just splendid.

The twin guitar attack of Andrea Cantarelli and Olaf Thorsen still sounds like a battle of who can fit in the most notes in the shortest time, but they are both beautifully melodic guitarists at times and I can forgive the dick swinging when it's counterbalanced by some masterful melodic playing.

Roberto Tiranti has a smashing voice and on the opening number he hits some notes that would have dogs yapping in the surrounding areas, but he also has a velvety timbre to his voice which I like. Oleg Smirnoff on keyboards and Nik Mazzucconi on bass are both great players and get their little cameo parts, but not many.

If you like live albums with lots of key and time changes, some mind bogglingly fast drumming and a singer with a perfect voice for the music, then this album is for you. If you like Labyrinth, then this album is certainly for you. If you're a general Prog fan, then this will probably sit in your collection but not get played too much as there's nothing new about it.

I really don't see the point in this album, especially so soon after their latest release and to feature none of that new album on it just seems odd.

Tony Marshall

LADY BEAST 'VICIOUS BREED' *(Cruz Del Sur)* HEAVY METAL

Is there still any space left – for as much as a single band patch, at least – on your battle jacket? If the answer to this question is yes, you should certainly think about adding the Lady Beast patch to it. The goal behind their newly released 'Vicious Breed' album is to secure this Pennsylvanian quintet a firm place in the Metal world and this surely includes the acid-washed denim armour of its representatives.

'…Breed' ticks all the right boxes when it comes to a robust and rough Heavy Metal sound, one that's largely influenced by the NWOBHM with undertones of Thrash Metal and a bit of Punk-esque nonchalance. Even though this band's hardly a novelty music-wise, the richness of textures and compelling changes of pace show different dimensions to their otherwise gritty and straightforward sound ('Seal The Hex', 'Always With Me'). True to their heritage which reaches way back into the past, Lady Beast indulges themselves in juicy riffs and elaborate guitar solos, all in the best twin guitar attack tradition ('Lone Hunter', 'Get Out'). Keen on keeping their music melodic and their overall tone clean and selective, they're also able to come up with a dose of Power Metal-esque grandiosity ('Every Giant Shall Fall' or the instrumental, slow-ish tune 'Sky Graves'). What's also pretty interesting is that the vocal duties in this band are handled by a female singer – Deborah Levine. This powerhouse front-woman blasts through a total of eight songs on the album, proving each time that the group moniker was hardly accidental when it comes to her vocal abilities.

Completed with a wonderfully clichéd artwork and fitting lyrics, 'Vicious Breed' is an easily digestible brew of Metal sounds based on well-tested recipes. Lady Beast's obvious inspirations scream through each and every note on the album – it's an enjoyable nostalgia trip for every old-school Judas Priest, Saxon or Motörhead fan and a useful introduction for Metalhead newbies in one complete package. Most of all, this mixture of riffs and melodies was clearly brewed with a passion that's supported by cohesive song-writing ideas, solid musicianship and strong vocal parts. You may have heard it all before – but you'll enjoy it anyway if you have at least a trace of Metal in your blood.

Alexandra Mrozowska

KISS THE GUN – 'NIGHTMARES' *(3MS)* HARD ROCK

One of the joys of this job, and occasionally the downside, is being sent albums from our Reviews Editor of which you know nothing about the band or the music therein. In this case, the former applies as it has been a total joy listening to Kiss The Gun, especially as I discover they are British (well almost) and from the southern counties (like me). I was, initially, dubious about the album cover which suggested to me that the album would be much darker than it is, but then you know the saying "don't judge a book…" etc.

Kiss The Gun, it would appear, formed in 2016 and the various playing members of the band have long pedigrees in this industry, some having been around as long as me I would suggest, so one would expect quality. That you get in droves! Vocalist Nadin Zakharian, on the other hand, hails from Georgia and was a semi-finalist in a TV talent show (also appearing on 'The Voice Of Georgia') and is one hell of a find! Search for her on YouTube and you'll see one video of her has views into seven figures.

'Nightmare' is a fine release, it's modern in places and yet sounds retro at other times. From the opener 'Into The Fire', through the title track and the very AOR 'Stand Up', it's chock full of fine songs. Great harmonies and solid guitar work also assist in making this a damn good debut. The good thing about the album is it doesn't remind me of any band in particular so Kiss The Gun are stamping their own trademark. Overall, this is one debut that is strongly recommended.

