

Mark Cutler Dreams, Junior Varsity Arson Burns It Up



The best in local albums of 2013 and the best in January 2014 concerts

2013 was a strong year for local releases. People like these “Best of 2013” lists, but I question if anyone ever goes out and buys a record because of it. I guess the local New England releases that come to mind in no apparent order would have to include releases by White Dynamite, The Silks, Deer Tick, Six Star General, Malysa & The Liberators, Reverend Bastien, Throwing Muses, Ravi Shavi, Brown Bird and Northern Lands. Maybe I’ll go into more depth in an online column, but who has time for that right now? In fact, 2013 was such a busy year that there are two new releases that came in at the end of the year that I haven’t gotten a chance to review. So let’s get to that, stat!

Mark Cutler - Dreamland (75orLess Records)

After recently quitting his day job to be a fulltime musician, Mark Cutler hunkered down to record *Dreamland*, a decidedly more quiet and intimate album compared to his recent releases *Sweet Pain* and *Red* (both on 75orLess Records). Cutler tells me he recorded the album in his house and mostly by himself with cameos from his always formidable Men of Great Courage band. One doesn’t have to wait long to see the new direction: the first tune, “Doing Things That We Like To Do” has a lazy, peaceful strumming guitar around a campfire kind of feel. “Tankful of Gas” has a decidedly acoustic blues meets folk feel, with buzzing slide guitars. “Circle To a Square” reminds me of the 60’s folk of early Donovan, before he started singing about important stuff... you know, like the hurdy-gurdy man and witching season. The title track is my favorite on the record with a great melody that I can hum all day. “Too Much Fun” is a more upbeat rocker, while retaining the stripped down feel of the rest of the rest of *Dreamland*. “We Don’t Do That Stuff No More” has the feel of Tom Petty blues ballad. The theme of

nostalgia runs through much of Dreamland, but probably never more than on the closing, "I'll Play For You," where Cutler weaves his tale of days past over a simple beat. It works. Dreamland may not be your typical get ready to rage on a Saturday night record, but it sure sounds great on a Sunday afternoon!

Junior Varsity Arson - Self Titled EP (75orLess Records)

Every now and again I get a new biscuit and look at it and say what the hell is this? Case in point, when something called Junior Varsity Arson came in. So I checked out their one sheet that describes the band as "Lonely Guy Rock." They go on to describe themselves as a soundtrack for men who are banned from certain establishments, with endless theories and endless amounts of time to explain those theories.

Okay, maybe I'll actually like this.

Truth is, Junior Varsity Arson is a local super group of sorts, composed of Guy Benoit (Thee Hydrogen Terrors), Don Sanders (Medicine Ball, The Masons), Dave Narcizo (Throwing Muses), and Kraig Jordan (The Masons). Junior Varsity Arson is a little twisted in a fun indie rock way. The EP kicks off with "Her Parents Love Me," chock full of lyrical gems like, "Her parents love me, I'm such a big improvement over the white supremacist." Indie rock is a genre chock full of people that take themselves too seriously. That's why it's refreshing to come across something like Junior Varsity Arson, that's lighthearted and still rocks. "Brown Jacket and Purple Keds" reminds me a little of the Dead Milkman as it chronicles the lonely man that Junior Varsity Arson proclaims to be the soundtrack for. "Hippy Dippy Milk Man" has an anthem, '60s spy feel with the keyboards. "Skull Collection" has an '80s alternative rock feel, while the song chronicles getting broken into and having one's skull collection stolen. "I'm Hooked" is Junior Varsity Arson's alternative dance number, that has a little bit of a psychedelic feel. What I like about Junior Varsity Arson most is they have personality both lyrically and musically, that makes each song memorable.

Shows to look forward to:

Hellbound Glory

Nothing like some old fashioned country music to warm you up from the winter's freeze and that is exactly what you'll get when Hellbound Glory invade Olneyville (aka Nashville North.) Hellbound Glory doesn't bother pretending to do anything but straight, old school country, which I respect, when done well. It's when people try to modernize it or meld it into Americana or pop that the whole thing goes to shit. Get there early to catch the local openers, Jay Berndt & The Orphans and Dog Day Afternoon - I'm as excited to see them as the headliner!

Hellbound Glory, Jay Berndt & The Orphans, and Dog Day Afternoon will be at Fete on January 9.

