

Summer Guide: The road to nowhere...

I was telling my friend Louie that I had to write a music summer guide and he responded, "Guide to what?" Good question, damned if I know. Maybe the best songs to listen to at the beach? That list for local music always starts with Neutral Nation's "Bad Music Beach" with honorable mention to Someday Providence's "Summertime in Rhode Island." Technically there is still The Mummies at Askew on August 23, but you'd get better odds at Twin River on roulette than whether that show happens. Sammy Hagar said live music should return to save the economy. He was willing to sacrifice himself for the benefit of his kids and grandkids. It makes sense. He had no problem sacrificing Van Halen. So ... fuck him, I can drive 55. Black Lives Matter. Here are some new tunes to crank up like the fireworks in the middle of the night.

Bob Mould – "American Crisis" (Merge Records)

Bob Dylan is the best lyricist in the history of rock 'n' roll. He even has a lyrically stunning new album out but, with all respect to Mr. Zimmerman and his chart-topping 17 minute song, he's not the Bob who came out of Minneapolis that the world needs now. I saw Mould solo in January in Fall River and he talked about coming of age as a gay male in the '80s, when the emerging AIDS crisis was referred to as "the gay cancer."

"American Crisis" starts off with this lyric: "To come of age in the '80s was bad enough, we were marginalized and demonized, I watched a lot of my generation die." And he is just getting started. "Wake up every day to see a nation in flames, we click and we tweet and we spread these tales of blame ... world turning darker everyday, in a fucked up USA." This song makes it feel like he was phoning it in with his old band, Husker Du, on *Zen Arcade*. *Zen Arcade* was one of the best records of the '80s. In under two and half minutes Mould and bandmates Jason Narducy and Jon Wurster power through more twists and turns than the Corkscrew at Rocky Point. In the fadeout Mould chants, "Silence was death, never forget." Yes. And vote!

steadystate – *Fast Machine*

I loved steadystate's debut EP, *Two Moons*, last year mostly because of the track, "Radiation," which exemplified great electro-alternative '80s rock 'n' roll. It took a while to appreciate the followup, *Fast Machine*, because it was kind of like going from Bowie's *Diamond Dogs* to *Low*. *Fast Machine* is trippy in both a psychedelic and melancholy manner, kind of like the times. I recommend checking out Tyna Calderone's (from Big Haired Sluts fame) video for the first single "Slider," which was shot in Providence right after the shutdown on their social media. Singer/Keyboardist Christian Calderon ponders whether "our nightmares will come alive, or will they clean up everything." The title track asks, "What's the point of no return?" while the band paints a foggy '80s electro-influenced wall of sound. The final track, "D+," isn't just my high school math grade, it starts slow till squalls of feedback usher in the beat. *Fast Machine* is the perfect EP to blast at the beach to chill between New Order and Jesus Jones.

Malyssa BellaRosa – *Affinity*

Malyssa BellaRosa has been a busy lady between this solo album and another record she's ready to drop

with her band, Sugar Cones. I was expecting a more mellow album in the vein of “these songs didn’t work with the band” type of thing, but *Affinity* ain’t afraid of a little rocking and a rolling. The opening, “Great Escape,” starts with BellaRosa’s smoky vocals that leads the listener into the titanic chorus about the need to get away. “All Used Up” is a tune that BellaRosa has done with one of her other bands, Malysa and The Liberators. I can’t say it is my favorite, but I get why it sticks around — when the song goes into the rocking part surfing a killer hook, I get the appeal. “Wanting More” reminds me of Bonnie Tyler with strings. As a huge fan of Jim Steinman’s songwriting, I love this! It only works because BellaRosa has the pipes to pull this off. “By My Side” has the neo-’60s garage strut reminiscent of Edwyn Collins “A Girl Like You.” “It’s Alright” is dirty guitar punk rock rave up. The closing “Groove With Me” is a meditative electro jam to fall asleep to on the beach under the stars.

Sick Pills — *Late Night Death Trip* (75orLess records)

Got this biscuit in the mail and after glancing at the song titles, I had to reach out to singer/guitarist Chris (Dr. Evil) Guaraldi to make sure he was okay. The song titles include “Wanna Die,” “Waiting To Die” and the title track. It turns out it was inspired by some health problems last year, including a late night ambulance trip. Thankfully Dr. Evil is doing better, and from the suffering came great art. The frantic opener, “Wanna Die” rips in a Husker Du pace before settling into a late ’90s breakdown. “One More Chance For Love” is another punk rave-up with a hook that recalls early The Replacements. “Waiting To Die” reminds me of ’90s The Queers and is infectious as hell — seriously, wear a face mask while listening. The title track has the frenetic backbeat like Funhouse-era Stooges, but at the same time, sounds nothing like them all. The CD version rounds out with a Devo cover in “Gates of Steel” and Q Lazzarus’ “Goodbye Horses” that was featured in *Silence of the Lambs*. *Late Night Death Trip* is the album to crank at the beach when one has had too much tequila the night before.

Blackletter — *Animal Farm*

Singer/Keyboardist Dave Laros told me this record was a reflection of the times and is his effort to make sense of it all. The release party for *Animal Farm* was to be the week everything shut down, so if the times were weird before, good luck with the next one, Laros. *Animal Farm* starts off with a ’70s rock strut with bassist Rob Shaggs holding down the low end before guitarist Vic Foley unleashes a bomb of guitar pyrotechnics on the title track that rival anything in Providence at 2am these days. “Vlad The Impaler” reminds me a lot of Blue Oyster Cult when they are not being sweet and singing about the Grim Reaper. “Murder on the Run” is my favorite on the album with Foley’s blues licks playing against Laros’ keyboards till the chorus that kicks any other power ballad to the curb. “Better Rain” reminds me of a cross between ’70s stoner rock and Kilgore Smudge. “Invisible Chains / The Waltz” has the title backward because it starts off with a waltz before undergoing a metamorphosis into early Queen at a freak show. *Animal Farm* is the record to put on the ghetto blaster at the beach for those who apply 110 SPF and ... it’s not enough.

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