Steve Price

LARS ERIC MATTSSON 'SAND AND BLOOD' *(Lion)* ROCK

Sand And Blood' is the latest release from all-round Finnish musical maestro Lars Eric Mattsson. This is his first full electric release in four years and consists of eleven finely crafted songs, on all of which he plays guitar, bass, keyboards and performs the vocals (with the exception of the final track), and is supported by Christer Jansson on drums and Alexander King on piano. The first nine songs are a loose concept arc, followed by an updated recording of the 1987 track 'Can't Go On Without Your Love' and ending with 'Still Here Waiting' where Adrienn Antal takes over the vocal duties.

This is a difficult album to describe as the content doesn't follow any particular style or conventional box you may describe. this as a Heavy Rock album with modern influences and should appeal to listeners of Gary Moore, Michael Schenker and Uli Jon Roth – the latter I can see. Mattsson sounds like a cross between Sting and John Anderson but doesn't have the strongest voice so the sound is dominated by the guitar which is very expressive and innovative.

'Rock Your World' opens the album and it starts with a catchy guitar riff that is the hook for the song. This is followed by the heavier 'Snow Queen' and 'You' with its slow bass intro becoming the background riff that is the song's foundation. The lighter 'Queen Of Love' is a slower track, but one with plenty of virtuoso guitar work, while 'Helena Of Troy' is probably the heaviest offering with its heavy chord riff intro and pounding drums throughout. 'Stand Up And Shout' maintains the heavy theme with a powerful riff that's not a million miles away from Dire Straits' 'Money For Nothing'. 'Bleed For You' slows things down again, whereas 'I'll Be Your Light' is a mid-tempo track with some incredible guitar tones. 'If Loving You Is A Sin' then follows and could be considered a ballad which suits Lars Eric Mattsson's voice.

This is an album that will appeal to those that appreciate virtuoso guitar playing with interesting arrangements that are a bit different. Highlights for me would be '…Troy' and '…World'.

Chris Mee

LEATHER LEAF 'DESECRATED MIND' *(Independent)* SYMPHONIC

Having previously pinned their colours to the mast of the good ship Hard Rock, Leather Leaf now find themselves desperately chasing the over-burdened bandwagon of Symphonic Metal. With some press sources talking of Nightwish meeting Mötley Crüe and others suggested outfits such as Evanescence, Disturbed and Symphony X as influences, the sad news is that Leather Leaf hit none of those lofty aspirations.

The issues run deep, the muddy sound and lifeless guitars not able to hide the below par vocals from Melissa Madnezz, an undoubtedly talented lady who seems to have been squeezed into a style that neither suits her, nor shows her abilities in a kind light. When things are Symphonic, her high-end register is hanging on for dear life, while the lack of power she brings to the meatier moments just feels symptomatic of this whole release. However, when 'White Picket Fence' lands somewhere between Symphonic Metal and Enya, suddenly this lady comes into her own, the more restrained style showing a enigmatic and atmospheric side to her voice that simply isn't able to come through elsewhere. However, a similar passage during 'Barely Alive' (which appears in both full and edited lengths) is admittedly beguiling.

Musically, things are hardly inspired, the safe options taken every time as 'This Haunting' and 'Delete Me' (don't tempt us…) attempt to infuse the merest hint of energy into proceedings. Yet with 'On The Radio' closer to the straight-up Hard Rock the band reportedly favoured before, the guitar playing from Max Montiel does spark into life, the grating riff a much more believable prospect than the Symphonic styling attempted elsewhere; but even here Madnezz struggles to match the intensity and any hopes of hitting the jackpot are dashed. With the Symphonic Metal market verging on saturation point, any newcomers really need to be on their game to have a chance of survival. Whether through the perfunctory songs, off kilter vocals or dreadful sound, Leather Leaf unfortunately fall well short of the mark.

