



SUGAR RAY

Lemonade and Brownies
(Atlantic)

This generation X quartet give their all to lure discerning consumers. Sugar Ray's debut album, produced by DJ Lethal of House of Pain and mixed by Jason Roberts (House Of Pain, Funkdoobiest, Cypress Hill) is set at a rapid pace, shifting restlessly and with diversity from track to track. The overall content is 'LA rock meets NY hip-hop, with excursions to other musical genres combined with a sense of humour and cute quirkiness which portrays their junk culture. Shuffled into their deck of harder edge are laidback funk songs such as 'Danzig Needs a Hug' and 'Hold Your Eyes', which could easily pass as the product of a cheesy combo fitted with polyester lounge suits. The single, 'Mean Machine', is a pure delight, being SR at their most energetic — lots of guitar and shouting in a pop-punk fashion. The album finishes with an unplugged country and western song which is not track listed.

JASON WALD

SUPERSUCKERS

The Sacrilicious Sounds of...
(Sub Pop)

This is a delightful album, from the inside out to the fine, limited edition, wink, lounge act cover art, swiped from Paul Weston's *The Sweet and the Swinging*. (The fact I know that means I really shouldn't be writing about punk and you just blew \$2). The music? Well, with ex-DJ Mr Rick Sims on board, the 'Suckers lay down a very serious twin guitar attack that's all beef and no filler. They aren't shy about dabbling in some twang or garage rock, or even heart rending C&W either, and manage to maintain that knife edge balance of musical integrity and self-deprecation that keeps it from all sounding snide.

If you're doubtful, just check out



Supersucker

the opening one-two of 'Bad, Bad, Bad' and 'Born With a Tail'. It's simple raving psych-punk, running on all four carbs and eight cylinders. Dumb enough to annoy the hell out of those who want rock to be sociology lectures set to music, and clever enough to rock harder than the punk-by-numbers crowd could ever hope to.

KIRK GEE

D'ANGELO

Brown Sugar (EMI)

D'Angelo's background and rise to fame read like a mythical story. Born Michael Archer, in Richmond, Virginia, the young prodigy cut his



D'Angelo

musical teeth playing in his father's church before moving to New York at the tender age of 18, where he won talent contests and started hanging out with Al B Shure, Tevin Campbell et al.

Now, at the ripe old age of 21, he's composed, written, arranged, produced and performed *Brown Sugar*, his first album. His gospel upbringing and the inspiration of old masters like Gaye, Robinson, Green and Wonder shine through in his sensually restrained, yet evocative vocal style. The title track is a prime example, with D'Angelo sexually crooning in a song that's actually 'about weed and getting lifted'.

His jazzed up reworking of Smokey's 'Cruisin'' shows where he's from and where he's at, and if

'Shit, Damn, Motherfucker' is urban betrayal, then healing is in the gospel roots of 'Higher'. Gifted, black, young — in that order; if there's to be a soul revival, D'Angelo will be at the forefront.

GEORGE KAY

THE FLAMING LIPS

Clouds Taste Metallic
(Warners)

This is one of those albums you could judge by its cover (although you'd be a cloth-eared fool to do so). The artwork consists of stuck on photos, doodlings and 'computer poo', and the album is jam packed with plenty of the same — subtle instrumental doodlings and aural computer poo to keep you occupied on return listens, with detailed vocal pictures in front.

In space, no-one can hear you scream, but the Lips have been receiving signals from there again somehow, as space musings and space junk samples are in abundance here. On earth, people can hear you scream, which could explain the inspiration behind the most excellent 'Lightning Strikes the Postman' and 'Evil will Prevail'.

Saving the best for last is the thoroughly uplifting and aptly dubbed 'Aurally Excited Version' of 'Bad Days'. It's certainly a triumph among triumphs to end on, from the modern day Manciniesque intro and reprises up.

BRONWYN TRUDGEON

RANCID

Out Come the Wolves
(Epitaph)

If ye cannae do anything original at least make it better than the original.

Like Green Day, Rancid are one of those bands who, upon first hearing, give off a fetid whiff of musical deja vu. When called upon to recall just who they sound like, no names ever seem to crop up. Why? Simple, the bands Rancid sound like are no longer listened to by anybody under 30, thus making Rancid sound fresh and rocking; and here's a funny thing, Rancid do

actually sound fresh and rockin'! After years of never being able to afford enough Vaseline for a really good mohawk, the success Rancid deserve is finally coming to them.

The singers (there's two who bounce vocals off each other) sound like Americans trying to sound like a couple of British lads trying to sound American. (If ye didn't already know, Rancid are Yanks.) This Anglophilia extends to a number of skanking good times, where Rancid's attempts at ska can go just a wee bit too far, as the singer imitates some tosser from *Eastenders*. However, one pile of rotten vegetables among so much fresh fruit shouldn't spoil the nutritious chunky feast Rancid have served up.

KEVIN LIST



Rancid

RY COODER

Music by Ry Cooder
(Warner Bros)

The second Cooder compilation in a year, this time it's a double disc scoop from 15 years and a dozen or so movie soundtracks (although the *Paris Texas* theme was also included in the recent *Best Of*).

To be expected, the styles vary considerably: snarling aggression, sentimental Tex-Mex balladry and spooky guitar atmospherics follow in quick succession. He also made use of native American musicianship in last year's *Geronimo*.

Despite Cooder's selectivity here, away from the original contexts, the durability of this music varies too. Some of the richly textured instrumentals (*Alamo Bay*, for instance) are gorgeous, and destined to join the ranks of classic

movie themes. Some of the merely mood invoking pieces can soon sound banal.

PETER THOMSON

EXCEL

Seeking Refuge
(Malicious Vinyl)

After a very long fallow period (we're talking at least five years here), Venice Beach's beloved sons of very fast rock have returned. Ordinarily, this would prove a good chance to heap scorn on their no doubt well tanned shoulders, but *Seeking Refuge* is really a good record. Most importantly, Excel haven't come back trying to slide a grunge, industrial, or some such genre-friendly sound past us. What they have done is tightened and refined their 80s punk/metal sound into a far more controlled, savage and contemporary sound. There are still traces of that golden age of 'trash', but the band aren't flailing around the pit anymore, they're heading straight for your throat.

Less metal excess, but an unrelenting pace, tight choppy guitars, and vocals that are acquainted with melody make it an exhilarating ride, and it even gets a tad strange at times. HR of Bad Brains turns up and things get punkafarian. Best of all, there's 'Riptide', which is kind of psychedelic faux surf/metal, and, like the rest of this album, sounds cool as all hell. I just hope they manage to get another record out this decade.

KIRK GEE

STEREOLAB

Refried Ectoplasm
(Switched On Volume 2)
(Flying Nun)

What better way to plunge into Stereolab's exquisite aural waters than with this collection of impossibly obscure (in New Zealand, anyway) collection of singles, B-sides and unreleased curios. *Refried Ectoplasm* is the band's sixth album in half as many years — a sure sign of precocious talent and/or a policy of vigorously pursuing an agenda outside accepted 90s rock norms. Certainly, their rapid-fire release schedule and

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