

December 22, 2008

[A Little Late, but with a Decent Excuse](#)

Filed under: [Pop Life](#) — Tags: [Charlie Pickett](#), [Mott the Hoople](#), [the Avett Brothers](#), [the Cool Kids](#) — Alex Rawls @ 8:25 am

When I evacuated for Hurricane Gustav, I had a number of CDs with me that I figured I'd write reviews for when I had a chance. The CDs ended up in the trunk of my wife's car at the end of a country road outside of Ponchatoula (to keep it from getting trapped by falling branches or trees. The car survived the storm, but not the bored chowderheads that slashed its tires, keyed a door and smashed a window. In the effort to get insurance to take care of that (with limited cell service) and get a rental car to get back to New Orleans, the CDs were forgotten until a week ago when my wife cleaned out her trunk and found the bag. Here are belated reviews since all merit attention:

Charlie Pickett: *Bar Band Americanus: The Best of Charlie Pickett And* (Bloodshot): Pickett's souped up take on Hank Williams, the Rolling Stones, the Faces and the Flamin' Groovies from the early 1980s predated alt.country by a decade, and to really hear this compilation and get it, you have to have slightly historical ears and realize that sounds and tropes that have become cliches weren't when Pickett sweated them out first. But you don't need a time machine to hear the songs themselves, which assemble familiar parts into something fresh, and only "If This is Love, Can I Get My Money Back" is dated. The brutally imprecise live version of "Shake Some Action" is what a lot of bar bands really sounded like then (and now), but the version of "Slow Death" is what they felt like.

Mott the Hoople/Ian Hunter: *Old Records Never Die* (Shout! Factory): Some day, the world's efforts to keep Mott and Ian Hunter in print will pay off and people will get some of the most perfectly shaped rock 'n' roll. In a sense, the band was doomed in America by its name and its awkward relationship with glam (the look of the day, but not of their Stones-meets-Dylan sound). "All the Young Dudes" was a belated hit, but its Bowie associations added a tint of fruitiness to Mott, further hampering their efforts. But Mick Ralphs' scientifically precise power chording and a sturdy rhythm section meant everything moved with powerful assurance, and Hunter's melodies are memorable, even when they have to lug around the word "Honoloochie." There are a host of Mott collections, none of which are identical and all are worth it. The selling point here is the second disc of Hunter's post-Mott output, starting with the brilliant "Once Bitten, Twice Shy" (all those Great White fans went to their grave never knowing it was a cover), and that disc is a tribute to the other great guitar of the glam era, Mick Ronson.

The Cool Kids: *The Bake Sale* (Chocolate Industries): Hip-hop has never been particularly good at looking back. People may pay tribute to Cool Herc, the Boogie Down Bronx and Run-DMC, but you rarely get the feeling their hearts are in it. Or, more accurately, they don't care enough to comb through the past to revisit a moment and see what could be done with a style that was left behind in the headlong rush forward to the next new sound. The Cool Kids aren't in any hurry, and they don't have to hustle just to stay alive. They rhyme and flow with the pleasure and freedom of people who are likely middle class and have no investment in hardness or the cutting edge. *The Bake Sale* isn't retro, but it isn't produced to bully you in shaking your ass. Records this friendly are hard to come by.

The Avett Brothers: *The Second Gleam* (Ramseur): This EP presents the Avett Brothers as folk balladeers, which is good and bad. The six-song recording is beautiful and smart, finding arresting