

fashion from more successful bands. 'We Came To Fight' is probably my favourite track. My least favourite is a cover of Survivor's 'Burning Heart', which should never have been allowed out of the studio, and the singing on '(I'm Not Ready To) Say Goodbye' makes me cringe.

Whilst my words have clearly highlighted the limitations, the songs themselves aren't too bad, and if a dedicated singer were to be used then the band could pick up fans.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5

MATT STEVENSON

LETZTE INSTANZ

'Morgenland'
Brachialromantik
AFM



If you crossed The Sisters Of Mercy with Norwegian pop stars A-ha and threw in a healthy dose of Rammstein, you'd come close to the sound that Letze Instanz present. Whilst the music has the energy and vocal tones that Rammstein are so well known for, the songs themselves are less intense and bring some of the keyboard styles from the Sisters, which give the tracks an added depth and more gothic sound. However, the variety in the tracks and the added 'special sauce' that the A-ha element brings to the mix make this a truly interesting experience.

Having spent the last few months learning Italian, because the Editor keeps sending me Italian language albums to review, I was eagerly expecting some more but no, curve ball time, and I'm presented with a brace of German releases, this being the first. So, once more I don't have a clue what's going on, but proof that the album is a growler is the fact that I find myself happily singing along to it. I'm assuming that my German is bad enough to not be understood by native speakers, so my sing along is safe, regardless of the lyrical content.

Musically, the songs are real ear worms, burrowing deep and bouncing around for hours, the biggest culprit being 'Disco D'Amour'. Even if your German is as bad as mine, I still defy you not to sing along to it as you listen to the album. The same can be said for the next track up, 'Mein Land'. A haunting song thanks to the cello and violin overlay, it's no wonder it has been chosen as one of the lead singles.

Interestingly, the opening track presented by the label to promote the album was 'Children', a composition that saw the band pair up with Israel's Orphaned Land. The song, an eight-minute epic is... not on the standard release of the album! I'm not sure about the logic here, but when a team-up like that is hyped, don't keep the track back and put it on the limited edition digipak edition only! A quick trip to YouTube and the emotive, black and white lyric video sees both bands intersecting perfectly. Dual vocals, plus the underlying middle eastern sounds that Orphaned Land bring to the song, mixed with the somber Letze Instanz sound make this a track that should have been on the main release. Minus one point for a bad decision!

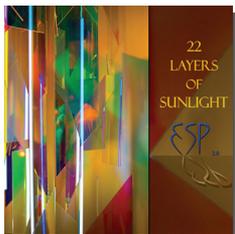
Overall, the album is a success, missing out 'Children' aside. Like a Rammstein album, it's got enough international flavour to appeal to rock and metal fans worldwide.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

ADRIAN HEXTALL

ESP 2.0

'22 Layers Of Sunlight'
Symphonic Progressive Rock
Sun Creative



2016 saw the ESP debut 'Invisible Din' see the light of day. It's a band that's been tagged as a "light disguise" for Tony Lowe and Mark Brzezicki who join forces with vocalist Peter Coyle on an album that sounds a little more optimistic than fifty shades of grey. The duo of Coyne and Lowe have an impressive enough list of names on their CVs, so it's good to see them with their own agenda and what they do on their own terms.

And on their own terms comes a grand concept written by Coyle that, in a nutshell, explores what happens when researchers find a way to link human brains which, when linked with the Internet, creates a higher consciousness. It goes on to find the ideal in peace and harmony, so yes, it's a work of optimistic fantasy. Kicking off with a hint of Tears For Fears sounding arty pop proginess, the album presents a lush and, despite the heavy concept, an undemanding listen. Perhaps not surprisingly given the Brzezicki name, a strong rhythmical presence occasionally surfaces; the mini drama of 'Ride Through Reality' and the heavily

sequenced progress through 'Gunshot Lips' see the percussion cut a bold drive. What stands out though are the congenial and extended song arrangements: new age-y and string embellished compositions that radiate an optimistic warmth. Nothing wildly exaggerated or excessive, but all controlled and contained in a warm and rich decoration.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MIKE AINSCOE

CREMATORY

'Oblivion'
Gothic Metal
SPV



Something of an institution in their home country, Germany's Crematory have enjoyed a lengthy and fruitful career, and album number fourteen sees the band in solid form as always. From the hooky, gothic metal tones of 'Salvation', to the symphonic 'For All Of Us' and 'Until The Dawn', the band blend harsh vocals (not a million miles away from Atrocity/Leaves' Eyes frontman Alex Krull) with the clean, memorable hooks that have become the band's stock-in-trade. 'Oblivion' might not step too far away from their comfort zone, but fans of the band won't care, I would imagine.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

MIK GAFFNEY

UNIVERSE INFINITY

'Rock Is Alive'
Hard Rock
Pride & Joy Music



Universe Infinity, previously just Universe, are a Swedish band who have been around in one form or another since 1982. They've split up and reformed occasionally since then, they released an album in 1985 and now, with former House Of Shakira singer Andreas Eklund on the mic, they are back for another go. The album is very 80s in its sound and style, you could easily imagine some of these songs being performed by Bonfire, The Scorpions, Yngwie Malmsteen or Europe, so what you get is good 80s rock/metal, but not a whole lot of originality. They do have a couple of killer songs on the album though. 'Rock Is Alive' is a storming call to arms, the kind of thing that would have been massive on MTV, and 'We Were Only Dancing' is another gem of a song. This one slows the tempo a touch. You couldn't call it a ballad but it's a gentler song than many on here.

