

Record review wrap-up

'80s mainstays Oingo Boingo, Gabriel still first-rate

By JOHN RIGHTER
Of The Battalion Staff

I was asked recently what music I've been listening to over the past couple of months. I don't use tea leaves or a crystal ball, so just like everyone else, I don't always know what to expect when I buy an album. So in view of this uncertainty, I offer reviews of albums I've bought in the last month.

OINGO BOINGO *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* MCA Records

Lead Boingo man Danny Elfman is gaining stardom with his movie soundtracks, most notably for *Beetlejuice* and the Grammy-winning *Batman*. Fortunately, in light of all his success, Elfman hasn't abandoned one of the few, great new wave acts America has produced.

Since Elfman brought together seven of Los Angeles' best and most diverse musicians in the early '80s, Oingo Boingo has rocked and grooved through its mixture of quasi-big band and Latino-hip hop via the '80's funnel of British new wave.

Elfman's frequent hiatuses, coupled with the side projects of other Boingo members, most noticeably John Avila and Johnny "Vatos" Hernandez' Food For Feet, hasn't helped quantitatively, but qualitatively, Oingo Boingo is better than ever.

Not as fun and quirky as mid-80 releases *Nothing To Fear* and *Only A Lad*, *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* builds on 1987's *Boingo*, a refined, accessible sound that gives commercial radio the chance to sound cool.

Boingo's bottom-heavy rhythms and saxophone section couple with Elfman's smooth tenor vocals for a sound worthy of Billboard and Rolling Stone.

"Out Of Control," "Skin" and "Flesh 'N Blood" all have a Rick Dees "popability" to them. But this is Danny Elfman and Oingo Boingo, not Duran Duran or Bon Jovi. Popability, in this case, never sounded so right.

Unless you're someone who lives and dies by the mod beats of '80's new wave, then *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* should be one of your first picks for commercial, yet still Boingo-quality, grooving. It's as good as *Boingo* and still Danny Elfman — that means it never will be normal, but always will sound cool.

GORILLA BISCUITS

Start Today
Revelation Records

New York is fighting along with Washington D.C. to preserve America's stake in hardcore. Although far from dead, hardcore and the straight-edge movement is fluttering on the critical list.

Seven years ago, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Washington D.C. and New York were cornerstones for the aggressive and ambitious hardcore scene.

Drawing its courage from the English punk movement of the late '70's, America's contribution to the '80's (along with rap and acid-house dance) proved true to its anthem: Live fast, die young.

With the revival of Restless Records and Dischord, helped by newcomers Revelation and Caroline, hardcore has found a voice again.

And as before, the screams and stomps are serving as the gospel of inner-city white kids. The cream of the east coast crop is Youth of Today, Warzone and Gorilla Biscuits.

Gorilla Biscuits is not only the best new-hardcore group today, but one of the best-ever thrash bands in an American-dominated scene. After an EP and a couple of compilation efforts, Gorilla Biscuits has joined the straight-edge fighting grounds with the angry, moralizing of *Start Today*.

Start Today adds the modern touches of less bass, more guitar, and eases on the primal screams in favor of enunciation and melody.

Lead singer Civ owns a strong,



emotionally-tinged voice that is outdone only by Meister Ian MacKaye. Civ's surprising range and raspy chokes move fluidly through the machine-gun beats fired through the Biscuits' dual guitars.

Three songs are especially impressive. "New Direction" is a thrown fist that flies in the face of older hardcore acts who have sacrificed their auspicious beginnings in search of a more accessible sound.

"Now you're so ashamed, now I'm so ashamed of you. We believed the same thing ... New stage, new ideas. You don't have to make excuses for us. Sitting there looking back, I'm scared. Don't spoil the memories of the way things were."

"Degradation" joins the frenzied attempt of new hardcore acts to disclaim their ties to racism. "Forgotten" is hardcore at its best, consolidating angry tempos and self-righteous scolding, in this case attacking the self-serving attitude of today's youth.

Start Today is a chronicle of a lifestyle that is beyond empathy for most of us. It is hostility, class struggle and vigilantism for the ideal of right and wrong.

