

David Berkman ★★★★★
Old Friends and New Friends
Palmetto

Cleveland rocks, but swings as well—take pianist David Berkman. He’s pounded the keys for Cecil McBee, Tom Harrell, and Jane Monheit, among others, and estab-



lished himself as a leader. Not only is he an ace at the acoustic keyboard, but he’s becoming quite the composer and arranger as well. *Old Friends* features a slightly unusual grouping: three saxophonists, piano, bass (the dandy Linda Oh), and drums (the great Brian Blade, who’s played with Wayne Shorter and Joni Mitchell). Berkman has a style that evokes the graceful, expressive, and economical lyricism of Bill Evans and Fred Hersch and the surging power-bop of Larry Willis and John Hicks. Despite the three saxes, there’s little big band-like sax section stuff—Berkman’s sextet (and one trio track) has the intimacy of a chamber music group, with the saxes providing plenty of contrast, sometimes light, pliant, and intertwining around each other like wisps of smoke, other times full-bodied and swinging like Rollins and Stitt. (Berkman played with Stitt in his Cleveland days.) There’s nothing earthshaking here, just some original and winning mod-jazz, full of both sophistication and gusto. (9 tracks, 50 min.) palmetto-records.com

Rob Reich ★★★★★
Shadowbox
BAG Production

Say “accordion” to most and notice their reaction (if

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any), as this carry-able keyboard, this squeezebox, has been associated with polka, Tex-Mex, and other exotica—but how many jazz accordionists can you name? Here’s one: Rob Reich (also a pianist), who swings like he’s at the Village Vanguard on “How Now,” helped in no small way by the woody tones of clarinetist Ben Goldberg and Eric Garland’s snappy drums. Elsewhere, these lads fashion urbane chamber jazz that may transport you to Paris in the ‘20s, North Beach in the late ‘50s, a Woody Allen movie, or Argentina whenever. (12 tracks, 55 min.) bengoldberg.net/bag_production

The Grip Weeds
How I Won the War ★★★★★1/2
Jem Recordings

Some people, once past age 30 or so, tend to think there’s very little notable rock music since [insert idealized era here]. The problem is: There’s LOTS of fine rock & roll out there but mainstream/commercial radio is unlikely to play it. New Jersey’s Grip Weeds reach into a par-



ticular era of the 1960s for inspiration—when bands such as The Beatles, Small Faces, Who, Cream (the first album), and Jefferson Airplane played concise and rousing rock & roll songs, but with a progressive and/or psychedelic edge yet minus any of the tedious excesses to follow (interminable instrumental solos). “Lead Me to It” tears from the speakers/headphones like a cross between Syd Bar-

rett-era Pink Floyd and The Kinks’ “You Really Got Me.” “See Yourself” combines the dreaminess of the Fab Four’s psychedelic period and the volatile dynamics of the Who at their 1972 prime. The Grip Weeds’ vocals are urgent and harmonious, the songs packed with memorable moments...and the title and cover art refer to the obscure 1967 movie starring John Lennon. This platter is, dare I say, virtually essential. (17 tracks, 50 min.) jemrecordings.com

The Cash Box Kings ★★★★★1/2
Holding Court
Blind Pig

Unless you’re a history student/nerd you might not know how important the Chicago blues sound is to music history. Other styles influenced the blues and rock performers of the 1960s and ‘70s (and beyond) but the raw, electric, sharp-edged Chicago style as exemplified by Muddy Waters, Little Walter, and Sonny Boy Williamson exerted perhaps the biggest influence on The Rolling Stones, Eric Clapton, etc. on the British side of the pond and on Dylan, Paul Butterfield, and Mike Bloomfield on our side. The Windy City combo Cash Box Kings specialize in the Chicago style—terse, razor-sharp guitar glistening in the moonlight/bar light, confident and soulful singing, stark simple drums, and serrated harmonica playing. But these lads aren’t stuck in the past—“Download Blues” is about a contemporary musician’s curse and “I Miss You Miss Anne” has sly vocal harmonies echoing the classic R&B/soul of The Dells and The Impressions. Further, CBK has a less-is-more approach (no finger-exercise solos), not too polished but never “raw” for its own sake, the songs dispense with my-baby-done-left-me clichés, and there’s a touch of rockabilly in the guitar playing. Old-school blues devotees and fans of the bluesier side of Americana (Jack White, Los Lobos, Heavy Trash) can agree on this one. (13 tracks, 48 min.) blindpigrecords.com

Pow Wows
Broken Curses ★★★★★1/2
Get Hip

Canada, our neighbor to the north, has contributed to all things cultural in a big way: Neil Young, Oscar Peterson, and William Shatner to name but three. Add to that list Pow Wows, a Toronto combo that both maintains and enriches the tradition of raw rock & roll: The Kinks 1964-1966; The Sonics; The Standells; The Buzzcocks; and The Ramones. It’s all here—fuzzed guitars, monolithic beats, insolent (but with a wink) vocals, memorable melodic hooks, and urgent, get-me-to-the-world-on-time tempos. But raw doesn’t equal sloppy—this lot play tight as a drumhead. Pow Wows play the living heck out of The Equals’ obscure mod/psych-rocker “I Can See But You Don’t Know”—that alone is worth the price of admission. Yet these guys aren’t throwbacks—the winsome-yet-driving “Traces” has an interesting ebb-and-flow structure, alternating winsome, thrash, stomp, and a bit of psychedelia. These lads don’t just live the good lessons of rock & roll, they put their own spin on it. (10 tracks, 30 min.) gethip.com ■