

SALUTES TO THE DEAD  
AND TO THE LIVING

Rock 'n' roll has always been about being a kid: anarchic risks, enthusiasm loud as thunder, rage, utopias and wild desire. Kids think they're indestructible, and that's a delusion that rockers have been known to suffer from. It is a shock when death intrudes, particularly when it hunkers down on those you heard as a kid, on folks you kind of looked forward to growing old with. Five bowed out this winter, and their passing deserves at least a nod of acknowledgment.

**Ian Stewart**, an original Rolling Stone who became the group's road manager and regular keyboard player, was felled by a coronary at 47. **Ricky Nelson**, the vanilla Elvis and truly America's sweetheart, who cut his first record to impress a girlfriend enamored of Presley (in the best egalitarian, anything-to-get-laid tradition of rock), and went on to sell 14 million records, was immolated at 45 in a plane crash. Irishman **Phil Lynnot**, who gave us "The Boys Are Back in Town"—a roaring autumnal anthem to male camaraderie and dreams of regeneration, sort of John Rechy via Bruce Springsteen—met his end at age 36 due to the failure of his liver and kidneys. **Ricky Wilson**, 32, the boyish guitarist with the camp-wacko, mock-funk, party-band The B-52s, expired, reportedly, of "cancer." Finally, **D. Boone**, 26, lead guitarist and vocalist with hardcore-heroes The Minutemen—a figure as full of hope, humor and tough intelligence as anyone in rock today—was killed in a freak car accident.

Boone was the only one of the five who still seemed drenched in promise: still on the verge. **The Minutemen**, after four years together, had just released their eleventh album, *Three Way Tie for Last* (SST). Track it down. It's a gloriously alert, obstreperous, inspired disc. Boone closes the album with his song "Situations At Hand." The entire lyric runs, "There are still lofty dreams, meagre desires, and still silliness." What a grand, sweet champ.

Each man's death reminded me of his music, of moments charged with possibility, poignance and dumb brazen humor—of feeling like a kid. I'm grateful for those gifts; I'm damned sorry they had to die. And I remember what Ricky Nelson hollered to the crowd, after finishing Buddy Holly's classic, at the end of his last performance, "Rave on for me."

Back among the living: Over in the U.K., former Bronski Beat lead singer **Jimi Sommerville** and his new partner in **The Communards** released the gay love song "You Are My World," backed with the politically barbed lament, "Breadline Britain." A lack of airplay hurt sales, but the duo embarked on the socialist "Red Wedge Tour" of England, joined by **Paul Weller**, **Billy Bragg** and **Junior**. After trying out new material, they've returned to the studio and hope to have a debut LP out

featuring **Elton John**, **Gladys Knight** and **Stevie Wonder**, has gone gold and keeps selling, with all profits going for AIDS research.

**COVER ME!** An unusual trio of cover tunes are coming out, all from folks with reputations as gifted songwriters. **The Violent Femmes** have picked a terrible version of T. Rex's 1972 anthem, "(You Can't Fool) Children of The Revolution," as the first single from *The Blind Leading the Naked* (Slash), produced by Talking



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as early as April. ... **Michael Jackson** made a rare appearance, under an oil slick of makeup but minus his aviators, at *The American Music Awards*. Besting even his own past record for preposterous escorts, he brought **Liz Taylor** as his date and lured the woman onstage to huff through "We Are the World" with the entire cast as MC **Diana Ross** barked, "Sing it Elizabeth." I thought Liz was going to belt Mahogany. Since Taylor will be taking a hand in any AmFAR Rock Against AIDS concert, rumors are circulating that she may be trying to nail Michael for the event. That would be a coup.

*Still searching for that heart of gold:* Various "Homophobe of the Year" features missed out on a truly winning crack from reborn-Reaganite **Neil Young**. The conscience of Farm Aid complained to the English weekly, *Melody Maker*, "You go to a supermarket, and you see a faggot behind the fuckin' cash register; you don't want him to handle your potatoes." What an ugly little man he has become.

On a brighter note, the **Dionne Warwick** single, "That's What Friends Are For,"

Heads keyboard player **Jerry Harrison**. The first single from **Elvis Costello's** keenly awaited new disc, produced by **T. Bone Burnett**, is a cover of The Animals'

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epochal "Please Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" (CBS). The **Rolling Stones'** upcoming LP, *Dirty Work* (CBS), produced by **Steve Lillywhite**, will be preceded by their cover of a 1963 dance tune by the R&B duo Bob and Earl. The video of "Harlem Shuffle" will be premiered on the Grammy Awards.

Let me bellow once again for a ban on all videos on the Grammys! Here's to live performances, and chances for the

presenters to dish! Let the MTV Awards and even the American Music Awards clot up their presentations with those airless wonders. The Grammys are given to artists and songs, and the producers could do us all a favor by celebrating them. Fat chance.

*Tips for Adventurous Listeners:* I like pop out there on the eccentric edges where it is vivid, insistent and frisky—where it just might make me laugh out loud or take my breath away. If you like to drop on a record and be surprised, try these on for size.

1) "Rise," **PiL** (Virgin): OK, this is really a cheat because it's lushly accessible, and if you never thought you'd want Johnny Rotten a.k.a. John Lydon breathing down your speakers, this rich dance number could change your mind. Working with producer Bill Laswell, former Cream drummer Ginger Baker and a brilliant Japanese guitarist, Lydon's keen becomes nearly a croon. Insinuating and delightful. Old PiL fans ought to be delighted as well with this nervy surprise.

2) *Psychocandy*, **Jesus and Mary Chain** (Reprise): These four Scottish teenagers are the most intriguing and original band to show up in the U.K. since The Smiths. Lush hypnotic pop vocals float over a rubble of white noise. Calm, unbelieving voices arch through plaintive love songs, often against an immense firestorm of bottomless feedback. Sound painful? Actually, it is fascinating, haunting and endearing.

3) *Mojo Nixon and Skid Roper*, **Mojo Nixon and Skid Roper** (Enigma): This team gets the full bull-goose looney stamp. Mojo sounds like George Thorogood on mushrooms, imagining himself as the bastard offspring of Tom Waits and Jonathan Richman, doing roadtime with Howlin' Wolf and John Lee Hooker. Mojo plays guitar. Skid plays washboard. These unhinged talking blues, from "I Saw Jesus at McDonalds" to "Art Fag Shuffle," came high-stepping from the dark side of the street—grinning incandescently. Mojo. Nixon. Indeed.

4) *I'm Alright*, **Loudon Wainwright III** (Rounder): This rogue folksinger has yet to match his boggling live shows on disc, but this Richard Thompson-produced effort captures enough of his mordant wit and blazing warmth to please this fan. Along with his cracked anthem to selfishness, "One-Man Guy," and his maniacal account of changing apartments, "Cardboard Boxes," there are intimations of mortality and wry autobiography—a streak of Yankee madness that rubs shoulders with wisdom. If this one puckers your fancy, get his earlier Rounder LPs. Then try Mojo again.

—Adam Block