Steven Reid

LEAVES' EYES 'SIGN OF THE DRAGONHEAD' *(AFM)* SYMPHONIC

It's been a turbulent couple of years for Leaves' Eyes. Founder member, vocalist and face of the band Liv Kristine left and her omnipresence in Leaves' Eyes left a big hole. Personally speaking (as a fan), I wasn't sure if they would be ever able to fill her place, but after a short-ish search, enter new chanteuse Elina Siirala (Angel Nation) who has put in a very fine and polished vocal performance indeed on her debut Leaves' Eyes album. 'Sign Of The Dragonhead' is a continuation of the Viking Saga of Harold Fairhair (the first King of Norway) that the band started on their last album 'King Of Kings'. It's also their most complete album to date (in my opinion), with a symphony orchestra under the baton of Victor Smolski, The London Voices Choir (of 'Star Wars' fame) and many guest musicians all help out to give this new album a big and bold audio attack that I found myself enjoying more and more, each and every time I played this release.

'Sign Of The Dragonhead' is a dramatic and energetic way to start an album, it's full of heavy, powerful guitar riffs, Siirala's strong, forceful vocals and some wonderful orchestration. This song slams into you like an out of control lorry that's flattening everything in its path and it bodes well for what's to follow. 'Across The Sea', the brooding 'Like A Mountain', the Folk rockers 'Jomsborg' and 'Riders On The Wind', 'Völva', the stunning ballad 'Fairer Than The Sun', the straight-ahead Melodic Metal of 'Shadows In The Night' and the epic closing track 'Waves Of Euphoria' all join together to showcase a band that, despite losing an important founding member, still have it across the board when it comes to writing, playing and producing fantastic sounding Melodic Symphonic Power Metal.

My worries at the loss of Kristine have easily been put to bed by this wonderful new Leaves' Eyes album and it's so nice (and a relief) to welcome a new singer to the band who – on this evidence – will take them to that all-important next level. This album is a winner in every department.

Ian Johnson

LICENCE 'LICENCE 2 ROCK' *(Metalapolis)* HEAVY METAL

Where else but the wild and whacky world of Rock 'n' Roll and Metal could you get away with the sort of extravagant claim that "you can't buy the licence to Rock, you have to own it. Licence does!"

The band is the brainchild of local Ludwigsburg guitar hero Steam Thiess who's not going to let a touch of nepotism hold back his ambition. Bringing his daughter Jacky Coke on board on vocals, the Licence line-up is completed by the splendidly named rhythm section of Pappe (bass) and Sammy Sin (drums).

Their debut is Classic Metal. What they call heavy and melodic and "back to the basics without sounding dated" – an interesting claim in itself so bear with us for a moment. They follow the strongly emerging trend on 'Licence 2 Rock' with an introductory instrumental piece, imaginatively titled 'In The Beginning', to lead into the first proper track 'Don't Touch The Light'. It's a down to earth, honest slab of Metal fronted by an extravagant coarse vocal sneer, when the thought strikes that perhaps Licence are flying the flag for a new genre – TRONNOBHM. Flows off the tongue quite nicely, unlike The Return Of New Wave Of British Heavy Metal. All the ingredients are there; big sustained chords, plenty of denim/satin and leather (probably that is as Licence prove one hell of a difficult band to Google and check on their sartorial splendour) and a rhythm section that keeps things simple and straight on the button.

For a highlight, check out the belter of a mid-album track 'Watching' – a sleazy hard riff matched by a lyric that doesn't hold back; like the music, it's straight to the point. Literal is the word. The sound of a steam engine heralds, yes… you've guessed it, 'Metal Train' and a sense of déjà vu emerges as some random tuning across the frequency dials serves as the intro to 'Turn On The Radio', but by now you're probably one step ahead. Again, there's some musical potential, even if it touches base more than once with Joe Elliott's boys from the Steel City and if you enjoy digging, a few more influences may surface.

To be fair, the absence of variety and originality might ultimately be the sticking point with the feeling that you've heard this all before, simply because you probably have. The promise of 'Nights Of Pleasure' from Licence might just be pushing their luck a tad.

Mike Ainscoe

LIFESIGNS 'CARDINGTON' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

It's been four years since the band's eponymous debut and given the nature of the business these days, they resorted to crowdfunding their second effort and the campaign was very successful, hitting their target inside forty-eight hours.

Guitarist Niko Tsonev has stepped down from the group since their 'Live Under The Bridge' release, on which several of these tracks were aired, but he still features here albeit guest guitarists Dave Bainbridge, Menno Gootjes and Robin Boult had to be employed to complete the album, but that's not detrimental to the continuity as John Young's keyboards are the predominant instruments.

