



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DARYL-ANN SAUNDERS

If a tree falls in the Fort, does anyone hear it? You bet, from left: Lach, Roger Manning, Billy Syndrome

Village of the Banned

BY TOM WARD

Call it antifolk, folk-punk, new folk, call it a bunch of hungry egoists who couldn't afford to keep a band together, it began five years ago when a gaggle of angry young smartasses found themselves excluded from the mellow clique in West Village establishments. In finest American up-and-did-it mode, ringleader Lach (who refuses to disclose his surname until the FBI applies the electrodes) responded: "Fuck you, I'll start my own." This he did, holding the Fort from his own Rivington Street pad for the next year and a half. When the cops inevitably shut it down, the farewell gig featured bluegrass

and bulletins by Roger Manning, plus acourant redecorations by Missing Foundation. (Yes, when the eviction notice arrives and your tastes finally grow up, it's time to book MF.) From there, the moveable feast spread like ragweed to Sophie's, ABC No Rio, Tramps, Nightingale's, wherever—as Michelle Shocked, Kirk Kelly, Cindy Lee Berryhill passed through—and on to Chameleon, my fave dive and true psychedelic shack of the NYC late '80s.

All very cozy, colorful, and incestuous. But you, dear reader and smart shopper, hadda be there and probably weren't, so you want to know: is the resulting vinyl

document a good deal? *White Trash: N.Y. Folk, Volume One* (109 Records, 115 St. Mark's Place, NYC 10009, \$8) is as raw, flawed, charming, obnoxious, and sometimes brilliant as the Loaisida mini-

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scene that spawned it. Thereby, about as "authentic" as anything can be in this thoroughly fake, overrated one-horse town. Of course, the audio quality leaves much to be desired (beware of boomy bass), and too many cuts are more rough

sketch than developed conception. (Then so was the Tompkins Square mini-insurrection, you might add.) Still, given the flakiness and factionalism endemic to the milieu, it's commendable they got this quickie together at all, capturing a subculture moment, perhaps sustaining its momentum.

Having said all these nice things, however, I must now instruct these boys and girls to pull up their socks. Let us, true to the dialectic of presence/absence, consider some of the things this album is not. It is not Edgar Winter's *White Trash* live at the Apollo (*Roadwork*, Epic 1972), bun-

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cha motherfuckers so white they were *albino* up there paying proper, humble homage to the sources of all uniquely American contributions to world music: African-American, of course. Nor is it Aleksandr Scriabin's *Poem of Ecstasy*, a majestic celebration of the spontaneous social creativity of the Russian proletariat in 1905. (The word *soviet*, you should know, is Russian for "council," an organ for *direct* democracy and workers' self-management—as the Situationist International formulated it in 1966: "The slogan is still 'All power to the soviets,' this time without the Bolshevik afterthoughts.") Nor is it William Butler Yeats on Dublin's 1916 Easter Rising, but, come to mention it, Yeats was nothing but a johnny-come-lately fraud, anyhow. "Terrible beauty being born," oh sure. Tell it to your pals in the House of Lords, Bill. "Give an Irishman a horse and he'll vote Tory" is more like it. Yet

instantly and universally denounced as trivial, opéra bouffe (targeting the Post Office?), deranged, etc., only to be subsequently transmuted into an inspirational event of mythic proportions. So it may be gratuitous to add that this LP also is not Linton Kwesi Johnson's *Making History* on the UK insurrections of 1981, nor even as politically crucial as what KRS One and MC Lyte are doing right now.

Isn't it a terrible habit to go around faulting folks for what they're not? I do it all the time, of course, but then I think of social-democrat Val Orselli knocking my homesteader friends: "right issue, wrong people." So guess who wrote the following re Paris 1848: "The February Revolution was the *beautiful* revolution... The June Revolution is the *ugly* revolution, the repulsive revolution, because deeds have taken the place of phrases." And as T.J. Clark pointed out, notice how MARX

like these flitting through my head that I decided I *like* the we-are-all-damaged-goods attitude that unifies the *White Trash* compilation. Because we are, and all you've ever got is the human raw material that's there which, even in the best of times, ain't pretty. It is well to remember that Malcolm X had to pass through the abyss of self-destructive self-hatred in order to remold himself into the great teacher and fierce warrior he became. And as Lower East Side fixture Josh Whalen explains: "Our generation is not disillusioned, because we never believed in the system to begin with."

So on to the straight-ahead product review. (Hackwork at a higher level, damn straight.) Lach is a prolific, often superb, songwriter, and his bratty delivery usually works, but "Poor Town" is weak. To do him justice, catch him live or check him out on the cassette-only *Fortunes 13* compilation (Meta Media, POB

er/songwriter than you'd ever guess from the ponderous "No Patience." Manon Briere's enunciation needs help on "Murder Can Be So Easy," though what's audible is passable. "Nickel Bag" by Steve Witt—a bona fide street vet, grant him that—might be used as the soundtrack for the next "Nothing Happens With Marijuana" TV spot. Ron Katz's "Silent and Grey" is itself too monochromatic, badly in need of a band. Billy Syndrome's "Have You Seen the Cows?" is chaotic garage thrash, if that's your amusement.

Now the good news. Mark Zero's "White Trash" is a hoot, an accurate confession and belch-along anthem for all youse low-life scum. (If Johnny Cash covers it, this guy's set.) Moira Luna's "Naked Animal," penned by Katz and Briere, weaves through the polyvalences of lusty/vulnerable/tough that make Lower East Side women so fine. Speaking of same,

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Lauren Stauber's "Prisonville Blues" should win some prize for sustained narrative on adolescent boredom and bad-girl bonding. Stauber's supple synth chording and rhythmic skips make hers the most musically savvy track of the batch as well. Elsewhere, excepting Tom Clark's Zeppelinesque guitar on his impressive "Trouble at Home," verbal aptitude on this LP vastly exceeds musical. Yet at times that's more than enough to carry it, as on "I Love My New Clothes" by Jennifer Blowdryer. Indulging object fetishism to the oozing erotic max, she nails consumerism-as-consolation with a subtler, sharper stroke than Billy Crystal's "You Look Mahvelous" hit. Cuts deeper, too.

Finally, the (other) politics. Reisbaum's "Blood on the Pavement" is a good, if raggedy, set of Bukowskian, riot-related vignettes. Joe Hurley's "All Quiet on the Western Front," a Pinter adaptation lifted from Hurley's one-man play, *The King of Upton Park*, hints darkly at the prole brutalization (on both sides) that led to last August's eruption around the park. But "Real Estate Blues" by Roger Manning, the Guthrie/Ochs successor here, spells it right out: musicians politicized only by default, by the gentry, by the antipostering gestapo, by yo mama. I find his town-crying against an impending "catatonic shopping mall" oddly akin to Missing Foundation's "Kill the Hypnotic Bastards," yet Manning conveys warmth, colloquial humor, even empathy for the y.u.p. chumps ("feelin' poored and ignored"). These same strengths, by the way, are amply in evidence on *Roger Manning (SST)*, his first solo LP. So bop down to Chameleon, 505 East 6th Street, any old night, and blow all your money. As for the LP...tape the highlights. Then check *World War 3 Illustrated's* "The Riot Issue." That's a rock and roll statement. ■