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CLASSIC ROCK CRATE DIGGER: 10 ESSENTIAL PROTO-METAL ALBUMS

BY JUSTIN FARRAR

JUNE 22, 2010 6:00 AM

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Welcome to another edition of *Classic Rock Crate Digger*, a (near) weekly column wherein Rhapsody nerd Justin Farrar wanders the never-ending maze that is our catalog in search of classic rock's forgotten gems. If you're new 'round these parts, then also check out the *Crate Digger's* [archives](#).

List the innovators of early heavy metal, and two bands sit at the top: [Black Sabbath](#) and [Led Zeppelin](#). They are the groups most responsible for taking late-'60s hard rock — itself a bombastic mixture of blues, psychedelia, boogie and prog — and turning it into something wholly unique, a heavy music that rocked hard yet wasn't really rock 'n' roll anymore.

Though we are forever in their debt, they weren't the only bands during those heady days forging the new genre. They had plenty of help from the likes of Vanilla Fudge, Uriah Heep, Blue Cheer, the great Deep Purple and more. Much like Zeppelin and Sabbath, many of these groups can be considered both hard rock *and* heavy metal. Even groups such as Judas Priest, whose first record came out in 1974, started off exploring a decidedly progressive sound that was way more beard 'n' denim than hell-bent for leather.

If vintage proto-metal is your thing, then here are 10 essential albums that will blow your doors clear off. This isn't a comprehensive list, mind you, but it does contain some seriously killer jams.

Dig in!



Vanilla Fudge

Vanilla Fudge

Vanilla Fudge suffered from myriad weaknesses: poor choice in covers, lousy songwriting, way too much schmaltzy blue-eyed soul and an unhealthy obsession with hippie-baked sonic poetry. Despite all this, the band's 1967 debut was a radical statement on the possibilities of heaviness in rock 'n' roll. Whereas [The Jimi Hendrix Experience](#) swung hard but with agility, The Fudge rumbled like a couple of continental plates slowly ramming into one another. It's a plodding aesthetic that would influence a whole generation of hard-rock icons, including Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin and Blue Cheer.

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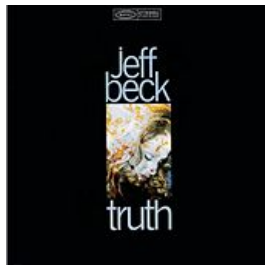
The Lonely Island x Beaches Original Soundtrack

Ellie Goulding x Bon Iver

Simon Le Bon x Patti Smith

James Blake x Stevie Wonder

— Justin Farrar



The Jeff Beck Group

Truth

This was Jeff Beck's first band — and album — after leaving [The Yardbirds](#). Made up of Beck, [Rod Stewart](#), Ron Wood and Mickey Waller, the Group gained notoriety for their clever reworking of blues, embellished with Beck's visionary guitar, his fondness for electronic effects and his pioneering use of distortion and feedback. What sets this apart from any other British blues records at the time is that their sound is lighter and more fluid, and contains a unique dramatic element — the coiled tension of Beck's guitar playing off Rod Stewart's gritty, resolute singing. — *Jaan Uhelszki*



Deep Purple

Machine Head

Machine Head might seem like too obvious of a pick for a list attempting to do a little crate digging. However, younger fans who are new to old-school metal don't seem to "pedestalize" the mighty Deep Purple the way they do Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. Yet back in the 1970s Deep Purple were every bit equals of those other bands in terms of volume and sonic ferociousness. This record right here is one of the greatest hard-rock jams ever made. There's no debate, no discussion about it. If you're a stranger to *Machine Head's* mechanical roar, then be prepared to obsess over this platter

for the next six months, easily. — *J.F.*



Blue Oyster Cult

Secret Treaties

"*Career of Evil*" combines Sabbath with TV-theme cheese in a way no one thought of before, and if it were the only good song here, it might be OK to file B.O.C. away. But the menace of "*Harvester of Eyes*," the weirdness of "*Flaming Telepaths*" and the boogie epic "*ME 262*" make *Secret Treaties* no less than mandatory. — *Mike McGuirk*



Judas Priest

Rocka Rolla

Worth it for hearing Judas Priest play flitty psych (check the "Winter Retreat" part of [track three](#)), *Rocka Rolla* is Priest's proggy 1974 debut. More uncharacteristic moves come with "*Caviar and Meths*," an instrumental comedown that closed things out on the original issue before an early version of "*Diamonds and Rust*" was added in 1987, along with a new van-art cover. Despite lacking its future identity, the band has its eternally distinctive rhythm-section chug already in place, and title cut "*Rocka Rolla*" is the best Priest song that doesn't sound anything like Judas Priest. — *M.M.*



