

# Resurrection Section

Legends At Large, Radical Reissues & Killer Compilations by Jim Kaz

## It's A Modern Rock Invasion

Besides its impact on today's fashion and pop culture, punk rock has spawned several scenes throughout its relatively short existence. Of its many bastard offspring, the synth-centered new wave movement made possibly the biggest impression on the mainstream at the dawn of the '80s. But when new wave began to fade midway through the decade, modern rock—often referred to as “college rock”—began its steady rise, accounting for some of the period's hippest sounds.

I first heard the term “Modern Rock” used by the San Francisco radio station KITS 105.3 FM. “Live 105” had been heavily influenced by another SF station, The Quake FM99—which had broken new ground as a mainstream station by playing new wave, power pop and even some death rock. This eclectic blend of “Modern Rock” actually had deeper roots that stretched into the college radio scene, hence the term “College Rock.”

Modern or college rock refers to the stuff that largely ruled college radio programming from the rise of the scene around 1983, into the very early '90s. The movement came together at the intersection of new wave, post-punk, and early indie rock. Early pioneers included a mishmash of artists as diverse as The Pixies, The Smiths, The Cure, Echo and the Bunnymen, The Replacements, Red Hot Chili Peppers, New Order, The Cult, R.E.M. and Depeche Mode among others.

The advent of modern rock marked a shift away from the frilly, camp stylings of new wave, moving in a more serious direction. Modern rock bands were generally more introspective than their new wave brethren, and even the poppier songs had hints of irony or dark humor, like The Smiths' sarcastic “Panic,” for example. From jangling guitar rock to synth-heavy dance pop, brooding goth and thrashy faux-funk, this was the scene that paved the way for the alternative music of the '90s, and would serve as a bridge in time between that movement and the original post-punk scene of the late '70s. Right now loads of reissues and new releases are coming out from some of the scene's best and brightest.

Depeche Mode is one of the prime examples of modern rock's evolution from new wave—morphing from lightweight techno-popsters into dark-synth pioneers. Rhino Records (Rhino.com) has recently reissued three of the band's best albums in definitive two-disc versions. *Speak & Spell* (1981), *Music For The Masses* (1987) and *Violator* (1990) are now all available in plush 2-disc editions including bonus tracks and DVD content. Of the band's repertoire, *Violator* has always stood out to me as its finest hour. The album is dark but still easily accessible, opening with the eerie bounce of

“World In My Eyes.” First single “Personal Jesus,” which was played in advance of the album's release, was far different than anything else at the time, and hinted at great things to come. The song's stark,



simplistic arrangement fusing bluesy guitars with funk beats and bold vocal melodies is truly extraordinary. The band's acoustic version released as a B-side presented the song as a stripped-down, anti-ballad that also came off brilliantly. The album's zenith is reached with “Enjoy the Silence,” an epic valentine filtered through lush orchestration and Dave Gahan's soulfully smooth vocals. Dark, danceable and thoughtfully moving, the track was not only influential on DJs and producers, but on future industrial-tinged rock bands. The album would eventually make international superstars out of

the little pop band from Basildon, England. Each reissue comes with a remastered CD and a DVD with enhanced mixes of the songs, plus B-sides and remixes. The packaging is also excellent and includes a booklet with lyrics and photos.

There's not much to add regarding The Cure's impact on modern rock, or rock music in general...but I will talk about three new reissues from the band's impressive back catalog. Rhino has just released lavish two-disc versions of three albums that marked Robert Smith and company's transition from proto-goth depressives to avant-pop superstars between 1984-1987. *The Top*, *The Head On The Door* and *Kiss Me Kiss Me Kiss*

*Me* were all pivotal pieces of the band's evolution. The incorporation of new sounds and a few new members into the ominous mix broadened the band's style to showcase its eclectic side, and the results were nothing less than stunning, especially on 1985's *The Head On The Door*—where different influences (dance, pop, Far-East and South American) helped fortify the direction band would ultimately move in. The New Order-lite “In Between Days” kicks things off in fine pop style, “Kyoto Song” explores the band's gothic tendencies and “Close To Me” is a grandiose Latin-flavored number that defies all categorization. Other songs like “The Blood,” “Six Different Ways” and “A Night Like This” further demonstrate that The Cure was no one-trick pony. *The Head On The Door* may not be everyone's favorite Cure album, or even its best, but its timing and breadth of styles make it an important document of a band in transition that uses it to its full advantage.

