

UNDERGROUND



Douglas Dobry

What are today's ten-year-olds thinking about: The death of John Wayne? The destruction of the Soviet Union? Big Fights? Answer: All of the above.

Column by
Judge I-Rankin'

Picking a space somewhere between après-punk aggravation and brooding power pop, **Honor Role** offers a rigorous discourse on the art of thinking. *The Pretty Song* neatly backlights the band's preoccupation with alienation, military-industrial overkill, Third World strife, and grinding boredom. Honor Role approaches each song as if it were a curious-looking rock on the beach, inspects it thoughtfully for a few minutes, then puts it down to search for another. In the process, Honor Role may or may not be satisfied with what they encounter. Generally, they're not pleased. "Anonymous Cave" starts out with hair-raising feedback abstractions à la Butthole Surfers which segue into a swinging, rock 'em, sock 'em punk epiphany about loneliness. Still more uneasiness about estrangement from others reappears on "Purgatory" as fidgety guitar filings lurk menacingly close to Eastern bass perforations. "Go Places" and "Shuffle" posit themselves as pre-hardcore madrigals concerned with the plight of the homeless and psychic inertia, respectively. Top-notch production lends an exquisite sparkling agony to Honor Role's punitive yet sage punch-ups. Go to the head of the class by contacting Honor Role at 9 South Pine St., Richmond, VA 23220.

Mighty Sphincter may rank as the only band that can honestly point to the old *Dark Shadows* TV series as a major influence. Their album, *The New Manson Family*, wallows chest deep in an ecstasy of bile, sputum, severed penises, skulls with glowing eyes, hideous mutants under the bed, and way-gone nightmares that make a bad PCP trip look like a walk on the beach. No wonder—it's produced by Alice Cooper. On the title cut, Sphincter idolizes the exploits of the Manson family. Doug Clark's heavily flanged guitar propels the song substance into a sonic canyon of minor-chord deception and perversion. Scary stuff this, especially when Sphincter trashes Charlie Manson's fave Beatles tune "Helter Skelter." If you've ever wondered what standing in the exhaust of a 747 at full-throttle while staring at a Heironymus Bosch triptych sounds like—and who hasn't—this one's for you. Consider yourself warned. Contact Mighty Sphincter in their caskets at P.O. Box 23316, Phoenix, AZ 85063.

Homelessness tends to be a secret theme of the blues, but don't tell **The Heartfixers**. They've sho'nuff found a home on *Cool On It*, a bracing mojo-blues affirmation dosed with rock 'n' roll. Guitarist Tinsley Ellis



picks, clicks, and kicks out blues-based originals alongside astute cover versions of Bo Diddley's "Hong Kong, Mississippi" and Chuck Berry's classic "Tulane." "Time to Quit" highlights Ellis's aerobic blues finesse backed by answering sax mournings. The title cut, "Greenwood Chainsaw Boogie," and "Drivin' Woman" find the

Heartfixers in well-explored territory—rock 'n' booze riffing suffused with a beery, sweaty ambience. Surprise knockout cut is Ellis's cover of Leo Kottke's "Sailor's Grave on the Prairie." Contact the Heartfixers through Landslide Records, 450 14th St. NW, Suite 201, Atlanta, GA 30318.

Who is **Human Skab** and why is he saying rad things about Russians, Skeletor, Hitler, and John Wayne? Human Skab is a ten-year-old mowhawked kid who uses *Thunderhips and Saddlebags* as a teetering platform to rant and rave in prepubescent dementia on such songs as "Phone Goof Off," "Eat My Scabs/Song of the Century," "We Need to Destroy the Soviet Union," and "Grandest Fight of the Year." Bashing spoons on buckets and hanging on a poorly tuned upright piano, Skab emits screwy non-sequiturs like "Your wife is almost a widow but she doesn't know it," or "Five people digging through a mountain, One person left playing the piano." Jeepers, these kids today! If Captain Beefheart were ten years old, this is what he'd probably sound like. A must for adults who want to know what kids are thinking about. Human Skab will be delighted to hear from you at P.O. Box 1130, Elma, WA 98541.