Rainbow

Rising

Ritchie Blackmore has to be considered one of metal's five greatest innovators, right up there with Jimmy Page and King Diamond. His first band, Deep Purple, helped invent the form. His second, the classical-inspired Rainbow, helped lay the groundwork for the New Wave of British Heavy Metal and later progressive metal. *Rising*, the group's second album, is just awesome. Blackmore shreds, Dio howls and keyboardist Tony Carey lends the music a unique cosmic vibe. Think Judas Priest meets [Tangerine Dream](#), and you're not far off. You might want to rock a monk's robe or a space suit for this

one. — *J.F.*

JPT Scare Band

Past is Prologue

Kansas City's JPT Scare Band didn't release an album until the 1990s, yet the group has been recording its burly jams since the early '70s. If you dig thunderous proto-metal from the age of bell-bottoms and thick 'staches, then you need to explore *Past is Prologue*. This wonderfully raw mishmash of once-forgotten demos is proto-metal heaven, particularly the 13-minute opus "[Sleeping](#)

Classic Rock

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Sickness. In 2007 [Rolling Stone](#) magazine tagged the JPTs as "the lost pioneers of heavy metal." That's no overstatement. These dudes slayed with the best of them: [Cactus](#), [Black Pearl](#), [Pentagram](#) and so

on. — *J.F.*



[Uriah Heep](#)
Uriah Heep

No album cover better encapsulates its sonic contents than that of Uriah Heep's 1970 debut. This record isn't just a beast; it's a humongous silver centipede sporting wings, fangs and a straggly goatee. It's a fact that will bludgeon you as quickly as the three-minute mark of "[Gypsy](#)." Organist Ken Hensley goes off, people. Guitarist Mick Box quickly follows him, spitting out a raging litany of reverb-fried hot licks. And remember: this is just the first song! Though the Heep turn mortal on a few lower-key tracks, they maintain this grizzly form for the bulk of the record. It's gorgeous,

really. — *J.F.*



[Scorpions](#)
In Trance

In the '80s, the Scorpions reinvented themselves as a pop-metal act heavy on power balladry so thoroughly that an entire generation of fans had no idea the group's history stretches all the way back to 1972. It's on *In Trance* that the band really tightened their attack. Gone are the bombastic prog-rock moves weighing down their first two LPs. Given new freedom, the twin leads of Ulrich Roth and Rudolf Schenker are vicious on both "[Top of the Bill](#)" and "[Dark Lady](#)," one of the best album openers of the '70s. On top of all that, the cover art nails the whole guitar-and-phallic-symbol mythology. —

J.F.



[Blue Cheer](#)
Vincebus Eruptum

As the tale goes, Blue Cheer were so loud that at one show a dog sitting on an amplifier actually exploded. Taking blues-rock cues from England and adding sun-blocking stacks of Marshall amps, these acid-charred hippies not only inspired the term "power trio," they practically invented heavy metal. Try "[Second Time Around](#)." — *M.M.*

Honorable Mentions

Sir Lord Baltimore: **Kingdom Come**

Budgie: **Squawk**

Dust: **Dust**

Thin Lizzy: **Fighting**

Wishbone Ash: **Argus**

NecronomicoN: **Tips Zum Selbstmord**

Captain Beyond: **Captain Beyond**

Buffalo: **Volcanic Rock**

Flower Travelin' Band: **Satori**

Pentagram: **Relentless**

Categories: Album Guide, Classic Rock Crate Digger, Justin Farrar

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AUG AUGLEBY | [OCTOBER 5, 2010 12:03 PM](#) | [REPLY](#)

JPT Scare Band! these guys kick serious a** with psychedelic stuff. It's great to see they made this list of monster bands! ROCK ON IT DUDES!!!!!!

JEFF LITTRELL (JPT SCARE BAND DRUMMER) | [NOVEMBER 5, 2010 6:51 PM](#) | [REPLY](#)

The boyz in JPT Scare Band are astounded to be included in this exalted list. Despite all the years and decades of toiling in painful obscurity, the original lineup of JPT are still together and still delivering molten slabs of old school brain frying proto metal blues rock. We have a brand new album out on the Ripple Music label, titled, Acid Blues Is The White Man's Burden. We double dog dare ya to check it out!

LEVIRAMSEY | [MARCH 18, 2011 8:09 PM](#) | [REPLY](#)

If you're talking about bands from the '70s that straddled the line between hard rock and metal, then I don't think it's possible to ignore Rush. Don't let the synthpop period cloud your thinking.

ACIDBLUESHEAD | [JULY 28, 2011 8:27 PM](#) | [REPLY](#)

This is one of the best lists I've ever seen, even if I already have half the albums. The other half are absolute gems that are a joy to find. The very fact the JPT drummer himself responded here is indicative of just how amazing this content is.

Although I agree Rush would've been a choice inclusion as well, *Caress of Steel* has to be one of the best ever proto/prog/psych albums I've ever heard.



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