The reissues include remastered versions of the original album and a second disc of rarities and previously unreleased tracks, plus a booklet featuring memorabilia and photos from Robert Smith's personal collection. The label has also reissued *Blue Sunshine* by The Glove—Robert Smith's one-off, side-project with Steve Severin from Siouxsie and the Banshees.

Another important band from the era are noise-pop pioneers The Jesus and Mary Chain. JAMC carved out their own unique niche



by mixing spry pop melodies with cartoon lyrics, crunchy power chords, drum machines and scorching bursts of feedback. The band celebrated the sunshine pop of the Beach Boys by subverting it with the dark druggy tones of the Velvet Underground and chaotic bits of The Stooges. Led by shaggy-haired Scottish brothers William and Jim Reid, the band was notorious in its early days for playing 15-20 minute sets with their backs turned to the audience, prompting concertgoers to demand refunds from irate club owners. The disaffected brothers also hosted a revolving door lineup with the drum machine being the only constant.

The band's first few albums on the Blanco y Negro label (distributed through Warner Bros.) are its best, and have been lovingly reissued by Rhino. From the feedback psych of *Psychocandy* (1985) to the pop perfection of *Darklands* (1987), which featured the excellent single "Happy When it Rains," through the driving, high-octane approach of *Automatic* (1989), JAMC's strengths are well represented. Later albums *Honey's Dead* (1992) and *Stoned and Dethroned* (1994) were valiant efforts but failed to harness the fire of the first three, or capture the imagination of fans on a wider scale. The fact that grunge was in full swing when these two came out probably didn't serve the band well, as its surly brand of twisted, animated pop had become somewhat gauche. Either way, Rhino's DualDisc reissues feature remastered hi-def sound, music videos and onscreen lyrics.

The Sugarcubes are probably best known for being the band that launched the career of quirky Icelandic princess Bjork. The Sugarcubes also made quite an impression on the modern rock scene with their avant-garde pop sounds. Rhino has recently released two DVDs chronicling the band's peak years during the late '80s. *Sugar Cubes The DVD* has all the band's promo videos including "Regina" and "Hit" plus a few extras, while *Live Zabor* has some bizarrely fun concert footage from 1988-89, with excellent footage of the band's best song, "Motorcrash."

Once the Sugarcubes disbanded in 1992, Bjork launched a successful solo career.

Closer in spirit to the more-upbeat '80s new wave and modern rock scenes than the self-aggrandizing, woe-is-me era of the grunge/alternative '90s, the pint-sized firecracker has gone on to release six studio albums, and record a soundtrack. The 1993 album *Debut* saw the singer pursue a techno-flavored dance direction, deviating somewhat from the Cubes' off-kilter pop stylings. The album's single "Human Behavior" solidified her as a solo artist to be reckoned with.



But with her second album, 1995's *Post*, Bjork channeled her inner Sugarcube to produce an album of intricate and complex numbers with complex melodies and offbeat instrumentation, further demonstrating that nothing in her career is ever predictable.

Rhino's new *Surrounded* box set includes all of Bjork's solo output on seven DualDiscs featuring Dolby 5.1 and DTS Surround Sound for a stellar listening experience. Each disc also includes videos and other bonuses, and comes house in a slick, "brick" box. Each album has also been reissued individually, but for the consummate fan, this box is the way to go. Besides, it costs less!. Check it out.

