

Book review in July 9, 2004 issue of

Goldmine

THE COLLECTORS RECORD AND COMPACT DISC MARKETPLACE

Heavy metal book review

The Collector's Guide To Heavy Metal - Volume 1: The Seventies

By Martin Popoff

Collector's Guide Publishing Inc (softcover, 344 pages, \$23.95) ISBN 1-894959-02-7

Martin Popoff must not sleep. That would explain how the music critic and Goldmine contributor managed to pen six books about heavy metal and one about Southern rock - containing a total of more than 7,700 reviews of songs and albums - in 10 years.

Of course, Popoff's flippant writing style indicates he may dash off a couple dozen reviews every hour or so. But his work is admirable (and valuable) for at least two important reasons: First, he's more thorough and exhaustive than most critics. Second, he includes bands, albums and songs often ignored by mainstream music guides. Take some of the artists featured in Popoff's seventh book, *The Collector's Guide To Heavy Metal - Volume 1: The Seventies*. Rex, anyone? How about Electric Food?

This is the first in a series of at least two more forthcoming books covering the 80's and the 90's, and if those titles dig as deep into the obscurity well as the first volume does, metal fans are in for a long-term treat. This edition contains 1,162 album reviews, of which only about a third appeared in Popoff's mammoth 1997 book, *The Collector's Guide To Heavy Metal*.

Sure, many readers will disagree with the author's choices and opinions here, but he encourages that. In fact, he writes in the book's introduction that he wants to "burn a hole in your anger bag." By arguing that Led Zeppelin's early albums were "lazy and unfocused" and calling Styx "unsung co-creators... in this thing we call progressive metal," he just may do that.

Because several of the bands Popoff includes can be considered heavy only in the context of their era (Journey, Angel, Cheap Trick), he assigns each album reviewed two

grades, the first for heaviness and the second for musical merit. Hence, an album such as Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* scores a 9/9, while 38 Special's *Rockin' Into The Night* gets a 4/7.

Still, Popoff seems to struggle with exactly how to define "heavy," ultimately favouring power chords, clanging symbols, thrashing rhythms, speedy playing and "nutty" vocals, while essentially discounting all ballads. But some albums rank so low on his heaviness scale (Nick Gilder's catalog, April Wine's mid 70's output), it's fair to question why Popoff even bothered to include them. Excluding Kansas and Jethro Tull while giving a nod to REO Speedwagon and Desmond Child is almost unforgivable.

Yet Popoff doesn't seem to take himself (or the book's entries) too seriously, so readers shouldn't, either. As usual, Popoff's descriptions of some albums are amazingly convoluted yet precisely correct, describing Aerosmith's *Draw The Line*, for example, as "sounding not unlike a weary but unrelenting party blasted by three competing stereos."

Along the way, Popoff contributes personal anecdotes about specific artists, traces band histories, personnel and reissue news; and offers intriguing information for

collectors (citing a promo-only white-label copy of Molly Hatchet's self-titled 1978 debut, for example, and the leather-textured cover of the U.K. pressing for Stray's 1970 LP *Suicide*). But he shines brightest when digging up gems such as *Savage Grace*, *Night Sun*, *Hairy Chapter*, and *Jerusalem* - along with plenty of unheralded Canadian bands such as *The Dictators* and *Wenzday*.

A 12-track sampler from Monster Records that comes with the book and features artists mentioned within these pages (including Truth and Janey, Poobah, Sorcery, and Cain) will no doubt whet serious readers' appetites for more - making them want to put down this book, log onto the Internet and discover the world of lost gems Popoff has already found.

