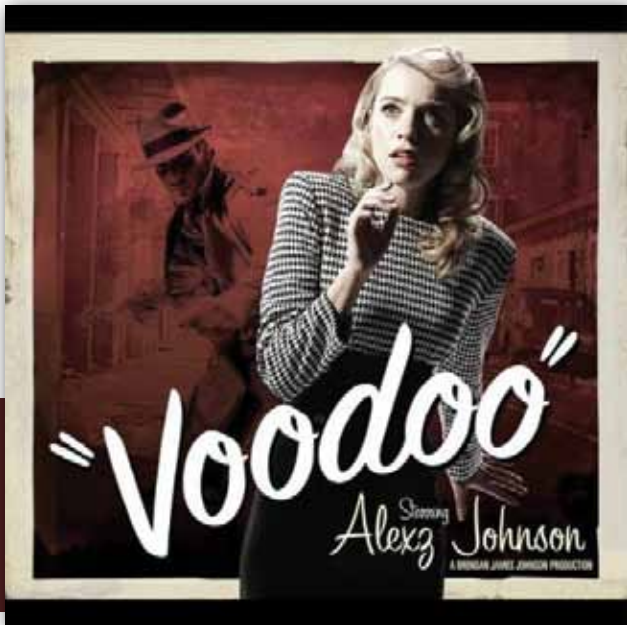
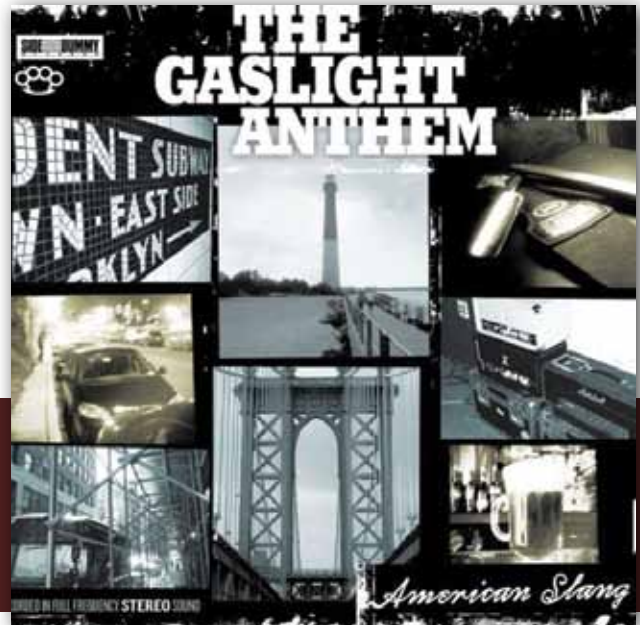


By Keith Carman



**ALEXZ JOHNSON**  
**VOODOO (ORANGE LOUNGE)**

■ Years in the making, Johnson's debut reveals something far more masterful and effective than what some may perceive as disposable pop. Best known as the face of programs such as Instant Star and The Disney Channel's So Weird, she justifies her singing abilities on Voodoo via running the emotional gamut: shuffling, haunting grooves, sugary bounce and introspective melancholy. Overall however, while Johnson's drive is steeped in simplistic pop/R&B, with her formidable voice and rich melodies, Voodoo results in a distinct, resounding premiere far superior and soul-searching than that of musicians twice her age.



**THE GASLIGHT ANTHEM**  
**AMERICAN SLANG (SIDEONEDUMMY)**

■ There's something admirably working-class about New Jersey rockers The Gaslight Anthem, especially with this follow-up to acclaimed 2008 release The '59 Sound. Breaking outside the confines of connotations to fellow no-frills hometown favourite Bruce Springsteen, the band explores deeper pop sensibilities, old school soul and classic punk attitude without straying too far from roots-based, driving anthems that feel as poignant and personal as they are dynamic and unforgettable. Rich and sincere, this stirring effort proves The Gaslight Anthem are poised to take over as new heroes of the modern blue collar brigade.



**BETTIE LAVETTE**  
**INTERPRETATIONS: THE BRITISH ROCK SONGBOOK (ANTI/EPITAPH)**

■ One of soul music's strongest presences, Bettye LaVette is an endless powerhouse of passionate, rousing vocals. At that, latest effort Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook is another bold addition to her stellar catalogue. Attacking bluesier versions of classics from Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones and more, LaVette turns each tune into something unique and engaging. Furthermore, despite climbing even closer to 70, with that sultry-yet-sassy spirit, the enigmatic singer is just as sexy and commanding as ever, ensuring Interpretations: The British Rock Songbook is an enduring soul/R&B affair.



