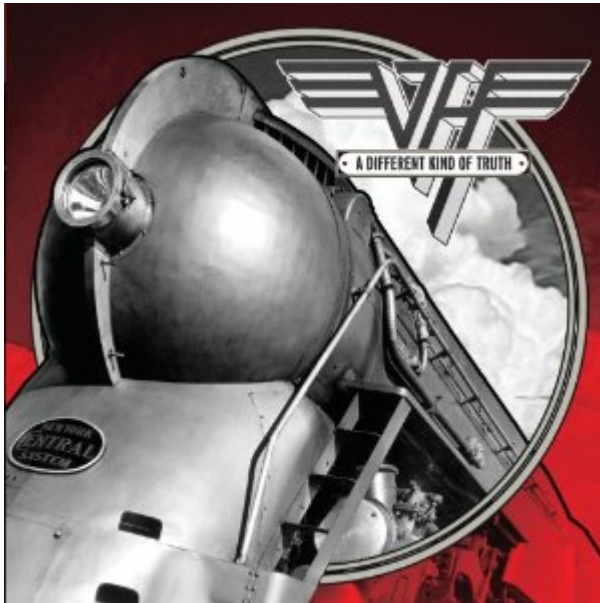


Van Halen – A Different Kind Of Truth



A Different Kind Of Truth is Van Halen's twelfth studio album, and their first in fourteen years. This album marks the recording reunion of Eddie and Alex Van Halen with original singer/front man David Lee Roth. Roth was the singer in Van Halen from 1974-1985, and was replaced by Sammy Hagar when the band softened their hard rock sound into a more commercial pop rock sound in the mid-1980s. Roth recorded two songs with Van Halen in 1996 for a greatest hits album released when Hagar left the band, and expectations were high that he would return for a new album, but it didn't work out that way. Instead, Extreme singer Gary Cherone joined Van Halen, and they recorded one weak album together. Touring reunions with both Hagar and Roth followed the departure of Cherone in 1999, but there was no new music recorded. There was much debate whether there would ever be another Van Halen album, as Eddie Van Halen was often seen drunk in public during his separation and after his divorce from actress Valerie Bertinelli. Furthermore, a YouTube video surfaced of Eddie, appearing to be near death, sitting in with a party band playing a Tommy Bolin song, and his guitar playing was pathetic. Eddie appeared unhealthy due to suspected drug use, and the second half of a tour was cancelled in 2008 due to Eddie's poor health. This is the much abbreviated "CliffsNotes" version of the Van Halen soap opera, which effectively reduced one of the most popular rock bands in history to a joke.

Then the unlikely happened. David Lee Roth and the Van Halen brothers, with Eddie's twenty year old son Wolfgang on bass and background vocals, recorded a really good, hard rocking album together. There aren't any cheesy keyboard-driven songs or wimpy ballads on A Different Kind Of Truth, it is all rock and roll. After the first single Tattoo was released, I wasn't expecting this to be a great album, and after hearing the first three songs, I was losing interest. Beginning with the fourth song in, however, the songs start seriously rocking, and they don't let up for the remaining ten songs, which is about as many songs as most Van Halen albums ever had anyway. This is an album on par with the first two Van Halen albums in the 1970s. This is no coincidence, as four of these songs were on the Gene Simmons (of the band Kiss) financed demos from 1976, and most of the others are unfinished songs written by David Lee

