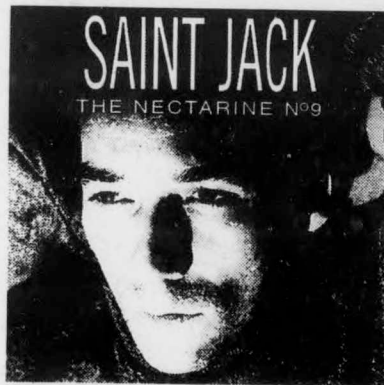


GENRECIDES

MICHAËL EDWARDS

SAME OLD, SAME OLD...

There are both good things and bad things about releasing albums at the end of the year. The main advantage is that people will remember it when they compile their 'Best Of The Year' lists; just the thing to sell a few more copies in that lucrative Christmas market. But therein lies the problem. If an album comes out just before Christmas, it tends to get lost in the glut of greatest hits CDs that are so popular during the festive season. Sad but true. So when Shake The Record Label released the



very wonderful *Saint Jack* by the equally wonderful Nectarine No. 9 in December, nobody seemed to notice at all. But now that all the tinsel has been put away for another year, it seems like as good a time as any to review this very special album. Maybe now it will get the attention that it will deserve.

The Nectarine No. 9 are a band whose praises I sing every single time they have a new release. And this one is their finest to date. *Saint Jack* is a collection of the most eccentric pop songs that you could find anywhere, and also very hard to describe. Some useful reference points might be Captain Beefheart and the Velvet Underground, but yet so much more than that. For instance, distorted guitars, distorted vocals, songs that you can't help singing and the words of questing poet, Jock Scott. There is a song called 'This Arsehole's Been Burned Too Many Times Before', which should more or less alert you to the fact that David Henderson (although he'll always be Davey to me...) is bitter. There is no disguising it. Nevertheless, there are a few moments of sweetness, such as 'Curdled Fragments,' which help to stop that knife in his back from twisting for a few minutes anyway. The work of a very tortured genius, and all the better for it. Yet another essential release from Postcard Recordings of Scotland.

If you read the review of the year last week, you might remember that I said I would spend a little time on the demise of Bristol's Sarah Records this week, and more specifically on their final release, *There And Back Again Lane*. It could essentially be called a greatest hits package if any of their bands ever really

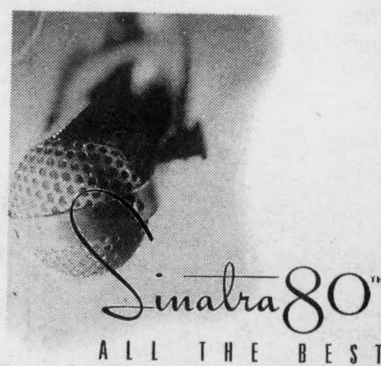
had a hit. Instead, it is a collection of songs with a booklet of sleeve notes that try to capture what Sarah Records was all about; the indie philosophy, the seven-inch single aesthetic, the joys of vinyl and general twee-ness. One of the most impressive things in retrospect is the roster of bands that they managed to assemble between 1987 and 1995 - Heavenly, The Field Mice, The Orchids and Blueboy to mention just a few. So *There And Back Again Lane* is a great way to sample some of the best indie music from the past decade. And it is also a fine way to show your respect for the very sad departure of Sarah Records - may she rest in peace.

Staying with the world of indie music, Vancouver's Mint Records have just sneaked out a couple of new releases. First up is a split EP entitled (rather seasonally) *Summer Games* which features the finest in garagey rock from the Smugglers and the Hi-Fives. This is straight-forward stuff driven by twanging guitars and the odd spot of harmonies in the vocals. Nothing too complicated. There are two tracks from each band including the wonderfully titled 'I Need Your Lovin' Like A Chicken Needs An Oven (When I'm A Little Bit Hungry)', but the whole thing is over in under eight minutes. Still, never mind as there is a full-length album due from the Smugglers at the end of February, so this will tide you over until that arrives.



Mint's other release is one that comes from their alliance with California's Lookout Records. Thanks to this partnership, it has become a lot easier to pick up records by the likes of premier punk band, The Mr. T Experience. *Love Is Dead* is their

seventh album, and they continue to define the East Bay sound that they created 10 years ago (and bands like Green Day made famous). The songs on *Love Is Dead* are not the most cheerful in the whole wide world if you take a listen to the lyrics, but fortunately there is an underlying sense of humour (who could forget 'That Prozac Moment'...) which makes this a very enjoyable album. There may have been an awful lot of wannabees coming out of San Francisco in the past 10 years, but The Mr. T Experience can hold their own with any of them.



You probably noticed that Frank Sinatra turned 80 at the end of last year - it was hard to miss the special concert that they put on for him, even though it was kind of sad to watch. At this point in his life, Frank has become a parody of himself; he still might be able to perform concerts, but he is just going through the motions. I hate to be the one to say it (although I don't have any horses, so I feel relatively safe...), but he's not the man he used to be. And that has never been more obvious than when listening to the two releases put out for his birthday. First up is *All The Best* which collects 40 of his greatest hits. No big deal. Does the world really need another album of Frank's most famous songs? Well, if the recordings come from his glory days at Capitol Records then I can live with it. It really is a joy to hear such songs as 'Come Fly With Me' and 'Night And Day' being performed as only Sinatra can. Wonderful stuff. For a total contrast, listen to *Live In Concert*, recorded last year. The delivery is stilted, and, in comparison to his work from the Fifties and early Sixties, is boring. Then you have to sit through yet another version of 'My Way', this time recorded

with Luciano Pavarotti. Sigh. Do yourself a favour and pick up *All The Best*, and try to forget all about the live disc.



And finally this week, it is cartoon time. *Saturday Morning Cartoons' Greatest Hits* to be precise. Yup, it's another of those wacky compilations

where all your favourite bands (the Ramones, Matthew Sweet, Liz Phair, etc., etc.) performs the theme tunes to the likes of Scooby Doo, Josie and The Pussycats, Spiderman and Hong Kong Phooey. Even although I come from the wrong side of the Atlantic to recognise all of these songs, I did manage to sing along to Frente's version of Pebbles and Bam Bam's "big hit" 'Open Up Your Heart And Let The Sun Shine In' (they do provide lyrics for all tracks) - such happy memories. The only bad track is when Wax try to pull off 'Happy, Happy, Joy, Joy'. Quite horrible. If you skip that track, you will find yourself smiling for no inexplicable reason every time you listen to this album. More fun than it should be, but probably not for very long, as it won't stand up to too many repeated listens.

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