

Hidden Gems
by
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I have around 750 CDs in my collection, and I love it so much I have to stare at it on occasion for several minutes at a time. I have classics, I have modern stuff and perhaps sadly, I have lots of very obscure stuff that really deserves to be more well known. I will be discussing such albums. Hopefully after reading the following, you will check the releases on Youtube, and your life will be massively enriched. I'm not FORCING this material on you, but if I was a less reasonable man I would. Maybe I am now, in a covert way. Who knows? (I really am, because you'll love all of it). Anyway, enjoy!

Facing the Animal by Yngwie Malmsteen

Yngwie has a bit of a reputation for writing the same songs over and over, and coming up with guitar solos so mindless, the keyboard equivalent would be to just run your fingers over a huge range of keys as fast as you can. If you do so, the only thing you'll have to worry about is the notes bleeding together. However, don't fear, many synthesisers have settings where it's impossible to play two notes at a time. Anyway, this album is different in terms of songwriting. After his debut, you could argue this work is his greatest in fact. It is also possibly the best produced album I own. Pretty impressive. Sure the leads aren't exactly melodic here either for the most part, but to be fair, some notes get held for well over a second. :0

From the 13th Sun, Candlemass

Ok, this isn't the doom metal band's best album, but it is far from their worst. In some of their other releases, a lot of the singing is SO theatrical. I mean really. I would go as far as to say it ruins everything. It's hard to describe in words how the vocals sound, but I'll try: 'I've-uh been possessed by Sataaaaaan-huh! Yeah-huh, Ohhh yeah-hahahaha-huh!' It's just too much. But as I was saying, FtTS isn't like that at all. Ok the songs aren't exactly masterpieces and are relatively simple, but they are as creepy as hell. In a good way.

Downward is Heavenward, Hum

Not quite as depressing as their hit album 'You'd Prefer an Astronaut', and maybe that's why the album in question is more obscure. Some people just like being depressed. (In a musical way, of course). Some of the lyrics are gibberish here, such as 'It's all green to me'. The correct phrase meaning something that's impossible to understand, is 'it's all Greek to me', as in most English people can't speak Greek. It's all green? Does the singer have a unique vision problem? Not exactly relatable is it? Maybe that's what another problem is. According to Allmusic.com, this album is superior to YPaA and it got four and a half stars. Not to be sniffed at.

Violent Machine, Tony Macalpine

Ok, you could argue that almost all instrumental rock/metal guitar albums are hidden gems. Even superstars such as Joe Satriani and Steve Vai have released pieces that 99.999% of the population will never hear. What's interesting about VM, is that it fuses rock with jazz. Most axe man-focused-vocalist-neglecting albums of its era fused metal/rock with classical music or prog. And compare the song titles with similar releases: Tony has fun ideas like 'Shoe Shine Cyber Boy', and artists such as Joe Stump have the predictable 'Weapon of Choice', 'Pistol Whipped', 'Trigger Happy', etc. Sure he doesn't JUST write about weapons, that would be crazy, but which titles are more creative? Anyway, more importantly the songwriting is solid.

Rain of a Thousand Flames, Rhapsody

Not as popular as many of the band's other LPs, but this power metal case does have a highly different sound to most of them. That alone is worth noting. Yes, RoaTF has the same kind of fantastical themes, for example killing monsters with swords, (I think) and such themes aren't exactly cool, but you can't deny they're fun. 'But I believe that all music can be cool if performed properly'. No. Don't even think for a moment Will Smith or whatever would tackle such topics. I'm sure if that ever happened, a serious musical crime would take place, it would be very messy, and the world of rap and even music in general would never be the same. Don't believe me? Here's some 'power rap': 'Yo, yo, bluds! Just smoked an orc. No more orcs in da hood'. Yep. Cringe. I know it was me who wrote that, but let's see someone do better.

Go Off!, Cacophony

Not as well known as their other album 'Speed Metal Symphony', and that isn't exactly too famous either. But why isn't G'off (as very creative goths may say) a household name?? Japanesey scales, crazy shredding and all that stuff? Sure, it's more of the same, but who complains about more of anything that's excellent quality? I'll tell you who: The biggest spoilt brat of all time. I'm sorry if I just called you a brat, I didn't mean it, I was just making a point. You'd only be a brat if you complained and got the album for free and that's not likely - it's pretty hard to find.

