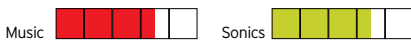


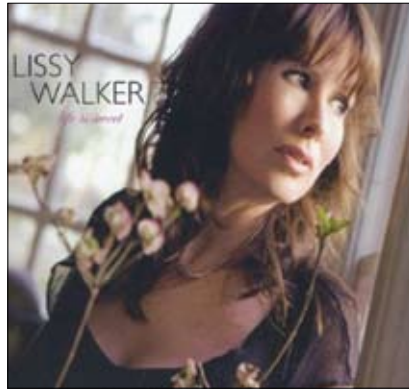
Rock Music Reviews



Mark Chesnutt: *Outlaw*. Saguaro Road.

After a decade-plus of cutting contemporary classics for MCA Nashville, Mark Chesnutt hits his third straight indie label tape measure blast with *Outlaw*. This time out Chesnutt teams up with former Dwight Yoakam producer/alter ego Pete Anderson to advance an even harder-edged sound than Chesnutt favored in his MCA days—you can practically smell the sawdust on a honky tonk hardwood floor in this raw sonic setting. It'll put you in mind of the best of the late 80s New Traditionalist style in its evocative soundscape of basic band augmented by organ and fiddle, with plenty of swirling, stinging, and twanging guitar blazing across the channels and some rock 'n' roll ballast at the bottom supporting Chesnutt's expressive, husky tenor in the dead center of the fray, moaning a mean country blues (Hank Jr.'s "Whiskey Bent and Hell Bound") or digging in with a plaintive Amber Rigby on Shel Silverstein's tearjerker waltz ("Couple More Years"). He does the most spiritualized take yet (yes, even more so than Cash's) on Kristofferson's "Sunday Morning Coming Down," and a fine job channeling ol' Waylon's rambunctious spirit on Neil Young's "Are You Ready For the Country"—the answer to which is yes, if it's this real. **David McGee**

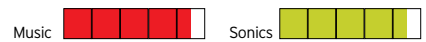
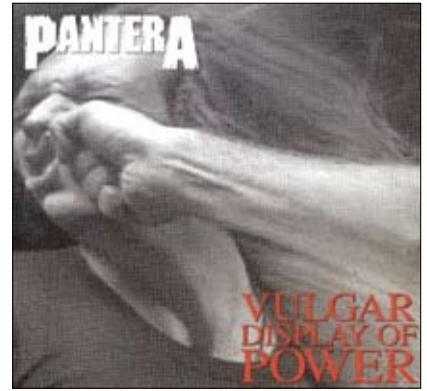
Further Listening: Patty Loveless: *Sleepless Nights*; Randy Travis: *Heroes & Friends*



Lissy Walker: *Life Is Sweet*. Strawberry Canyon.

It's a rich time for fans of the Great American Songbook. Especially on the distaff side, the number of compelling vocalists imbuing new meaning to the songs of Mercer, Gershwin, Porter, et al., grows with each passing month, whether it's veterans such as Jane Monheit or relative newcomers on the order of Victoria Clark bringing the news. Newest of all is the Bay Area's Lissy Walker, whose self-released *Life Is Sweet* is a sheer delight from start to finish. Backed by a tight combo conversant in jazz, pop, folk, and country (one of the key members is keyboardist John R. Burr, who's also worked with bluegrass giant Alison Brown), Walker purrs, coos, and swaggers sultrily through the Songbook. The timeless "I Remember You" gets a warm, shuffling take; Irving Berlin's ethereal "What'll I Do" is as wistful and forsaken a torch song as any saloon has ever heard at 2 a.m.; and—surprise!—Ray Davies' "Celluloid Heroes" frames Walker's forlorn report from the other side of stardom in a gentle, piano-and-brush drums country-inflected soft-shoe. Walker's engagement with or distance from her material brings fresh perspective to it, and sonically it's all in proper proportion: band, voice, and attitude, one beautiful, delectably sweet whole. **DG**

Further Listening: Victoria Clarke: *Fifteen Seconds of Grace*; Nancy LaMott: *What's Good About Goodbye?*



Pantera: *Vulgar Display of Power*. Rhino (two 180-gram LPs).

Vulgar Display of Power is considered to be Pantera's breakout release though the Texas-based quartet was far from a new face on the rock scene before it, with four indie releases. For loyal followers, *V/DOP* unleashed a Pantera with a grittier edge. Gone was the glam-metal persona, replaced by a darker, harder grade of iron. Led by the Abbot brothers, with Vinnie Paul and "Dimebag" Darrell on drums and guitar respectively, Rex Brown on bass, and lead vocalist Phil Anselmo, the music is seminal grunge metal that's surprisingly tuneful and structured. Driven by double kick drum riffs, bone crushing power chords, hell-bound guitar slashes, and an onslaught of tripled and quadrupled beats and pulses, the tracks are geared to overwhelm and disorient. Thematically *V/DOP* fuses generational angst and isolation with the band's tirades against war and racism while standout songs like "Rise" and the anthemic "Walk" reignite the fuse of 60s-era protest. The Rhino reissue is a template for satisfying vinyl junkies. The 180-gram, two-disc gatefold LP was remastered from the original analog tapes by cutting maestro Doug Sax (see the interview on p. 24). Sonics are cataclysmically pristine right down to Anselmo's shredding vocals—but demand a high-output system with unfettered dynamics. **Neil Gader**

Further Listening: Black Sabbath: *Paranoid*; Metallica: *Master of Puppets*