For the New York street kids it is an escape, a true alternative lifestyle for those who have few alternatives.

Hardcore wasn't meant to last, and it won't. But it's satisfying to see a group like Gorilla Biscuits kicking and screaming until the end.

TEN HANDS

The Big One Is Coming
ESG Records

Ten Hands is the leader in the Texas sweep towards tight funk. Widely recognized as Texas' top

unsigned act, the fivesome recently finished the follow-up to 1988's *Kung Fu ... That's What I Like*.

The Big One Is Coming is the same fusion of eclectic funk and satire that catapulted the former North Texas University group to its teetering position.

Their innovative sound is wedged in the wackiness of Frank Zappa, surrounded by the sounds of Camper Van Beethoven, Bad Mutha Goose and Peter Gabriel.

Ten Hand's strength undoubtedly lies in their arrangements of catch-all percussion, jangly guitar, pounding drums and the unusual bass tones of Gary Muller's Chapman Stick.

Meanwhile, keyboardist Paul Slavens adds his hoarse whims that tend to become tiresome at their more absurd moments.

The Big One Is Coming splits between Zappa grooves and soft asides reminiscent of Gabriel. The romanticized "World With No Money," the mocking "Moses In My Life" and the unexplainable "Little Man In My Head" are the album's highlights.

Musically, Ten Hands is excellent, and they only fall short on the vocal arrangements when Slavens is allowed to really ham it up.

Lyrical, they can be extremely funny on songs such as "Jimbo, The Gay Methodist Minister," (definite anti-religious overtones can be found throughout the album), touching on "You Are My Fix" and just plain stupid on "Amoeba."

Obviously, Ten Hands is hoping the big one (record deal, that is) is really coming. Their new album is a strong, sometimes great, independent release that astutely was recorded live.

Anyone who has seen the group perform knows that live is the only way to hear them. Expect great things from Ten Hands in the future.

PETER GABRIEL

Passion
Geffen Records

The Grammy-winning soundtrack to "The Last Temptation of Christ" is not as controversial as the movie.

In fact, it is so universally appli-

cable that Gabriel decided to add extra music to the disc and name it *Passion*, a befitting title that was director Martin Scorsese's working name for "Temptation."

Three years ago, Gabriel released the spectacular *So*. Since then, he seems to have become bored with the conventions of pop music.

But even devoid of vocals (expect background cries and chants on "Passion"), *Passion* is a work of art that only Gabriel could concoct. Why else does everyone from Kate Bush to Brian Eno to Laurie Anderson end up collaborating with him?

Although the album is not a true soundtrack, it flows like a continual piece that probably was devised for a longer version of "The Last Temptation Of Christ."

The tempos are based on Gabriel's fascination with North African sounds and rhythms. Violins, flutes, oboes and a bizarre arrangement of African instruments create the mystical atmosphere that is chilled by the hums and cries of Gabriel, Yossou N' Dour and a cast of African session men.

Gabriel deserves compliments for his collaborations with musicians from Africa and South America. The distinctive sound developed on *So* and *Birdy* (another movie score) now is copied heavily by a rock industry that used to shun ethnic flavor.

With luck, Gabriel will find time to revitalize his solo career. The one-time frontman of Genesis has a voice worthy of these sounds of *Passion*.

HOUSE OF FREAKS

All My Friends
Rhino Records

All My Friends is the second release in the past year for the folk-punk duo known as House Of Freaks.

The combo finished the critically-acclaimed *Tantilla* last spring and rounded up leftover tracks and a couple of new singles for this 6-song EP.

Guitarist and vocalist Bryan Harvey and drummer Johnny Hott offer the usual manic beats that rely on a simple guitar format with an all-hell-is-breaking-loose drum sound.

On *All My Friends*, hired hands such as trumpet player Paul Wat-

son and saxophonist Zip Irvin add a little pizzazz to the usual punch.

"Pass Me The Gun" is a song reminiscent of John Lennon's "Happiness Is A Warm Gun." The arrangement is extremely simple, but changes tempos throughout to give it more life.

