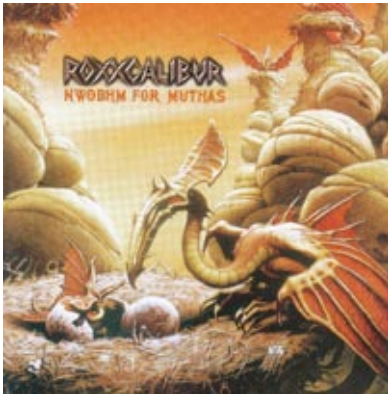


JOHN TUCKER ONLINE - MAY 2009



"We are no great fans of tribute bands or tribute albums," says **Roxxcalibur** drummer and driving force Neudi by way of introduction; "OK, you can enjoy an AC/DC covers band after several beers, but that's about it. But when my interest in the NWOBHM became an addiction about ten years ago the idea of a tribute band formed in my head. There are so many great songs that stayed unknown and many of them were of a poor sound quality due to the lack of money or label support. I never had a problem with this rough sound, but you can't play the ARC single 'War Of The Ring', for example, to a 16 year old metalhead today and expect him to enjoy it; but I was sure that he would enjoy the song itself. I tried to find musicians for that project, knowing that our singer Alexx had also been interested in the idea for some time. But it was in 2007, after we met Kalli from Abandonned and Mario that the thing got more concrete. We had a barbeque at my house and started listening to some old vinyl; a couple of days later we were rehearsing 'Seven Days of Splendour'." And so was born Roxxcalibur, and their debut album 'NWOBHM For Muthas' (LMP).

Taking their name from the rare NWOBHM compilation album of the same name (although inexplicably adding another 'x'), Roxxcalibur is the brainchild of Viron drummer and NWOBHM fanatic Neudi who roped in

bandmates Alexx Stahl (vocals) and Roger Dequis (guitars), Kalli Kaldschmidt (guitars) from thrash band Abandonned and bassist Mario Lang [ex-Into The Abyss]. 'NWOBHM For Muthas' steers well clear of the more well-known NWOBHM material, so there's nothing from Iron Maiden, Saxon or Def Leppard. Neudi also decided to avoid anything already 'properly' covered by Metallica, thus kicking the bulk of Diamond Head's back catalogue into touch!

In all, 'NWOBHM For Muthas' ably tackles songs by JJ's Powerhouse, Cloven Hoof, Jameson Raid, Bleak House, Jaguar, Dark Star, Trident, ARC, Witchfinder General, Savage, Radium, Chateaux and Grim Reaper, and visually the band do a light-hearted job of recreating both Raven's 'Rock Until You Drop' album cover and Witchfinder General's tasteless 'Friends Of Hell' involving a couple of cloaks, and sword, a whip and two inflatable dolls. Priceless, believe me!

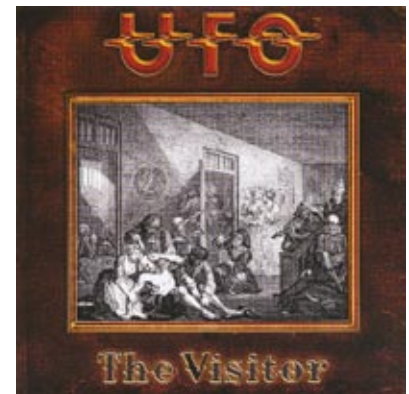
Whereas the guys in Roxxcalibur might dream about the Eighties, both **Magnum** and **UFO**



were out 'n' about and doing great business back then, and both have new albums out on SPV. Magnum's 'Into The Valley Of The Moon King' is everything you'd expect from the band with prog rock epics like the six-plus minutes of 'The Moon King' itself standing shoulder to shoulder with shorter, snappier cuts which - 'Feels Like Treason' for example - could easily be a

single. Except that these days the chances of Magnum getting back into the singles charts are absolutely zippo. '...Moon King' is not 'On A Storyteller's Night' and never will be - those days are long gone and the band have moved on - but still showcases some classic songwriting and evocative lyrics, and the middle order of 'No-One Knew His Name' and 'In My Mind's Eye' stand as loud 'n' proud as anything the band have ever come up with.

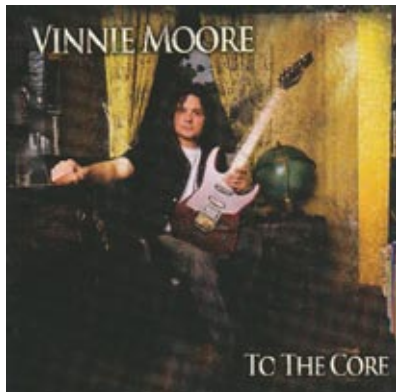
Meanwhile, UFO's 'The Visitor' marks their fortieth anniversary, although the band formed in



1969 by Phil Mogg, Pete Way, Mick Bolton and Andy Parker was very different to the one that finally broke through in 1974 with the addition of Metal Mickey and an album called 'Phenomenon'. Remarkably, 'The Visitor' still features Mogg and Parker (who's come and gone over the years), although Way was unable to participate in the recording because of liver disease: not at all pleasant, but face it, not surprising either. With the ever reliable keyboard player/guitarist Paul Raymond and new boy of six years Vinnie Moore rounding out the line-up, UFO are now reaping the rewards of three consecutive back-to-form albums and 'The Visitor' is set to continue the trend. Moore in particular has rejuvenated the band and Mogg has rarely sounded better as ably demonstrated on album opener 'Saving Me' - a clear statement of intent

if ever one was needed.

