

spins

DANNY ELFMAN

Corpse Bride

(Warner Bros.)

Composer Danny Elfman knows the drill when it comes to crafting the creepy elegance necessary for a Tim Burton soundtrack. Still, it's hard not to compare *Corpse Bride* unfavorably with Burton and Elfman's classic collaboration on *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. *Bride* lacks a standout track along the lines of "This Is Halloween" or "What's This?," and mostly features lush and moody instrumental pieces.

"Victor's Piano Solo" and "The Piano Duet" have an intricate beauty, while other tracks are variations on the "Main Titles." "Remains Of The Day" is fun in a Tom Waits vein, but the lyrics, which strain to describe how the title character met her fate, could use more of the rapid-fire cleverness Elfman has shown in the past. The cast's vocals on the ballad "Tears To Shed" are so precisely delivered they sound like a poetry recital.

"The Wedding Song" fares best, thanks to Elfman's ambitious arrangement and operatic vocals like Gilbert & Sullivan sung by underworld denizens. Four bluesy instru-

mental bonus tracks, credited to Bonejangles & His Bone Boys, end *Corpse Bride* festively.

Terrence Flamm

5

HAM1

Ham1

(self-released)

The 13-track, self-titled release from Ham1 is a surprisingly pleasant collection of authentic rock songs and instrumental orchestrations. The band, whose heart and soul is singer-songwriter Jim Willingham, exudes the laidback milieu of its hometown, Athens, Georgia. The tracks echo early R.E.M. in its reliance on organic, acoustic guitar, shuffling drumbeats, background organ, and layering of instruments to provide a musical tapestry. As a vocalist, Willingham has a warm delivery and vulnerable quality, not unlike the Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne. Standout tracks include the more-upbeat "Out On The Tarmac," the melancholy "Florida," and the dreamy instrumental "Alice's Call."

Jason Scales

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GRETCHEN WILSON

All Jacked Up

(Epic)

This, Wilson's second album, follows the wildly successful *Here For The Party*, but lacks its wit and innovation. It's a little less buoyant, a little more workmanlike. Still, *All Jacked*

markable. "Politically Uncorrect" is musically bland and lyrically cliché. "Rebel Child" and "Ain't Even Cold Yet" reach for pathos and end up in treacle. "One Bud Wiser" is cute fluff. But then there's the *other* half of the tunes. The title cut reiterates her Patsy Cline-meets-Charlie Daniels sound and it's as much fun as anything from her debut. "Full Time Job" has lyrics that restate the obvious, but are delivered with stirring conviction. "Skoal Ring" and "I Don't Feel Like Loving You Today" have nuance and sophistication beyond anything on her first album. *All Jacked Up* buys Wilson time. What she does with that time will make all the difference.

M.S. Dodds

7

SUPERMERCADO

Scary Baby

(Dark Star)

Chicagoan Matt Mercado is the city's rock 'n' roll Energizer Bunny – he keeps going and going . . . He first found success in the early '90s with the glammy Daisy Chain, which morphed into the harder, metally Mindbomb. The latter continued the run of success with opening gigs for KISS and Rob Halford, and inclusion on some major film soundtracks. But Mercado didn't give up; instead he and



then/now band members Gregg Potter (drums), John Skender (bass), and Michael Ray Garrett (guitar) formed Pivot Man, which never catapulted them very far outside the local scene. Fear not, though, as Mercado is back again with Supermercado, delivering Mindbomb to the umpteenth power. Adding rapper Cliff "Killa Kat" Hunt gives the band plenty of rap metal cred; the track "Bitch Ass" is the pinnacle here, where Hunt brings it home on top of some kick-ass, rap-inspired guitar/bass work. "Leather Messiah" and "What I Say" are close seconds, conjuring Disturbed meets ICP. Unfortunately a few tracks on the front end may be a tad too reminiscent of a past metal era that's best left there, but once you hit "Bitch Ass," the fun only builds.

Penelope Biver

8

DAVID BANNER

Certified

(SRC/Universal)

Don't let the scowl that seems to be permanently attached to Banner's face fool you. He likes to have a good time, particularly with the ladies. Well, he at least likes "Fucking" them, as one cut's title so eloquently states. Banner's third CD throws its hands up for the South often and with much cheer. *Certified* is a celebration of Mississippi pride and Southern hip-hop flair. But it's also a salute to the sounds and styles of contempo-