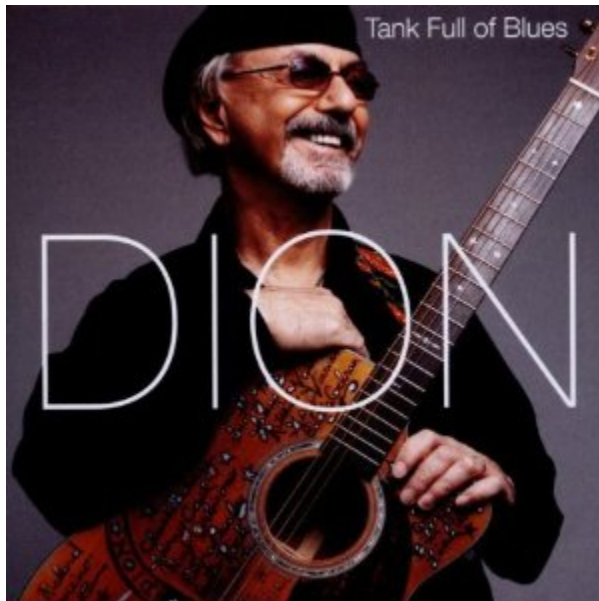
Roth and Eddie Van Halen in the late 1970s. Only five songs are totally new compositions. This album actually sounds more like a follow up to Van Halen II or 1984 than a reunion album recorded 28 years later!

A Different Kind Of Truth (the name comes from a line in the barn burning song Bullethead) has a steam locomotive on the cover that is a fitting image for the music within (and it's almost exactly like the Commodores' Movin' On album cover). This is one solid, fun, hard-rocking album with a sense of humor, just like the original Van Halen albums always were. Eddie Van Halen's guitar growls and screams, and so does David Lee Roth. Roth has more speaking parts than he usually does, and he sounds even more menacing than ever before. Alex Van Halen's drumming keeps the music churning along, and Wolfgang is more than capable on the bass guitar. Gone is original bassist Michael Anthony and his distinct backing vocals that were a Van Halen signature, but as long as the band is making music this good, I can easily live without his vocals. The band plays like they had something to prove on this album. I believe that they had to prove that they could still rock and still be relevant, and they have definitely proven both of these. The best part is that they genuinely seem to be having great fun doing it, and YouTube videos of the opening concert show that the band is reinvigorated and enjoying playing live again.

Most Van Halen fans are split into two camps: Those that prefer the David Lee Roth era, and those that prefer the Sammy Hagar era. I like both eras, but the harder rocking David Lee Roth era is by far my favorite. Hagar is a better singer than Roth, but Roth is a better front man, and he brings out the best performance of the band. Both front men can be extremely annoying and irritating to me at times, but Roth seems to have mellowed very well with age. He's still confident, but not as over the top cocky as he used to be. Hagar has gone on record slamming the single Tattoo (the song Stay Frosty should have been the single), and the fact that the band used older material. I don't care where the songs came from, they are great, and Eddie has said that he has ten albums worth of demos and unfinished songs from the band's early days. The bottom line is that Hagar has only been involved with one album that is as good as A Different Kind Of Truth, and that was the first Montrose album in 1973.

A Different Kind Of Truth is available in two versions: the standard 13 track version and a deluxe version that includes a video DVD of three acoustic performances. One new song, You And Your Blues along with Panama and Beautiful Girls. A double vinyl version of the album will be released on March 26, 2012, including a special red vinyl tour edition. The vinyl is said to have been meticulously mastered, since the band is aware of the potential of high sound quality that vinyl offers.

Dion – Tank Full Of Blues



Dion DiMucci, usually known as simply Dion, was born in 1939 and grew up in the Bronx of New York City. His dad was a vaudeville performer that Dion often toured with. Dion became a fan of early country music, blues and doo-wop, and he sang a cappella on street corners and clubs with his friends, leading to their recording as Dion and the Belmonts in the late 1950s. On February 2, 1959, while touring on The Winter Dance Party with Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper, Dion turned down a seat on plane to the next show, because it was going to cost \$36.00, the same amount that his parents had paid for rent in the Bronx, and Dion couldn't justify spending that much. As most everyone probably knows, the plane crashed, killing everyone on board. Dion went solo in 1960, and had his biggest hits with Runaround Sue and The Wanderer. In the 1970s, his music took a more serious and mature turn, and his biggest hit was Abraham, Martin & John, a folk rock song honoring Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy. In the 1980s, Dion recorded a series of contemporary Christian albums that were moderately successful. In the late 1980s and 1990s, Dion returned to his earlier style of rock music, appearing on many oldies tours. In 2006, Dion took most everyone by surprise and released Bronx In Blue, a great acoustic blues album, and followed it up with Son of Skip James in 2007. In 2008, Dion released Giants of Early Guitar Rock, a covers album that pays tribute to the founders of rock and roll, most of whom Dion worked or toured with at one time or another.

