

REVIEWS

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4Bitten - No More Sins (**Rocksector Records**) Review by Steve Green



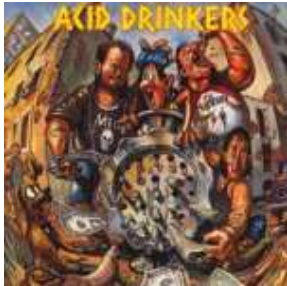
I have to say I absolutely hate the band name. It's horrible, clichéd and dated... but thankfully, even though the music is from a couple of decades ago, it's a hell of a lot better than the band name would suggest.

4Bitten are a female fronted Blues based Rock band from Greece, who'd have been very at home in the early to mid-80s. And although they don't sound like this song, I'd say the style of Alannah Miles' Black Velvet is a good barometer of what to expect here. Albeit with a rockier edge, particularly with sassier numbers such as Follow, which follows the David Coverdale book of blatantly suggestive lyrics. And they do sound very good coming

(no pun intended) from front woman Fofi's very smooth tones. In fact, the more I hear her voice, the better I think she sounds.

Let's put everything on the line here. I don't think 4Bitten will ever rise above the level of a very good, hardworking support band. And that's not to say I don't think this is a very good album. I reckon 20 years ago I would have gone crazy for No More Sins, especially when I was getting exposed to a huge number of slick US bands. As it stands, I don't listen to this type of music much these days, so this album is a refreshing distraction from the norm and it's an album that comes very highly recommended to fans of 80s Hard Rock. www.4bitten.com

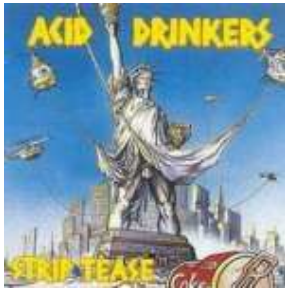
Acid Drinkers - Dirty Money, Dirty Tricks (**Metal Mind**) Review by Metal Mark



Poland's Acid Drinkers were back for their sophomore effort in 1991. Now I wouldn't go as far to say that they had mellowed since their debut, but they were overall less chaotic this time around. The Dead Kennedy's influence is perhaps even greater this time. These guys were still rooted in thrash as well, say similar to Anthrax. None of that quite does justice to the gung-ho direction that this band takes. They take metal, punk, hard rock and stir it all up in the pot and then pull just various elements from their arsenal as they see fit. Having that kind of take on their music allows for it to be both surprising and exciting. At a time when many metal bands were becoming all too predictable, these guys seem to have

more than their share of ideas and they were not afraid to use them. They also benefit from not caring much about labels or sticking to one style. They pretty much just did what they wanted to. Obviously they had more varied influences than some of their peers, but these guys knew how to pull it off as well. Pulling off this style isn't something that everyone could do. This kind of insanity has to have a flow to it to really work, but apparently this band had the kind of skill and personality to make it look easy. This disc didn't have quite the spontaneous feel of the debut. It's close, but the debut just had more pace and style changes. Still this is another fine chapter in their career of this long running band. The re-issue includes a lyric booklet and a live version of "Street Rockin" from 1996 as a bonus track.

Acid Drinkers - Striptease (**Metal Mind**) Review by Metal Mark



The year was 1992 and metal was being swept away by grunge in many circles. However Poland's Acid Drinkers didn't seem phased or concerned about the shift. If anything they seemed more than content to continue on in the direction that they had established with their first two efforts.

This album includes a whopping fifteen tracks full of thrash, foolishness and other oddities. Almost everyone gets in on the action this time around as "Titus", "Litza" and "Popcorn" all contribute vocals. Always big on covers, the band contributes two here with an acoustic version of Metallica's Seek & Destroy. It is sung by a Polish artist, Edyta Bartosiewicz.

The second cover is "Menel Song/Always Look on the Bright Side of Life", a remake of a song by Monty Python. Both fit it very well with the band's less than typical approach. Their mix of thrash, punk and off the wall arrangements works wonders in large part to their sense of humor and unrestrained enthusiasm. When I can pin down influences I hear Anthrax, Dead Kennedys, Tankard (minus the beer soaked lyrics) and they even toss in some Guns n' Roses inspired bursts as well. Acid Drinkers were more than just a joke or novelty band though. The music is tightly woven and the flow is spectacular. They were about being off the wall than getting some cheap laugh and that's a large part of their appeal. It also gave their material a fresh feel that still works today 17 years after the fact. My only regret is that I didn't hear this back in 1992. The re-issue includes a lyric and two live bonus tracks.

