

On Tracks—

A diverse look at the 'best' of the new albums

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Guest Writers

Joe Omnibus Reader: Hey guys, isn't it time for you to recommend to me, Joe Omnibus Reader, the latest and hottest in new vinyl? I hope you've got some good albums for my listening pleasure this go-round.

All: Why yes, Joe.

Jason: I'll go first. To begin with, I've got the swell new album from England's Julian Cope, entitled *St. Julian*. If you've heard him or his old group, The Teardrop Explodes, you'll know what to expect. If you haven't, here's a sort of capsule definition: He's a British eccentric in the tradition of Pink Floyd's Syd Barrett and Cope's contemporary, Robyn Hitchcock. His lyrics are written from a skewed point of view. Listen to this, from the title cut: "I met God in a car in a dreaming ankerside/And I was very unkind/I said 'I said you locked us out of forest and gave us a mind.'"

St. Julian's songs have a sort of fantastic science fiction imagery. Note titles like "Pulsar," "Eve's Volcano," "Planet Ride," and "Spacehopper," which is a sort of stellar version of Bo Diddley's "Roadrunner." The production is lush and full and accessible. It's pop, but not overly commercial-sounding. Some of the music is upbeat guitar rock, and some of it is lackadaisical pop, like "Planet Ride": "Well I think my world is fading fire/Fading world in a burning sky/Think my world is fading fire/I'm on fire in a burn,

burn, burn/Railing — Complaining." Cope doesn't seem to take his music too seriously. It doesn't sound frivolous, but he doesn't feel the need to act overly solemn and deep, like many of his contemporaries.

Alison: Enough of that British pop stuff. How about some music with meaning? How about the third album from East L.A.'s Los Lobos, *By the Light of the Moon*. It's finally here, and it's great. They've progressed tons from their first. There's less of the polka-accordion bop and more diversity here, including country, rockabilly and, of course, Los Lobos' own brand of Mexican-American rock. You've probably seen "Shakin' Shakin' Shakes" on MTV, Joe. The spice of that one is peppered throughout the album. But Los Lobos isn't confined to up-tempo, Tex-Mex-style rock. "Prenda del Alma" is a loving traditional number. And on "Set Me Free (Rosa Lee)" they shift into a Motown mode. Lead Lobo David Hidalgo is no Smokey Robinson, but there is definitely an echo of "Tears of a Clown" wafting through that song. "River of Fools" is another lovely one. An acoustic lament on immigration troubles ("Memories of a lovely past/A boat set into the wind/Drifting lost in waters of doubt/On a journey that has no end") that the Immigration

and Naturalization Service may not approve of, it's still a beautiful song. But the most powerful song on the album is "The Mess We're In." An intense song, it's made even stronger by great lyrics. Los Lobos touch on war ("Bombs are bursting in a far off land/Fire in the sky/ A soldier takes his stand/But who is to know about the rules men make/For what honor and for whose sake"), alcoholism, and the homeless. Great.

Jason: Why do you use one-word sentences?

Alison: Because.

Carolyn: But great lyrics aren't everything. Sometimes you just want to dance and have fun and the Fleshtones are just the band for that. It's been four long years since the Fleshtones have put out an album of new studio material, but now the wait is over — their new record *Fleshtones Vs. Reality* is here. The Fleshtones have overcome adversity (leaving I.R.S. records and joining a small independent record label) and have come up with their best yet.

The Fleshtones have long been known for their incredible live shows — sweaty, frenzied, uninhibited partay's. Unfortunately, the only way to really experience this and to see lead singer Peter Zarella dance (he's the greatest since James Brown) is to go see them live. But if you can't do this,

Fleshtones Vs. Reality comes the closest to capturing their true spirit (with the possible exception of their live album) on vinyl. You can't help but dance to this record, even if someone were to tie you up and drug you.

The Fleshtones' sound might be best described as '60s party rock meets mod. Although their songs may remind you of some of your favorite '60s tunes that use lots of organs and other '60s trappings, the Fleshtones update their sound with backup singers and plenty of horns. Just because all the tunes on *Fleshtones Vs. Reality* are very '60s-influenced does not mean they all sound the same. While "Another Direction" is fun-loving pop, "Way Down South" has a Southern rock flavor and "End of the Track" has a tough-guy sound.

The Fleshtones are lovable, wacky nuts — the kind of guys you'd love

to have at one of your parties, and this comes through in their lyrics. Sometimes they are uplifting: "It don't matter nothin's gonna bring me down." Sometimes they're romantic: "Whatever makes you happy I want to do it with you." My favorite lyrics are in "The Return of the Leather Kings": "Life's a fashion/someone screams/these are spectres from your dreams/who knows what the night shall bring/bow before the leather King." No, the Fleshtones aren't socially or politically conscious, nor do they ever approach deepness or sincerity. You'll probably be dancing too much to notice anyway.

Jason: I think Julian Cope is the best of the three because the music is so good.

Alison: Los Lobos — Musica buena y las palabras son fantasticas!

Carolyn: I like the Fleshtones' new album because it has a good beat.

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of about 45 other hearing-impaired students at Athens High but is much more mainstreamed than his counterparts, according to his grandmother. He never wears his hearing aid outside of the classroom, preferring to rely on lip-reading. He has gotten his driver's license and plans to go to a reputable university. UNC is his first choice.

His mainstreaming success could be due to the fact that his family has never made a big deal about his handicap. "We never even acknowledged that Tommy had a handicap," Tidbal said. "It just wasn't important."

And once you step out onto the mat, everyone is equal, at least until the end of the match.

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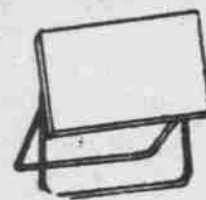


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