

# Music

## The CD Side of Town

A survey of the best locally produced albums of 2002

BY MIKE BREEN

**A**nother year, another strong showing from the local music community in the CD-release department. The CDs coming out of Greater

Cincinnati continue to get better sonically with the accessibility and affordability of recording options. And, if there were any trends, it was in length — shorter-running EPs were more common than in years past and, perhaps because of their leanness and focus, were often as good as the long-players. Guess size doesn't matter after all.

Here are our picks for the best of year. See "Locals Only" on page 31 for a rundown of the wider-distributed, nationally available records.

### THE YEAR



### IN REVIEW

#### • Iswhat?! — *You Figure It Out ...*

The local trio Iswhat?! has shattered preconceived notions and made the album of their career. Known around town for their smart, creative blend of Spoken Word, Hip Hop and Jazz and their enigmatic live performances, the group goes to the next level with *You Figure It Out ...*. The band weaves in new elements like drums (courtesy of jazzier Hamid Drake), turntables (from the Animal Crackers and John Doe) and computer music (by Michael Barnhart), which greatly accentuate the strengths of their core of Jazz bass, sax and flute, deft rhymes and human beat-boxing. A local treasure.

#### • Giant Judys — *Giant Judys*

This exciting debut was given out free by the band at their shows (making it the bargain of the year and one of the best local first efforts in a long time). Smart, incredibly catchy tunes for fans of Indie Pop's best, from Pavement to Creeper Lagoon and beyond.

#### • The Underwoods — *Natural Memory*

This stunning debut EP is a graceful, sophisticated showcase of the band's majestic songwriting and original style, which mixes a classic Brit-like flair with a grounded, organic feel. Highlights include the ethereal, keys-filled

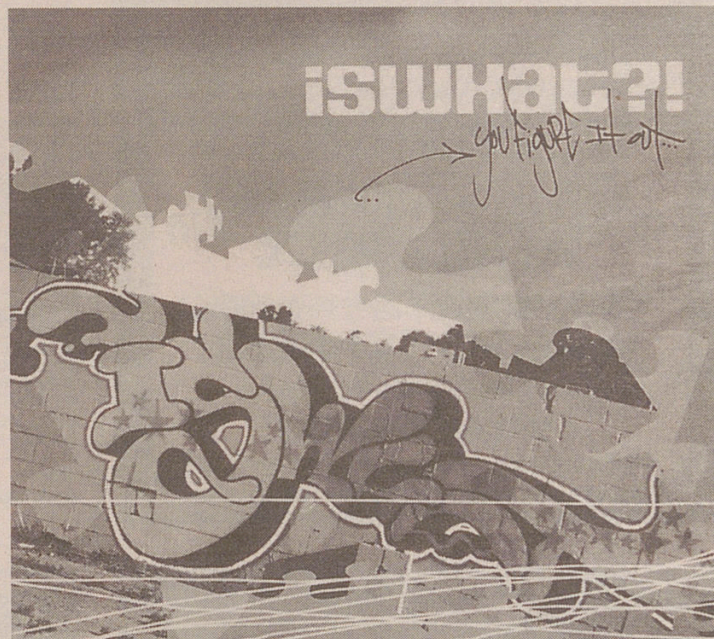
"Guenivere" and the stunning, spine-tingling "It Never Will," the local "summer" song of the year, with its perfect balance of sunshine and melancholy.

#### • Mallory — *The First One Hundred Years*

A kaleidoscopic assortment of ambient sounds, churning Post-Punk rhythms, wild-eyed guitar interplay and winding, engaging arrangements and compositions. On this often-hypnotic disc, the Built to Spill-like vocals come across better than they do live, adding a tasty extra layer of icing to their distinct sound. A mesmerizing piece of work.

#### • Various Artists — *Hidden Treasures: Cincinnati's Tribute to King Records' Legacy*

Featuring local musicians of all styles paying tributes to the songs from King Records — the historic local label that produced singles and albums from some of the biggest names in all of



create a great record. Delicious, hook-loaded songwriting makes *Boxed* one of the best local releases this year.

#### • The Swarthy Band — *Play This in Front of Your Cool Friends*

The singer/songwriter gets a band and makes a humble masterpiece in EP form. His new bandmates (members of Ray's Music Exchange) serve as an excellent foundation to his catchy, emotionally-driven songs. Fans of archetypal Pop music should do anything they can to get their hands on this collection.

#### • Dallas Moore Band — *High on the Hog*

This disc is these Outlaw Country masters' best yet. The group does a great job of keeping the proceedings as diverse as possible, mixing rockers with acoustic songs and bluesy numbers. Those tiring of mainstream Country music's increasing tendencies toward Top 40 Pop stylings won't be disappointed.

#### • Mike Wade and the Jazz Mafia — *The Broach Approach*

Cincinnati's favorite trumpeter teams up with some of the area's best artists for this return to traditional Jazz. Masterful performances and choice song selection made this the best local Jazz release of 2002.

#### • The Stapletons — *Low Dealers ... and Hangers On*

Roots Rock's great local band of brothers turned turmoil into art with this great sophomore effort. *Low Dealers* — the band's first



music — the *Hidden Treasures* disc is one of the most creative, diverse and well-produced "various artist" CDs to ever come out of Cincinnati.

#### • Swissfarlo — *Boxed*

Twelve tracks of highly addictive, catchy-as-hell songs, fleshed out by endearingly raw vocals and crafty guitar parts. The do-it-yourself diehards of Swissfarlo have shown that big studio budgets and gimmicks aren't necessary to

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