Now, Dion, at age 72, has released Tank Full of Blues, his best album ever. Dion was being interviewed on camera by rock journalist Dave Marsh at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2010, when Marsh pointed out that Dion is the only first generation rock and roll artist that has remained creative and relevant consistently through the years. As Dion tried to argue this point, Marsh boldly said that Dion's last three albums had been his strongest (this is true). Dion went home, and his wife Susan's response to Marsh's comment was to ask Dion "So what are you going to do next?", essentially turning Marsh's comment into a dare for Dion to make another good album instead of resting on his laurels. Dion initially decided to work with a band and make an album of half covers and half originals, but music kept pouring out of

him, and Dion was surprised at how fresh it sounded. It was bluesy and earthy without sounding retro, and he felt so close to it, that he decided to play all of the guitar himself and just use a bass player and drummer, and keep things basic. This proved to be an excellent choice, because Dion is a competent guitarist, though never flashy, and his playing suits the material perfectly. As good as his last three albums are, this one is even better.

Dion is a down to earth guy who is grateful for his life, and that is what comes across on this album. It's obvious that Dion had a lot of fun writing and recording Tank Full Of Blues, and it is a lot of fun to listen to. It has a stripped down rootsy sound that is not over-produced. It is pretty much a live performance recorded in the studio. Dion plays both electric and acoustic guitar, but mostly electric on this album, and he plays surprisingly well. I had high expectations for this album based on Dion's last three albums, but this one was a total pleasant surprise. It simply doesn't have a weak track on it.

Howlin' Rain – The Russian Wilds



Howlin' Rain was formed in 2004 in San Francisco, California as a side project of Comets On Fire's singer/guitarist Ethan Miller. Eight years later, Comets On Fire is no longer, but Howlin' Rain is still going strong. Howlin' Rain's music is a soulful classic rock sound that draws from California's blues based rock of the 1960s and 1970s, British rock, southern rock, and everything in between. They are often labeled a jam band, but that is because they play more guitar and keyboard solos than most current bands.

The Russian Wilds is Howlin' Rain's third and best full length album. All of their music has been good, but this album sounds more confident, especially Ethan Miller's vocals. His voice is still a bit thin, but it fits the music well, and is an improvement over the band's previous recordings. This album was four years in the making, and the band released a vinyl only EP in 2010 called The Good Life since it was taking so long to record. The album was executive produced by the eccentric Rick Rubin, whom Miller says would

disappear for long periods of time while the album was being recorded. Rick Rubin was a fan of the band's first self-titled album released in 2006 and sent Miller an email that simply said "Let's hang out together sometime. Peace, Rick Rubin". When they met, Rubin signed the band to his American Recordings label and released the already recorded Magnificent Friend album in 2008, and made it clear that he wanted to be involved in the next album. The Russian Wilds picks up right where the excellent The Good Life EP left off, and it is even better. Some of the songs are a little long, but they often change completely mid-stream, so they are effectively two songs in one. Just when the song Phantom In The Valley is beginning to drag, for example, it shifts gears into a great classic Santana-like jam. Guitarist Isaiah Mitchell from jam band Earthless is a guest on this album, and his playing is a great asset. Mitchell's playing is much more refined than what he typically plays in Earthless, and it complements Miller's playing very well. The guitar solos often make good songs great on this album.

The Russian Wilds is available on vinyl LP, CD and download, and it will appeal to classic rock fans of bands such as Little Feat, The Allman Brothers Band and Supertramp.