

SHOWTIME

SUNDAY

[HOTWAX]



Rock

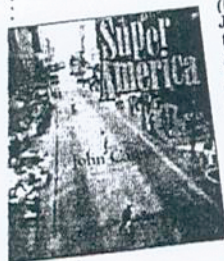
Vantage Canada, "Beecher's Bible" (Jetelectro) ★★½ — Listening to this debut, you'd swear the five folks who make up Vantage Canada hail from somewhere near the Appalachians, not South Minneapolis, and that they had a regular gig at the Cedar Cultural Centre, not their usual haunts of the Turf Club and the 400 Bar. That is to say, this isn't an alt-country record, but the work of a straight-ahead fiddle-fueled honky-tonk outfit that leans heavily on traditional bluegrass arrangements, disciplined playing, upbeat tempos and Chuck Nelson's genial urban-hick vocals. Of course, those who had trouble swallowing Gillian Welch's "Revival" last year will be just as put-off by Vantage Canada's vintage-copying. But the topics — spirituality, friendship and the prohibition blues — are timeless.



Lifter Puller, "Half Dead and Dynamite" (No Alternative) ★★ — Thus far, the Minneapolis-based No Alternative label has released three terrific, and terrifically dissimilar, records — by Dylan Hicks, the Beatifics and Magnatone. The prolific Lifter Puller makes it four for four, and this demented, clever and ridiculously rocking record is the funnest blast of art-punk I've heard since "Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain." Lifter Puller's fine self-titled debut from last year was produced by Casey Rice (of Liz Phair fame), but this time the helmsman is the Rank Strangers' Mike Wisti, a man whose own aesthetic fits nicely with Lifter Puller's: Both are searching for something, like a bunch of under-the-bleacher bums with metal detectors, and what's most exciting is that we're in on the process. Speaking of searchers, singer/guitarist Craig Finn's words fill the air like a bunch of spliced-together indie-movie trailers, or a game of 52 pick-up, with "images" of sleeping, waking up in airports and parking lots, James Brown, Pine Sol, bloody hippies and bigger-than-Jesus Beatles.

As do the sounds, the lyrics and arrangements have a special reflective-but-forget-about-it quality, and for the adventurous listener/searcher, there's plenty to chew on, such as: "They all woke up at the airport/ In the arcade, at the western concourse/ That's when she said that we should do this all over/ She wipes the blood from her mouth with her shoulder/ Said I just need a diet cola/ Or maybe just a little Lifter Puller." Don't we all. Actually, we could all use a lot of Lifter Puller, which may soon be the case, for these 11 tracks suggest Lifter Puller is brimming with ideas, and that "Half Dead and Dynamite" is just the tip of the ice, ice bergy.

John Casey, "Super America" (Urban Ear) ★★ — I run into John Casey now and again around town, but our conversations never go beyond the rush-rush-howyadoin-seeyalater. Which is why I'm thankful for his records, since they do that thing that music is supposed to do, but which too many songwriters seem reluctant to do these days: reveal something about themselves and tell stories. This, Casey's third full-length recording, tells as much about him as would any long-distance road-trip conversation



— which is what this journey through "Super America" often feels like. Though he doesn't explicitly map it out as such, the listener is put in Casey's beer can- and Frito-littered passenger seat, as the *wisenheimer* driver — funny, gruff and heartbreakingly passionate — sings along to the radio's folk, blues and rock songs that testify about how much he cherishes and scorns this land of the free.

winter winners

WITH COLD WEATHER UPON US, OUR
HOTWAX REVIEWERS — MICHAEL

FLEMING, VICKIE GILMER, BOB

PROTZMAN AND JIM WALSH — HAVE

ROUNDED UP THE LATEST IN LOCAL

RECORDINGS WITH WHICH TO

HUNKER DOWN AND STAY WAR



JAZZ

Vicki Victoria, "I'm Having a Good Time" (Delight Makers Music) ★★½ — Classic barrelhouse, barroom and bawdy blues dominate this entertaining effort

from singer Vicki Victoria, who, indeed, seems to be having a great time. Obviously a Peggy Lee devotee, Victoria sings several songs either composed by or associated with Lee, along with old-time classic blues tunes by Lil Green, Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox and Don Redman. Twin Cities blues legend Willie Murphy produced, plays piano, and sings a delightful duet with Victoria on "Honky Tonk." The band is terrific, comprising folks like pianist Don Stille, bassist Dave Maslow and saxman Rick O'Dell.

— BOB PROTZMAN