The Creepshow

The Creepshow are a female-fronted punk psychobilly band from the hot bed of horror that is Toronto. Truth is, I know nothing about Toronto's music scene, but they do elect crack heads mayor. That's a hint to expect something very disturbingly wrong with those people, right? Beside the headliner, this bill is stacked locally with the roots 'n' roll of The Throttles, the female fronted surf garage of The Evil Streaks, and the punk-a-billy of Tony Jones & The Cretin 3. I'd go out just to catch any one of the bands on this show by themselves.

The Creepshow, The Throttles, The Evil Streaks, and Tony Jones and The Cretin 3 bring the rock to Fete on January 22.

Marshall Crenshaw and The Bottle Rockets

I actually saw this tour the last time these two acts toured together, and stopped at The Narrows.

Marshall Crenshaw enjoyed quite a bit of success in the 1980s, as kind of an offbeat power pop solo

artist with hits like "Someday, Someway." Crenshaw has been plugging along ever since and will have The Bottle Rockets as his backing band for the night. Don't miss The Bottle Rockets' opening set as they completely blew me away last time through town. Check out their first two records (The Bottle Rockets and The Brooklyn Side), which were recently re-released with bonus cuts on Bloodshot Records. Standout cuts include "Lonely Cowboy," which comes across as a redneck version of Warren Zevon, "Gravity Falls," which is my favorite of their tunes, and "Stuck in a Rut," which reminds me of Crazy Horse era Neil Young. The Bottle Rockets are like a country version of The Hold Steady. Part country twang, part rock 'n' roll, The Bottle Rockets are just an all-around great band. Even the bonus cuts on the two CD set are killers, with standouts like "This is What It Sounds like When You're Listening to Lindsey Buckingham," and the punkish Radar Gun (1989 Chicken Truck Version) among the assorted gems. The Bottle Rockets reissues were among 2013's best! Marshall Crenshaw and The Bottle Rockets come to The Narrows come to The Narrows Center For The Arts in Fall River on January 23rd.

Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires

There are a lot of shows to be excited about in a season - hell, in any given week there a couple. That said, if you only leave the house to go to one show this winter, this is by far the one. Charles Bradley is just your average former James Brown impersonator, who decided, at the young age of 62, to release his debut, after hooking up with the folks at Daptone Records who brought you Sharon Jones. Dubbed the "Screaming Eagle of Soul," Bradley more than lives up to the name and still busts out all his patented James Brown dance moves, often while wearing a jumpsuit. I first caught Bradley at the Newport Folk Fest in 2012, and I was about to check out someone else, but his hype man (yes, the man has his own hype man) convinced me to stick around. I wasn't disappointed. Bradley mixes the soul of Al Green and Otis Redding with the energy of James Brown. His sophomore album, Victim of Love was one of last year's best. As a performer Bradley has an amazing ability to connect with the audience and share the joys and pains of life. Even if you're having an awful day, you should go because Bradley ends all his performances by going out in the crowd and hugging as many people as he can before his manager drags him away.

Charles Bradley & His Extraordinaires come to the Columbus Theatre in Providence on February 6.
Odds & Sods

SexCoffee, Spider Rockets, Nymphidels, Paryah are at Dusk on January 11. The Can't Nots, Torn Shorts, and Brainfruit are at AS220 on January 11. The monthly Alt-Nation listening Party returns to E & O Tap in Providence on January 16. I'll be selecting the music that always includes a mix of locals, hits, and obscurities from all genres of rock 'n' roll. Mother Falcon and The Kids are at The Columbus Theatre on January 17. Vudu Sister, Dr. Jones and The Shiners, Paddy Saul, and Dan Blakeslee are at AS220 on January 23. Deleted Arrows, Tinsel Teeth, and Phantom Glue will rock AS220 on January 31. Yellowcard and What's Eating Gilbert (featuring Chad from New Found Glory) will be at Lupo's on February 1. A couple of weekly nights to check out include The Funky Autocrats every Wednesday at The Parlour, and Dropout Night is back with a new home at The Spot every Monday. Congratulations to Deer Tick's John McCauley, who married Vanessa Carlton right before the New Year in a ceremony officiated by Stevie Nicks of Fleetwood Mac. Best wishes to the both you.

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