A man who obviously likes to keep busy, when he's not been playing with UFO guitarist **Vinnie Moore** has been playing with himself. The result is 'To The Core' (Mascot Records), Moore's eighth solo album since



1987's 'Mind's Eye'. Obviously a set of eleven instrumentals isn't going to be everyone's cup of tea, but Moore's playing is effusive and emotive, and 'To The Core' allows to showcase both the shredder and the more laid-back player on one disc. 'Panic Attack' is a great slow-burner, and 'Tailspin' takes off from a Satriani-ish funky groove and doodles away to the horizon. For those of us who can still remember buying Vicious Rumors' first album and hearing Moore's playing for the first time almost twenty-five years ago it's great to hear that he's still out there and turning it on.

Stream Of Passion are going to have to live with the tag of being an Arjen Lucassen side



project for many years to come, despite the fact that there's been four years between their 'Embrace The Storm' debut album and its follow-up 'The Flame Within' (Napalm Records)

and only vocalist Marcelo Bovio and bass player Johan van Stratum remain from that original band. Like most people I kind of assumed that without Lucassen they'd be dead in the water, but actually 'The Flame Within' is a really strong offering. Much as I hate to agree with a band's biography this time around the songs are indeed more mature, and overall offer more light and shade than those on 'Embrace The Storm'. Stream Of Passion's principal strength is Bovio herself, and on 'The Flame Within' her voice is absolutely beautiful. Just when you thought the metal female voices genre was over, Stream Of Passion come along and almost re-invent it from scratch. This is a great album, make no mistake.

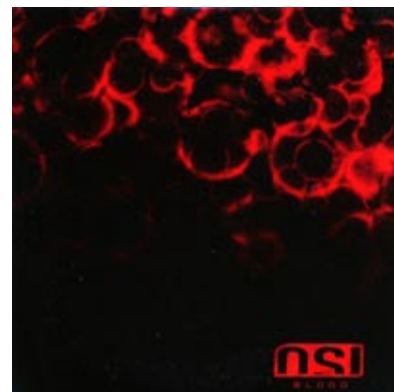
Another cracker from Napalm Records is the sixth album by **Trail Of Tears** 'Bloodstained



Endurance'. Just before the release of its predecessor 'Existencia' the band completely fell apart during a tour of Mexico in November 2006, so Trail of Tears 2009 is a very different beast with only vocalist Ronny Thorsen remaining from days gone by. 'Bloodstained Endurance' is a very likeable album indeed, darkly gothic as you'd expect but easily accessible, powerful yet melodic. The success of the album rests heavily on the dual vocals of Thorsen and Catherine Paulsen who incredible voice sounds not unlike Floor Jansen at times; in fact, After Forever would be a good point of reference. Eleven tracks – twelve on the almost obligatory limited edition digipack – and not one duff one amongst them; 'Fare-

well To sanity' is as good a pick as any to highlight the majesty of this album.

Kevin Moore and Jim Matheos continue their collaboration under the **O.S.I.** banner with 'Blood' (InsideOut/SPV). With their albums seemingly appearing on a three-year cycle, 'Blood' follows on from 2006's 'Free' and 2003's 'Office Of Strategic Influence' debut. A lot of people didn't really seem to get on with 'Free', but 'Blood' is a really great album, a dark, brooding



monster with a range of twists and turns and a variety of styles and influences; it's firmly Twenty-First century metal although nods abound to days gone by, particularly in the 'Houses Of the Holy'-ish 'Terminal' and the Zepelin-esque intro to the guitar driven 'Be The Hero'. This time around Porcupine Tree's Gavin Harrison sits behind the drum kit, and Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt puts in a guest appearance on vocals on penultimate track 'Stockholm' which together with the desperation-ridden haunting 'Radiologue' and upbeat opener 'The Escape Artist' is worth the price of the CD alone. Once again, there's a limited digipack version with a three-track bonus CD which should be well worth hunting down if only to see what they do with Elliott Smith's 'Christian Brothers'.

I've always had a soft spot for **Tim Ripper Owens** as I think he never seems to get the credit he deserves for his contributions to some of metal's great albums. His debut solo CD 'Play My Game' (SPV) might just rectify that situation. There's no band as such

backing him, just a stellar who's who including the likes of Steve Stevens, Michael Wilton, Chris Caffrey, Tony Franklin, Vinnie



Appice, Billy Sheehan, Rudy Sarzo... It's an impressive cast list and one which certainly seems to pull the best out of each of the album's twelve songs – it also makes for a nice marketing ploy just in case Owens' name doesn't have the desired pulling power. But as an album, 'Play My Game' is almost a throwback to the hard rock of the early Eighties with a nice twenty-first century sound and is as in-your-face as metal should be as tracks like 'The Light' and 'Death Race' ably testify. A minor quibble though is that there are too many sound effects for a purist like me!



