

a few spins and what began to emerge was a game of two halves, or at least the songs could be divided into two camps.

Aside from the rumbling 'Two Brothers' which is excellent, most of the more upbeat numbers – they of the explosive drums and scything guitars – are fairly two dimensional affairs, not terrible, but not anything that would particularly distinguish the band in a crowd either. No, where they really score for me is when they slow it down as on the likes of 'What Have You Become', 'Sandrio' and 'The Enemy' (very Metallica at times), then the band that made the debut becomes to come back into focus.

A bit of a step backwards perhaps, but there's enough evidence here to suggest Angels Of Babylon are far from done.

Dave Cockett

ANVIL – 'HOPE IN HELL' (SPV/Steamhammer)

Anvil return with the follow up to their 2011 release, 'Juggernaut Of Justice', and it's the first to feature new bassist Sal Italiano, whom the band describe as "a little like we have enlisted Steve Harris of Iron Maiden!" Anvil has been around for three decades now, and after the success of the movie 'Anvil - The Story Of Anvil', have been rightly catapulted back into the heavy metal spotlight, where they belong.

We begin with title track 'Hope In Hell', which is a slow-grinding anthem that has singer Lips spitting out discontented lyrics in a pulpit-bashing fashion. Rob Reiner's driving drums take us into more familiar territory with Eat Your Words', featuring frantic guitar solos and riffs galore, and is classic old school thrash metal. 'Through With You' is a shameless steal of the main guitar riff from Deep Purple's 'Smoke On The Water' and the bizarre chorus of 'See You Next Tuesday' renders the song a little redundant in my opinion.

Thankfully, 'The Fight Is Never Won' revisits a more classic sound, closer to the 'Forged In Fire' era. This is classic 'chest-beating' metal that few bands but Anvil can pull off! Both 'Call Of Duty' and 'Pay The Toll' are standard metal moments, and its not until 'Times Show No Mercy' that the band hit the mark. The lyrics here give a vivid account of the aging process, and where you stand in your later years as a metal fan. It is all nicely wrapped up with thug-gish charm, and some colossal guitar bites. 'Mankind Machine' cuts into the heart with its molten metal attitude and thrusting chorus - it's one of the stand-out tracks on offer. With a title like 'Shut The Fuck Up', little is left to the imagination! There is enough punk rock energy and humour to propel the song nicely along on a sea of chugging guitars.

You always know what you're going to get with an Anvil release, and the band rarely disappoint. There is much to recommend here for die hard Anvil fans, though I really would like to see the band let loose from the more predictable metal approach, and take a few chances now and then.

Ray Paul

ARROW HAZE – 'MUSIC FACTORY' (Shooting)

Arrow Haze, hailing from Belgium, has released its debut album entitled 'Music Factory'. They are a four piece band with two guitars, bass and vocals supplied by the drummer. The sound of the band is modern rock with a strong nod to the riff based classic rock bands of the past. The guitars are strong with a crunchy droning undertone to most of the songs and fairly extreme soloing throughout. The vocals are quite soft and subdued, but not weak - just pretty much back in the mix allowing the twin guitar attack to dominate.

'Casino' opens the album with an accelerating pedal point riff launching into an energetic song and a long and absorbing outro guitar solo. The third song, 'Visions' demonstrates a commercial feel and approach to the vocals and a memorable chorus helped by well-judged backing vocals. Derek Sherinan (Dream Theater) appears on the album but the cd booklet does not explain exactly where. Certainly there are strong piano and keyboard elements to 'Perfectly Ordinary' which is one of stronger tracks on the album with its increasingly epic production.

The standout track is in fact the title one. Appearing late on in the album, 'Music Factory' has a great intro (I'm sure involving Sherinan) and some very augmented guitar solos around the industrial keyboard motif. This is an intricate song with time signature and key changes galore and a complex syncopated rhythm. Above all it shows a musical maturity from the band to actually carry it off. The subsequent track, 'Stranger Tides', is equally epic but lower key and laidback and well closed off with a keyboard solo interspersed with the final chorus.

