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MUSIC

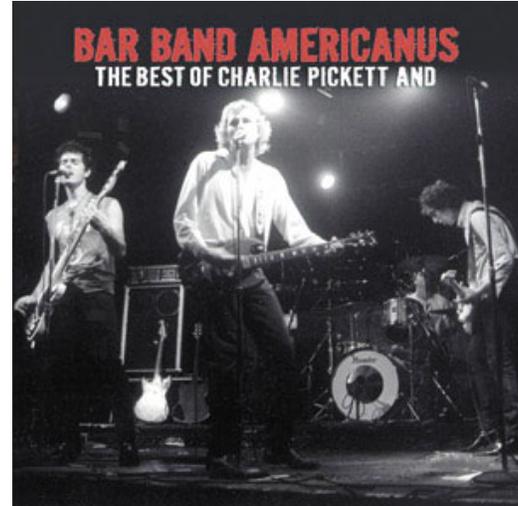
New Sounds: Charlie Pickett

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Charlie Pickett

Bar Band Americanus: the Best of Charlie Pickett And ...
(Bloodshot)

He's a lawyer now, but time was that Charlie Pickett was a guitar picker of sorts—the kind of man who could mangle and rangle the strings, tearing up flesh and spurting blood with every torn-up note that escaped his clutches; the sort of guy who wrote songs as though he was rambling down the road, careening out of control, while still managing to sound like he knew his purpose and was intent on getting through to the other side of wherever it was that he was blasting through; the type of guitar slinger who wasn't afraid of a little buzzing from an amp and who didn't need more than three or four chords to tell his tale.



For a decade or so in the '80s, Pickett worked the bars and sideshows, dropping three albums and a few other scattered sounds—EPs and singles—and then he moved on, still playing occasionally but leaving behind music as a career.

For *Bar Band Americanus*, Bloodshot records has collected material from throughout Pickett's career and it's a joy to hear it all come together—the rawness of the recordings reminding of the loose ramble of the oldest bluesmen, or of the Rolling Stones when the band was exiled on main street and often of the dirty punk rock of the dirtiest punks, too.

“Like it a Lot,” culled from the 1984 EP *Cowboy Junkie Au-Go-Go*, finds Pickett and the band fanning a slow burning groove, always just around the corner from a full-on bonfire, with a lead guitar that struggles against the howl of feedback, while “Slow Death” is a raging, urgent punk attack and “Marlboro Country” trades on a “Wild Thing”-inspired chord progression, hammering its way across the country.

Pickett's voice is a suitable companion to the journeys he takes with his guitar; the songs—some from his own pen, others well-chosen covers—generally keep to the wrong side of the tracks, where bad luck tends to play a large role in life. On “If This is Love, Can I Get My Money Back?” Pickett makes a last-ditch attempt at escaping the wrong relationship, and on “Overtown” he pleads “Don't let me down” as the band carries on underneath.

Pickett rarely stands still in his music, either galloping onward or dragging himself along through the muck and across the river—wailing and picking as if his life depended on it, and maybe it did back when he was living in the bars that both inspired and defeated him.

Bar Band Americanus is overloaded with swampland stomps, punk by way of Florida roots, with a dash of alt-country before there was alt-country thrown in for a little extra kick.

Compilation albums are often marred by a lack of focus—in both musical vision and sound—but Pickett had his head together as far as where he was headed with his songs, and the approach to the production throughout is pretty much hands off—let the instruments breathe and let the players have their say.

So, on *Bar Band Americanus*, Pickett's songs work together pretty well as a whole, offering up a few variations of his late-night rock 'n' roll while sounding very much like a singular work. **V**