

JOHN TUCKER ONLINE - DECEMBER 2009

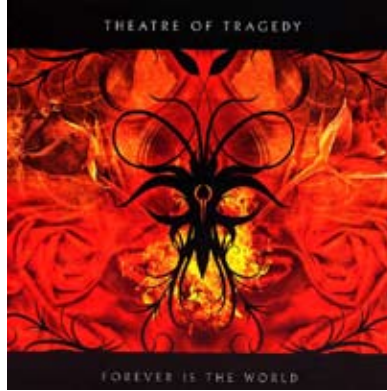


Starting where we left off last time, Germany's **Metalforce** recorded a new song and posted it on their website for free download at the end of October. The track, unsurprisingly called 'Halloween' is a rollicking four-minute rollercoaster ride of metal-meets-power-pop (think Lordi on the Eurovision Song Contest), a gonzo slab of head-shaking chest-pounding metal which won't change your life but is guaranteed to put a smile on your face. Cracking solo too. And it's free. Download it now – immediately – from www.metalforce.eu and within days you'll be humming it in the shower. Trust me on this.

"Here where I live in Stavanger, in south-west Norway, the scene really started in our city when **Theatre Of Tragedy** started doing well..." – Morten Veland, Sirenia, 2007

Fifteen years after changing their name from Le Reine Noir, Theatre Of Tragedy illustrate the fact that they are still well ahead of the pack with their seventh album 'Forever Is The World' (AFM Records). From the opening off-beat chords of 'Hide And Seek' (one of the most evocative songs you're likely to come across) to the final notes of the title cut – a simple, haunting ballad – this is one hell of an album. 'Forever Is The World' is one, maybe two, steps forward again from its predecessor (2006's 'Storm') – it's more organic, not so electronic, more goth than industrial – a move

which keeps them fresh and ably shows why they still head up the genre they unwittingly founded. The ten cuts on offer are easily accessible and generally quite straightforward – 'Hide And Seek' and the quirky driving 'Astray' notwithstanding – and



sound all the better for it. Great production too – guitars crash, the keyboards soar and the dual vocals of Nell Sigland and Raymond Rohonyi are used to quite startling effect at times: check out the slow-burning 'Illusions' and you'll see what I mean. Quite frankly, I can't see an album better than this coming out now – it is that good – and can see 'Forever Is The World' topping my 2009 album of the year poll. It really is that good. And there's a vinyl version too, which doesn't have a bonus track but a bonus side: now that's metal...

1987 was a pivotal year for **Anthrax**. Touted as one of the original big four of the Thrash scene, they lagged behind Metallica and Slayer in sales and Megadeth in publicity, but, at least for a time, all that changed with signing to Island and the release of 'Among The Living' that April. Sandwiched around that event came two impressive gigs recorded by the BBC and issued now under the title 'Caught In A Mosh' (Island). The band had opened their account in the UK in May 1986 with a one-off at the Hammersmith Palais and toured with Metallica that September, and were back at Hammersmith once more in February, this time headlin-

ing the prestigious Odeon with Metal Church and Crimson Glory in tow. Six months later they were at Donington, sandwiched between the opening pairing of Cinderella and W.A.S.P., and the second-half of Metallica, Dio and headliners Bon Jovi, and both of these slices of history are faithfully presented on this double disc. The first one is 62 minutes of the band live in London, which sounds like the full set or near as dammit anyway. For some reason I wasn't impressed on the night ("After a while it all got a bit tedious... Scott Ian, Frank Bello and Dan Spitz chased around



the stage with all the grace of a cow with its tail on fire...") which is bizarre because listening to it now it just sounds like a young band finally enjoying the success they deserve. It's a warts and all release, (listen to vocalist Joey Belladonna completely lose the plot towards the end of opener 'A.I.R.') but features some great performances of the likes of 'Madhouse', 'Metal Thrashing Mad' and the recent single 'I Am The Law', and the final run-out of 'Sabbath Bloody Sabbath', 'God Save The Queen' and 'Gung-Ho' justifies buying the album alone. Disc two showcases a different set as the 'Among The Living' material displaced some of the older songs, and truly reproduces the terrible muddy sound that we all got used to at Monsters Of Rock. Again, at 40 minutes it sounds pretty much like the full set (although the bizarre spectacle of Joey Bella-

donna famously shouting "Thank you, London" has certainly been excised), and you can't argue with 50,000 or whatever people singing along to 'Caught In A Mosh' or 'I Am The Law'. Oddly though, although 'I'm The Man' is listed on the CD (and I'm sure made a tedious appearance in the set – it was at this point that I gave up on the band for six years) it's not on the CD, the listed track 9 being the second half of 'A.I.R.'...