It would be too easy to simply label this as Neo-Prog because it's more varied than that and crosses various boundaries. Opening number 'N' starts with a Frost*-like synth refrain, but across its ten plus minutes, it passes through different moods, each of which is wonderfully melodic and captivating. Bainbridge's solos are terrific, Jon Poole's resonant bass is none too shabby either and Frosty Beedle shows what a great drummer he is.

'Voice In My Head' has a wonderful shuffle beat and a fine vocal arrangement. This time Gootjes provides the incisive solos. 'Chasing Rainbows' begins in sparse fashion but builds, the guitar work and little accentuations are subtle but oh so effective, giving the arrangement top marks.

'Different' has some lovely piano work from Young whose lyrics are also terrific. It's a track chock full of melody plus peaks and troughs of power. 'Impossible' has Pop credentials; it puts me in mind of Train and Maroon 5 in places. The knack of producing great hooks and refrains is once again evident, while the guitar solo duties are split between Bainbridge and Gootjes.

'Touch' is one of the shorter tracks, it has keyboards to the fore but where the bass is also front and centre. Its lengthy outro is a rip-roaring affair. The album closes with the epic title track, the name of which is the site of the hangers where the ill-fated R101 Airship was based. The tumbling refrain of the piano and acoustic guitar set an initially brisk platform before the song goes into a melancholy phase from where layers are added before it ebbs once more. In terms of grandeur and scale, if not style, I can't help but think of Big Big Train as a comparison.

Simply put, Prog fans will revel in this album.

Gary Marshall

LILYGUN 'STRENGTH & GRACE' *(A Line)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

I remember reviewing the debut self-titled Lilygun album for issue #54 back in 2012. Though my thoughts were positive on the whole, my main reservations concerned the vocals of the band's leader and vocalist Anna-Christina. Unfortunately, those reservations come to the fore again on this new sophomore release 'Strength & Grace'. The singer has suffered with health issues in recent years, so I must commend her on her own strength and dedication in continuing with the project she obviously loves. Lilygun have built up a healthy fan base in London, where they tend to concentrate their activities, but outside the capital they seem to be relatively unknown.

The Lilygun musical style is darkly Gothic and quite sombre in tone and I will try to create a scene to illustrate how it impacts. "You stumble across a Gothic clothing/craft shop in Whitby or York or somewhere similar. In the window are decorative skulls, dragons, gargoyles and endless rows of candles. You walk inside. It is dark and there is incense burning, creating a heady atmosphere. Behind the counter is a beautiful girl with long black hair. In the background music is playing. It is the 'Strength & Grace' album and it is on repeat". That's an image that came to mind immediately following just one play after my own experiences in establishments of that type. It is all very downbeat and an air of melancholy tends to prevail. The pacing lacks variety and the sedate nature of the material is uninspiring and makes it difficult to maintain interest levels. 'What Goes Around' and the hook of 'Free Instead' aside, there is no real sense of urgency or energy. Anna-Christina has a decent voice, but it feels as though she's never really pushing herself and that is one of the missing factors needed to inject the songs with some identity.

'Strength & Grace' contains just eight tracks and has a short running time (just over thirty minutes), but after several plays, I felt as though more of my day had passed. I'm always reluctant to give a negative review and the Lilygun fans out there will probably disagree with my musings. I can't see this having much appeal to the readers (or writers) of Fireworks so maybe the band's success is dependent on a rather different audience.

Dave Bott

LIONE-CONTE 'LIONE-CONTI' *(Frontiers)* POWER METAL

"Here comes another one, here comes a bunch of 'em…" – Monty Python. There are many different views regarding the Frontiers way of bringing different people to play together, often on other people's songs; some regard it as soulless, some point to the absolute success of disparate talents coming together, while some believe it's an interesting label idea if it isn't overdone.

We do seem to have a lot of these projects popping up and so some are going to be more successful than others. This cuddling up of Alessandro Conti from Trick Or Treat and Fabio Lione, originally with Rhapsody, singing Simone Mularoni's songs is patterned after the success of the Allen/Lande albums, and this partnership does what that one does very well, albeit with a little more of a prickly rush.

