

Sublime
"Stand By Your Van"
Gasoline Alley/MCA
Grade: C+

If done correctly, live albums can bring forth the vibe of a show while

displaying the band's greatest hits. If done incorrectly, the album is usually a poor-sounding mess of songs that either means the band is bad live, the mix of songs is poor, or the sound quality is bad.

The new Sublime album, "Stand By Your Van," fits a couple of the latter points. The record is a collection of live songs recorded from '94 to '96 that will leave most Sublime fans feeling a bit let down.

After listening to a few Sublime live recordings, it is obvious Sublime was a quality live act. From lead singer and guitarist Brad Nowell's improvisation to the interesting song order of the band's two-part shows, the band thrived on playing shows.

The problem is that this album

isn't a fair reflection of what Sublime had to offer. First of all, the majority of the album was recorded at the Kommotion in San Francisco in September 1994, which was almost two years before the band tragically ended.

Plus, many of the songs are already available elsewhere. The show was recorded on a live bootleg album, "It All Seems So Silly in the Long Run," which many Sublime fans already own. Making things worse, the sound on "Long Run" is better quality than on "Stand By Your Van," making the latter completely unnecessary to own.

There are a few saving points here, however. More recent recordings, including the bass drum thumping of

"Waiting For My Ruca," and the only song from their self-titled album, "Caress Me Down," make these individual songs worthwhile.

Still, it would make a lot more sense to put on the "Scarlet Begonias/What I Got" medley or the acoustic version of "Wrong Way" to make the album more well-rounded. While the fans who are recently learning about "40 Oz. to Freedom" may enjoy the record, it will find its way to the bottom of the stack for everyone else.

Although it may have hurt sales, releasing a double-disc album with an entire show or continuous parts of a show would have been a lot more sublime than this low-quality butcher job.

— Patrick Miner



The Cows
"Sorry In Pig Minor"
Amphetamine Reptile Records
Grade: B+

The Cows have made an international parade out of the "great live band" reputation.

However, their recordings have usually portrayed the meager levels of vision one would expect from Roger Daltrey teaming up with a rejuvenated Candlebox.

For the first time, the Cows on "Sorry In Pig Minor" sacrifice the obligatory Amphetamine Reptile Records sonic elbow grease for some thought, and by God, even a little artistic pretense.

The Minneapolis-based quartet's newest offering is distinctly highly produced compared to past releases and showered with musical jabs profoundly new for the band.

"Cabin Man," the album's first track, features singer Shannon Selberg reciting a frighteningly humorous short story about being delivered from suicide's door by a flying cockroach.

Selberg, who also plays bugle for The Cows, enjoys the admiration of underground types around the globe for his clever and bizarre stage performances.

The singer-performer seems intent throughout the record on baffling the emotional senses of his listeners. Every song is a bit ill from Selberg's combination of personal rant and funny-man tactics.

On "Finished Again," he deadpans Bob Dylan's nasal overkill while commenting on a rock 'n' roll singer's chore of self-reinvention. "I have nothing left to send ... 'cuz I am all done and I'm finished again."

Selberg employs a ridiculous mock Mexican voice on "El Shiksa" under the great instrumental work of percussionist Freddy Votel and Lincoln natives Thor Eisentrager (guitar) and Kevin Rutmanis (bass guitar).

Strangely enough, Selberg's lyrics cut through the goofy imitations he usually employs in the

album, however, doesn't involve lyrics or vocals. "Dear Dad," a song dominated by Rutmanis on organ, might be described as elevator music for the Bates Motel.

Upon numerous listens, "Sorry In Pig Minor" evolves into an album with entertainment value and fine musical pieces. However, like the majority of noise rock bands, The Cows lack terrific poignancy in their song writing.

For that reason among others, you won't be seeing Shannon Selberg replacing his signature magic marker mustache with a milk one and a billboard smile any time soon.

— Christopher Heine

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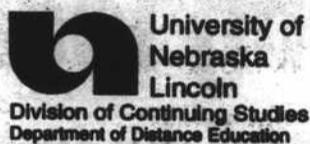
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Social Distortion
"Live at the Roxy"
Time Bomb Recordings
Grade: A-

In sharp contrast to the painful live wails of Sublime, the new Social Distortion record, "Live at the Roxy," shines as an example of everything that is good about live albums.

The disc was recorded across three shows, April 7-9, 1998, at the Roxy in Hollywood. Produced by James Saez and guitar/vocalist Mike Ness, the shows were edited together perfectly to give the illusion of one very cohesive set.

The album contains 17 of the band's greatest hits over almost two

full decades of music. Kicking off with "Story of My Life," from the band's self-titled album, the listener is happily subjected to an hour-long assault of Social D. punk rock.

From the trademark guitar of "Mommy's Little Monster" to the control-centered Rolling Stones cover "Under My Thumb" and the us-vs.-them attitude of "Telling Them," Social Distortion plays the songs fans want to hear and plays them well.

Some fans may complain about the omission of "Sick Boys," the absence of which Ness mentions in the liner notes. Still, it would be hard to gripe at this mix of songs that spans seven recordings, including EPs.

Even the commentary between the songs is here, and Ness will never be accused of being too subtle in that department. At one point, he displays a gold record to the crowd in the middle of the set and explains the tremendous effort the band undertook to achieve the goal.

Being the furthest thing from another punk rock burn-out, Social D. has once again put out a record that is solid from start to finish. Now let's see if they can go another 20 years.

— Patrick Miner

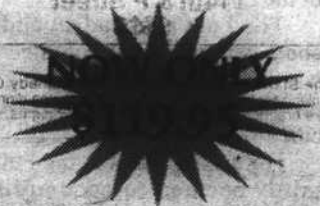
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