



Summertime Requires Music! And here are our choices...

[By Tom Horne]

With summertime imminent, we know many of you will be taking road trips, hitting the beach, or visiting the party circuit. And none of those activities is complete without music! This week, we're pleased to recommend the album that our staff has deemed as the number-one must-have of the summer.

And the winner is...*RockFord*, the newest album by Cheap Trick.

This collection of 12 songs covers virtually everything Cheap Trick is known for. A ballad like "O Claire," for example, recalls the band's penchant for love songs with some cool guitar work, similar to their #1 hit, "The Flame." Rockers like "Give It Away" and "Perfect Stranger" (an excellent choice for the first single) prove that Cheap Trick is the best band in the world at combining addicting melodies with powerful rhythms. These new tunes make you recall the band's earlier masterpieces, such as "Dream Police," "Surrender," and "I Want You to Want Me."

Robin Zander, Bun E. Carlos, Tom Petersson, and Rick Nielsen have been at it for 30 years as Cheap Trick; but don't you dare call *RockFord* a comeback CD or a reunion of any kind. The fact of the matter is that Cheap Trick have toured relentlessly over the past three decades and have put out new albums consistently every step of the way, a fact that they are quite proud of.

Besides the great and voluminous music, Cheap Trick's history is a story in and of itself. Formed north of Chicago in the Illinois city of Rockford, Cheap Trick began by playing as many live shows as possible. In the late '70s, they were playing as many as 320 concerts per year. Finally, they were noticed and signed; and their first album, the self-titled *Cheap Trick*, came out in 1977. Critics loved the hard guitar work, Beatlesque melodies, and provocative lyrics, especially in an era when the dreaded disco dominated the music scene.

Their visual image also added to the early appeal. The four members each had his own theme, instead of other bands (picture KISS or any filthy-flannel-shirt grunge band), which of course dress alike. Fans were intrigued, for example, by a singer in a snazzy three-piece suit and a lead guitarist in a baseball cap and an ever-smoking drummer who looked like a bored businessman filling in.

Cheap Trick toiled on for two more albums without much notoriety (despite further critical acclaim) until 1979, when they made a brief tour of Japan. They had no idea what was in store for them. Japanese fans flocked to their concerts at the famous Budokan Arena and swarmed the band in their hotel and in the streets and at virtually every appearance they made. The band would later recall that they knew they were popular in Japan, but they had no idea just how popular.

They released a small live album for the Japanese fans only, almost as a thank you for their loyalty. Over in the U.S., a few DJs received promotional copies of this Japanese-only import; and they started playing "I Want You to Want Me." And they played it a lot. Suddenly, record stores were deluged with requests for this album, so CBS Records quickly went into production on a U.S. version. *Live at Budokan* was a mega hit, and Cheap Trick went from a small Midwestern band to the "biggest thing since transistors," as their ads declared.

The 1980s saw Cheap Trick lose some popularity, but they pressed on. They

were somewhat instrumental in the video revolution, and anyone watching MTV in the '80s was happily subjected to seeing "If You Want My Love" or "She's Tight" constantly. Bassist Petersson quit the band for a few years, but then came back with their 1988 release *Lap of Luxury*, which produced their #1 hit, "The Flame." Invigorated by this success, Cheap Trick entered the '90s with the album *Busted*, which again produced Top-40 material.

Most recently, after several streaks of bad luck with their record companies (one company saw its executive pass away and another went bankrupt), Cheap Trick settled down with Big 3 Records, where they currently happily reside. And it is Big 3 that now proudly presents *RockFord*.

After 30 years, Cheap Trick sticks to their glorious basics, but their lyrics have shown a growth and maturity since their onset. The trials of life also make their way into Cheap Trick music now. "I don't need another perfect stranger trying to run my life," blasts Zander's angry voice on the first single. He also bids the ultimate goodbye to a loved one with, "See you on the other side." Anyone who only remembers Cheap Trick's campier lyrics is in for a thought-provoking treat here.

You will not be disappointed by *RockFord*. In a music world dominated by hip-hop and whiny emo bands, it is beyond refreshing to hear some powerful rock. We heartily recommend you get *RockFord*. And for those who are possibly too young to remember



Cheap Trick's heyday, we suggest you ask your Mommy and Daddy. They're all right. They just seem a little weird.

Honorable mention goes to *Youth* by Matisyahu.
(Reviewed below by Charisse Dengler)

A mainstay at summer festivals this year, Matisyahu is the current name to drop if you want to sound all cool and hip and stuff. An Orthodox Jew whose lyrics reflect his heritage, Matisyahu blends melodic rap with groovy reggae and comes out with something that makes you want to either lay on the beach all day or start a revolution.

His sophomore album, *Youth*, hit music store shelves on March 7 and has been flying off of them ever since. The 13-song album includes instant favorites such as "What I'm Fighting For" (a track that can literally be listened to on repeat for days without losing that favorite-new-song feeling) and "Jerusalem" (an inspiring track about not forgetting where you came from).

Matisyahu, formerly known as Matthew Miller, is in charge of vocals and beatbox skills and is backed by Jonah David on drums, Aaron Dugan on guitar, and Josh Werner on bass and keyboards. The album also features appearances by Marlon "Moshe" Sobol, Stanley Ipcus, and Youssou.

Described as "a compelling mix of ancient and modern sounds and ideas," *Youth* resonates in the hearts of young people, declaring that "youth is the engine of the world."

"Young man, the power's in your hand/
Slam your fist on the table and make your demand," Matisyahu sings on the album's title track.

Perfectly balanced with fun melodies and weighty lyrics, *Youth* is insanelly addicting.

From "Indestructible," a song that ends with a Psalm-like petition for protection, to "Time of Your Song," a vaguely haunting song of guidance and discovery, the album shines. While other reggae-esque artists are busy singing about sunsets and banana pancakes, Matisyahu is singing about something bigger; and the change is a welcome one.

In a time when pop stars are manufactured on reality TV shows and given nose jobs and tiny dogs in sweaters upon their so-called success, it's nice to see someone doing something different and even nicer to see people taking notice.

However, with the unpredictability of the music biz and the constantly shifting loyalties of "dedicated" fans, the future of Matisyahu is uncertain. As a somewhat surprising superstar, will he fade with the summer heat or live long in iPod playlists? I'm not sure.

One thing's for certain, though. Whether you're looking for something with a little more meat than the new Ashley Parker Angel album or you're simply looking for a soundtrack for that cross-country road trip you've been planning, *Youth* is a must.