This offering really is well done, well played, well sung and well mixed in that harder-edged Euro Melodic Rock way, and this is both its excellence and challenge. For those who like that sound, this is going to be amazing, but for those who are getting bored with it, this may sound like so much processed meat.

There are some truly exciting moments to be found here, the double kicks racing the guitar on 'Outcome', while 'Somebody Else' believes there's no point in having a ballad unless you're going to have one you can see from space. The closing track 'Crosswinds' is as dramatic as the drums at the end of 'EastEnders', the clear tuned solo taking you home and the moments which are over-sung play right into the hands of this music. However, there's a little too much of 'Truth' where everything is expected, from the heaving riff and twinkling synths to the dropped-out verse and the catchy chorus.

That's it then, depending on your view, another excellent combo offering or another meeting of two disparate talents who do not mesh. To my ears, both can be found here. This isn't Allen/Lande, but occasionally it gets close, and Frontiers surely have to be given kudos for trying.

Steve Swift

LUX 'SUPER 8' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

When you think about France – and the French music scene in particular – Blues, Country and Folk might not be the first genres that come to mind. However, the very essence of Americana with a modern twist is what apparently inspired Sylvain Laforge, the Paris-based guitar player. Having accompanied the likes of French singer Catherine Ringer before, he has now joined forces with the American vocalist Angela Randall to form LUX with 'Super 8' being the duo's first album.

MAGNUM – 'LOST ON THE ROAD TO ETERNITY' *(SteamhammerSPV)* ROCK

This will be very easy. Magnum's follow-up to 2016's 'Sacred Blood "Divine" Lies' sees the band with a new line-up. Long-standing keyboard player Mark Stanway, who left the band in December 2016, has been replaced by Rick Benton, while departed drummer Harry James (who has two other bands to deal with) has been replaced with Lee Morris. I suspect, like me, you will probably have gone "who?" in both cases. However, let me tell you, this band sounds totally re-invigorated and they have come out with the best album they've recorded for years.

I had only listened to this once and I already knew this was something special. Right from the solid opener of 'Peaches And Cream' through to the last track 'King Of The World', there is something in every song that will make you sit up and take note. The break in 'Show Me Your Hands' has an African feel, thanks to the sequenced Marimba (I think) running under the guitar, while the title track has a nicely classic piano opening which leads into some glorious orchestration courtesy of the Wolf Kerschek Orchestra. Then, at around just under two minutes in, a voice arrives that isn't Bob Catley's! Instead, it belongs to Edguy/Avantasia front-man Tobias Sammet; talk about a surprise, I can't remember anyone else ever singing with Magnum (write in and correct me if I am wrong). This title track is almost six minutes long, as is the following 'Without Love', and those times sit firmly in Prog territory. 'Forbidden Masquerade' has a taste of 'On A Storyteller's Night', and then at two and a half minutes in, it has another gorgeous section that feels like you really should be outside staring at a starry sky while listening to it; it's almost hymnal.

There's not a bad song on here and every one of them should and likely will become a Magnum favourite. I firmly believe that any long-time fans who lost their faith in the band over the years will once again jump back in after hearing this – all I can say is well done guys!

Andy Brailsford

Joe Satriani's music is a continuation of the path he has been on since his debut album 'Not Of This Earth' back in 1986. Over the years, Satriani has developed a unique style of playing that has influenced countless guitarists and has made him a household name in the guitar world. Satriani's music is instrumental, which is unusual for a guitarist who has had success in the mainstream, but his music is so melodic and accessible that it has a wide appeal.

'Shockwave Supernova' is Satriani's fifteenth studio album and it's a return to the more guitar-driven sound of his earlier albums. The album opens with the title track, which is a powerful and energetic song that sets the tone for the rest of the album. The guitar work is incredible, as always, and Satriani's solos are both melodic and technically impressive.

'All For One' is a more laid-back track, with a catchy melody and a great guitar solo. 'Perfect Love Affair' is a beautiful ballad, with a soaring guitar solo that will give you goosebumps. 'Lifetime' is a fast-paced track with a driving rhythm section and a great guitar riff.

'Nineteenth Nervous Breakdown' is a cover of the Rolling Stones song, and Satriani does a great job of making it his own. The guitar work is fantastic, and the song has a real energy to it.