If you love your 80s metal, check this out. Hopefully the band will continue and develop more of their own sound.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

MARTIN HOWELL

SUSPERIA

'The Lyricist'
Modern Thrash Metal
Agonia



Some nine years ago I predicted that this Norwegian band would go on to bigger things, but unfortunately that was misplaced, as the band seemed to disappear off the planet and I suspect the members pursued other musical ventures. As a follow-up to 2009's 'Attitude', the band has stylised their music for a new era and whether that will pay off only time will tell. The album punishes the listener with 'I Entered' as its opener with a crisp guitar sound and deadly riff. One thing that stood out on previous albums was the clean vocal and here that is intact and is deftly transposed within the songs. 'Heretic' has a momentary mood change which is quickly subdued by the blasting foray that drives the impetus of the song into the title track which has a bristling opening riff and smooth double bass that intensifies with the blast beat. Massively contrasting is 'My Darkest Moment', which has a mournful melody and morose clean vocal that is reminiscent of Nevermore, although the ending is a little weird, which I'll leave at that. That gravitas aura is also heard on 'Void' with its despondent guitar riff that's interlaced with a drifting lead hook and sorrowful vocals, which make the song a standout for me, as is 'Feed The Fire'. Opening with a gloomy riff, the song's mid-

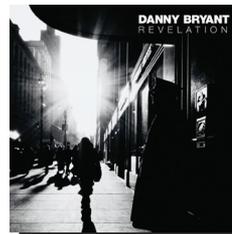
tempo thump splices the vocal tones nicely with the guitar work as the song changes gear, increasing the pace, and it is this variety of riffing and fluxing dynamics that I particularly enjoy.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

MARTIN HARRIS

DANNY BRYANT

'Revelation'
Blues
Jazzhaus



The unassuming lad from Hertfordshire has finally done it! This album is consistently good, one he's threatened to make for years. He always does us proud with the packaging, this time he's gone all out with the music, too. From the moment the glass garbled scream of 'Revelation' sets us off, the gentle simmering organ then rises to a tough guitar and austere piano chorus, David Maddison's wistful trumpet only adding to it all; all bent on capturing our feelings. 'Isolate' has the smoky but touchable feel of King King at their best, but then 'Liar's Testament' ramps up the raw emotion and simply hammers the floor in sorrow; impressive.

Of course, he can just ramp up a party blues tune too, 'Truth Or Dare' parps, enjoys Stevie Watts' organ (cor!) and values Danny's fluid solo, but 'Shouting At The Moon' can sound like a self-important late 80's chart ballad (it's a bit Then Jericho, actually); interesting...

Danny has been keen to make an album which shows his progression. This is it. He has a settled band, a great career through constant live playing and the ability to write good music. But there is something else this time; Danny's heart sits just above his cuff, and that raw emotion imbues these songs with real importance.

Not a Revelation, but bloody close.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

STEVE SWIFT

NESHIIMA

'Purple'
Nu-Metalcore/Electronicore
Independent Release



The first of a planned trilogy of EPs from Scottish act Neshiima, 'Purple' is a nice change of pace for the genre. I'd be tempted to lump this in the category of nu-metalcore that is rising in popularity, but really it's a mix of stuff. We have some pounding riffage in the vein of Sular, with rapped vocal lines and screams that bring to mind The One Hundred, not to mention the electronic aspects of this EP that rounds off a trendy, almost original sound. Every one of these five tracks has something to say about it, and with the lyrics touching on topics of mental health and various other societal problems, I can see Neshiima doing some good work in the future. Keep it up.

POWERPOINTS: 1 2 3 4 5 6

BRUCE TURNBULL

SALTY DOG

'Lost Treasures'
Hard Rock
Escape Music



RIP Salty Dog. Formed in LA in 1986, deceased "in the early 1990s". The PR bumf recounts the band as being "lost in the shuffle when grunge rock movement hit in late 1991." Well, either that or an overindulgence in the rock lifestyle and massive naivety. We appear to have here a bundle of tracks from the archives, perhaps intended for release as a second album almost twenty years ago, which show just why the grunge rock movement was such a breath of fresh air. Nothing wrong with good old fashioned Led Zeppelin, Aerosmith and blues influenced rock but good and 'Lost Treasures' these most certainly are not.

Starting with two AC/DC type tracks, 'Damned If I Do' and 'I Need More', both so badly produced the guitar distorts at any volume, the album runs a derivative gamut of 80s styles from any US hair metal band you care to name to Zeppelin like bluesy stompers, and while competently played, the relentless shrieking