

SOUND Opinions

By Mike Beagan

Well folks, last week I began this column-writing thing with a few reviews of newer releases. This week will be about the same, with the addition of a focus on a specific musical style; a type of method to the madness, to speak.

This week I will focus on three releases during music based on the very foundations of popular music; namely, the blues. As these cases illustrate, blues music is the foundation on which all rock music is based.

First up is a grand old master of the blues, John Lee Hooker, who has been making "the Boogie" since the 1930's. His latest release, *Chill Out*, proves that he is still among the strongest blues performers alive today. Although his voice has lost some of the power that it had in his youth, Hooker still lays down a fantastic groove based blues. As usual, he has assembled an all-star studio band featuring names like Santana, Charles Brown, Van Morrison, Booker T. Jones, and Roy Rodgers, among others. *Chill Out* is a worthwhile buy for any blues fan.

A little less exciting is *The Canadian Blues*, a double disc compilation by Long John Baldry. Baldry is an originator of the 60's

British "white boy" blues scene that produced such greats as Eric Clapton, Led Zeppelin, and John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. This set is a collection of his "best" from the time he has spent based in Canada. The music is quite respectable for the most part, yet I have to say that the overall package is somewhat bloated. Many of these songs could, and should, have been left on the cutting room floor. Baldry can really rock, but a remake of "You've lost that loving feeling" is not a beautiful thing. This release is not a write off if your CD player is programmable.

Stomp Revival is the name of a new release by Bonepony. This is not rightly a blues album, but the heavy blues influences are quite apparent. The sound is best described as an Eighties metal band playing country blues with mandolins and fiddles for accompaniment. The result is surprisingly interesting. It's worth a listen for fans of heavy country blues.

Well, that about does it for this week. I am emotionally drained by all this opinion forming.

Next week: World music and the practically indescribable sounds of Grandharva and Blue Dog Pict!

Lenny Kravitz
Circus
(Virgin)

Lenny's fourth album indeed qualifies as his most explosive. The sonic charge of "Rock 'n' Roll Is Dead" detonates the record. The song attacks "the giant corporate white-bread bubblegum machine that we're all a part of" and "the clinched rock 'n' roll lifestyle." Kravitz offers real emotion, genuine passion, and this song delivers its message loud and clear: "Be whoever you are; be the person who is inside you."

Kravitz is nearly the exclusive instrumental force on *Circus* alternating 10 or 12 guitars and crafting irresistibly tuneful bass-lines (as in "Magdalene" and "Thin ice"). He also plays drums on most tracks and his joy in commanding the kit is obvious on "Beyond the Seventh Sky".

Typical of all of his albums, there are a couple of slow hypnotic, sermon like songs which I don't care much for ("God is Love"). I found it too preachy. However, throughout the album, Lenny's singing is exultant, knowing, sharp -- singing that comes straight from the soul. *Circus* is a true music lover's dream: a dazzling carnival of rock and funk, ballads and barbed guitar. It will be part of my permanent collection.

-- Joel Hussey

The Presidents of the United States of America
Self titled
(Yankee Invasion)

Names can be misleading. Rather than being patriotic flag waving Yankees, the Presidents of the United States of America are just out for a good time. Their lack of concern is demonstrated by tracks like "We are not going to make it" which tells the listener the band will never hit the big time, basically because they don't care enough. They certainly have the talent. The songs are very tight and musical, too light to be classified as "grunge" but with too much distortion and weird lyrics to be mainstream pop. The Presidents are a refreshing change of pace from the normal angst-ridden "alternative" musicians. It will be interesting to see if we hear from them again. (3.5)

-- Matthew McRae

Eat Static
Epsilon
(Attic)

Warped, repetitive techno. I like computer music, but it needs to have at least SOME flow to it. This... well, it has a background beat. For the actual "music", it sounds like someone weaned two slinkies on DOOM II, and set them loose on an electronic keyboard to do a live version of the game. If you like techno with on continuity of tune, you could like this. I don't.

(3)

-- Jonathan Davis

J.R. CAPONES



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