

VARIOUS ARTISTS

MESSTHETICS #108 (South Coast DIY '77-81)

Hyped2Death

Oh God, this is massive! And brilliant! From one of the finest retrospective compilation labels that have ever existed, as I am sure you know, and this time they have a real winner. I could be biased as having been born near London and living in the South I naturally gravitated towards the South coast rather than up towards the Midlands.

While I never had any great interest in Portsmouth or Southampton, which gets represented here, I did venture down for gigs in the other areas featured - Brighton and Bournemouth. Indeed I relish the opportunity to bore people with tales of sleeping out on car showroom forecourts while teddy boys were on the prowl for anyone punky, even being chased by the police (in their cars) through the Winter Gardens for some reason, or trying to break into a Richmond gig by The Piranhas through a ladder via the upstairs window (when you're drunk logic doesn't really come into it). We even visited the Vault (cause of the excellent Vaultage compilations) on a pilgrimage only to arrive shortly after it'd been burnt down.

Yes, the South had some great bands and this compilation also unearths some who clearly weren't so great, but very certainly absorbing in their own right. As usual the booklet is rammed with old photos and info, plus some excellent links to interesting sites. It's all enthralling. You'll love it.

Chimes have cutely funneled poppy punk on the brisk spotty opener 'Through To You' which is a bit like early Patrik Fitzgerald if he had a band. The Chefs sound almost ridiculously lovely on the dreamy 'Commander Lonely.' The gently weary Bloated Toads are also rather charming with their 'Happy Home', possibly recorded in the same studio as The Adverts did 'Gary Gilmore's Eyes' and as Worthing's premier punk band they're a relaxed crew!

Again Again have turbulent yet balmy punk noise to offer in their infectious 'Wrong Again' while the witty Objeks (who grew out of Vulva Vegan And Her Objeks) do some chunky Clash steals in the floppy 'Negative Conversation.' Greeting No 4 were apparently part of the well known and long-lived Stitched Back Foot Airman and their 'Photos' is really airy indie with delightful crisp drums, delicate vocals and diminutive keys. Poison Girls are a weird addition, especially as 'Cat's Eye' has male vocals, unless Vi was having a spectacularly off day. It also sounds like a pastiche of New York punk.

Lilletes have a cool, thoughtful 'Air Conditioning' which has a jaunty but oddly hypnotic feel, Renaldo & The Loaf tinkle artfully through the post-hippy whimsy that is 'Scottish Shuffle' and Thought Police are a sweetly grazed poppy punk, rustling calmly through 'Pictures.' April & The Fools (post-Lilletes) have more grubby urgency about their 'Baby Watch Out' and Vitamins are weedly jarring in their basic 'Newtown.' Pink Flamingos survived a rough debut ("I asked the crowd for a request and they threw a brick at us!") but with songs as rough as 'Oh Isn't It Wild' it's not that surprising they got peoples' backs up. Very deadpan punk. Joe Dash whoop around like an intellectual version of The Damned in the snappy but wobbling 'Truth About Surgery', or The Fall crawling out of Talking Head's toilet. From this band we later got Venus In Furs so it's fascinating to hear.

Relatives are really drab pop in 'Organisation' which surprised me as Mark from The Molesters is involved, and he was brilliant in them. Legendary Tenfoots is one step removed from politely aimless in 'Just An Excuse', Attic sprawl through the jittery 'War We're At War' which has an art school lament feel to its dramatic nature. Indifferent Dance Centre are really interesting and their intentionally flattened ambient burbling has great potential but when they moved to Manchester it seems they were more interested in clubbing than the band so 'Flight & Pursuit' was no inspiration for anything else, but they're virtually a slow motion Ludus.

Again, Almost Cruelty are an intriguing band and include the writer Lucy O'Brien. 'Foetus' wanders gloopily, like a ghost submarine, Mike Malignant & The Parasites are also over keen on Lydonesque vocals in 'OD Baby' and rumble weirdly. Their drummer goes by the name of Nick 'Knicker-neck' Connors. Right Profile have cheerful lo-fi punkiness in 'Alien', not unlike Hagar The Womb but without the spikiness. 3D (more post-Lilletes) have a fractured but attractive 'Emotions.' Forward Edge are textbook scrappy punk throughout the forgettable 'Statements' then we end the CD with a fairly awful Intestines with their angsty 'Boy With A Gun' but they have the most attitude of these bands which seems the key factor here. Just as Manchester bands seemed to veer towards the oblique and angular, the South Coast bands seem to have a fairly cerebral or laid back thing going for them.

There's a loaf of bonus mp3 files on the CD too. 3D drift casually through the graciously crumpled 'Colour Of Love', Again Again tumble through a jagged 'Golden Futures' and April & The Fools rattle out the jangling mess that is their truly horrible 'Disco Floor.' Butcher is post-Intestines UK82 scowling in 'On The Ground', Catholic Girls (pre-Almost Cruelty) manages very prim punk baby steps in 'Child's Vision' while Chimes flop like Buzzcocks relatives in 'White Walls.' Intestines leer lustily in the dog-eared punk fun of 'Living In Bournemouth', Joe Dash melt demurely in the fragrant 'Cutdown' and The Passengers (pre-Forward Edge) are sparse and easily ignored in their shambolic 'Cancer Sticks.' I mustn't ignore Venus In Furs shimmying urgently through the cantankerous live 'Into The Factory' which is fabulous and I could easily recommend you get a copy for that alone but seriously, this is a wonderful compilation.

Just utterly, utterly wonderful.