"This Old Town" and "You Can't Change the World Anymore" are mellow, night club numbers. "Meet Your Heroes," a satire on fandom and glorification that borders between cynicism and jealousy, is the album's highlight.

"Look in their eyes, stand in their shoes. Put them on the ground right next to you. So many jerks and so many fools. They'll make you laugh when you meet your heroes."

The album works best when it gets down and dirty on "Meet your Heroes" than on the wine-and-dance theme "You Can't change The World Anymore."

All My Friends is obviously a

the group's metamorphosis from an early thrash band to a kind of blue-collar Elvis Costello. The entire way, however, the Minutemen based their lyrics on Boon's short, symbolic spiels fraught with political ambiguity.

Although their later efforts paved the way for FIREHOSE, it was their early work that gained them recognition along with Husker Du as America's blue-collar spokesmen.

The recommendation here is for *Post-Mersh Vol. 1 & 3* that feature their first six releases (oddly, the later albums are contained on Vol. 2).

Particularly important is the two recordings of *The Punch Line* and *What Makes A Man Start Fires?* on Vol. 1.

In fact, if you were to buy Vol. 1 and the remarkable *Double Nickels On The Dime*, you would have all the necessary material for a Minutemen collection.

The Minutemen was one of the



closet cleaner and not equal to *Tantilla*. Recommended only to House Of Freaks freaks.

MINUTEMEN

Post Mersh
SST Records

Post Mersh is a trio of collections (Vol. 1, 2 & 3) from a group forced to disband abruptly in the wake of the death of guitarist and vocalist David Boon.

Bass player Mike Watt and drummer George Hurley have moved on to form the critically-acclaimed FIREHOSE, a group that recently saw its third release *FROMOHIO* soar up the college charts.

The three volumes chronicle

most important alternative bands of the '80s. They were also one of the first. *The Punch Line* was the first full-length release on America's groundbreaking SST label.

The *Post Mersh* collection is an excellent opportunity to approximate yourself to a segment of America's underground from the early '80s.

The sound quality is improved from the original recordings, and grouped together, the albums cost a third of their normal price. But hearing bassist extraordinaire Watt on two continuous albums is worth any price.

Post Mersh is a must if you pride yourself on alternative thought.

'Men Don't Leave' gives tribute to family strength

By TODD STONE
Of The Battalion Staff

"Men Don't Leave" is a quality film that evokes warm-hearted tears and gentle laughs without the typical Hollywood manipulation.

Fine performances and a sincere screenplay add depth and originality to the film's conventional storyline.

Beth, played by Jessica Lange, is a middle-class housewife and caring mother of two sons. Her husband, John, has provided the family with a home, love for his sons and security for his wife.

The sons are completely devoted to their father, and Beth looks at John as though he were the one reason she wakes up every morning. He is the nucleus of the family, the person who solves their problems.

Of course, for the sake of plot development, this secure family life is too good to last. One evening, John is called to work because of an emergency. When he drives away with Beth anxiously watching, you know he isn't coming back.

Suddenly, Beth is a widow, and her sons are without a father.

John was a good provider, but he failed to leave life insurance for the family. His legacy included a \$63,000 debt, and Beth doesn't have the education or training to get a \$63,000 job.

Beth is forced to sell John's truck, which her 17-year-old son, Chris (Chris O'Donnell), considers worse than robbing his father's grave. Then, she must sell the house and uproot the family from the peaceful suburbs

MEN DON'T LEAVE

Starring Jessica Lange and Joan Cusack
Directed by Paul Brickman
Rated PG-13

to downtown Baltimore.

She gets a job at a gourmet food store, but her boss treats her like a worthless errand girl, which makes working there unbearable.

Further, Beth is attracted to an avant-garde musician, Charlie (Arliss Howard), but she is too insecure to begin a relationship.

The move from a small town to an inner-urban lifestyle is intimidating and upsetting to the nine-year-old son, Matt, played by Charlie Korsmo.

Matt meets a kid who steals videocassette recorders, and the two start selling their stolen recorders for extra money. Matt wants to buy lottery tickets with his share of the loot, so he can win enough money for his mother to buy back the family home.

