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Some of the best in the current crop of independent releases
Indie artists emerge
By Karl R. De Mesa



THE indie ethic accepts no compromise. There is no space for negotiation with an artistic vision that is willing to keep its creativity intact in the face of any contrary force.

The indie artist keeps his art and music pure from currently fashionable genres, dumbing down for mass accessibility, money and the inevitable dilemmas that come with being under a big label. Releasing music independently has its own cons though, chief of which is distribution—which big labels easily solve on a national level, but is one of the toughest complications for indie artists to hurdle even after the CDs are pressed and ready.



Here are some of the best full-length albums from emerging local artists, all produced in DIY fashion and (as of this writing) still unavailable at your local record store. Proof that excellence blooms on the fringes and that gigantic music labels can and often do make idiotic oversights.

They also make a hell of an opener for 2004.

ACID 42 *Mutatis Mutandis*

Acid 42 is Lionel Zivan Valdellon, one man electronica band and composer equipped with a veritable army of musical software programs from Fruity Loops to Sound Forge. It takes a completely different mind set to make music out of PCs but Acid 42 pulls off the task with uncanny finesse and depth, the compositions in his current release evoke such diverse spirits as Enya to Underworld, Paul Van Dyk to Kronos Quartet.

Acid 42 started as a drummer for a pop band in 1994 and was then upgraded into a keyboardist for an acid jazz band in 1995. He was fed up by 1997. So, he decided to finally compose and play the kind of music he truly enjoyed. He started Clone, then a trio of like-minded individuals who performed songs like a band, albeit one that used keyboards and samplers instead of traditional drums and guitars.

Acid42 currently uses his laptop and sampler, playing as often as possible at any available gig or venue, whether it's at school fairs, punk gatherings, cozy lounges or hazy bars. "The point is to play as often as possible, and practicing this thing called Live P.A. which is basically playing music that moves people to nod their heads, dance or even just to relax."

He has since released Yes, I Am the Soft Asian Enemy. *Mutatis Mutandis* is his second full length, independent album. *Mutatis Mutandis* is a legal term which means "after all the necessary changes have been made." A term that jumped out at him after reading the locally proposed Optical Media Bill, "Which I believe," he writes "will turn anyone with a CD-Writer into a criminal." Wow, heavy stuff.

In any case, this album of 15 tracks wanders through a musical labyrinth and through enough emotions that you feel blissfully exhausted, like the aftermath of a rollercoaster ride. There is everything here from soothing chill-out ("Beach," "Saklolo"), groovy downtempo ("Rancho Cucamonga"), snappy bossanova ("Bossa Me Around"), avant garde ambient experiments with sound samples of gulls, crashing waves and the air in conch shells ("Human Sign"), a ballad that could very well take the cake in the Katha Awards ("My Silent Song is You"), to rousing mandala fusions of classical and house ("Onionlife" my personal favorite). There is never a dull moment on this album and nearly everything is obsessively, masterfully orchestrated. You can still hear happy surprises of drop-in riffs and musical Easter eggs even after several listens, serving to heighten an already enjoyable trip.

However, a good number of the tracks ratchet up to 6-7 minutes. In some of the tracks these are apropos, in a select few such a running time is quite unnecessary and can be quite grating. On a minor note, the vocal collaboration with Yumi Calderon could also use some work in terms of beefing up the sound during the verse parts. Perhaps some instrumentation played the traditional human way can help this variant rhythm problem?

All in all though Acid 42's *Mutatis Mutandis* is an accessible and enjoyable musical odyssey that can serve not only as a great introduction to electronica but also as a way to elevate the genre in the local scene. It is competent enough for that.

Online samples of Acid 42's music are available at: <http://www.soundclick.com>

[/acid42](#)

For copies of the album contact 0919-2969178]

THE LATE ISABEL

Doll's Head

Do you like Goth? Darkwave? Then you'll like The Late Isabel. See, they're the unapologetically quixotic and tropical baroque version of this sinister music form. And just who exactly is this deceased Isabel?

After giving the CD a few spins I think I got it: in the dreams of those she haunts, Isabel is always leaving. She has been sighted barefoot and pale, by various sleepers, at the doorstep of a familiar downtown cinema, the gates of a university building at closing time, departing a smoky club and exiting a convenience store at twilight. She vanishes when she steps to the curb, just as the high beams of an approaching car freeze her. Those who do wake, often wake in sweat.

"I was playing with a visual concept, a series of posters showing this half-familiar woman always in transit," says guitarist (and former TIMES assistant entertainment editor) Allan Hernandez, explaining the basis of the name and the band's wraith-like female persona.

