

7 is the undisputed classic, loading up on strum-and-jangle indie rock that pretty much paved the way for every Amerindie band who made their bones during college rock's '80s heyday. The follow-up – 1986's *The Good Earth* **8** – deserves to be re-evaluated. The album is more song-oriented than its predecessor, layering actual melodies on top of all the moody textures. These expanded reissues tag on demos and live songs, including Beatles and Neil Young covers.

Michael Gallucci

MILES BENJAMIN ANTHONY ROBINSON

Summer Of Fear
(Saddle Creek)

It's totally reasonable to think Miles Robinson would go the way of Micah P. Hinson, a fellow youngster who steered too close to the brink, revealed all in soul-emptying songs, and then couldn't overcome the past. On his sophomore album (produced by TV On The Radio's Kyp Malone), Robinson is still fighting his way through the dark ("It's a hard enough time trying to hang myself"), but the music implicitly seeks redemption even as the singer takes every chance to deny it. *Summer Of Fear*, partly because of the cleaner recording, is infinitely brighter than its predecessor and apparently enthralled by gospel. His dark obsessions need to throw up an arm to block the stained-glass beaming of "Always An Anchor," while "Death By Dust" is like R.E.M. doing "Alex Chilton" but blowing kisses to the restorative, general idea of song. Robinson still struggles to hit notes exacerbated by a pristine mixing job, but flaws always appear greater under the lights.

7 Steve Forstneger
Appearing: 11/15 at Reggie's.

WOODY GUTHRIE

My Dusty Road

(Rounder)

As recounted at length in the accompanying booklet, the story behind the 2003 discovery and subsequent refurbishing of the metal masters that function as this four-disc set's Rosetta Stone is almost as interesting as the songs themselves. Serendipitously well-preserved, the masters turned out to contain Woody Guthrie's 1944 recordings for the Stinson company, much of which had been released over the years but in annoyingly lo-fi versions. Of the 54 tracks thematically organized here-in (*Woody's 'Greatest' Hits*; *Woody's Roots*; *Woody The Agitator*; *Woody, Cisco And Sonny*), six have never been previously released, and one, "Bad Reputation" (sic), wasn't even known to have existed. Would the left-wing individualism they enshrine matter much if it hadn't inspired Bob Dylan and he, in turn, countless others? Maybe not. But it did, so it does.

8 Arsenio Orteza

PEARL JAM

Backspacer

(Monkey Wrench)

Joyful is not a word often affiliated with Pearl Jam's recorded output. Yet, on the first single ("The Fixer") from the Seattle quintet's eighth album, Eddie Vedder plays the role of a man who has a wish list of things he'd like to improve ("If something's broke/I want to put a bit of

fixin' on it," he intones).

It's a surprisingly optimistic vibe that runs through most of the 11 tracks on this taut, concise record, that the band are self-releasing on their own label. What seems, on the surface, to be an elegantly simplistic record delivers subtle hooks and gorgeous guitar lines in many of its nooks and crannies.

When Vedder takes his rich, vibrato baritone for a test drive on ballads like "The End" and "Just Breathe," the results are some of his most impressive vocal takes set to tape. Of course, no PJ record would be complete without a swelling crescendo in the chorus ("Amongst The Waves," "Unthought Known") or the now requisite Who homage ("Supersonic").

7 Curt Baran

CALIFONE

All My Friends Are Funeral Singers
(Dead Oceans)

All My Friends Are Funeral Singers is an enchanting album from Califone that focuses on exploring the subtle textures of music while doubling as a soundtrack for a film by frontman Tim Rutili. The textures explored include the vocals over an orchestrated collection of varied backing instruments on "1928"; the reverberating twang of the guitar strings on "Polish Girls"; the building, melodic progression on "Funeral Singers"; and the unrestrained bursts of percussive activity on "Buñuel." The movie has a lot to live up to.

8 Jason Scales

KRIS KRISTOFFERSON

Closer To The Bone
(New West)

No matter what genre he's visiting, Kris Kristofferson is one of the world's most provocative and stylized songwriters with an unmistakable vocal warble. On this roots-rockin' collection, he turns intentionally personal with the subjects, speaking candidly about his family life ("From Here To Forever"), lamenting his friend and frequent collaborator Johnny Cash ("Good Morning John"), while calling for unity among colors and creeds ("Let The Walls Come Down"). Even with the heart-on-sleeve sentiments, there isn't anything all that surprising about the production from Don Was, though Kristofferson's tender harmonica howls and stripped-back strumming are just as astute as they are authentic.

7 Andy Argyrakis

BELPHEGOR

Walpurgis Rites - Hexenwahn
(Nuclear Blast)

Walpurgis is the latest installment in the endless bloodbath of carnage from blackened death-metal outfit Belphegor. This eighth studio album is another brutal collection of extreme, breakneck blast beats; rocket-propelled, technically precise riffing; and grotesque, lyrical blasphemy. Keeping with its preference for demonic occult themes, Belphegor examines witchcraft, black magic, and pagan rituals with lyrics that are purportedly actual chants and incantations from archaic scripts (which make them either more authentically evil or comically absurd). It really doesn't matter, as Helmuth employs both a coarse growl and a throaty rasp to rip through "Destroyer Hekate" and "Reichswehr In Blood," but since most of the lyrics are either nearly indecipherable or in foreign languages, the articulation and expres-