

on the go

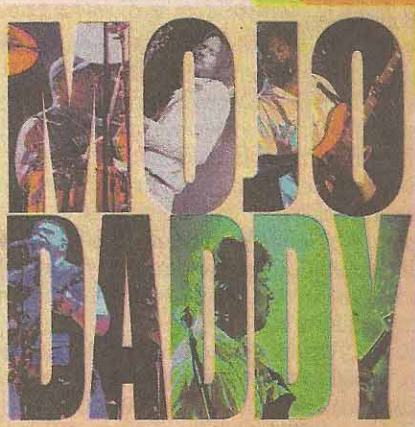
best of the best

Times music critic Tom Lounges ranks region's top albums of 2009

BY TOM LOUNGES • Times Correspondent

Having been the local music columnist for The Times since 1983, a good deal of albums make cross my desk throughout each year. Some bad, some good, some exceptional. Each December those in my "keeper" stack from the year get revisited, as the struggle begins to pluck out those which most warrant attention. Always remember, music is subjective and one man's noise may well be like the sirens' call to another. That said, what follows is my personal Top 10 of Chicagoland artist releases for 2009. Criteria requires the artist reside in the Great Lakes/Chicagoland region; released the CD between the last quarter of 2008 and Dec. 25, 2009; have it commercially available to the public; be professionally pressed and packaged; and contain a minimum of either six songs or 30-minutes of music.

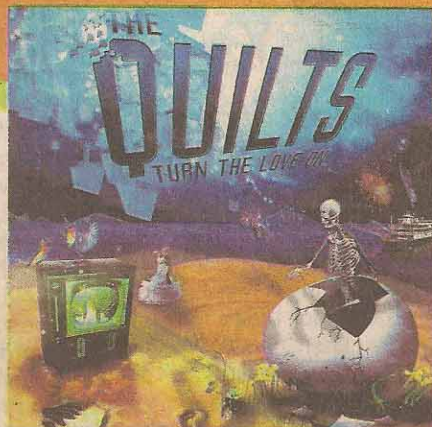
So let's get started. Counting down from number 10, here are my picks as the cream of the local 2009 crop.



FUNKY MOJO DADDY

"MOJO DADDY" (INDIE)

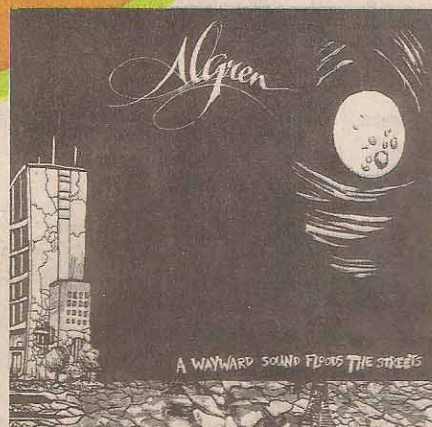
10 Though comprised of cover songs, the sheer talent on these tracks almost makes the songs themselves secondary. Mojo Daddy features bassist Kenny Kinsey (The Kinsey Report) keeping the groove with the rock-solid backbeat of Jerry Porter. Add in three scorching string benders - Jeff Massey (Steepwater Band), Corey Dennison (Vital Support Band) and Nick Byrd (Kinsey Report) - and even blues standards like Elmore James' "Dust My Broom," and Willie Dixon's "Little Red Rooster" and "I Just Wanna Make Love To You," take on a new life. Highlights: Dixon's "Mellow Down Easy," Mississippi John Hurt's "The Ballad Of John Henry," and Bill Withers' "Ain't No Sunshine."
FYI: MYSACE.COM/FUNKYMOJODADDY



THE QUILTS

"TURN THE LOVE ON" (INDIE)

9 "Turn The Love On" wasn't an instant favorite, but after repeated listens, many of the dozen songs began infesting my brain, as most are quite catchy. Good musicianship, but production is lacking and sound is too thin. The guitars of Eddie Jones (electric) and Justin Geagan (acoustic) get nice support from Adam Kelsven's keyboards, over the rhythm section of brothers RJ and Ryan DeYoung (Winepress band). Vocals come courtesy of Dana Okon (ex-Forty Piece Choir). Highlights: "Let It Rain," "Kingston Tennessee," and the title track.
FYI: MYSACE.COM/THEQUILTS



ALGREN

"A WAYWARD SOUND FLOODS THE STREET" (ALGREN MUSIC)

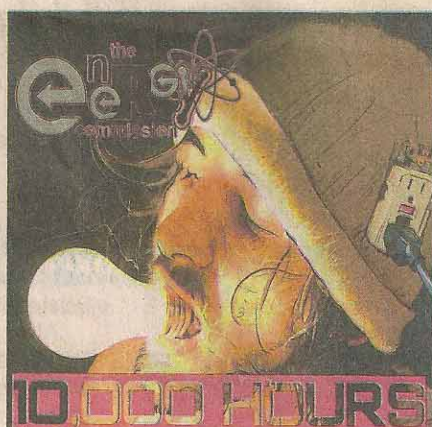
8 Formed while members were students at Valparaiso University, Algren is a Chicago-dwelling alt-rock group anchored by powerful riffs and thick grooves, coupled with a great sense of dynamics. Elements of industrial, grunge, and minimalism collide here. Not musically magnificent, but memorable. Highlights: "End of the World," "Bled," and the fact it comes with a cool graphic novel that expands the Algren musical experience.
FYI: ALGRENMUSIC.COM



