

November 20, 2009

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MichaelPopke

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- **Dustin Lee: On My Way Back Home** - My leading candidate for non-prog/non-metal/non-rock album of the year. Regular readers of this section know that I'm a sucker for a muscular acoustic guitar, an intoxicating melody and rootsy vibe, and *On My Way Back Home* is loaded with all three. You can hear the heartland in singer-songwriter Dustin Lee's clear, deep and comforting voice, and he sings earnest, honest and sparse songs about growing up where life moves slow, a farmer losing his crops and childhood nostalgia. Lee even quotes me on his [web site](#) — plus, he's from Iowa. Best song here: "It Was You."
- **Painkiller Hotel: Black Roses** - Tough, rootsy and emotive Midwestern rock out of Chicago. Drawing comparisons to Live and Tonic, Chicago's **Painkiller Hotel** checks in with a debut featuring 10 songs in 39 minutes. Not only is the moody and soaring leadoff single "How Was I Supposed to Know" the best cut on the album, it boasts some of the most intoxicating hooks I've heard all year. And considering that it's now November, that's pretty damn impressive.
- **Poppy & The Usual Suspects: Celestial Love Jones** - No, this isn't some smooth R&B outfit, as the title suggests. In fact, Arizona-based **Poppy & The Usual Suspects** sounds like the world's greatest, hardest-rocking bar band on *Celestial Love Jones*. Nils Lofgren call this music "honest, tough and inspired," so who am I to argue? Gritty guitars collide with bluesy jaw-dropping harmonica solos and brazen attitude. These dudes sing about everything from love ("Be My Girl") to corporate frustration ("Mr. Boss Man") and plenty of stuff in between. Old school? For sure. But so what? You can groove to *Celestial Love Jones* until it hurts.
- **Box Set Bonanza** - For some reason, I'm addicted to box sets. I don't even listen to them right away. I acquire them, admire them and then make sure I have enough time to savor them as I read the detailed booklets while taking in the music. That kind of uninterrupted time seldom seems to arrive, though, so I'm still looking forward to kicking back with **The Beatles Stereo Box Set**, **Black Sabbath's The Rules of Hell**, **Have A Nice Decade: The '70s Pop Culture Box**, **Marillion's Early Stages: The Official Bootlegs**, **Willie Nelson's One Hell of a Ride**, **Where the Action Is: Los Angeles Nuggets 1965-1968**, **Woodstock: 40 Years On-Back to Yasgur's Farm** and **Neil Young's Archives Vol. 1: 1963-1972** (the CD version, not the pricey DVD or Blu-Ray).
- **Shopping at Walmart** - I've been to Walmart more times than I care to admit lately, picking up exclusive releases from the likes of **Foreigner (Can't Slow Down)**, **Journey (Live in Manila DVD)** and **Kiss (Sonic Boom)**. When I grabbed the Kiss album, I also picked up a copy of **Ace Frehley's new one, Anomaly**. I'm still early in the listening process, but it's clear the Kelly Hanson now sounds more like Lou Gramm than Lou Gramm, Journey can function at a high velocity regardless of who's singing that band's songs, Kiss still sounds like Kiss regardless of who's playing guitar and drums, and Ace still may not be playing with a full deck but he's a hell of a lot of fun.

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