With all the African musicians recording in and/or expatriating to France (Alfa Blondie, Fela Kuti, King Sunny, et. al.), it was inevitable that pan-Africanisms would filter through into French musicians' compositions. **Ramuntcho Matta** uses basic African (and some Indian) motifs as a base upon which to build spatio-aural tapestries that verge on minimalist jazz. *24 Hrs.* is a concept album that uses music as metaphors for parts of the day. All of side two is given over to "Night," a more playful extrapolation that is alternately forbidding and exciting. Manipulation of mood forms the crux of Matta's night-tripping as tablas ripple through xylophone tingling, lonesome sax filigrees, Miles Davis-ish trumpet cascades, and whispered vocal exhalations. Excellent background music for seduction scenes. Write to Ramuntcho Matta at Madrigal France, 140 rue de Théâtre, 75015, Paris, France.

Uniformly good compilations of progressively damaged underground bands are always a welcome discovery; *Passed Normal* is no exception. **Skeleton Crew** gets the album off to an abrasive start with live versions of "Rombo," "Killing Time," and "Man or Money," all three of which are used by Crew members Fred Frith and Tom Cora to explore the various noises that can be extracted from stringed instruments by picking, strumming, banging, slapping, and torturing them. Kind of like having a root canal without anaesthesia. **The Sediments** rip out Zappa-esque folderol with "Capitalism," a queasy rock-oriented ditty that has nothing to

Above left: *Honor Role* in search of a curious-looking rock; Below left: *Human Skab* puts his foot in it; Above: RuPaul hits the wall; Right: *Mighty Sphincter* (L-R) Wayne Frost, Doug Clark, Greg Hynes, Bil Yanok.

Now Explosion sports the worst in '70s apparel—foot-wide lapels, ghastly leisure-suit polyester, gold chains, and four-inch platforms.



do with supply-side economics. Psychedelic C&W bastardizers **Shockabilly** do their best to irritate racists with the over-amped "I Keep the KKK in Line" and then proceed to take an extended hallucinatory vacation during "Shockabilly Weekend." All told, there are 58 minutes of exhilarating damage and improvisational doodlings, enough to satisfy everyone on your Christmas list. *Passed Normal* is available by sending \$7 to FOT Records, P.O. Box 4071, Bloomington, IL 61702-4071.

RuPaul is *Star Booty* and vice versa. *Star Booty* is the soundtrack to the film of the same name starring RuPaul (in real life a black drag artist from Atlanta) as a down 'n' out ex-model who manages to blast out of the ghetto to become a wowie-zowie model one more time. *Star Booty* is unctuous gay discoid funk with sarcastic lyrics. "I was the one who told you we should check into another scene," coos RuPaul sardonically to his girlfriend in "Ghetto Love," a lachrymose tale of Prince-ly romance and forgotten promises. "Ernestine's Rap" admonishes "I can tell by your knees you eat commodity cheese" while a ferocious slap-funk bass crushes the beat into a greasy spot on the dance floor. RuPaul's material is influenced by the trashy blaxploitation films of the early '70s, which he attacks with biting accuracy on the title cut and

"You Want Love." Along with the 6'7" RuPaul, fellow Atlantans and labelmates **Now Explosion** mine a similar synth-funk vein on *Bringin' It on Home to Daddy*—only their trashiness is lily-white and raised to a pornographic art form. Sporting the worst in '70s apparel—foot-wide lapels, ghastly leisure-suit polyester, gold chains by the meter, and four-inch platforms—the Now Explosion squirm their way across the jizzy underbelly of licentious porno-queen dalliances during "Bad, Bad, Bad." On "Nappy," a goofy chorus exhorts us to "Put your hands in the air and show your underarm hair!" while a robo-drum and synth do a two-and-a-half step with each other. Scratching your body in public never sounded so inviting. RuPaul and Now Explosion can both be had by writing to Funtone USA, Box 54472, Atlanta, GA 30308.

If you are involved in some sort of underground endeavor (band, solo project, whatever), send me the fruits of your labor. It could change someone's life. If you require a response of some sort, don't forget to enclose an S.A.S.E. Sorry, can't do reviews on a personal basis. My address is: Judge I-Rankin', 1338 E. Devonshire, Phoenix, AZ 85014. Go deh! P.S.: Many thanks to Brad Singer at Zia Records in Phoenix for making available the disks that have appeared in the last three Underground columns.