To be fair, even without the obvious associations, the most natural point of reference for **Sons Of Seasons'** debut album 'Gods Of Vermin' (Napalm Records) is Kamelot. Sons Of Seasons is the brainchild of Oliver Palotai, probably best known as Kamelot's keyboard player (although a bit of a journeyman who's cut his teeth with a number of acts over the years), who formed Sons Of Seasons in January 2007 as an outlet for his own musical abilities. Roping in Blaze co-

hosts Luca Princiotta (guitars) and Daniel Schild (drums) in the first instance, bassist Jürgen Steinmetz joined up in the summer of 2007 and, after a false start, the vocalist's shoes were finally filled by Henning Basse from Metalium at the end of that year. The band's debut album was recorded off-and-on throughout 2008, although commitments meant that Princiotta left the band in November last year and on the album it is the multi-talented Palotai who handles the guitars. So is it any good? Well, of course it is: this is an hour's worth of pedigree material, expertly handled and well executed by consummate musicians. Even though the spectre of Kamelot looms large over a fair swathe of the album, Sons Of Seasons are more than able to carve out a kingdom of their own. The songs themselves are huge slabs of prog/power metal, and Basse's vocals in particular are a joy to listen to: check out his performance on 'Wheel Of Guilt' in particular, and then marvel at its Savatage-esque follow-on 'Belial's Tower', a massive drum-driven metal behemoth, epic in both form and delivery, and, later in the album, the short and fiery 'Dead Man's Shadows'. For a bit of light 'n' shade Epica's Simone Simons makes a guest appearance here and there, and the vocal duet in the dreamy ballad 'Wintersmith' is pretty much worth the price of the album by itself.

Although they've managed to lumber themselves with probably the worst name in metal, **Fairyland** are fast proving to be a force worth reckoning with. 'Score To A New Beginning' (Napalm Records) is the French outfit's third offering, and taken together with its predecessors 'Of Wars In Osyrhia' (2003) and 'Fall Of An Empire' (2006) completes a trilogy which, through the medium of epic, symphonic metal, tells of events in the fantasy realm of Osyrhia. No matter how turbulent the imaginary kingdom may be, it can't be any worse than the band itself; Fairyland was pretty much

reconfigured after the release of the first album, and then after 'Fall...' the second line-up also took a one-way trip to Mordor



leaving founder member Philippe Giordana as the last man standing. 'Score To A New Beginning' is therefore pretty much a solo album, with Giordana handling keyboards and acoustic guitars and various guests lending a helping hand, including the band's co-founder and original drummer Willdric Lievin thumping the tubs.

Pathosray's exceptionally talented Marco Sandron and Fabio D'Amore handle vocals and bass respectively, and a whole host of vocalists and guitarists are also able to add their ten pennyworth, including label mates Serenity's gifted frontman Georg Neuhauser. Musically, Fairyland sit fairly and squarely in the middle of the symphonic metal scene. There's the stirring intro ('Opening Credits') which gives way to a mighty ocean of pounding drums, massive keyboards and orchestration, huge vocals and superb guitar work. OK, so there's nothing new there in that description, but the tracks are exhilarating – they almost glow with excitement – passionately written and fervently performed. Songs like the rousing 'Assault On The Shore' and the soundscape 'Rise Of The Giants' show to a great degree Giordana's skill as both songwriter and instrumentalist, and together with the slower but none-less-powerful (and eminently likeable) 'A Soldier's Letter' with its massive chorus and singalong structure press all the buttons for me. I'm not sure I can praise this album highly enough: this

is as good as it gets, it truly is, and I can see this being in my 2009 Top Ten already.

'**Hindsight 2005 – 2007**' is Dutch metal female voices act A New Dawn's first DVD, and, as the band has been in a state of flux recently with only three



members left from the line-up that cut last year's 'Falling From Grace' album, it comes at a good time to draw a line under the past and look to the future. Of most interest are the three live videos; these are handcam shots so are pretty rough and ready, but a good indicator of the enthusiasm and excitement you get when A New Dawn take to the stage. The band's spin on the MFV genre is its use of two female singers and some death metal vocals thrown into the mix, and this is best illustrated in 'Ascension': shot from above the crowd, it shows to full effect the band's previous line-up with Monica Janssen handling the bass and grunts centre stage, flanked by vocalists Sanne Kliuters and Jamila Ifzaren with guitarists Elbert de Hoog and Willem Cremer fanning out either side of them, while behind them all Peter van Toren thumps the living daylights out his kit. Other cuts on offer are 'Darkness Falls' and 'Veil Of Charity' which shows the talented Elbert de Hoog throwing around a twin-necked guitar with apparent ease. Also containing a documentary about the band and a photo gallery, the fifty minute DVD is really more of a souvenir than a major release or promotional tool, but it's a good opportunity to find out more about the band. Visit www.anewdawnband.nl for ordering information.