I do like things that come in a box. Maybe it's a guy thing, but I do like things that come in a box, and I'm a real sucker for CD singles collections. So bring on **Threshold's** 'Paradox – The Singles Collection' (direct-to-fans release – www.thresh.net), although, in truth it's not really a singles collection per se; as guitarist Karl Groom explains in the booklet, "The idea behind this particular release is to present the lead track or single from



each album. In addition there are two other tracks that are relevant to each album cycle. These include songs that didn't quite fit the style, 'B sides', live performances and rare recordings." So it's not a singles collection in the same way as others have been (ie presenting a full 7" or 12" record on CD with replica slipcase – Motörhead, Deep Purple, Him, etc), and purists could argue that you could have stick the whole lot on one double CD for £13 rather than presenting it as eight three-track CDs each in a cardboard slipcase for £25.00. So 'Paradox' is just that, really. But it does come in a box, and it is pretty snappy too. Things kick off with

'Paradox' (the best song White Sister never recorded), naturally enough, from 1993's 'Wounded Land' and run through to the radio edit of 'Pilot In The Sky Of Dreams' from the most recent 'Dead Reckoning'. Ignoring the 'A-sides' – given the complexities of the band's material and the way the songs build and build the edits are akin to aural premature ejaculation (and despite what Groom thinks, the particular edit of 'Mission Profile' included in the set is, frankly, pants) – the highlight has to be the live cut of 'The Ravages Of Time', omitted from the 'Surface To Stage' album because of time constraints. Elsewhere, the acoustic take of 'Safe To Fly' is a dainty little thing, and vocalist Damien Wilson's take on the Eastern-tinged 'Conceal The Face' and the 'urban version' of 'Voyager II' are well worth having in any collection. And did I mention that it comes in a box? And that it is quite snappy?

I'm also a sucker for compilation albums: '**25 & Alive**' is the proud boast of SPV Records, and worth shouting aloud too, given the company's recent financial difficulties and threat of insolvency. But a few tortured months later they're still doing what they do best, and '25 & Alive' is also the title of a 25



track double catalogue sampler, available at a budget price. To be fair, there's nothing really new here – the re-recordings of Saxon's train-spotting epic 'Princess Of The Night', and Molly Hatchet's 'Beatin' The Odds' don't really count, so it's just the unreleased 'Sweet Vampire Girl' by Engrained – but that's not

the point. Just pop either disc into the player and let the likes of Evergrey, Gamma Ray, Doro, Magnum and Demons & Wizards amongst others take you away from the daily grind for an hour or so. Priceless, really...

Another compilation package is Napalm Records' '**The Realm Of Napalm Records Vol. II**' which features a DVD (20 promo clips and five live cuts) as well as a bonus CD of largely different songs. I've said it before and I'll say it again, most music videos



are conceived and directed by people who are deranged, and, without wishing to take away anything from the songs they are supposed to visualise, they are generally at worst awful and at best shot through with naff fx. Katra's 'Beast Within' (the early low angle emphasising that she has a great pair of boots) is a great live-in-rehearsal clip marred by some footage in negative – her beast within, naturally – and Leaves' Eyes' 'My Destiny' is a pleasant stab at love and loss with the bizarre and literal enactment of the lyrics "I'm falling into the deep... Drowning in memories" as the lead actress flings herself from the cliffs into the murky waters below. Hmm... Votes for the best clip would have to be split between Saltatio Mortis's evocative and vaguely disturbing 'Edenbild' and Serenity's passionate 'Velatum' as runners-up, with the top dog award going to Hollenthon's 'Son Of Perdition', in which the choreographed dancers and the band footage just seem to work so well together; that said, why vocalist/guitarist Martin Schirenc lies in a bathtub of milk is

