

Rolling Stone magazine continues to slowly redeem itself from the joke that it became in the 80's and 90's, by running a reader-voted contest to put the first unsigned band on the cover. Amazingly, a good band with a bad name won. The Sheepdogs sound nothing like the dreck that major labels have determined to be sellable with their marketing research for the last 30 years. They don't even require Auto-Tune or Pro Tools to record a good album. Lenny Kravitz hits a home run with an album so funky and astoundingly good, James Brown would definitely apply his seal of approval to it, if he were only still around. Black And White America is easily Lenny's best yet. The Red Hot Chili Peppers may need to change their name to the Sweet Red Bell Peppers after releasing their tame I'm With You album, but keep in mind before making any harsh judgments - sweet can be just as good as hot.

The Sheepdogs – Five Easy Pieces and Learn & Burn



The Sheepdogs are a four piece Canadian rock band that recently became the first unsigned band to be on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine. The seven year old band has self-released three full length albums, but had become very discouraged by their lack of success until they were surprised to find out that they were one of 16 bands chosen by Rolling Stone to be in a competition to be on the cover. A music manager that they had randomly met at a party sent some of their demos to the magazine without their knowledge. After 1.5 million reader votes, a band that plays straight rock and sounds nothing like the current musical trends, won the competition.

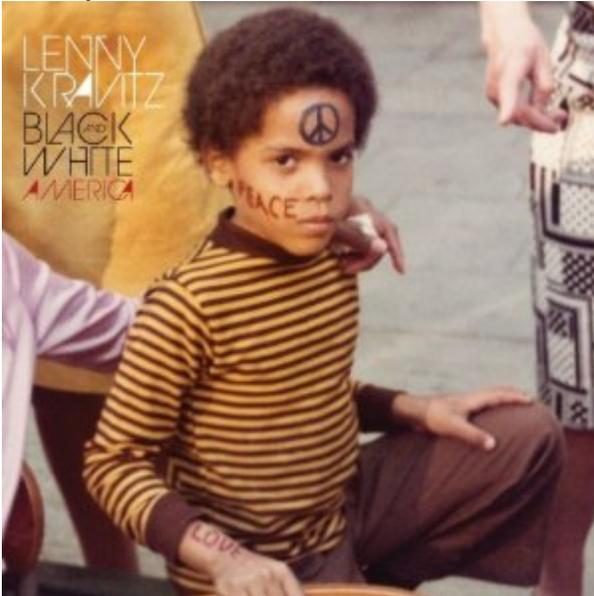
The Sheepdogs play melodious classic rock with lots of guitar and vocal harmonies. Comparisons to the 70's version of The Guess Who are natural, as both bands are Canadian and utilize strong vocal harmonies, but there is a lot of twin guitar harmonizing reminiscent of The Allman Brothers, Thin Lizzy and Wishbone Ash as well. Most modern rock bands shy away from playing guitar solos at all, but even more are terrified to attempt twin guitar harmonies, relying instead on processors to duplicate the effect from one guitar, rather than actually playing two guitars in unison like The Sheepdogs do. Five Easy Pieces is the excellent five song EP that was released to coincide with The Sheepdogs' Rolling Stone cover appearance, and it contains the songs that were recorded for the competition. All are new except for the re-recorded I Don't Know, which was originally from the Learn & Burn album from 2010. Learn & Burn is a great album as well. Some of the band's influences are very apparent, as on the song Right On, when they lift the bass line from Free's Mr. Big (the song that the band Mr. Big took their name

from) and a slowed down guitar riff from Led Zeppelin's The Wanton Song. At least they steal from the cream of the crop, and are smart enough to pick lesser-known songs to ape! I still like the album a whole lot, stolen song fragments and all.

It has been difficult to find physical versions of the Sheepdogs releases, with downloading being the only easy method of obtaining them, but this is changing. Learn & Burn is being re-released with two additional tracks, and will be available on CD 9/27/11. The original version is available on CD and vinyl LP, both of which can be purchased directly from the band's website. Five Easy Pieces can only be purchased on CD currently at the band's live shows. Downloads of both releases as well as their 2007 album Trying To Grow, are available as downloads, and the band's 2008 album, Big Stand can be downloaded for free from the band's website: http://www.thesheepdogs.com/?page_id=8. All of The Sheepdogs albums are good, and there's little doubt that they would have been popular in the early to mid-70's, and the band deserves all of the success that is finally coming their way.

