

Rock 'n' Roll Dreams Come Through: R.I.P. Jim Steinman

As a kid I hated music like Meat Loaf. I thought it was pompous and overdone, and I never liked having to hear that stupid "Paradise By The Dashboard Light" song at every wedding. It wasn't till years later that I was reading a review of a Meat Loaf concert that it all clicked and I realized the genius of Meat Loaf and of his songwriter, Jim Steinman. If the record label told him couldn't have seven choruses in a song, Steinman put nine choruses in. He curbstomped the idea of the 3-minute, radio-friendly pop song. In that respect, Steinman was more punk than Fugazi. Everything he did had great lyrics and dramatic storylines, and went against what pop songs are supposed to be. In addition to working with the Loaf, Steinman wrote the hits "Total Eclipse of The Heart" for Bonnie Tyler and "It's All Coming Back To Me Now" for Celine Dion. Sadly, Steinman recently passed away in Connecticut. But through his music, he will live forever.

The Living Pins — *Freaky Little Monster Children* EP

It's normal for bands to take a little time after their debut and second release. In the case of Austin psych-rockers The Living Pins, that little time translated into a quarter of a century. Was it worth the wait? I just hope nobody was holding their breath. *Freaky Little Monster Children* is like a basket of shiny psych-rock nuggets. "Jaguar" is fueled by a guitar riff reminiscent of "Honkey Tonk Women" with a chorus that sounds like '80s UK alternative rock on acid. "Downtown" sounds like the Strawberry Alarm Clock covering the Velvet Underground. My favorite track is "Raven" because the background effects sound like a jungle with searing guitars and the mystery and menace of singer/guitarists Pam Peltz and Carrie Clark's vocals floating through the moonlight. *Freaky Little Monster Children* is available now on Bandcamp.

Guided By Voices — *Earth Man Blues* (Rockathon Records)

Let's go from a band that had 25 years between releases to Guided By Voices, who is releasing their fourth album of this pandemic, *Earth Man Blues*. The press release describes the release as a magical cinematic album following the adventures of Harold Admore. I'd describe it as a great album that contains all the elements of classic Guided By Voices. *Earth Man Blues* is by far the best album of COVID-era GBV. From the unexpected circus-like breakdown on the opening track "Made Man" through the prog-rock madness of the closing "Child's Play," *Earth Man Blues* rocks like a tilt-a-whirl spinning through a funhouse. "The Disconnected Citizen" sounds like *Alien Lanes*-era GBV through a lens darkened by the millennium mayhem. The concept theme pops up from time to time like on "Dirty Kid School" where it sounds like *Tommy*-era The Who. "Sunshine Girl Hello" starts off like late '60s power pop before shapeshifting into an NRBQ rocker; it should not work, but somehow it does. Of course singer/songwriter Robert Pollard has been pulling off tricks like these since back when new episodes of "Cheers" were being filmed, but there is something different with *Earth Man Blues*. Pollard and the band haven't sounded this fresh and invigorated in years. I haven't really settled on a favorite track, but the album centerpiece is "Lights Out Memphis Egypt." It sounds like an indie prog-rock playing Deep Purple and Black Sabbath covers all within one song. *Earth Man Blues* captures the classic sound of Guided By Voices, but also sounds like it's from the future.

Dinosaur Jr. — *Sweep It Into Space*

I go back and forth on whether Dinosaur Jr. is the ultimate reunion success story. Since getting back together in 2005, they have released four albums and played hundreds of mesmerizing shows, but none of those albums are ones I'd ever want to go back and listen to. I wasn't expecting much from *Sweep It Into Space*, but just like that, Dinosaur Jr. hits you with their best album since *Hand It Over* from 1997. *Sweep It Into Space* was mostly produced by Kurt Vile till the pandemic hit and production shut down. Singer/Guitar wizard J. Mascis ended up finishing the recording alone. *Sweep It Into Space* starts off like the '70s — loud and out-of-focus, with jams like "I Ain't" and "To Be Waiting" made to be blasted out of a cassette deck in convertible speeding down the freeway. Mascis said he was listening to a lot of Thin Lizzy when recording *Sweep It Into Space*, and that comes through in the melodies beneath the thrash. "I Met The Stones" is a glimpse inside Mascis' mind as he wrestles with anxieties about meeting the Stones. It might be the oddest subject matter in the Dinosaur Jr. catalogue, but more importantly it RAWKS! The marriage of post-hardcore guitar and hooks on "Hide Another Round" makes for another classic Dino Jr. whammer jammer. "And Me" reminds me of *The Head on the Door*-era Cure, which, I guess considering Dinosaur covered "Just Like Heaven," isn't a leap too far. "Take It Back" has a keyboard-driven verse that sounds like something broken off of Phil Spector's wall of sound before blossoming into a power ballad. Bassist Lou Barlow contributes his usual two songs with the closing, "The Wonder," being the more compelling. Play this sucker loud!

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