Superheroes, Racer X

Why the instrumental 'Scarified' seems to be far more well known than the vocal-less pieces on Superheroes is a complete mystery to me. Compared to 'Viking Kong' and 'King of the Monsters', it's pretty bland, really. The production is far better on this gem, too. The album 'Second Heat' which Scarified comes from has production so bad, it has the same quality as a lot of early black metal. And bear in mind that genre is supposed to sound as bad as possible in many cases.

(Ok, let's be fair, SH's sound quality isn't THAT bad, I'm exaggerating because saying something has 'below average' quality isn't funny).

Like Linus, Deftones

This demo album is so obscure, you can't even buy it. At least I don't think you can, and I've looked. It has even worse sound quality than Second Heat, but that's understandable as it wasn't exactly recorded in a state of the art recording studio. Even so, my God the songs are good. I mean they're SO good. I want this album, now. I guess I'll have to keep listening to it on Youtube. If you choose to do so, you can expect 15 tracks of quality material. Even the song that uses a crappy penny whistle/recorder/whatever, is strangely brilliant. That's the first time the instrument has sounded so good since Stairway to Heaven. :O Don't be fooled by that comment, though - a toddler could play the part. But in a good way.

Rising Out of the Ashes, Warlord

Usually I'm at least a little bit put off by music that is really cheesy. However, the songwriting in this release saves everything. Easily. I have to be honest, the guitar playing is not so good, in fact it's often very scrappy in the solo sections (and there are a lot of them). But you know what? That adds to the album's charm. In a way. A charming album about war and stuff like that? How does that even work? No wonder no one knows about this album. It screws with the mind too much. I don't even like dealing with double negatives.

High Definition, Vitalij Kuprij

An instrumental album even more obscure than 'Violent Machine'. Far more, in fact. Paradoxically however, it is one of the most impressive albums I own. The musicianship is totally crazy, and the proggy-neoclassical songwriting is super clever. However, it seems things have got to Vitalij's head a little; in one of his later albums he sings 'the emperor's will cannot be denied. You have betrayed the emperor's will, you fool'. Not the coolest lyrics. Maybe he should stick to music without words.

Ok, that's ten relatively unknown albums for you. But now that I think of it, you probably won't like all of them, right? I was being too optimistic before. So now what I'll do is list the albums again, and suggest what kind of people might/might not appreciate them... I could have done that earlier, but never underestimate the power of repetition. What I'm saying is you need to read about the albums again, so they get stuck in your head. You at least need to TRY them. But I'm not pushy, remember that.

Facing the Animal by Yngwie Malmsteen - For people who have the ability to ignore endless, somewhat annoying soloing. Not for people who think even Jimi Hendrix played too fast. Wusses.

From the 13th Sun, Candlemass - For people who have mental problems. Not for anyone else, quite frankly.

Downward is Heavenward, Hum - For most people. Not for all of Hum's fans, though, for whatever reason.

Violent Machine, Tony Macalpine - For anyone who appreciates instrumental rock guitar music. Pretty extreme, right? Very nice and not cliched. Not for 99% of the population.

Rain of a Thousand Flames, Rhapsody - For all symphonic metal fans? Quite possibly. Not for 99.9% of the population. No only joking. Maybe 98%? Who knows...

Go Off!, Cacophony - For anyone who wants to see Japanese, Western and African cultures unite through music. (When I say African, I mean rock music has its roots in Africa, I'm not saying djembe drums or marimbas are used in this album, because that would be far too weird). Not for racists. >:(

Superheroes, Racer X - For Yngwie fans who also like comics. Not for ignorant people who don't like fast soloing. So ignorant.

Like Linus, Deftones - For everyone.

Rising Out of the Ashes, Warlord - For all power metal fans. Not for lactose intolerant people.

High Definition, Vitalij Kuprij - Even for those who are ultra-hard to impress. Not for many people as it's extra hard to find.

That's it from me! Byeeeeeeee.