



Big Dave and the Ultrasonics
Burnside Records **70:41**

Big Dave and the Ultrasonics have found a new home— Burnside Records of Portland, Oregon. After the demise of Schoolkids Records, the boys were left in a lurch: they had some great music, but no way to get it out. Although their previous CDs can be ordered from their website <www.bigdaveblues.com> this latest self-titled work should be easily found in most record shops.

Ostensibly the ensemble's remained unchanged for the last couple years— Big Dave Steele, guitar and vocals; Dave Morris, harmonica and vocals; Ben Wilson, keyboards; Pieter Struyk, drums; and Dale Jenning, now settled in on bass (replacing Jim Rasmussen). With the core unit still in tact, they've kept their polished, improvisatory, catchy, and compelling sound. And Big Dave holds onto his hallmark sounds: rock solid drumming, out-of-this world keyboard jams, tongue-twisting note bending harp playing, precision bass, and tasty rhythmic guitar fills. The main differences of this current recording are their slight drift towards a jazzier sound along with Dave Morris' singing debut.

The musicianship of this ensemble shines through clearly on all fifteen cuts, but a number of cuts deserve special mention. "She's the King" begins with Ben Wilson's outstanding boogie piano. He's certainly in the same league as other Ann Arbor boogie-woogie notables. On "Jump Street", Big Dave plays the meanest rhythm guitar line I've heard in a long time. More Charley Christian and T-Bone Walker, his rhythmic support gives this jive tune some real "authenticity". "Black Coffee" sounds like it's straight out of New Orleans and showcases the bass/drums rhythm section quite nicely. Dave Morris' "Back In the Hot Seat" shows why he's the hottest harmonica player in town. Ben Wilson's Jimmie Smith-influenced organ intro on "Phone Fun" is... inspiring. And the great band showcase, "Ooh My My," gives everyone an opportunity to show off their stuff.

In a weird sense, this recording makes me yearn for the old 8-track tape days. Then I'd be able to put it in and listen to it over and over again. This "must have" recording should be picked up now!



Khaleel—People Watching
Hollywood Records **53:23**

Wow! What a voice. Formerly known as Bob "Bronx Style", a poet and vocalist who played with Afrika Bambaataa's Zulu Nation, Ice-T's Rhyme Syndicate, Khaheel's latest recording shows that he can easily carry the mantle of his 1992 award "Best New Artist" from *Rolling Stone*. Catching up with John O'Brien, his old band mate from the alternative pop/rock group "Super 8," Khaleel and O'Brien have crafted eleven songs that mix and combine musical styles from around the musical world, delivering the goods on an outstanding recording.

The strength of this recording lies in its production and stylistic mix. Not only do we hear subtle hip-hop rhythms throughout, but also there is the power pop catchy-ness heard on "It's A Shame," the adult rock feel (including a great steel drum accompaniment) on "No Mercy," compelling middle eastern/south Asian motifs found on "The One," and various dance grooves throughout. If you don't like a particular stylistic bent in one song, just wait for the next tune. It'll be sure to grab you.

And the hits just keep on coming. There's the back-porch countrified funky groove of "You Can Try," the FM hook-laden rocker of "Love Comes 'Round," the 'heavy' and messy sound of "Like A Woman," the stunning balladry of "Daddy's Little Girl," the polyrhythmic feel of "Free," and the lyrically interesting "I Need to Know." Truly, there's not a bad cut amongst them. This is one powerful CD capable of many listens. I hope you caught his recent Ark opening. It was breath taking.



Karen Savoca—Sunday in Nandua
Alcove Records **48:23**

Karen Savoca's appearance at this year's FolkFest clearly showed a musician full of confidence and vision. Her light, controlled, soprano voice is a perfect accompaniment to the strong, poetic imagery of her songs. Her latest recording, *Sunday in Nandua*, enables us to lavish in her music a bit longer than the FolkFest allowed.

What I liked about this recording is how all of a sudden a song will grab you. Although Savoca's voice is perfectly supported by guitarist Pete Heitzman throughout this recording, it's her imaginative lyric turn-of-phrase, uncommonly solid vocal delivery, and particularly strong metaphorical sentiment that makes the listener pay attention. Where Savoca could have fallen into the narcissistic trap of writing music strictly for herself, because of these wonderful catchy musical and lyrical moments, one quickly sees an artist that has more to offer than just a pretty voice.

Songs of note include the poetically strong "Somedays", the vocally gut-wrenching "Here They Come", the funky "I Can Get It", and the great musical story "Mail Order Bride". Each of these tunes offers something musically or lyrically special thus making this recording a cut above. (See calendar-March 27 announcing Ms. Savoca at the Ark)

To catch Karen Savoca's show this month and other local performances... keep an eye on Agenda's calendar.