Agathodaimon - Phoenix (Massacre Records) review by Sam Thomas



Agathodaimon are one of those bands that have always been around, have never been absolutely brilliant, but have always looked as if they could produce something one day. Well, that day has arrived! They've got rid of all but two members of the previous line-up (keeping Sathonys on guitar and vocals and Felix Ú Walzer on keyboards) and moved from Nuclear Blast to Massacre. And if I was at their previous record label, I'd be gnashing my teeth right now.

For me, part of their problem was always a lack of identity: they didn't really fit into any particular niche (not of itself a bad thing) but they always seemed to lack direction. Well,

they've now got a sense of purpose, a new vocalist, Chris Bonner, and a new, catchy, clean, well-produced sound. The first few tracks are very much in the style of earlier (ie good) In Flames, with some rather good rippling keyboards, which could lead me to make bad jokes about Phoenix rising from the Flames, but I will resist the temptation. "Decline" in particular has so many hooks that your average fisherman would feel quite inadequate... But they haven't forgotten their roots either – they've managed to combine their earlier black metal leanings with the best of the Gothenburg sound to produce something which is both melodic and harsh. "Winterchild" features a very effective contrast of clean and distorted vocals, interleaved with great keyboards and some stirring riffs. Towards the end of the album, there are a couple of tracks that head more towards the style of Opeth in terms of vocal and guitar work, which of course is no bad thing... Altogether this album fits together like a well-tailored suit: Savile Row rather than George at ASDA. Both new and old members do well on this album: keyboards and vocals are the strongest aspects of a very strong offering. And the songwriting of course is something which has improved beyond measure. This isn't a short album (72 minutes, including 2 bonus tracks) but it's sufficiently good to keep the interest going for all that time, and it's got enough about it to be one of the (very few) albums that I will play again after I've finished the review. If you've encountered these Germans before, especially if you heard their previous album, Serpent's Embrace, give this one a try – they've made a quantum leap in almost every respect. Agathodaimon in fact.

www.agathodaimon.de | www.massacre-records.com

Backjumper - Across the Deadline (Killer Pool Records) Review by Anthony Deane



Although I feel Backjumper's roots lie in a fusion of Punk and Hardcore, they are not to be underestimated. Their debut album "Across the Deadline" is testament to this fact.

Backjumper are not afraid to incorporate a hybrid of sounds. These can range from ambient soundscapes on the track "Gravity," to quirky mathcore on tracks "Stabbed Back and Fall" and "Life Sponsored By." These ranges in sounds certainly add character and an element of experimentation which is refreshing to hear.

As "Across the Deadline" opens with title track "Deadline" I thought I knew exactly what I was in store for. Deadline definitely has to be the most straight ahead song on the album,

but has an uplifting quality which conveys as much energy as a relentless train inferno, much like their artwork and front cover suggests.

From track to track the songs structures have a rollercoaster of dynamics which are packed with many pleasant surprises. Backjumper have a habit of leaving the listener left wondering where each track is going on their epic journey through "Across the Deadline". Without a doubt there is no lack of groove and good levels of musicianship throughout the album. From the chunky guitar riffs, to the funky bass lines to help fatten up the bottom end, not to mention razor-sharp drumming which keeps the whole thing flowing, and brings its own pieces to the puzzle. Plus with PaCman manning the vocals you're sure not to be disappointed. His own combination of high pitched screams and melodic singing suits the raw energy that the band portrays.

www.myspace.com/backjumper1 | www.myspace.com/killerpoolrecords

Bai Bang - Are You Ready (Metal Heaven) By: Julian Handley



Hailing from Helsingborg, Sweden Bai Bang don't serve up pretence, they are the classic case of what you see is what you get. Ageing glamsters cavorting in mascara may not be everyone's cup of tea, but with this their 6th studio release they have concocted a satisfying tonic to banish the winter hangover.

Having emerged on the scene in the late eighties releasing 'Enemy Lines' (1989) followed by 'Cop To Con' (1992), they were looking to export the L.A sound from the heart of Scandinavia, and whilst not exactly setting the world on fire, they were equally as good as any of the MTV favourites of the day Bulletboys, Faster Pussycat et al. But in an era

saturated by bands coming out of the L.A cloning machine, it was inevitable that the chimes of doom were set to peel, thus sounding the death knell for the scene, with the impending arrival of grunge.

