoke and inspire. It's worthless if, to borrow from the bard, "it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." And Descartes a Kant delivers. The characters and stories here are engaging, if a tad overdone, and they welcome reflection and analysis. And, you know, the music's good. ~ Nick DeMarino



MAXIMUM ROCKIN' OUT: After one full-length on Dine Alone Records and one EP on Fat Wreck Chords, Hamilton, Ontario's The Dirty Nil is now releasing this collection of previously released EP songs and one unreleased track. The band has a wonderfully dirty and raw sound, one that is completely out of place on Fat Wreck Chords, but in the best of ways. Opener "Fucking Up Young" is the least punk and most garage rockin'/classic rockin' song the label has ever bankrolled, the band taking the best of huge 70s stadium rock riffing and energetic garage attitude, wrapping it up in a fuzzed out production and delivering it emblazoned with the Fat Wreck logo. "Verona Lung" continues the crashing and bashing, the song sounding like a 90s band throwing back to the 70s, while "Little Metal Baby Fist" sounds like an early Nirvana tune. Grunge inflected classic rock on Fat Wreck Chords? Not quite, as The Dirty Nil has plenty of raw, ragged, and rough punk rock energy on this fun, refreshing album, which races past in 31 minutes but still has plenty of variety, not to mention an album cover that perfectly matches the music—simple, understated, and emphasizing energy over perfection. And it's all about the energy. The Dirty Nil totally nailing the punk rock spirit on *Minimum R&B*. ~ Greg Pratt



DEATH THRASH SLUDGE METAL: If you look at the history of Bolt Thrower and Sepultura, you can see how the former altered its approach very little over the course of existence. On the other hand, Sepultura made, and continues to make, a wealth of drastic changes, making the band virtually unrecognizable to the handful of people who witnessed their first show back in 1984. This pair of bands gets mentioned because if there's a midpoint to the Venn Diagram between them, the long-running, cataclysm crew that is Disbelief falls somewhere in there. After a seven year break, the German quintet has returned rejuvenated and stronger, with its monochromatic temporal approach to industrialized sludge sounding meaner, leaner, vibrant, and refreshed. *The Symbol of Death* is content to pound away at a driving mid pace, propelled by a combination of excellent sounds captured during the production. The guitars are insanely thick, the drums are locked and viscous, the bass is punishing. This album is resplendent in uncomplicated rhythms that poke at the primordial and primitive parts of the brain that are responsible for full body reactions to downpicked and palm muted chug and holes being punched in walls when powerfully pulsating riffs dripping in distortion consume all sense and sensory processing. ~ Kevin Stewart-Panka