

Remove the silly vocal effects and piano and improve the leads would be my advice, and then the next album could be a cracker.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

MARTIN HARRIS

KATATONIA "The Longest Year" Genre: Dark Metal Peaceville Records



Following on the heels of their recent dark metal tour-de-force in the shape of 2009's "Night Is The New Day" comes a four track EP that, as the name suggests, places the spotlight on the magnificent "The Longest Year" taken from that jaw-dropping album. To be honest, the band could have picked any of the compositions from that record

as they are all worthy of special attention, but "The Longest Year" is nevertheless a great choice.

Next up is the previously unreleased gem, "Sold Heart", a beautifully poignant track that was perhaps correctly left off the album. I don't mean that derogatorily, just that its slightly more mainstream, uncluttered feel would have been a touch out-of-place nestled amongst the other tracks on "Night Is The New Day".

In addition, the EP features a Frank Default remix of "Day & Then The Shade" and an alternative version of "Idle Blood". Both of these cuts are interesting and entertaining but the original versions are considerably better. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, as they say.

To round out the EP and to provide that much needed added value, videos of the title track and "Day & Then The Shade" have been included and are both well worth a look. As usual, the Katatonia boys have produced a release of quality but one that will be of genuine interest to devotees only, rather than the metal populace as a whole.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MATT SPALL

JUROJIN "The Living Measure Of Time" Genre: Metal/World/Fusion Majestic Elder Records



London based Jurojin are certainly an interesting proposition. Blending the metal edge of Tool with a jazz fusion bassist and a fulltime tabla player, they bring the best of several musical styles and put them all in one huge melting pot. Although a little on the short side (only seven tracks) "The Living Measure Of Time" does give a full 360

degree view of just what Jurojin can do. Standouts include "The Scars", the gorgeous "Proem" (which reminds me of the excellent Memento) and the groove laden closing track "The Dreaming". All in all a very promising start.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MIK GAFFNEY

THE SMASHUP "The Sea And The Serpents" Genre: Post-Hardcore Glasstone Records



From the obtuse stomp dredged up by Brooklyn based The Smashup, you wouldn't have thought that guitarist Vin Alfieri recently completed the entire soundtrack to the sequel of "Alvin And The Chipmunks". And yet with a host of film soundtracks under his belt, and alongside singer in Sean Cuthbert - a well travelled front man - The Smashup have created an obliterating album of dynamic proportions.

From "Set Loose Black Sail" the band unleash an accomplished post-hardcore melee that remains both energetic and catchy as hell. Songs like "Weigh The Anchored Cross" and "Compass Adrift" offer both competence and strength, instantly raising them above the rest of the pack. Cuthbert's vocals lie somewhere between the tortured howl of Dillinger Escape Plan's Greg Puciatto and the brazen obnoxious glory of Every Time I Die's Keith Buckley.

The music provides more than ample backup for the flourish of ideas and concepts that the band throw into the

equation, and while it may not sound like anything completely out of the ordinary, if you are looking for a smart and wholesome contemporary metal record, then this will float your boat.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

MATT INGHAM

LEVI/WERSTLER "Avalanche of Worms" Genre: AOR/Instrumental Rock Magna Carta Records



In a sense, instrumental AOR is the most extreme kind of music there is. It plays a weird game of cat-and-mouse with the listener. Only, there isn't a mouse, or at least, never any vocals, even if the format and the structure of the music would seem to suggest a singer is going to start warbling... any... minute... now... But he or she never does, and certainly not on this new album, by Messrs Levi & Werstler. [Eyal] Levi plays in Daath, in case you were wondering. And [Emil] Werstler has the sort of name you associate with hot dogs. But he also plays in Daath too. Just saying.

Anyway, the music is ornate and at times well made. But it seems awfully lifeless and over-crafted at points, a musician's dream and an audience's nightmare. It doesn't help that there are no vocals, and so it all sounds incomplete, or perhaps missing something? Perhaps THE VOCALS?

It doesn't quite fail miserably. But there is the sense that if you're not going to have a singer, at least have enough substance to compensate for that. And yet, on this album, there isn't.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5

ALEXANDER HAY

CLONECIRCLE "Behind The Wire" Genre: Metal/Goth MSM Productions



Something that really bugs me at the moment is the fact that there are so many metal bands around that slap the 'industrial' tag on themselves after sticking some synths and a few digital effects underneath what are otherwise straightforward metal songs. Clonecircle are being marketed as a dark, gothic, industrial metal band, but that's not entirely accurate. They would more clearly be described as a heavy gothic metal band, which is something they do very well indeed. The songs are hugely memorable, with huge riffs and even more massive choruses on offer.