Whilst the band refused to die, they went quiet, just ticking over, putting out 'Riding High' (1996) and 'Attitude' (2001) followed by 'Best Of Bai Bang' (2006) which appeared to be the swansong for another hard luck story.

Fast forward to 2009 and Bai Bang are back with a vengeance, having been cited as a major influence on the excellent Wig Wam and The Poodles both of whom are currently spearheading the resurgence in the Scandinavian glam scene.

'Are You Ready' epitomises the bands never say die attitude, having achieved a 20 year apprenticeship at the school of hard knocks, emerging broken, beaten and scarred yet triumphant in creating their finest work to date. Perfectly crafted but simple in a vibe that is somewhere between Def Leppard meets L A Guns in a glorious head on collision. Stand out tracks are 'Party Queen', 'Big Time Party', 'Born To Rock' and the excellent 'Only The Best Die Young'. Here's to the future guys. www.baibang.se

Bloodbound - Tabula Rasa (Blistering Records) Review by Mat Willcocks



Sporting a cover of what cannot be described by any better way than something seen in the 80s (including the band's logo), one's opinion is already formed of not only what the CD will produce upon being played, but also whether to negate even listening to it. However, my friends, opener "Sweet Dreams Of Madness" is a wonderfully hurried affair with a nice powerful, but not typically-of-the-genre theatrical chorus. It is already evident that this relatively-recent formed group have a lot to offer. Though not possessing what could be described as a signature sound displayed by Sonata Arctica, Dragonforce and Firewind, Bloodbound are in the position of being able to play around with the sound and

not live up to anyone's expectations. From the opener, the disc continues in rocking one's socks off (track 5 'Night Touches You' initially coming across as the album ballad, but turning into an epic stomper). Track 6 'Tabula Rasa pt II' comes over a little Symphony X, which by no means is a bad thing, but it is by this point that your attention is grabbed, your liking to Bloodbound truly irreversible. End track, 'All Rights Reserved' is sadly not a cover of the wonderful Vicious Rumors track, but is an energetic way of finishing the album off, encompassing what BloodBound appears to be about, which is being a devastating heavy metal band.
www.blisteringrecords.se

Darkness By Oath - Fear Yourself (Cyclone Empire) Review by Chris Davison



Right, a quick challenge for you. When was the last time you heard a new melodic death metal band that a) didn't sound like a million other, soulless, over-polished goons and b) didn't just plain suck? Can't remember? No, nor me, to be honest. Well, fear not, gentle reader, because Darkness By Oath are the miracle answers to both proposition a) and b) ! Huzzah!

A Spanish outfit by nature, (which is unusual, in itself), Darkness By Oath manage to avoid many of the pitfalls that afflict their peers in melodic death metal. Firstly, they keep the emphasis on sounding raw and deathly, and add the melodies as a bonus, rather than

focusing on sickly sweet guitar melodies that suck all the metal out of the songs. Secondly, they can play some serious, serious guitar, these boys. I haven't heard such effective, infectious twin guitars in a very long time. While Diego and Tristan deserve rich plaudits for managing to come up with fresh, engaging melodies and crunching, powerful riffs in a genre populated by copyists and the mundane, the true praise must be reserved for vocalist Aritz, who has a phenomenal range of death metal voices. From his main rasping delivery, to a deep, almost brutal death metal grunting style, this guy really knows how to deliver. Of course, all this would be for naught if the band couldn't write songs. They don't disappoint here, either, with the likes of the breathless "My Own Mind" being a perfect example. A racing tempo, some deftly played drums and matching bass lines, while the guitars themselves plumb a rich vein in intricate, almost sorrowful melodies. The production throughout is thick and pleasingly rough around the edges, maintaining a clear sound but also keeping that all important abrasive edge. Anyone looking for fresh ideas in a tired genre should bring themselves to this opus right now. www.cyclone-empire.com

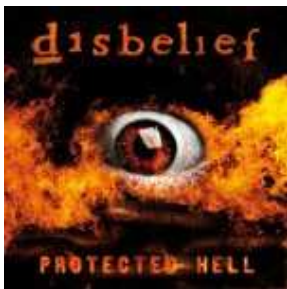
Devin Townsend Project - Ki (InsideOut Music) By: Joe Florez