**CANCER BATS**  
**BEARS, MAYORS, SCRAPS AND BONES (DISTORT ENTERTAINMENT)**

■ Primal and vicious while still patient/organized, metal-influenced hardcore outfit Cancer Bats obliterate with this tertiary full-length. Stepping up the passion and abrasiveness of its predecessors, the album's 13 original tracks and voracious cover of The Beastie Boys' Sabotage are so explosive and confrontational, they make John Rambo seem like a peace-keeping missionary. Aiming for the groin while delivering from the gut, Bears, Mayors, Scraps And Bones should be a controlled substance, it's got so much potential to get the brave words and bloody knuckles flying.



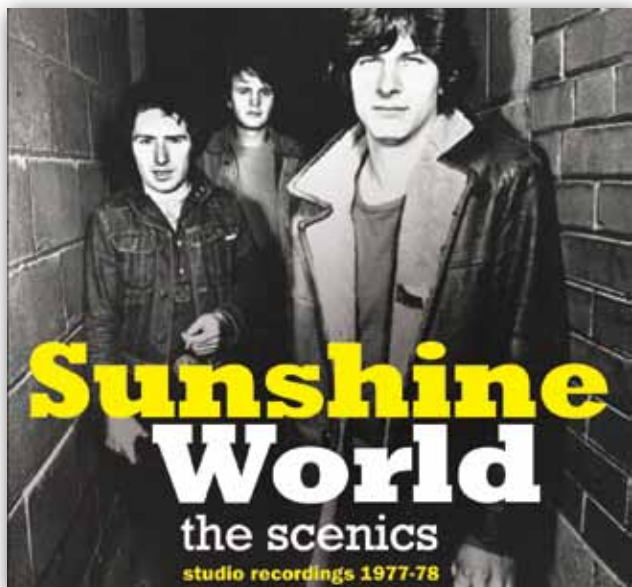
**RATT**  
**INFESTATION (ROADRUNNER)**

■ While we all claim to dislike '80s hair metal, few are upset when tunes like Ratt's Round And Round pour out of the speakers. With this in mind, seventh studio album *Infestation* proves that despite almost three decades of turmoil and a vastly different musical climate, this band is still able to pen a slinky, sleazy collection of anthemic, revelrous tracks. Hard and fast but never ridiculous or in danger of trying too hard, *Infestation's* 11 tunes are just plain glam metal fun, perfect for ramping up a night of leather-clad bar hopping, booty hunting and brain cell blasting.



**SARAH BLACKWOOD**  
**WASTING TIME (STOMP)**

■ Stepping out of her day job as front for psychobilly rockers The Creepshow, Sarah 'Sin' Blackwood reveals a deeper, more dynamic side on this sophomore solo effort. Steeped in folk-rock/country twang, *Wasting Time* is a rich, diverse experience supported by everything from banjo, slide and acoustic guitar to simple shuffle beats and handclaps. On top of it all, Blackwood's compelling voice shines with a swoon-inducing velvety ring, set front-and-centre as she isn't battling loud instruments and hyper tempos. Relaxed, sincere and beautiful, such a lackadaisical title couldn't be a bigger misrepresentation of this enthralling experience.



**THE SCENICS**  
**SUNSHINE WORLD: STUDIO RECORDINGS**  
**1977-78 (DREAM TOWER)**

■ One of Canada's unsung heroes of first-gen punk, The Scenics reacted to slinky art-rock made popular by New York acts such as Television, The Velvet Underground and other Warhol-esque colleagues. However, with their sublime understanding of pushing boundaries without sacrificing grooves, their low-fidelity creations are exercises in tight, post-garage accomplishments. Celebrated on this first ever compilation of their studio works, *Sunshine World* provides another case-in-point as to why The Scenics deserve merit for being as innovative as they were—and now are, given the reunion—impressive.



**SLASH**  
**SLASH (UNIVERSAL)**

■ Those looking for a return to Slash's early days of sleazy guitar riffs circa Guns 'N' Roses best search elsewhere. On this debut solo affair, he opts for cleaner riffing and a poppier application than he's been revered for in the past. It works for the most part, particularly when featuring the likes of Motorhead's Lemmy, Dave Grohl and Iggy Pop. A few questionable tunes arise when Black Eyed Peas' Fergie and Soundgarden's Chris Cornell take over wailing duties but all-in-all while Slash may not be dirty anymore, he's still got the gritty rock in his veins.