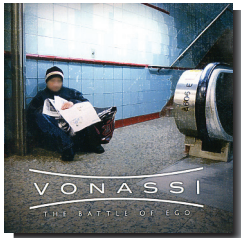
Bizarrely, vocalist Martin Heggren sounds just like Dave Mustaine for some of the opening title track, but the rest of the album sees him adopt a Nick Holmes style croon which fits the music much better.

"Undying" is hugely anthemic and should please fans of Rob Zombie just as much as fans of Paradise Lost and Sentenced. "Obey" seems to have nicked some of its backing from "Du Hast" by Rammstein, while "Memento Mori" and "Save Me (NOT)" are a good example of the band getting their sound going in the right direction. Closing track "Infinity" is sadly a bit irritating thanks to an annoying effect that runs through most of the song and sounds just like a faulty CD clipping for five minutes. It's a good album, but the band and label could do with ditching the industrial angle, as it really ain't.

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ANDREW HAWNT

VONASSI "The Battle Of Ego" Genre: Progressive Rock Progrock Records



Hailing from Chicago, Vonassi class themselves as a progressive rock band, although any comparisons with Genesis and Yes are probably inappropriate. Think Incubus and you may be closer to the mark. Indeed, singer Chase Carter's vocal stylings do have more than a passing resemblance to a certain Mr Brandon Boyd. Vonassi's polished song arrangements stretch out, touching on several styles, with some working well, whereas others don't.

Despite the differing approaches, the band doesn't stray too far from their hard rock hub, with big distortion tones and flashy guitar solos waiting in the wings to reclaim the musical

high ground. However, despite the musical invention on offer, Vonassi fail to achieve what other genre bending bands such as Incubus and Faith No More seem to do easily: write great memorable songs. This falling at the final fence, as it were, doesn't do justice to the fine musicianship on the "The Battle Of Ego".

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5

CHRIS TATE

SCEPTOR "Introducing...Sceptor" Genre: Heavy Metal High Roller Records



Sceptor is another traditionally styled metal act debuting on High Roller Records with a limited edition, two track seven inch single.

Like the vinyl format itself, the band is firmly rooted in the late 70s/early 80s. Their style owes considerable debts both to the NWOBHM sounds of Saxon, Diamond Head and early Iron Maiden, and to the European vibe of acts like Mercyful Fate and Accept.

Neither of the two tracks - "Powerhouse" and "Shadows In The Maze" - offer anything remotely new or original. They are simple but effective offerings: loud, proud and unapologetic heavy metal, well played and enjoyable on their own merits.

Dust off your denim, polish up your leather. True metal probably doesn't come any truer than this. If only it were 1980 again.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MARCUS JERVIS

MARTYR DE MONA "Demo" Genre: Rock Independent Release



Martyr de Mona's demo is only three tracks, so it's difficult to get much of a grip on their music, especially as the tracks differ so much. Hailing from Dudley, they've been getting lots of good press about their live show and are now looking to get their first album out.

The demo kicks off with "Eva" and starts with a riff Anthrax would be proud of. It then incorporates a Soundgarden-esque style which, combined with the heavy riffage, sounds great. For "Try To Mend" the band ease up a bit, heading off into Tool territory. They continue with this approach on "Identity", although this one does start to get heavier again towards the end.

And that's it. All the songs are pretty good, but "Eva" is the clear winner, and more songs in this style would definitely be a good move. All the songs are on the band's MySpace page so check them out, but save "Eva" till last.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

MARTIN HOWELL

ALICE COOPER "Brutal Planet"/"DragonTown"/"The Eyes Of Alice Cooper"/"Dirty Diamonds" Genre: Heavy Metal/Hard Rock Armoury



These albums are fairly recent (all of them originally released in the past ten years) so there seems little point in those who already own them spending hard earned cash picking them up again. The point in these reissues is that they are a) released on Eagle Rock's new label Armoury Records and b) they are sold at "mid-price", whatever that

means at a time when CD prices fluctuate all the time. (A price check on Amazon UK sees them going for £6.99.) Sadly, there are no bonus tracks or even sleeve notes detailing the making of the albums, etc. What you get is the original CD.

Both "Brutal Planet" and "DragonTown" are kind of anomalies in Cooper's back catalogue. Fans rarely speak of them and Cooper doesn't play much material at all from them on his current live sets. The former was his first album in six years and sounded like nothing he'd ever done before. Sure, "The Last Temptation" was heavy and modern and a world away from "Hey Stoopid" but "Brutal Planet" was close to what Marilyn Manson was doing with Trent Reznor. It's actually an underrated gem with some killer songs like "Wicked Young Man" and the title-track. "DragonTown" continued his jaunt into the world of industrial metal. Again, it's actually a great modern sounding