The Sheepdogs will be making a Memphis appearance at The New Daisy on Beale St. on October 28, 2011, opening for Robert Randolph & The Family Band.

Lenny Kravitz – Black And White America



Black And White America is the ninth album that Lenny Kravitz has released, and it's by far his best. It's so good, you should stop reading this and go get it right now, preferably at Target, since they have a special two disc version with exclusive bonus tracks. Black And White America is a soulful funk album, not the typical rock album that Lenny is known for. I usually like about half of a Lenny Kravitz album, but I love this entire album from start to finish. The songs are all great, with relentlessly positive messages,

and the playing (Lenny plays most of the instruments himself, except for slide guitar and horns) is unbelievably good.

Lenny Kravitz built a new studio in the Bahamas where this album was recorded, and he says that his funk, soul, and rhythm and blues roots naturally came out. My problem with Lenny's music in the past was that he often emulated his influences too heavily. One song sounded like Led Zeppelin, the next song sounded like John Lennon, and so on. There are obvious influences on this album as well, but none of it sounds like he's trying to write a song that was an outtake from one of his favorite albums. The most obvious influence on the new album is the early 70's James Brown funk on *Life Has Never Been Better Than It Is Now*, where Lenny name checks James at the end. The song includes a priceless solo by Trombone Shorty that takes an already great song over the top. It's my favorite song on the album.

As you might imagine from the title, *Black And White America* addresses racial issues in America, but this only directly comes out in the excellent title song, where Lenny sings about his parents' early 60's interracial marriage. Lenny's mom was Roxie Roker (Al's cousin), the actress that played Helen Willis, the neighbor on 70's TV show *The Jeffersons*, whom was married to a white man (not much of a stretch for her to play this character). The rest of the album deals with peace and love, which are usual Lenny Kravitz topics, as well as his heartfelt thanks to God for his life. The only mis-steps are the inclusion of some rapping on a couple of songs. Neither song benefits from the rapping, but Jay-Z on the song *Boongie Drop* fares better than Drake on *Sunflower*. Drake's rapping almost ruins this great song, and I can't understand why Lenny felt the need to have rap on it at all, much less this horrid dreck. The songs on the bonus disc from the Target deluxe version are great as well, and make getting the deluxe version worthwhile. They are actually some of the most rock-oriented songs recorded at these sessions.

Black And White America is the best album that has come out in 2011 so far by anyone, in my opinion. I expected to like five or six songs at the most, so I was completely caught off guard by how good it is. It's the album that I knew that Lenny Kravitz had in him from the first time that I heard *Let Love Rule*, but had given up on ever materializing. The double LP vinyl version of the album was released the week before the CD version. Lenny said that he set out to make a 16 track album so it would fit well on two records with four songs per side, because he doesn't want to see the experience of listening to an album as one complete piece of art go away. He has succeeded in making an album that is enjoyable as a whole, but every one of these songs is strong enough to stand on it's own as well.