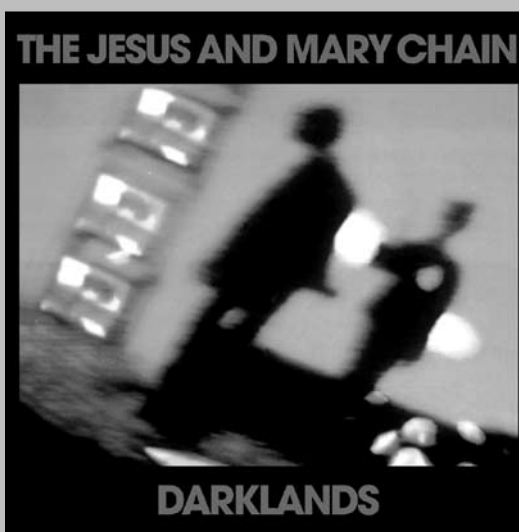
Although the dB's may now be an afterthought, the band did put out a few decent albums rich

in rootsy pop with hints of psychedelia and new wave. They never sold too many records but were critical darlings, and pre-dated REM in the jangle-rock arena by a few years. The band's third album *Like This* (1984) has just been reissued by Collectors' Choice Music (CCMusic.com). More of a straightforward country-pop LP than the earlier sounds on the band's first two offerings, this album found them in transition, having lost an original member. Nevertheless, songs like "A Spy in the House of Love," and "Love Is for Lovers," are perky, guitar pop gems brimming with big hooks. This reissue features the original artwork and two bonus tracks.

One of the most revered bands of the era is back with a kick-ass new rock 'n' roll album. Primal Scream was formed by drummer Bobby Gillespie (ex Jesus and the Mary Chain) during the mid '80s, and released a couple pseudo-psych, jangle-pop albums during the period. But it wasn't until 1991's *Screamadelica* that the band really hit its stride. A spirited mix of psychedelia, rock, dance, dub and pop, the album electrified critics and fans alike.

New album *Riot City Blues* on Columbia (ColumbiaRecords.com) may be one of its most consistent to date. More of a straightforward rock 'n' roll album than the acid-house or overtly retro stylings of past efforts, the album kicks off with the rousing "Country Girl." While obviously influenced

by The Stones, this number is no rip; it's got its own groove and even utilizes a banjo to full effect. "Suicide Sally & Johnny Guitar" explores the band's punk roots through acoustic riffs, Johnny Thunders licks and driving beats. *Riot City Blues* sees a rebirth of sorts for a band that's been through it all—drugs, uneven output, label shakeups and critical disdain—but has survived to pull through, and still make one solid-rocking new record.



If I had to break down the most important artists of the era, The Smiths would be right up there near the top. Led by the inimitable Morrissey, the band's dramatic pop songs set to '60s pop-rock structures were not only unlike anything you'd ever hear before, but influenced a generation of indie and early emo musicians alike. Not content with just playing standard stuff, the band's trailblazer guitarist Johnny Marr was also a bit of a virtuoso, which when coupled with Morrissey's self-absorbed, melodramatic croon further distanced the band from its peers. And the band's fondness for guitar-driven rock and punk ethics helped develop a part of the scene that wasn't connected with the synth stylings of Depeche Mode and New Order. *The Smiths Under Review* DVD from MVD/Sexy Intellectual ([MusicVideoDistributors.com](http://MusicVideoDistributors.com)) is a 90-minute exposé on the origins of the band, and includes videos, live shots, interviews and TV appearances. The *Under Review* series is always a compelling view, and hasn't let me down yet.

