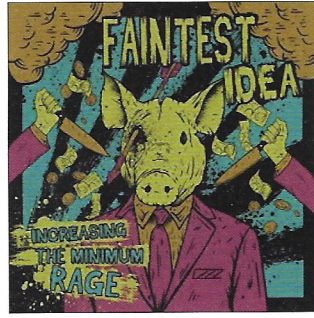


FACE TO FACE PROTECTION

(Fat Wreck)
Ripping ninth album from Californian punk rockers.

8/10
Celebrating their 25th anniversary in style, Face To Face return to Fat Wreck Chords for their new record, the label through which they released their 1992 debut 'Don't Turn Way'. The good news continues as these eleven fast songs blast out with the energy of a band half their age, but with an intelligence and world view only gained through experience and being a 40-something punk rocker like frontman Trever Keith. Produced by Descendents drummer Bill Stevenson, 'Protection' sees Face To Face recapture a pace and sense of melody that they haven't mastered this well in years. Certainly a much better album than their last record, 2013's patchy 'Three Chords and a Half Truth', the likes of 'Bent Not Broken', '14:59', 'Double Crossed' and 'Keep Your Chin Up' prove that the quartet are rejuvenated.
Ian Chaddock



FAINTEST IDEA INCREASING THE MINIMUM RAGE

(TNS)
Shouty ska punkers rally against "free market capitalism".

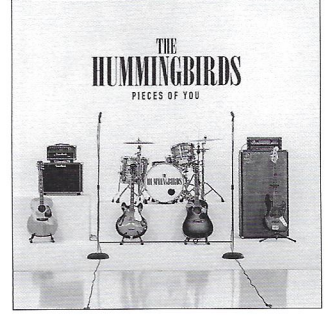
6/10
Kings Lynn "rudeboy street punks" Faintest Idea have been recording and gigging since 2008, gradually morphing over time from straight-ahead, politicised hardcore punk toward more of a ska punk direction, with the addition of a horn section and the adoption of two-tone and reggae influences. This translates into a potentially incendiary live act – something to dance and shout along to, raging against the evils of capitalism – but fares less well on record. Production is good, arrangements and musicianship tight and effective, vocals a little too shouty and earnest to avoid grating – it takes a skilled group to set themselves apart in this field (Citizen Fish, Rancid, Capdown), and a little more light and shade in the vocals, as on standout track 'Throw Away The Key', would make for an enjoyable listening experience.
Russ Bestley



GARDEN GANG MIDDLE CLASS SYMPHONY

(Still Unbeatable)
Power-punk anthems from Deutschland.

7/10
This fourth album sees the German five-piece pushing their glam-tinged punk noise into air-punching power pop territory. While the presence of former Adverts man TV Smith on backing vocals on the title cut lends some context, the most obvious reference point to this album might be The Boys, whose timeless way with a pop punk hook is echoed here on 'Stop Complaining' or 'The Likes Of Us Have To Take It As It Comes'. Punchy, big-chorused chanters are the order of the day here, though occasional departures from the formula do occur, as on 'Tainted Summer', with its mariachi brass stabs, or the headbanging guitar motif of 'Another Dimension'. Garden Gang save the best for last, the rollicking single 'Grave In Your Garden' (absent from the LP release, though the download covers that), which is an impressively widescreen closing cut.
Hugh Gulland



THE HUMMINGBIRDS PIECES OF YOU

(Gladstone Recording)
Liverbirds debut album of north western, country and Western, with a twist of Lennon.