AVM

"A MATTER OF TIME" (BIG CHANCE RECORDS)

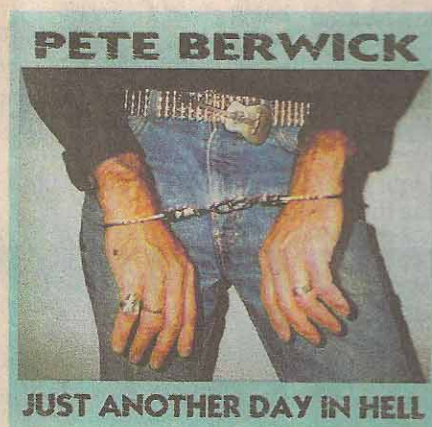
7 Prog-rock originals with pop elements. Vocalist Robert Mackey has a Lou Gramm (Foreigner) kind of sound. Guitarist Mackey wrote or co-wrote all of the 11 tracks on "A Matter Of Time," collaborating on the title track with Grammy-winning composer Jim Peterik of Survivor fame. Mackey also produced. Not every song is a winner, but enough are. Kudos to Scott Carlin's Hammond B-3 organ for lending a Jon Lord/Deep Purple sound to some songs. Highlights: "Changing," "The Way," and the title track.
FYI: AVMBAND.COM



JAY WEINBERG/THE ENERGY COMMISSION

"10,000 HOURS" (PERSISTENCE RECORDS)

6 This Valparaiso singer/songwriter is an adventurous protest singer and troubadour with plenty to say about common folk being used as chattel by corporate powers. Totally refreshing sound and approach; songs range from smooth ("Davy Jones Locker"), to ska-like ("Price Gouge'n"), to white boy rap ("Ode To Howard Beale"). Politically-charged with instrumental assistance by a bevy of regional talents, including the Schaffer-Murray brothers of Planetary Band (see #5 on this list). Weinberg sings what average Americans are thinking. He's got brass. Highlights: "Price Gouge'n," "You're So Vain," and "Mediaocracy (if it bleeds)."
FYI: THEENERGYCOMMISSION.COM



PETE BERWICK

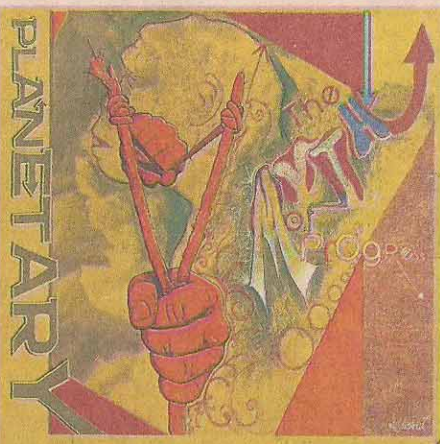
"JUST ANOTHER DAY IN HELL" (SHOTGUN RECORDS)

5 Snarly, battered and bruised rock that bleeds out of the speakers. Berwick is a 'true denim 'n' leather rebel son and outlaw rambler. With rockabilly power, leathery baritone vocals, and defiant lyrics, Berwick is equal parts Dylan, Elvis, and Johnny Cash, with just a pinch of Steve Earle for acerbic flavoring. There's some steel pedal and a few moments showing Berwick's softer side, but mostly it's soul-shaking. Highlights: "Roadkill Blues," "Standing At The Gates," "Busted In Kentucky," and the title track.
FYI: PETEBERWICK.COM

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THE TIMES

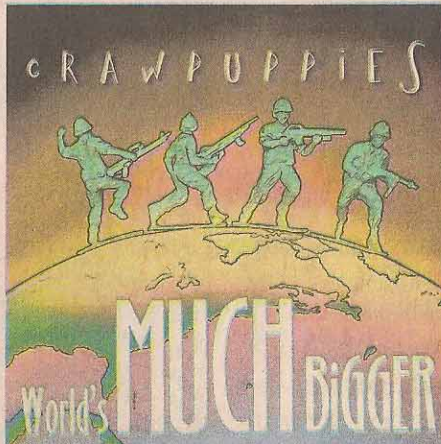
BEST OF THE REGION



PLANETARY

"THE MYTH OF PROCESS" (TOWERING BUDDAH RECORDS)

4 The Martin-Schaefer Brothers - Martin, Bobby and Michael - have been one of Northwest Indiana's best-kept secrets for much too long. These lads are excellent musicians and fine songwriters. "The Myth Of Process" greatly expands the Planetary sound. Though still sporting strong elements of blues, this adventurous project is bouncy with jazz-like tempo and time changes. Tasty guitar throughout! Zappa-esque in many ways. That this music defies categorization, makes it more enticing. Highlights: "Man Is Wolf To Man," "The Sacred Well," and "I Left My Heart on the Steep Hillside."
FYI: PLANETARYJAMS.COM



CRAWPUDDIES

"WORLD'S MUCH BIGGER" (STAR LARK MUSIC)

3 I have been an unabashed fan of Chad Clifford's songwriting for years and Crawlpuddies are the perfect vehicle for it. This 14-song set is a major progression from the group's 2004 debut, "Peaceful Amnesty." It's darker, deeper, more topical, and more cohesive. It's also sequenced well. Not as Beatlesque, Clifford shows he is shedding his Lennon-isms and finding his own voice. Playing is strong, production is fair. A strong sophomore effort. Highlights: "Mundane," "World's Much Bigger," and "Here We Go Again."
FYI: CRAWPUDDIES.COM