I honestly thought that after SYL and the numerous side projects that Dev was going to pack it in and perhaps focus only on producing and other behind the scenes action. Little did I know that he had a new outlet on the horizon. Minor background info first about how Ki came to be. First, according to the bio sheet Devin had to quit his hazardous vices which included the usual of drugs and alcohol and other things. Next up was putting this disc and band together. He says that it will contain four discs in the end and then he will do a small tour and play this in its entirety with specific musicians. For the freshman debut, he has enlisted drummer Duris Maxwell who is 62 and has worked with the likes of Heart,

Jefferson Airplane, Tommy Chong and more. That in itself is quite different, but before you jump to any pre-conceived notions, this isn't a full blown out angry and aggro record. This is so much different. "A Monday" which is the intro is an instrumental that is just guitar, but it's quite soothing, calm and relaxing. The parameters soon shift to something a little bit groovier with "Coast." I'm digging this one a lot because the rhythm is so spot on with a simple drum beat and the bass just giving it the right amount of thump. The guitars are also passive, but contain a good riff and Devin is mellow here actually singing and not burning out his throat with harsh screams from hell. "Disrupr" remains a bit low key in the beginning, but the riffing has a tinge more bite, but you can hear things slowly progress into a monster of sorts. By the second half of the song, it crescendos into crunchy riffs, heavy handed drumming and screams. However, it doesn't speed up or anything like that of the old days. It just gets meaner. The formula is pretty much laid out in which you are going to get calm and peaceful music to more aggressive. I won't say extreme because it doesn't get to the point. The only thing is here is that you don't know where or when these actions will occur. There are plenty of jazz elements thrown in as well to keep things fresh and funky. This isn't a metal record by any means. This one really goes outside of the boundaries and there will be no apologies made here. I think that this the next phase of the unpredictable man's career. Don't expect much of that signature "wall of sound" either such as in Ocean Machine or Physicist. If you are a daring music lover who likes to think outside the box, then you are welcomed to soak in the new sounds of Mr. Devin Townsend, but if your diet consisted of nothing more than SYL, then you're SOL! www.insideout.de | www.heavydevy.com

Disbelief - Protected Hell (Massacre Records) review by Sam Thomas



This is going to be a difficult review to write. Not because of any musical problems, but because I've finally been dragged kicking and screaming onto Microsoft Office 2007, and none of the commands for Word are in the same place... The Luddites may have had a point, you know.

Anyway, back to the business in hand. Protected Hell is the eighth studio album from Germany's Disbelief (one of a huge number of Dis- bands that fill up my CD shelves, sorry, piles on the floor). If you've never heard them before, they are generally categorised as death metal, largely for lack of a precise category to pigeonhole them in. To my ears,

there's more than an echo of Fear Factory about the vocals and the general style. Karsten Jäger has a particular, tortured vocal that is fantastic for the first half hour or so, but begins to grate by the end of the album, simply because of its inflexibility.

Something that I do like very much with this album is that the track names are generally exactly the names that you would tend to refer to them by: ie they are the most obvious fragments taken from the lyrics. That always makes it easier for me to engage with an album, and makes it more likely to stick in my head.

"Nemesis Rising" is the perfect example of this phenomenon, Karsten bellows those words enough times that it's obvious this must be the track name.

The onslaught of sound is quite impressive too – the production is good enough (particularly on headphones) that you can still distinguish the individual elements whilst still being submerged in a sea of sound. There's just one thing that really wrecks this CD and has led to it getting fewer listenings than would otherwise be the case: the voiceovers. Now voiceovers are a necessary evil, and we are quite happy to accept them because we recognise that otherwise music is pirated before release, which clearly is a bad thing. But, equally, one voiceover per track is enough to solve this problem. On this album, I've been getting them every couple of minutes, and the tracks aren't that short! It breaks up the flow of the music, and prevents me from wanting to hear it too often. So come on Massacre Records, revert to your previous level of voiceovers, which were fine! Rant over.

"Hell Goes On", the sixth track, is to me the stand-out track of the album, with its intense, driving power. The whole feel of the track is rather like standing underneath a corrugated tin roof in a hailstorm: noisy, but exhilarating. I'm not sure that the lyrics quite "causes goose spots and thrills your inner!!!" as promised by the press release, but nonetheless it's damn fine stuff.

Raw, driving and intense death metal delivered with Teutonic thoroughness. What's not to like?

www.disbelief.de | www.massacre-records.com