Red Hot Chili Peppers – I'm With You

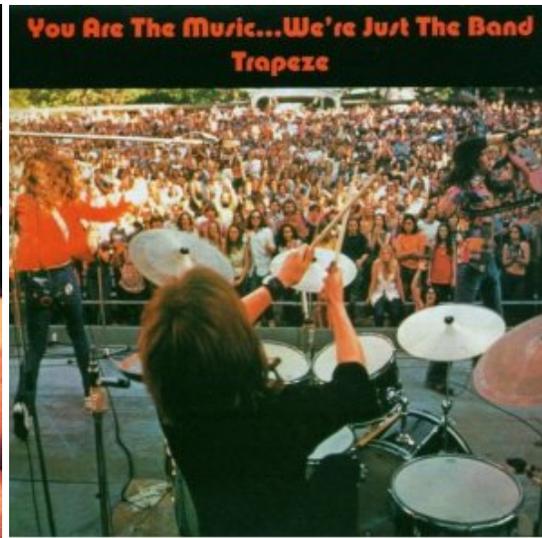
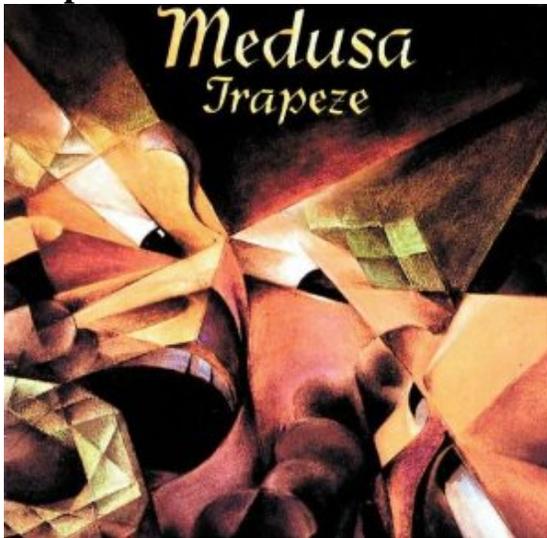


I'm With You is the tenth Red Hot Chili Peppers album, and their first in five years, which is the longest gap the band has ever had in album releases. The band decided to take a two year hiatus in 2007 after three huge albums and the relentless touring that went along with them. Founding member and bass guitarist Flea used the time off to study music theory, composition and jazz trumpet (his first love before being introduced to rock music by singer Anthony Kiedis) at The University Of Southern California.. Drummer Chad Smith used the time to play in Sammy Hagar's band, Chickenfoot. Guitarist John Frusciante quit the band on good terms, and his friend John Klinghoffer replaced him when the band got back together in October of 2009 to begin writing for the new album. The band wrote 70 songs and recorded enough of them to make a double album, but decided to narrow it down to a single since the last album, Stadium Arcadium, was a double.

I'm With You is a much tamer album than the Chili Peppers have become known for, but it's a great album that should do well. The band has had big hits with some of their milder material in the past. Klinghoffer's guitar playing is more subtle than any of the bands' previous guitarists, but he is very good and fits into the band well. He and Flea wrote several of the new songs on piano and then developed them in the studio, but there are a few songs that ended up with piano in them on the finished album. Flea says this is influence from Bach and The Rolling Stones, but I also hear some influence from Dungen and Tame Impala, two current underground psychedelic bands. If this is the case, then that may also be where some of the more laid back feel of this album originated. I really expected a harder rocking album, with Klinghoffer making a louder statement as the new guitarist. He does play some interesting solos, but for the most part, he makes his statement by showing restraint and playing tastefully. The rest of the band says that they feel re-invigorated with the new guitarist and new sound, and are eager to get out and play the album live.

I really like I'm With You, though I admit that I would like to have had a couple of more rocking/hard funk songs included on the album. I think that long-time producer Rick Ruben just let the band make their natural progression into a more thought out, laid back sound. Many of the songs here would have fit on Stadium Arcadium perfectly well, however, so it's not completely different from some their past material. A live broadcast via satellite of the band playing I'm With You in it's entirety in Germany along with some of their biggest hits was shown in theaters on 8/30/11, but no Memphis theater showed it. It could be seen in Nashville, Knoxville, Little Rock, Birmingham, Anchorage, and many other towns, but not in Memphis! This was a huge disappointment to me as I would love to have seen it.

Trapeze – Medusa and You Are The Music...We're Just The Band



Trapeze, in it's best incarnation, was a British power trio that was only around from 1970-1973, yet has been a huge influence on many others that came after them. Due to a lack of hits or substantial radio airplay, Trapeze is relatively unknown except to the most hardcore rock music fans. The band formed in 1969 and released one self-titled album, but the vocalist and keyboardist returned to their former band, The Montanas, leaving bassist Glenn Hughes, guitarist Mel Galley and Drummer Dave Holland, to carry on as a power trio. The band's sound changed from an early Moody Blues-like sound to a mixture of hard rock, funk and soul. Glenn Hughes became the front man and lead singer, with powerhouse soulful vocals that eventually became legendary. His ability to wail may impress or grate on one's nerves, depending on personal taste, but there's no denying the man has some serious pipes. In Europe and Japan, in fact, he is known as the Voice of Rock. Trapeze was particularly successful in touring these two albums in the southern United States, partly due to being managed by Bill Hamm (also ZZ Top's manager).