The music of The Late Isabel is the origin, product and nature of this haunting rolled into a single koan. It is music that makes of funerals and wakes a celebration—a time to sing and a time to dance as tears run down your face. The character of Isabel, the vignettes and scenes of her life (and probably her demise) live on in the band's songs. Aural creations that crest and break like a wave of grief to wash over both viscera and brain with the force of psychedelia, ambient, shoegazer, dark wave and goth.

The band started in 1998, gaining and shedding members, as it did band names, along the way. The band is currently composed of Wawi Navarroza (vocals), Allan Hernandez, John Pete Agcaoili (drums), and Roval Bacale (bass), all veterans of the Manila goth-punk scene.

Coming of age in the post-punk era, the quartet grew up with a love for bands that eschewed the freewheeling go-go of eighties mainstream music, groups like The Cure, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Clan of Xymox, Bauhaus, Joy Division and the gaggle of artists under the 4AD banner.

With this came the intuitive understanding that music had to function on all to achieve a holistic effect. "Art is not an isolated experience. It is deeply personal and deeply communal. I believe that the [visual] aspect of the band needs to be included in the package," relates JP Agcaoili.

Their debut album, Dolls' Head, is currently in the finishing steps of production with 8 exceptional tracks composed of equal parts lament, anguish, awe and snapshots of everyday tragedies. From the sinuous and seductive chant of the title track, the hungry eloquence of "Fingers Around the Wineglass," the demented agitation of "Follow (The Mad March)," to the exploration of the urban abyss that is "Midnight City," the record is the culmination of the band's labor in the subculture fringe.

Doll's Head crystallizes the quartet's skill for leading the listener to precision rapture via a swirling palette of textures and sonic landscapes that bring to fore the monsters, beautiful or otherwise, that lurk in our depths.

[For copies of the album contact The Late Isabel at 0916-8338990]

THE PURPLECHICKENS

Here's Plan B

The Purplechickens, fondly called Manox by their friends and fans, may have a weird moniker but their music is experimental only to the point that they can still melodically push the boundaries of songcraft.

The Purplechickens is composed of Aldus Santos (vocals/guitar), Adrian Arcega (guitar), Marco Harder (guitar), Mayo Uno Martin (bass) and Zig Rabara (drums). They were formed in 1997, in UP Diliman. Their first gig was at an activist event called Freitag, sponsored by CSJP (Concerned Students for Justice and Peace). Thing was, they didn't have any idea what to play or call themselves. Eventually the name came from a hypothetical football team the members and a few of their friends wanted to form for Latagaw, a UP-based football showdown.

Here's Plan B is their debut release, recorded and mixed at Perf De Castro's studio. The album is filled with mostly mid-tempo tracks that ooze with brilliant turns of rhythm, the musical equivalent of catch-22's, grand swirling fusions of everything from Radiohead to REM, plus a lyrical penchant for insular obfuscation that nonetheless evokes literary finery (Here's to all the failures of my heart/My deep regard for isolation/My iron fist/My destination, sings Santos in "Pickle").

Just to clear things up, no, they're not some stupid folkie-ethnic group masquerading as rockers. Rather they're experimentalists and sound connoisseurs armed with pop sensibilities and a stance that often strays into deliberation that just barely skirts the edge of shoegazer. Their copious use of

distortion and effects however move them closer to Smashing Pumpkins territory than Tom Petty. There's the Camus as private, lovelorn pestilence track "Ars Terror," the Mojave 3—saccharine "Cupboard Song," the rebuke of religious dogma of "A Break In A Prayer," passionate melancholia via slide guitar in "Common Cold", the excellent paean to soaring wishes that is "Dream Systems" (which, I think, is at once the apex and embodiment of the Manox sound).

In every track there's the feeling of careful creation and revision, as if the band sat down with each song and polished, polished, polished until it shone brighter than Captain Barbell's, well, barbell. In any case none of them feels raw. I've only got 2 complaints: first that I can barely understand the vocals at times (probably a glitch in the mix) and that, in many of the songs, Santos fails to hit the high notes that would signify the song's next level. These are more than compensated for in the songwriting, however, and perhaps in the future the band can craft songs that hide such flaws. I mean, if System of a Down can make fun of its own shortcomings without being self-pitying then I'm quite sure the Manox will find a way around this minor dilemma.

So, if your ears would like something unconventional and alt as alternative can be for the New Year then Here's Plan B will make you happier than Sylvester on catnip. You can also get a load of the Manox's other efforts in their EP titled Let's Not and Say We Did, available with Plan B as a bonus. ♦

For copies of the album contact 0918-3293097 or 0919-8278480]

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