

Goodwill Hunting

Crate-Digging for Holy Grails and Hidden Gems

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When I got into classical music in my early teens, I bought my first two LPs in a thrift store; I still have them, and to this day I get the thrill of the hunt walking through a thrift store's hallowed doorway. I thought it would be fun to write about a handful of thrift scores I've fallen in love with. We crate-diggers may never find that first-state Beatles butcher cover for a dollar, and we will always see plenty of records by Mantovani, Don Ho, Mitch Miller (and, of course, a certain title by Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass). Still, there are plenty of treasures to be had. At this point, many of the gems you'll find were originally released on small, private press labels and barely made a blip when they came out, but fortunately the music survived.

Hard rock/heavy metal isn't usually my thing, but sometimes I have to crank up the power chords, feel the punch of the double kick pedal, and let slip the devil horns. DarkStarr, a quartet from Rochester, New York, recorded an EP in 1983 that scratches that itch admirably. Memorable melodies, solid riffs, a charismatic and expressive lead singer, and excellent sound pervade the too-short effort. The mood is grim but not nihilistic. "My Deepest Regrets" blasts out the opening grooves with driving drums and nimble bass licks, giving way to the dark, rainy night of "Lovin' Strangers." The tough-boy posturing of "Stand Aside" is clichéd, but the musical swagger makes up for a lot. Cult Metal Classics reissued the EP as the *Shines Again* CD, with bonus tracks and demos ranging from good to impressive. More recently, the original five songs and six extra tracks have been released on vinyl. Original pressings of the album have sold for over four hundred dollars, so grab the modestly-priced reissues while you can.

When you spot a trippy cover in the record bin for a buck and notice the LP was pressed on white vinyl, you buy it. That's how I discovered *Have It All* by Planningtorock, the stage name of English electropop musician Jam Rostron. A 2006 release, *Have It All* is fantastically detailed and inventive, a little disturbing, and a helluva good time. Its confident goofiness is a feature not often found in pop music: see the are-they-joking-or-not cannibalism discussed in the kinky "I Wanna Bite Ya." "Take It Away" is a plea about inner darkness set to a chirpy waltz. The overdubbed vocals, sometimes artificially sped up, can sound like the Chipmunks singing the Andrews Sisters, but they work.

When I saw the cover of Isabel Baker's *I Like God's Style*, I thought, "What the heck—an early 60s Christian album with a girl holding an electric guitar?!" In 1965, this teenager walked into a studio with 12 self-penned songs, a raw, belting voice, and



an ignorance of music theory that did nothing to stop her. Session musician Joe Utterback did the arranging based on what she played and sang, and he and the rest of the backing band helped birth a wild, shaggy (and Shaggs-y, if I may) rockabilly gospel album. Very few singers write about the demon-possessed Maniac of Gadara from in the Gospel of Mark, but Isabel made the story swing. Harkit Records reissued *God's Style* while out of copyright in the EU, though their source LP had groove wear that resulted in a little distortion. (For more near-unhinged rockabilly gospel, check out, on Dayton's Jalyn label, the "One Heartbeat/The Glory Bound Train" single by Roy Baker.)

My area, Southwestern Ohio, has its own strong culture of gospel music (and bluegrass and country) going back decades, and I tend to pick up anything local in the interest of preserving it. One fine recent find was *A Harvest Prayer* by The Mellotone Midkiffs. The gentle-voiced Wayne Midkiff had fiddled on the Renfro Valley Barn Dance radio program with the Holden Brothers, and his wife Josephine performed

there briefly in the Coon Creek Girls. There's no fiddle, though Wayne plays mandolin and guitar; he and Josephine are backed by rhythm guitar, bass, organ, piano, and celeste. The two teenagers have the new-to-the-studio jitters, and a few tempos almost go off the rails, but the homespun, heartfelt singing and intelligent arranging make for a satisfying country-tinged album. Hellfire and brimstone have never sounded so cheerful as in "He Will Set Your Fields on Fire." Another area talent, Trudi (last name Glaser), recorded *I'm His* for Jewel Records in 1977, with the Hopple Street Exit band (formerly the Jordan Parker Revue) backing her in a tight, energetic, delirious set of Christian blue-eyed soul, funk, and adult contemporary styles with a synth taking the bass line. Trudi, with a voice that evokes Petula Clark's, soars in songs by Lonnie Mack, Billy Preston, Walter Hawkins, Danniebelle Hall, and others. The perky "New Nature" has bluesy piano and Dixieland clarinet fills over a delicious funk beat. For love of God and Trudi, will someone reissue this addicting, entertaining album? **CBS**