

MARTIAN EAR ZIT

To the Power of Two

2009 (CD, 52:07)

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

PROGRESSIVE

RATING 11.5

Martian Ear Zit is Scott Tatiana and Don Ramirez on guitars, bass, vocals, and synth programming. The music is an eclectic mix of styles from rock, to pop, to country.

"Bitches Borscht" starts with a poppy beat and synth-driven melody but the middle section morphs into a fusion-like workout with dissonant guitar solo and a bass feature that evokes Jeff Berlin. "Leighton's Lament" is an ethereal track with lovely haunting melodies. The exciting and creepy "Aberzombie and Felch" sounds like the soundtrack to a short horror film, while "Dreggitude" is a short but wild romp with ever-evolving interlocking guitar and keyboard melodies.

Vocal tracks include covers of The Kinks' "Waterloo Sunset" and a rather perfunctory take on King Crimson's "Starless," plus originals featuring the psychedelic pop of "Alistair Greene" and "Throw a Penny," which has a country rock vibe.

Vocals are not really this duo's

strong point, and the juxtaposition of styles on this record creates a somewhat unfocused listening experience. Production also is a bit unpolished, but some of the instrumentals on this lighthearted work still shine through.

-- **BILL NOLAND**

ROB MARTINO

One Cloud

2010 (CD, 48:47)

INDEPENDENT RELEASE

INSTRUMENTAL/PROGRESSIVE

RATING 14

Though Tony Levin remains the best-known exponent of the Chapman Stick, more and more players have become accomplished enough to offer recordings of their own. That would seem to suggest increasing avenues of exploration for this unusual and unusually versatile instrument.

Certainly, Virginia musician Rob Martino thinks so. This exceptional player has devoted his debut album to an exploration of the instrument's broad range and capabilities. However, it is wrong to think that One Cloud is simply a travelogue of the Stick; rather, these

are well-crafted compositions, quite melodic and many quite gentle. (On his website, Martino expresses admiration for Ian Anderson's acoustic Jethro Tull pieces, several of which he offers as Stick renditions.)

If forced to suggest an analogue, then it would have to be one of the better Windham Hill releases, like Michael Hedges' Aerial Boundaries. Martino's approach definitely is different from Levin's, but then there always is a difference between an element pure and an element applied. Here, you can hear the Stick pure, and it makes an undeniable impression. -- **JASON M. RUBIN**

the United States, the second release from these Frank Zappa prodigies. 1997's *The Music or the Money?* was initially released only in their native Sweden. But Cuneiform Records, the band's current home, has remastered and reissued what aficionados of this avant-garde jazz-rock outfit consider its masterpiece — complete with new cover and more than 45 minutes of previously unreleased material.

Oberg and Agren have made music together since 1981, gradually defined themselves through original works. But at this point, they still incorporated Zappa hallmarks such as compositional complexity, genre resistance and just plain goofiness.

This album showcases two different halves: spontaneous improv and heavily programmed electronic pieces. Interspersed among the studio tracks are live cuts recorded mostly in 2008. The fact they aren't confined to a single disc, plus the difficult-to-read liner notes and lack of an essay, make this feel like an incomplete reissue. But that certainly is not enough to detract from some adventurous, challenging music.

-- **MICHAEL POPKE**

MATS/MORGAN BAND

The Music or the Money? (Reissue)

1997/2010 (2CD, 134:13)

CUNEIFORM RECORDS

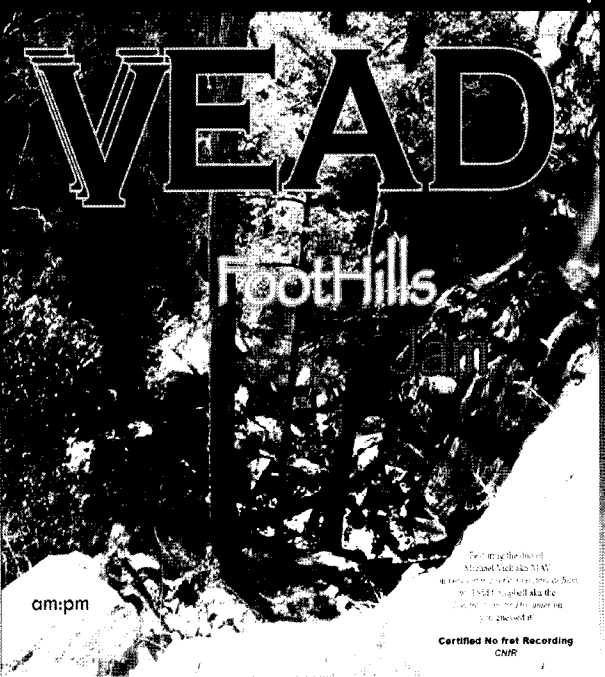
RUNE-301-302

AVANT-GARDE ROCK/JAZZ

RATING 11.5

While other albums from this duo of blind keyboardist Mats Oberg and (also current Kaipa drummer) Morgan Agren have been readily available in

"the future of guitar is missing something..."
VVV Guitar Player



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