

1 new model army

HIGH

(ATTACK ATTACK/REDEYE)

LIVE 161203 (DVD)

(SECRET FILMS/MVD)



Milestone studio LP number 10 for Bradford, England's NMA (they have twice as many live/non-LP/radio albums) over 27 years is their best and most jarring in 14, since 1993's *The Love of Hopeless Causes*—and possibly in 21, since their blistering third LP, 1986's *The Ghost of Cain*. It's a seat of the pants ride through punk-edged rock and cooling breather songs, taking all of **JUSTIN SULLIVAN**'s long experience and transmitting it into something so fierce but beautiful, it's often breathtaking. Whoever picked **CHRIS KIMSEY** to produce was on the ball; *High* recalls the resounding hellfire of his **KILLING JOKE** work on 1984's *Night Time* and 1986's *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns*. (Think "Eighties" and "Love Like Blood.") And these guitars and organs are like a Geordie hollow-body Gretsch attack!

Three songs speak volumes for this corker. The British service in Iraq is on Sullivan's mind on the zenith, hellacious closer, "Bloodsports." (Note, *not* Killing Joke's 1980 song "Bloodsport," though great minds think alike.) Yet he's too smart to jump on a soapbox and shout. Much more personally than he did on 1984's directly critical (of the **THATCHER** administration) "Spirit of the Falklands," he puts you into a scared soldier's spinning emotions. This expression of impending doom, fear, death, and pity—while the rest of the world watches on TV—is impossible to shake no matter your war views. (The celtic "No Mirror, No Shadow" also hints at back room politics/business surrounding such conflicts.) It's memorably driven by an icy Killing Joke-ish death-star keyboard, two burning guitars, and bruiser **MICHAEL DEAN**'s *inhuman* pummeling on the drums. Remarkable! The opening single "Wired" is likewise as simple a straight-kicking song as they've done since "Wonderful Way to Go," with Sullivan and new find **MARSHALL GILL** trading up-down riffs into one of Sullivan's trademark soaring, monster choruses. And the rocked-up folk of "All Consuming Fire," with its Peter Hook wandering bassline, is full of tremendous trepidation and pathos.

Three other cuts revisit Sullivan's solo masterpiece, 2003's *Navigating By the Stars*; the romantic dark night acoustic mediations of "Sky in Your Eyes," "Into the Wind," and "Dawn." And others are in the vein of 2005's *Carnival*, 2000's *Eight*, and 1998's *Strange*

Brotherhood: mid-tempo, tribal pop with philosophical pack-behavior explorations. All provide *High* a balance and repertoire with equal passion.

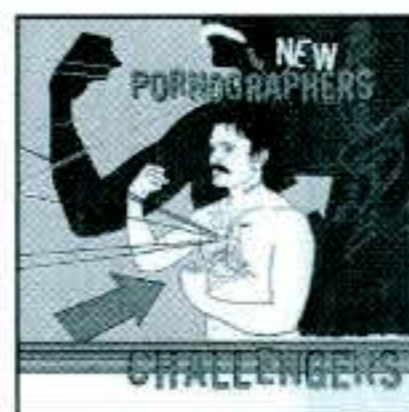
In the end, "Bloodsports" alone beats anyone else at present. Its *TommyWho* meets The Clash's "Safe European Home" power is just colossal. But the whole LP is great. That *High* comes from someone doing it as long as Sullivan and mates, makes them a classic band to *follow*—then, now, and in the future, until the day Sullivan quits. This cult band of cult bands is as effective and powerful as they've ever been in an unstoppable history. (newmodelarmy.org)

For a startling example of this contention, see their first ever live DVD, *Live 161203*. Shot at The Astoria in London on December 16, 2003 as per the title, it is Exhibit A for every excited live review of theirs that ever appeared in this magazine. Touching equally on every NMA era—since there never was a fallow period, there's never been a return to form!—and extremely well filmed and edited, with long lingering shots, this concert is dead thrilling. Now all can witness Sullivan's extraordinary command of an audience, the group's 100% commitment on any given night, and how many incredible songs they draw from. (And since our inane State Department denied NMA visas for their Fall 2007 U.S. tour, just as they did in 1986 when the band was promoting the equally contentious "51st State," *this* is as close as we may get for a while.) This DVD is as highly recommended as the new studio LP. For newcomers, it might even be the best place to start, given its best-of set list and the chance to see them in action. (mvdvisual.com)

2 new pornographers

CHALLENGERS

(MATADOR)



I wanted to be the only reviewer not to call this "a grower." I—and I suspect others—would have had no trouble if *Challengers* was Vancouver's New Porns' debut. But over three previous LPs, and leader **A.C. NEWMAN**'s solo record, they'd conditioned fans to relish a crunchy, high-octane, power-pop thrill-athon. So when they shift gears so drastically to slower, prettier, serene orchestral-pop, they inspire reactions like "plodding" and "sparkless" from those who quit on it, and—yes—"grower" from those who let its lighter magnetism reveal itself. So call me a failure—but not the group.

Much has been written about Newman's relocation to Brooklyn (to my block!), and

his inspiration to use the greater range of musicians/instrumentation at easier beck in our burg. He hasn't used them carelessly. If not an orch-pop opus like the ones Sub Pop routinely released back in Newman's days in **ZUMPAÑO**—the label's roster also included Pernice Brothers, Jeremy Enigk, and Eric Matthews—*Challengers*' background strings, woodwinds, horns, and deep piano nevertheless lead to a bottomless beauty that the New Porns had previously eschewed. And when those strings swell on the coda of "Adventures in Solitude," it's the most pleasant sound of their career thus far. Perhaps one still hears elements of The Move/ELO and new wave and punky power-pop, but this stripped-down, airy, mid-tempo New Porns is remarkably sweet and mischievous.

Meanwhile, Newman remains a top-notch writer, penning and arranging crystalline harmonies—and with five great voices in-house. Of course, shadowy, mysterious **DAN BEJAR** contributes three songs out of 12. He has no "Jackie, Dressed in Cobras" for us, but rather, in this New York incarnation, seems to imagine himself a Velvets-era Lou Reed traversing Lexington 1-2-5 on the deadpan "Myriad Harbour" or a young Paul Simon whistling down Bleeker Street toward a lusty rendezvous on "Entering White Cecilia." Bejar ultimately fuses the album's dusky atmospherics on the hypnotic, neo-folk closer "The Sprit of Giving." As for Newman's nine, he ranges from balladeer romanticism like "Challengers" and the yearning "Go Places" (no doubt for his new bride, both songs featuring star-turns by **NEKO CASE**) to the epic mood of "Unguided." There're also two old-muse, romper-stomper rockers providing balance: the Sparks-ish "All the Things That Go to Make Heaven and Earth" is like the rush of wind when trains hurtle into tunnels. And the even-paced "Mutiny, I Promise You" is a second chance for incredible drummer **KURT DAHLE** to batter his skins (instead of his brushes, bamboo sticks, or light tapping elsewhere).

Having hit us over the head before, Newman exchanges hammer for feather-tickler. *Challengers* is just plain *great*, a beckoning dawn after the hard drinking/rocking night.

3 the libertines (u.s.)

GREATEST HITS, VOL. 1

(LIBERTINES MUSIC)



Having spilled buckets of ink of late on these Ohio '80s greats, spurred by their surprising