Chris falls for a nurse, Jody (Joan Cusack), who is in her 20s, and they begin an affair. Jody is kind and caring, but her airhead sweetness has the same effect as fingernails scraping across a chalkboard.

Cusack is simply wonderful in this role, and she makes Jody the most memorable character in this movie. In comparison with Lange's performance as Beth, Cusack's prominence is a grand achievement.

Beth is overcome by her problems and

grief. She enters a deep depression and stays in bed for five days.

Ironically, it is Jody who comes to her aid. The interplay between Beth and Jody is grand. Jody coaxes Beth out of her depression, despite Beth's unwillingness to cooperate.

The theme of the film seems to be that the family must endure. It does, although the characters go through significant transitions.

Beth wants to be more than a mother, and she tries to develop her own accomplishments. Chris is entering adulthood and discovering his sexuality. Matt just wants the security of a family again.

Lange is superb as Beth, who desperately wants to keep her family together and develop as an individual. Cusack steals the screen as the nauseating but caring nurse, and Howard is charming as Charlie.

Newcomer O'Donnell has surprising range as the troubled older son, Chris. One of the most moving scenes of the movie is when Chris desperately pleads with Charlie to help his mother. Korsmo is equally effective as Matt.

Director and co-screenplay writer Paul Brickman ("Risky Business") maintains a slow and meandering pace, which works because the audience focuses more on the characters.

The dialogue is snappy and believable. Brickman and co-screenwriter Barbara Benedeck's screenplay is a cinematic gem.

The ending of the film fails to sum up the action and developments of the movie, but by then, you already will be more than satisfied with "Men Don't Leave."

In Advance

Largest-ever BVSO to perform Wagner, Holst masterworks

More than 100 musicians will perform during the Brazos Valley Symphony Orchestra's concert Tuesday at 8 p.m. in Rudder Auditorium.

The concert will begin with Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" from "Die Walkure," followed by Wagner's "Arrival of the Guests at Wartburg" from "Tannhausen." Mezzo-soprano vocalist Dixie Fine Sellers will be featured during Gustav Mahler's "Songs of a Wayfarer."

The final composition will be Gustav Holst's "The Planets," accompanied by the Brazos Valley Choral. During the performance, pictures taken by the Voyager spacecraft will be projected above the orchestra.

During the intermission, Texas A&M President William Mobley will recognize University honors students who will be special guests.

Tickets are on sale at Rudder Box Office. Prices are \$12 for adults, \$10 for students and senior citizens and \$8 for children under age 12.

For more information, call 845-1234.

'Classics Illustrated' offer colorful alternatives to novels

NEW YORK (AP) — Classics Illustrated, those comic-book adaptations of classic works of literature, are back — in glossy print, and with new artwork and adaptations.

The original Classics Illustrated were produced on newsprint and stapled together. Publication began in 1941. The series ended in 1972.

At the height of its success, more than 25 million copies of Classics Illustrated were sold each month, with total sales at more than 1 billion cop-

ies worldwide, according to the Berkley Publishing Group.

The new Classics Illustrated are soft-cover, printed on glossy paper, generally in a 48-page format. Each adaptation has its own distinct style and look, depending on its text and artist.

The original Classics Illustrated urged readers to read the original texts.

The new series explains, "While they stand on their own merits, Clas-

sics Illustrated are not substitutes for the originals. Rather, they are artistic interpretations."

Eighteen titles are planned for release in 1990, including "Great Expectations," "Moby Dick," "Hamlet," "The Count of Monte Cristo" and "The Scarlet Letter."

Rick Obadiah, publisher of First Publishing in Chicago, says the text of the new Classics Illustrated is "suitable for educational, as well as general reading."

"The content of these books maintains the integrity of the original novels," he says, "but the wording is appropriate for a young adult audience."

Obadiah says low literacy rates were one factor in his firm's decision to produce the new series.

"People aren't reading enough," he says.

"We wanted to show that reading can be visually exciting, vibrant and entertaining."