Arrow Haze has laid out its stall with its debut album and the band members have clearly demonstrated their musical chops. With the enlisting of A-list help (and resultant increased attention) along with the care the band has taken in the song writing and production, this release should warrant some good attention.

Rob McKenzie

ATTACK! ATTACK! – 'LONG ROAD TO NOWHERE' (Attack! Attack!)

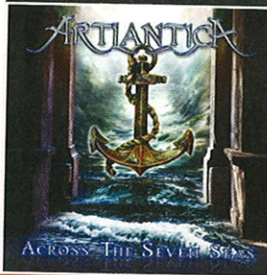
The title of this album is perhaps a good pointer to the demise of a band that after the last album – the excellent 'The Latest Fashion' – seemed to have everything going for them. Plagued by problems with their name, where they were often confused with the American hardcore band Attack Attack! (one exclamation mark), who by a strange twist of fate has also split up, they failed to embed themselves into the public's psyche in a way that some of their Welsh kissing cousins had done; a bitter irony when you consider that they were way better than many of them. The hard work for little outlay finally lead to the band splitting up earlier this year and although a final farewell tour is planned with others filling in for departed members it still feels like a waste of an extremely talented band.

'Long Road to Nowhere' is thus a suitable epitaph to the band and shows a progression away from the overt commerciality of its predecessor. It's a more mature effort that's for sure and for that there's always kudos and yet the irony is that the band lose something when they're not lining you up for the killer hook or the sucker punch chorus. This is Foo Fighters style rock as illustrated on the aggressive 'Hate Song' and overall it's much more guitar-orientated and vocally less subtle. 'Make Up Your Mind' gallops along, 'Cut to The Chase' gets the head shaking and the retro rock of 'Helpless' could have been a leftover from 'The Latest Fashion'. 'Miles Away' is a cracking slice of hard rock and although there's not a ballad in sight the album doesn't suffer from it as Attack! Attack! has clearly aimed for a more out and out rock record this time.

As a rock album 'Long Road to Nowhere' isn't a bad album by any means, but for me the band hit their peak with 'The Latest Fashion' and the change in direction is a good clue to as to why the band has perhaps made the decision to call it a day.

Mike Newdeck

ARTLANTICA – 'ACROSS THE SEVEN SEAS' (SPV/Steamhammer)



The name may be all shiny and new (although not something which trips all that easily off the tongue if truth be told), but the individual faces behind the gilded façade that is Artlantica will be anything but for those of you with a penchant for melodic/symphonic power metal.

Essentially the follow up to Angel Of Eden (the band put together by former Artension guitarist Roger Staffebach) who released one album – the somewhat overlooked 'The End Of Never' – back in 2007, Artlantica reunites Roger with erstwhile Artension colleague (and one time Royal Hunt man) John West, a vocalist who's dulcet tones have been conspicuous by their absence in recent times (which, in some respects, is kind of ironic given that he's actually busier than ever!). Joining Roger and John in this latest venture are Italian keyboard prodigy Mistheria and one time Testament/Iced Earth bassist Steve DiGiorgio, with drumming duties being split between Dani Löble (Helloween) and the much sought after John Macaluso (Malmsteen, TNT, Ark)...Savatage legend Chris Caffrey also guests.

Stylistically speaking, debut album 'Across The Seven Seas' leans towards the more metal edged sound of the early Artension releases (the same sound Staffebach resurrected with Angel Of Eden), yet still manages to maintain a strong melodic identity (thanks in no small part to a neat line in neo-classical phraseology and the powerfully emotive vocals of John West). So in amongst all the thumping riffs, fluid solos and moody keyboards you have to ask yourself "do Artlantica have the songs?"...after all, technically deft musicians do not always make the best songwriters (Yngwie Malmsteen being an obvious case in point).

