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by Tom Conen

Phil Naro
self-titled
Independent

If you like anything by Aerosmith or Bon Jovi, then Phil Naro's nine-song tape is a must-buy. Naro's music is loaded with addictive, hooky choruses and melodies, yet retains a unique sound and feel.

In an era of rock stool, where a 'great' CD has only three good songs, Naro's indie tape plays like a greatest hits package. "I Can't Win" is a fantastic ballad. Though passionate and strong, it lacks the putrid clichés and cheesy commercial candy-fluff that has sullied the form. "I Am The Reason" is a high-energy twist of melodic rock. "I Sweat Better in the Dark" employs lyrical innuendo and catchy hooks to communicate no-

tions of schwing. Only "Hashimoti", due to its excessive repetition elicited displeasure.

The recording is album-ready, expertly capturing instruments, energy and spirit. Like Bon Jovi, Sebastian Bach and Steven Tyler, Naro puts everything into enunciation and delivery. His performance on "Down By the Whisky River" is outstanding - he belts out the opening lyrics as though they're his last.

Drew Masters, publisher of Canada's only national metal magazine, wrote: "This act is ready and should be signed." When an unsigned artist has better material than the recent efforts of Aerosmith, Bon Jovi and Def Leppard, who can disagree.

For a tape, send \$9 to Naro, 141 Davisville Ave. #1901, Toronto, ON M4G 1G7

Scorpions
Face the Heat
PolyGram

The Scorpions are ancient rockers trying to survive the grunge-inspired winds of change. Unfortunately, *Face the Heat* is, aside from a few gems, directionless guitar-solo rock noise. "Alien Nation" and "Unholy Alliance" combine great music with a meaningful message — both songs denounce the rise of racist gangs in Germany. Though the Scorpions are certified high-masters of the rock ballad, "Woman" and "Lonely Nights" disappoint. "Woman" soars vocally and generates terrific mood and tension but goes nowhere. "Lonely Nights" is rife with the kind of formula writing that steers people away from commercial rock radio. With only two killer tracks, fans are better served by the band's recent greatest hits compilation, *Best of Rockers and Ballads*.

Varga
Prototype
BMG

Metal music has suffered at the hands of talent-void Neanderthals, screeching goonie-squeezers, and dreamy escapists. While Voivod's material has been murky and nebulous, and Alice In Chains have merged grunge and metal, Varga is perhaps the clearest vision of heavy metal's next stage. Elements of Metallica, AIC, Queensryche, Faith No More, and a twist of the impossible make Varga amicable to most metal fans. Of eleven songs, a few are mediocre or overdone ("Self-Proclaimed Messiah") and some could use more multi-layered harmonies, but the result is still a powerful and challenging listen. "Greed" and "Goodbye-Boogaloo" are joy defined. With high-energy, strong bass, full range sound, and a myriad of variety in song structure and arrangement, Varga may define the next stage of metal.

Life of Agony
River Runs Red
Roadrunner Records

Despite four songs of grinding, crunchy grooves, most of this CD sounds repetitive, predictable and boring. The sound presents three themes: strong production, precision playing, and extreme bass rumble. Aside from redundant song structures, vocal delivery — a whine-like monotone croon — is the band's biggest drawback. The industry standard of three good songs per CD is in effect here. "Words and Music" and "Bad Seed" groove. "My Eyes" combines Nirvana-grunge with machine-gun metal riffage. Avoid the rest of the CD.

Arcade
self-titled
Sony

Arcade is the story of a joyous musical marriage. Ratt's Steven Percy joined Fred Coury of Cinderella. The name emerged from Percy's feeling that a video arcade is a vast magical place of wonder and variety, of escape: "You can play one game and, if you don't like it, just go to the next." With raw energy, Percy's trademark gritty vocals and evolved song-writing, the result is the best hard rock CD I've heard all year. While faithful to the current sound of LA rock, created by Van Halen and expanded by Motley Crüe and Ratt, some Arcade songs have incorporated a form of layered vocal harmonies à la Alice in Chains. The result is hit material. With full stories of strange characters and situations, the band has rejected formula for progress.

The axe-smash is the sheer energy of the music and vocal delivery. Tracks like "Calm Before the Storm" match anything by Motley Crüe. "Livin' Dangerously" is the anthem of all true party maniacs. "Screamin' S.O.S.", a song about a tough environment, threatens the English language with its intro of "Eeeeeow! Huhhh!..." Arcade's three industry-required ballads are emotive, none are wonky. Though "Cry No More" steals from Cinderella's "Not Your Fool" and borrows from a Christmas carol, the ballads that remain involve a personal experience: The loss of a father.

Modern rock fans can rejoice. In an age where baby-boomers rule radio, LA rock is still produced. Grab this CD or suffer.

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