The first Trapeze album as a trio was Medusa, released in 1970, when Glenn Hughes was only 18 years old. The song Black Cloud from this album is the most well known Trapeze song, and is probably the most 70's radio-friendly song that the band ever

recorded. Rob Halford, of Judas Priest, was definitely inspired by the proto-metal hard rock songs Jury and Medusa, and patterned his entire career's vocal style based on these two songs. The songs Your Love Is Alright and Touch My Life are the first ones that Trapeze incorporated funk on, and are way ahead of their time. Trapeze became one of Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham's favorite bands, and he and Glenn Hughes remained close friends up until John's death in 1980.

You Are The Music... We're Just The Band, with its live cover shot taken at the Overton Park Shell in Memphis, was a natural progression from Medusa. The band continued to play hard rock with healthy doses of funk, but dropped the heavy metal and replaced it with a couple of straight soul songs. The show that the cover shot was taken at was supposed to be an Argent headlining show with Hydra opening and Trapeze the middle band. Argent never showed up, but reportedly, Trapeze put on such a great show, no one missed Argent at all. There used to be a fence around the shell grounds, but so many people turned out for this show, the fence was torn down in order to make room for a larger audience. My older brother attended this show, and it was one of his all-time favorite concerts. A former Rock 103 disc jockey once complained on air in the 90's about still getting requests to play Trapeze songs from this show's attendees. I feel the same way about this album that those attendees felt about that show. It is awesome and timeless, and one of my all-time favorites. It was way ahead of its time, influencing later bands Red Hot Chili Peppers, No Doubt and countless others. Every song on this album is great, but how the song You Are The Music never became a huge hit is beyond me. I have never known anyone that didn't like it after hearing it. Trapeze was just hitting their stride with this album when Deep Purple offered Glenn Hughes the job of replacing their departing bassist Roger Glover in 1973, an offer that he couldn't refuse.

Glenn Hughes's departure threatened to stop Trapeze in their tracks, but Mel Galley took over the vocal chores and hired a replacement bass player and second guitarist, and this lineup recorded two good albums called Hot Wire and Trapeze. These albums are paired on a single CD that is recommended to those that really enjoy the two prior albums. Glenn Hughes left Deep Purple in 1976, and a short Trapeze trio reunion tour took place, and they began recording a new album, but he left and decided to go solo. Glenn had developed some serious drug addictions while in Deep Purple that would plague him until he finally became clean and sober in the early 90's. Trapeze recorded one further album, Hold On, without Glenn, before disbanding. Mel Galley joined Whitesnake, with Glenn's former Deep Purple bandmate David Coverdale, and drummer Dave Holland joined Judas Priest. If Rob Halford couldn't be Glenn Hughes, at least he could have his drummer! The original Trapeze trio eventually reunited and toured, even releasing a good live album in 1994. Glenn Hughes went on to have a prolific solo career that has been mostly successful in Europe and Japan (Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Chad Smith often plays on Glenn's solo albums and sometimes tours with him as well). Mel Galley passed away from cancer in 2008. After ten years in Judas Priest, Dave Holland began teaching drums and was convicted of attempted rape of one of his students in 2004, and is currently in prison. No Judas Priest or Trapeze reunions for Dave. In 2010, Glenn Hughes formed Black Country Communion with guitarist Joe Bonamassa and Jason Bonham (John's son), and they have already released and toured two great albums. I was fortunate

enough to see them in St. Louis and can testify that Glenn Hughes still has his great voice, can still play excellent bass, and is the most energetic member of the band on stage, though he is by far the oldest at 60. It reminded me of what Dave Mason once said “Ability to rock is an attitude, not an age”.