Thankfully, with Roger's proven track record in that department and West's innate ability to wring every last drop of emotion out of anything placed before him, that's not really something Artlantica have to worry too much about. Bombastic and grandiose, the soaring melodrama captured within tracks such as 'Return Of The Pharaoh Pt3', 'You're Still Away' and 'Across The Seven Seas' provides a compelling argument to that effect, an argument that certainly grows ever stronger with repeated exposure. Factor in a final spit and polish at the hands of Tommy Newton and I do believe John and Roger could have another winner on their hands!

Dave Cockett

AVENTYR – 'DRIVEN' (Mighty Music/Target)

When Norway careens into the USA the results are unsurprisingly eclectic and not as messy as you might think! However, the amount of Britishness about 'Driven' by Norway's Aventyr, which was mixed and mastered by legendary American producer Beau Hill, maybe isn't quite what was expected.

This debut effort is pleasantly varied in approach with elements of good old fashioned metal in the style of Judas Priest jostling keenly with the howl and stomp of The Cult, a touch of Sunset Strip, some straight down the middle NWOBHM'ness and a good blast of energetic rock and roll. Yeah I know, that sounds like a stramash of ideas and in a way it is. However if you are able and willing to put aside the fact that one song on this album can sound decidedly unlike the next, while still fitting together beautifully, then there's much to entice the bouncy big kid out of you here. A twin guitar sound courtesy of lead licker Jan Tore Befring and rhythm raconteur Steinar Aven infuses 'Driven' with a keen sense of purpose, while the sometimes snarling, sometimes scything vocals from Roger Olsen sit perfectly in songs strongly influenced by a whole host of 70s and 80s ideals.

'Outside' combines the school-cap riffery of AC/DC to an early Def chant of Leppard via the snarl of 'Kill 'Em All' Metallica. 'Delirious' adds a human pyramid of Scorpions staccato harmony riffs to a blurring NWOBHM chorus. 'Torpedo' mashes up wolf worrying era Cult and the lip-curling gurn of Billy Idol, while 'Crazy Roads' pounds and pummels like Priest rattling their 'British Steel'. Add to that a Skid Row grind and layered Crüe like gang chorus in the title track and then a hip shimmying of G&R, a throaty cough of Motorhead and a straight between the eyesness of Krokus or Golden Earring and you pretty much have Aventyr covered.

What's not to like?

Steven Reid

BARISH KEPIC – 'ADDICTION' (Independent)

Back in the 80s I was a massive fan of guitar instrumental albums, I really enjoyed all those shred Gods and the work they put into their music. However, after a while the guitarists and albums all tended to seem very samey and only a few of the truly talented musicians including messrs Moore, MacAlpine, Taffola, Satriani and Vai, continued to try new an innovative ideas to broaden the appeal of the genre. So I tended to leave that kind of album/music behind me and off I went in search of a more song orientated approach in my music.

So when Barish Kepic's (Jaded Heart, Powerworld) 'Addiction' popped up in my reviews pile, it really was the first instrumental guitar album that I'd heard in probably the last twenty-five or so years! Mr Kepic has no need to worry because I have totally enjoyed his approach to guitar rock music. Instead of the usual wank fest of notes, we get a set of songs, with catchy riffs strong melodies and clever guitar passages, that really are screaming out for a vocalist!

Nevertheless, in the absence of a singer Barish Kepic has still recorded an album that entertains and keeps one focused throughout the album.. Play 'Addiction' with it's superb acoustic intro, 'Vagbunder' with it's hypnotic guitar refrain, the intoxicating 'Lost In Samsara', the infectious 'The Long Road', 'Only By Light', 'Book Of Destiny' or 'All That Idle Talk' and delight in Kepic's clever compositions that feature enthralling but never over the top guitar solos, driving melodies and strong musicianship. And maybe just like me you'll once again begin to fall back into love with instrumental guitar rock.

Overall 'Addiction' is a fine way to be re-introduced to the pleasures of a guitarist letting loose and showing his skill as a musician, whilst always keeping in mind that the song and melody are the key elements.

Ian Johnson