Although industrial music had already been around for several years, the mid '80s saw an upsurge in interest and mainstream popularity with the transformation of Ministry from wispy, techno-pop softies to scary, industrial-metal merchants. But even before Ministry made the switch, Skinny Puppy had been grossing out captivated audiences for years. Canadians Nivek Ogre and cEvin Key were heavily influenced by avant-garde performance artists like Suicide and the Virgin Prunes, adding further dance, goth and industrial elements back in 1982. The band would release a few memorable records during its '80s heyday, then disband in the mid '90s. Ogre and Key eventually buried the hatchet a few years ago and released *The Greater Wrong of the Right* CD in 2004. SPV America ([SPVUSA.com](http://SPVUSA.com)) has recently released *The Greater Wrong of the Right Live*, a two-disc DVD, showcasing the band's return. The first DVD includes a full set culled from two Canadian shows. Mixing old and new, the band rips through classic material such as "Warlock," "God's Gift Maggot," "Tin Omen," as if they've never been gone. The hi-def sound is excellent although some of the editing is a bit shoddy in spots. The second DVD features a documentary on the Iraq war entitled *Information Warfare*, plus three different vignettes focusing on Puppy's past including bits from prior tours. Although the new Skinny Puppy is a bit of a departure from its glory days, *The Greater Wrong of the Right Live* is still an interesting document of the band's return to the scene. And on that note, I guess it's okay that they've become tritely political and a tad sanctimonious.

Often derided as second-rate Sisters of Mercy copyists, Fields of the Nephilim made quite an impression with its *Dawnrazor* album in 1987. Putting a spaghetti-western spin on the gothic template, the band dressed in desperado duds and motorcycle boots, and covered itself in baking flour for a truly contrasting black-and-white look. *Dawnrazor's* horror-show themes, swirling keyboards, razor-sharp guitars and guttural



vocals courtesy of Carl McCoy created an unholy ambiance that was nothing short of intense. A pair of FOTN albums have surfaced in recent times, keeping the band's 20-year legacy afloat.

Jungle Records' *Fallen* ([Jungle-Records.co.uk](http://Jungle-Records.co.uk)) was touted to be the band's first new album in years under its original namesake. The problem was that McCoy was the only original member on it, and has stated publicly that the album is nothing but a bunch of outtakes and demos that were never supposed to see official release. Either way, the album is a decent enough tribute to past glories, sounding a bit like early Sisters of Mercy. The album comes smartly packaged in a digipack and includes a bonus disc with four live tracks, including a rousing version of the title track to *Dawnrazor*.

McCoy and company's latest release as Fields of the Nephilim is *Mourning Sun* (SPV). What looks like another solo album for McCoy finds him predictably dabbling in a scary mix of darkwave, electronica and metal. The tracks are quite lengthy,

so right off the bat it's a challenging album. The most compelling track is the opener "Shroud (Exordium)," a keyboard-drenched epic that straddles the line between ambient space rock and gothic, metallic mayhem. The next track "Straight To The Light" is an upbeat number with an industrial feel and some frenetic bass lines, but from then on the tracks get increasingly long and more difficult. One has to wonder what McCoy's speaking voice must be like, as he gets deeper and more hoarse with each verse. In spite of his megalomania, it's still good to see the band's name out there, especially since more traditional

goth is getting increasingly harder to come by these days.

The most experimental artist in this roundup is Jah Wobble. The one-time cohort of Johnny Rotten, and bass player for his band Public Image Limited has released his latest solo album *MU* through Sanctuary records ([SanctuaryRecords.com](http://SanctuaryRecords.com)). With music ranging from quirky alterna-pop to faux-reggae, world music, electronica and odd experimental junk, the ever-prolific Wobble has confused and delighted diehards, breaking solo ground during the early '80s. *MU* is full of atmospheric soundscapes augmented by pipes, flutes and strings—giving it a more organic feel than some of his previous work. Songs "Viking Funeral" and "Samsara" feature some interesting vocal arrangements, but by and large, I've never been a fan, and this album hasn't done anything to convert me.

For those who were around during modern rock's best years, this little rundown will hopefully bring back fond memories of Aqua Net Extra Super Hold, fingerless gloves and the smell of burning cloves. But for those who were too busy discovering crack (this was the '80s, after all), or too young to know what the hell was going on, there's quite a bit resurfacing these days to bring you back up to speed. Send your comments, questions or requests to me at [Retrohead77@yahoo.com](mailto:Retrohead77@yahoo.com). I'll see you all next month. Cheers. ☞