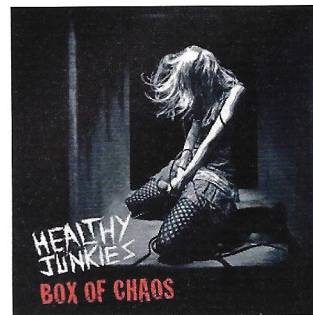
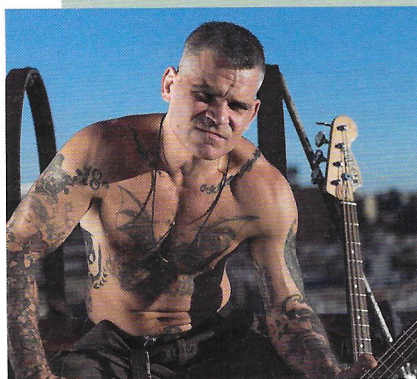
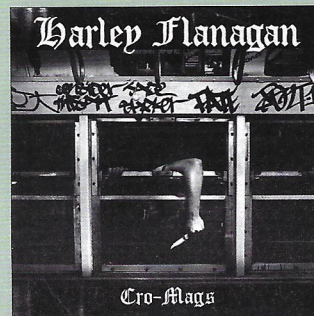
9/10
Liverpool's Hummingbirds set up their musical stall with a harmony-heavy collection of earworms, proudly displaying the band's local roots like a Beatle badge of honour. The 'birds striding writing gets filtered through a Fabs pre-psych songbook: 'Beatles For Sale', 'Rubber Soul' with a twang of country connections. Only occasionally melancholic, the Mersey accented upswing and pedal steel guitar gives 'Pieces Of You' a pedigree of truly skiffing winners. Although there's more than just moptops sitting in the mix: Difford and Tilbrook, Neil Finn and Gene Clark's 'No Other' all colour this album's sound. The greatest set of Northern songs since Alfa 9's 'Gone to Ground', it's so rich, loaded and flowing it could be a contender for my album of the year.
Dave Collins



HARLEY FLANAGAN CRO-MAGS

(171-A/MVD)
New full-length from the NYHC veteran.

8/10
Harley Flanagan has hardcore punk running in his veins, from drumming at the age of twelve in The Stimulators to touring the globe with the much revered Cro-Mags, he has always been outspoken and had the look of a man on the edge. Four years ago after a heated exchange with former Cro-Mags members at a CBGB festival in New York, he was arrested for assault, detained on Rykers Island and subsequently released without charge. This new solo platter is his side of the story, a cathartic kick back at the haters and the liars. From the raging opener 'I Come In Peace', this is Harley at his NYHC best. This is some of his fastest and nastiest material yet to date, his snarling vocals spitting forth the wrong doings of that fateful evening. Each track, including the instrumental section 'Webster Hall' (which is overlaid by an audio of the news story from the ill-fated show) is a section of the events during and after that evening. Musically, the sound is probably the closest any former Cro-Mag has got to that classic sound of their much hallowed debut 'The Age Of Quarrel', and although this may lack some of the aforementioned's rousing choruses, riffs like the one belted out in 'Trust No One' are razor sharp and on point. Harley himself, despite his rage on this record, is still reaching out to his former band mates for a reconciliation. Who knows if that will ever happen, but until then this short stab of Harley anger will fill the void.
Miles Hackett



HEALTHY JUNKIES BOX OF CHAOS

(STP)
Wholesomely addictive third album.

8/10
Band mainstays Nina Courson and guitarist Phil Honey-Jones have built a sizeable following through constant gigging and two well-received albums since 2010. An oxymoron moniker neatly mirrors their grungy punk rock sound offset with Courson's near-sweet voice. Packed with irresistible choppy guitar, aside thumping drums and insubordinate, in-ye-face lyrics; the vocals on opener 'Nice N Sleazy' seduces you into a compelling song collection. Aggressive/melodic juxtapositions occasionally integrate reggae vibes, whereas 'Hypocrite' is a piercing short vitriolic torrent in sharp contrast to the haunting feel of 'Captive', another tale from the darkside. Political defiance infuses 'Just A Fool' and the PJ Harvey-esque 'Je Suis Free'. A pop punk blast on finale 'D7' is trumped only by indie rocker 'Danny Trash', a tale of an uncaught multiple murderer, boasting a killer chorus.
Mark Chadderton



KNUCKLEDUST SONGS OF SACRIFICE

(GSR)
20 years on and still hitting hard.

8/10
It's hard to believe that Knuckledust have been blasting out their punishing, high energy hardcore punk onslaught for two decades now, especially considering the power they still command on sixth full-length, 'Songs of Sacrifice'. Highlights include the huge chorus of 'Life Struggle', the gang vocal-fuelled 'Family Ties' and the crushing 'Foundations' and 'Cycles' (both also to be found on a recent 7" release). All the breakdowns and chaos you'd expect from London's most vicious hardcore veterans is here by the bucketload but there's also a melodic edge that will have you singing and shouting along to the choruses. 'Songs of Sacrifice' is a victory lap that shows that 20 years in and Knuckledust are still dancing around the ring and looking as fast and brutal as ever. You've been warned...
John Truman