

# Arts

## & Entertainment

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### Mails bring in host of new tapes, records

By Jon Bream / Staff Writer

In a business sense, a record or cassette is a calling card. It doesn't matter if you're Bruce Springsteen introducing a new direction your muse has taken you, or four young women calling yourselves the Clams and trying to get people to pay attention to your music.

Here's a look at some of the calling cards of Minnesota musicians that have been sent to the Star Tribune in the past few months.

The **Clams'** second single is an impressive two-sided effort. "Train Song" and "Crazy Boys" (Imaginary) convey a sense of rock 'n' roll urgency, with the latter comparing favorably to the Georgia Satellites. The Clams are often mentioned in the same breath with the Blue Up?, another all-female Minneapolis rock quartet. The **Blue Up?** has issued the five-song "Now!" (Susstones EP), featuring harmony-laden folk-rock reminiscent of Robyn Hitchcock, the British cult artist who requested that the group open his recent Minneapolis concert.

The current calling cards of Illiterate Beach, the Contras, the Blue Hippos and especially the Gear Daddies make this listener want to hear more from these new bands. The **Gear Daddies'** single includes "She's Happy" (Gark), about a woman's mundane life and her pre-occupation with Elvis Presley's death, and "2-18," reflections on a love affair; this folk-rock quartet plays with electric intensity. On "No Polyester Please . . ." (Susstones EP), the inviting **Illiterate Beach** sounds like English folk-rock meets it's a Beautiful Day. The **Contras** display rock 'n' roll guitar fury with restraint on "Ciphers in the Snow" (Whittier LP), which includes a swell version of ABBA's "S.O.S." **Blue Hippos'** (Twin/Tone EP) showcases the passionate blues-tinged rock 'n' roll of 19-year-old ace Paul Osby.

Equally passionate in the blues vein is "Legends in Our Spare Time" (Treehouse LP) by veterans **Dave Ray and Tony Glover**. One of the most pure and emotive blues albums heard in a long time, this collection of acoustic country-blues is shaped by Glover's moody harmonica and Ray's low-down voice. If you prefer electric boogie blues, check out "A Measure of Time" (Waterhouse LP), which is sort of a greatest-hits compilation of the old **Lamont Cranston Band** (the new incarnation features female singers).

Ray and Glover's LP is not the only local effort that rates high on a national scale. There's also "Buddies of Swing" (Red House LP) by fiddler-mandolinist **Peter Ostroushko**, who continues to amaze with his versatility. Joined by pianist Butch Thompson, fiddler Johnny Gimble and others, Ostroushko swings to tunes by Fats Waller and the Gershwins, to name a few. Prudence Johnson contributes vocals on this fine project.

Another local record of high merit is "Out in Our Meadow" (Red House LP), the overdue debut of **Bill Hinkley and Judy Larson**, who have been playing together for more than a dozen years. It's an acoustic delight, covering music from South America to Scandinavia. Included on the two-record set are blues, calypso, swing, country, folk and a guest appearance by Garrison Keillor.

Another folk album of note is **Marnie Jones'** "ReUnion" (Trivial LP). This clear-voiced soprano is at home on children's tunes and songs of self-searching, mostly of the earnest, sincere variety a la early John Denver. "**Red Gallagher Live**" (Redbird LP) features a folkie who is more an engaging entertainer than a distinctive singer.

Country music is not the most prominent sound associated with Minnesota musicians, but two praiseworthy albums have cropped up. "Tall Corn" (Pendulum LP) suggests that Billy Alcorn has a voice with a country edge and that his band, **Tall Corn**, plays with finesse. **Jack Franzen and the Muddy Water Band's** "A Little North of Dixie" (ACM cassette) offers tastefully low-key country-pop rendered by a vocalist with an attractive understated style.

Studio experimentation is common among Minnesota musicians. **Damien Gossett and Robert Tabb's** "dance 87" (Verdant Ventures cassette) is intelligent studio noodling ranging from avant-garde jazz to Eastern-like chanting with English words to political techno-rap. **Kindergarten's** "No. 3" (Impala EP) contains intense, intriguing instrumental work and self-consciously arty lyrics with occasional social

commentary. "Rock & Roll" (Generic LP) is a concept album concocted by **Robert Ivers**. He often confuses generic with classic when referring to his rock 'n' roll sound, and he walks the line between playful and smart-aleck with his lyrics.

Some area musicians aren't afraid to make blatant attempts for commercial success. "Younger Days" (Vision LP) by **Boys Next Door** sounds like a contrived project by six fresh-faced young men trying to make Top 40 music in the faceless style of Survivor and Glass Tiger. **Randy B's** "Dancing with the DJ" (RNC EP) indicates that Randy Bawek, formerly of the band Sterling, has a good commercial voice and instincts but no distinctive musical personality.

**Victoria Gilmer shows a certain vocal allure on "Victoria's Bullets" (Bullet EP) whether she's singing low-budget disco or pseudo-jazz.**

**Episode I** offers well-sculpted, self-conscious modern-rock on "Young and in Debt" (Bam Boo LP). The duo has British leanings and a sense of humor.

Topical is trendy among some Minnesota musicians. **Jerry and Justin Barfuss's** country-flavored "Ev'rybody's Fishin'" (Count single) would have been almost too cute for even Garrison Keillor's "A Prairie Home Companion" whereas **Jeff Brooks'** carefully packaged "Minnesota Morning" (Tyrol Hills cassette single) is a bit too sappy, like greeting cards with sunsets. "Ferriswheels on the Farm" (Blackbird single), about the death of family farms, is less direct than some of the best stuff by the **Paul Metsa Group**. The flipside of "Party to a Crime" is a nicely shaped story song.