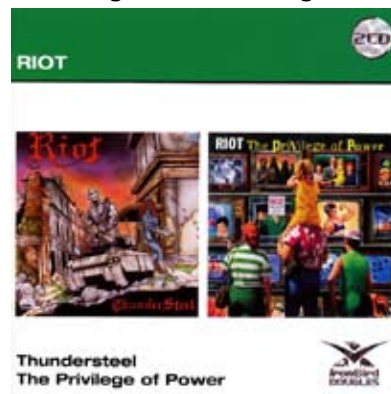
anyone's guess... The packaging declares an '18' rating (at least, I guess that's what it means) presumably either for Grave Digger's 'Ballad Of A Hangman' clip – terrorising a woman with scary monks and torture is so Eighties, and was crap even then – or for Saltatio Mortis singer Alea der Bescheidene's haircut. Saving the best till last, Van Canto pop up right at the end with 'Speed Of Light'. An a cappella band with just a lone drummer supporting three backing singers taking the part of the instruments and a male and female lead vocalist, it's pure genius, and it's metal, Jim, but not as we know it! The five live cuts feature the woeful Alestorm, one apiece from Arkona and Atrocity (and although the latter's 'Fade To Grey' is not strictly live as it's just live footage over the audio track; but with flamethrowers, caged dancers and general mayhem it does showcase how the band deliver the goods onstage) and two from Leaves' Eyes recent live video 'En Saga I Belgia'. The CD is another 75 minutes' worth, and although Alestorm's 'Keelhauled' duplicates its appearance from the DVD and 'My Destiny' and 'Edenbild' also double up, and there's nothing new on offer, the CD is still a worthy romp through the Napalm cupboard. The only real complaint about this set is that you need a degree in mechanical engineering to get the discs out: I accidentally snapped the packaging on day two. Just something to bear in mind...

In a similar vein but with easier to handle packaging comes AFM Records' 'All For Metal II' sampler, a double disc with 24 track DVD and a 17 song audio CD. Again, there's something for everyone on offer, and if U.D.O. ('Dominator') doesn't float your boat then maybe Elvenking ('Another Awful Hobs Tale') will. Given my current obsession the highlights are Theatre Of Tragedy and Brainstorm (with Almah's 'Magic Flame' not far behind), and it's such a shame that ToT don't have a cut on the DVD as well. Well, you can't please all

the people all the time...



Finally, December sees the release of a brace of double-packed classic CDs in a series called **Ironbird Doubles**, Ironbird being a division of Cherry Red. The label seems intent on spring-cleaning some long-lost classics that most of us of a certain age have lurking in the



darkest recesses of our collections, and kick things off with this little garden of treasures: Europe – 'Out Of This World' & 'Prisoners Of Paradise' (IBIRD2 0001 CD); Dangerous Toys – 'Dangerous Toys' & 'Hellacious Acres' (IBIRD2 0002 CD); Corrosion Of Conformity – 'Deliverance' & 'Wiseblood' (IBIRD2 0003 CD); Britny Fox – 'Britny Fox' & 'Boys In Heat' (IBIRD2 0004 CD); Riot – 'Thundersteel' & 'The Privilege Of Power' (IBIRD2 0005 CD). I'd forgotten how good the two Britny Fox albums are, having mentally filed them under 'lipstick and lace' rather than heads-down rock 'n' roll, and only recently had the pleasure of explaining Dangerous Toys' 'Sport'n A Woody' to a crowd of people at ProgPower Europe who'd never heard the phrase before. Top of the pile for me though are the Corrosion Of Conformity coupling

– two fab albums that still get regular spins around here – and Riot: 1988's 'Thundersteel' saw them back in business after their years with Rhett Forrester, although by this time only a bewigged Mark Reale remained from the original band, and its follow-up 'The Privilege Of Power' saw them trying – although not with a great deal of success, it has to be said – to expand their horizons with a vast amount of samples and tapes and a horn section. All the albums in this series are straight re-issues with new booklet notes and photos, although in addition 'Britny Fox' features two single edits of MTV faves 'Long Way To Love' and 'Livin' On The Edge'. Classic Eighties and Nineties metal: every home should have some.

See you next year!