'Energy' is a short instrumental track that showcases Satriani's virtuosity on the guitar. The song is full of fast runs and complex chords, and it's a real treat for guitar fans.

'Cataclysm' is a heavy track with a powerful riff and a great guitar solo. 'Ali Farka' is a tribute to the late Malian guitarist Ali Farka Touré, and it's a beautiful and moving piece of music.

'Spirit Of Wood' is a folk-influenced track with a catchy melody and a great guitar solo. 'Personal Jesus' is a cover of the Depeche Mode song, and Satriani does a great job of making it his own. The guitar work is fantastic, and the song has a real groove to it.

'Here And There' is a short instrumental track that showcases Satriani's virtuosity on the guitar. The song is full of fast runs and complex chords, and it's a real treat for guitar fans.

'Big Bad Moon' is a heavy track with a powerful riff and a great guitar solo. 'Lies' is a beautiful ballad, with a soaring guitar solo that will give you goosebumps.

'Shockwave Supernova' is a great album that showcases Satriani's virtuosity on the guitar. The album is full of catchy melodies, powerful riffs, and great guitar solos. It's a return to the more guitar-driven sound of his earlier albums, and it's a welcome one.

'Super 8' has a late nineties/early noughties vibe to it, each song harking back to the era when the Alternative Rock scene thrived in all its varieties. At certain points, it might even be mistaken for the likes of The Cranberries or The Cardigans if it wasn't for that Country-ish, slightly bluesy twang given off by Laforge's guitar. The sound on the album is kept deliberately simple, the instrumental parts being far from virtuosity, but still expressive enough to draw the attention of guitar lovers ('Rough Translation', 'Island' or the slightly more up-tempo 'While Waiting'). Effective as they are in providing a solid background for the emotionally-laden vocal expressions of Randall ('Damaged', 'Hijack') and occasionally Laforge ('Liquid And Fire'), they push the vocals and the lyrics up to the front, making it an essence of the album. Certain tracks – for instance, 'Runway Lights' or 'Super 8' – have a laid-back and live feel to them that makes it easy for the listener to envisage for themselves the power duo performing the same songs in concert. However, there is also one serious drawback to the album and that is a lack of stylistic variety among the tracks which makes the entire set cohesive but also quite repetitive.

While 'Super 8' probably won't create an enormous buzz in the Alternative Rock music scene, it still remains interesting due to its late nineties Alternative scene vibe paired with a distinctive Americana flavour. It's also a reminder for us listeners that good music doesn't always have to be flashy and spectacular. Sometimes this type of back-to-basics approach works better than the excessive virtuosity route, especially when it comes to emotionally-laden intimate music. Therefore, if you value feeling and authenticity above elaborate song structures and instrumental panache, LUX may be an act you should keep on your radar from now on.

Alexandra Mrozowska

MADAM X 'MONSTROCITY' *(EMP)* HEAVY METAL

After a single album in 1984, Madam X fell apart in 1988 after recruiting a cocky young singer called Sebastian Bach (who never recorded with them) and they all went their separate ways. That is until now, obviously, as the original line-up has reformed, including sister act Maxine and Roxy Petrucci (guitar and drums respectively) with original vocalist Bret Kaiser.

Sensibly, Madam X have been careful not to just release a thinly veiled copy of their original release. What they have done is keep the energy and vibe they had in 1984 but remove some of the cheese (and there was plenty) and replace it with steel.

Although the band have redone their best-known song 'High In High School' (not sure why, but it's still a good song), the rest of the album is heavier and more intense. The sense of fun, of telling the world how all we wanted was to rock (yeah!), is hidden behind some pretty kick-ass Metal tunes. It's still there, don't get me wrong, but it's no longer sat on the surface sticking its tongue out at you. Opener 'Resurrection' really sets the tone for the record nicely, it's an in-your-face track that has a definite eighties feel to it but doesn't sound too dated. What's evident is that Madam X can still deliver the goods, with big riffs, pounding drums and very tight vocals from Kaiser, who can still scream like a Metal God when he has to. To be honest, it's pretty much like a Judas Priest track in a cool way. It's a high benchmark for the rest of the album, and whilst the quality doesn't continue at this high level throughout, there's not a duff offering in sight.

There's no reason why 'Monstrocity' shouldn't appeal to old fans and make new